**Silence of the Hunters**

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**Summary**

Hannibal Lecter is a therapist with a secret double life. Hisoka Morow is a Hunter who has narrowly escaped death, only to be held on suspicion of mass murder. Usually, he wouldn't mind, but this time, the murders weren't actually committed by him. Hannibal's life is forever changed when he accepts an assignment to conduct an assessment on a criminal mastermind who seemingly cares about nobody and a prizefighter who he finds himself unable to stop thinking about.
The Fool

Hannibal sighed as he finished the latest chapter of his favourite book of fairytales and looked over at the comatose man in the bed beside him. He wondered again what he was doing here. He should be continuing his research into Chrollo Lucilfer, but ever since he’d first visited Hisoka Morow a week ago, he’d been drawn back to his bedside. This was his third visit, and he knew there would be talk if he kept this up; he was trying to decide if the fallout was going to be worth it.

At first, he’d told himself that his curiosity was simply a byproduct of his desire to make sure that his patient was being properly taken care of, but now; he wasn’t delusional enough to think that there wasn’t something deeper going on.

He looked at the title of the next tale he was going to read to the ‘sleeping’ redhead. “The Iccantado and the Princess,” he said aloud and felt a mild twinge of sadness as his voice bounced off the walls of the sterile room. “Well, I don’t think you’re the Princess,” he continued. “But maybe you could be the Iccantado?” He thought back to his Mother’s stories about why his Aunt had left them. “But if Chrollo let you leave the Troupe, then I doubt it, and I’m not going to let you become another disappointment.” He took a deep breath and pushed aside the spark of hope, that insisted Hisoka could be the creature he’d been searching for in favour of reading his favourite fairytale. He didn’t need the book to recount the words, but as he read aloud, tracing the stylized letters and turning the pages soothed him. He’d searched for a lifetime; he could wait until the man woke up to confirm that, just like Will, Chrollo and all the ones that had come before, he was not the Iccantado he was looking for.

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Pacing up and down the corridors of the hospital, Jack tried to reign in his frustration. He’d just come to Yorknew Medical Centre after an impromptu meeting with Cheadle Yorkshire. Surely it would have been easier to send Hannibal to where Mr. Lucilfer and Mr. Morow were initially being held? He couldn't help wondering, as he approached the private, and heavily guarded room holding Hisoka Morow. The man's in a coma, and the troupe leader is a flight risk. Still, I shouldn't be surprised that a doctor would think of patients before the possibility of criminals escaping during transit.

Coming to a standstill outside of his intended destination, he nodded to the two guards currently on duty and opened the door to let himself inside. The first thing to catch his attention was the bed that dominated the room. The unconscious man, hooked up to various machines, was a far cry from the proud performer Jack had enjoyed watching during his visits to Heaven's Arena. In the ring, Hisoka Morow was a living force of nature - even when it appeared that he was losing, he was still in control. Seeing the former crowd-pleaser covered in bandages and without his makeup was disturbing, but it did make it easier to see the man for what he was; a plain and entirely breakable human being. And a criminal, don't ever forget that. Just because you enjoyed his fighting career doesn't mean you can be soft on him.

Jack didn't recognise the story that Hannibal had just stopped reading, and despite himself, he smiled. It was a rare sight to see his friend so unguarded, but Jack didn't fool himself into thinking that his presence hadn't been felt. Still, out of respect for social conventions, he cleared his throat, allowing Hannibal to close the book before speaking.

"Morning, Hannibal," he began. "Please, accept my apologies for interrupting your reading. I've just come from a meeting with Chairwoman Yorkshire; she informed me that Mr. Morow had been moved into a private room, and I'm told you've taken quite an interest in him?"
Closing his book, Hannibal smiled up at his old friend. "He has no next of kin. There is no one to speak on his behalf," Hannibal said calmly, closing the book and offering his friend a polite smile. "As he is my patient, and Mr. Lucifer is currently under Dr. Chilton's care, I thought it only fair that Mr. Morow had someone to vouch for him. What did the dear Miss Cheadle have to say that was so urgent that it pulled you from your rest?" Hannibal asked, taking in the bags under Jack's eyes, and his mildly rumpled shirt.

"There's been another disappearance; both the BAU and the Hunter Association are being told to prioritise the investigation. A young socialite, Melissa Fayeweather has been reported missing after failing to return home. Further to that, I've been advised that when Mr. Morow awakens from his coma, the decision has been made not to house him in the same facility as Mr. Lucifer," Jack explained with a hint of annoyance bleeding into his tone. "As if we're not stretched thinly enough with these alleged kidnappings, I'm now going to have to assign a team of agents to watch your patient as well. Thankfully, the Zodiacs have arranged for his movements to be restricted," he paused to check the room for another chair before continuing. "Apparently there have been several statements from the survivors of the explosion, stating that Mr. Morow was taken by surprise by the bomb. As such, the Zodiacs are taking the approach that he needs to be kept under close observation, until his level of involvement can be confirmed."

Hannibal allowed his face to shift into a look of genuine concern. "But I was told that the reason he was being held in custody, was that there were numerous reports that he was actively involved in the deaths of the audience members?" he said, choosing to gloss over the fact that his request to have Hisoka housed in the Townhilt hotel had been approved. Pariston's connections were still as strong as ever. "Has the dear Miss Lounds been causing trouble again? Has she decided that Mr. Morow is innocent after all?"

Jack gave Hannibal a look before groaning. "When doesn't that woman cause trouble? She's a thorn in my side; apparently, she's already tried to get an interview with him. Also, you are correct, we have had statements alleging that the members were already under Mr. Lucifer's control and that they were killed by Hisoka. Actually, on that topic, there was a vote that Mr. Lucifer would be better under your care than Dr. Chilton. Concerns arose when it was found that the troupe leader apparently has a license and the Association is keen to keep that information as quiet as possible; I'm sure you understand the controversy that could be stirred up if that became public knowledge? There's already a lot of pressure from Victor Lefort and his supporters to try to get the V6 council to disband the Association, and regulate Nen use, thanks to all this. Finding out that Mr. Lucifer was able to attain a license is the sort of ammunition we can't afford to give him."

"Most certainly," Hannibal said and wondered if it was time to pay the man a visit. Mr. Lefort's business card had been characteristically plain but had used what must have been a personalised font for its lettering. The man had money and was never without a guard. It would be a challenge, but perhaps he should wait a few weeks until all the fuss had died down? Hopefully, Hisoka would have woken up by then. If he took Victor whilst he was within his radius, and he ensured that Freddie had written a scathing article that cited Victor's desire to shut down the association, then they would be sure to blame his disappearance on Hisoka.
"We can't allow Mr. Lefort to get his hands on that kind of ammunition, not at a time like this; it's exactly what he's been waiting for. Please, let Miss Yorkshire know that if she needs anything, she can count on my assistance, no matter the time or the day."

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"I'm sure she'll be relieved to hear that," Jack replied relaxing a little. "As am I, although I have to confess a certain friendly concern, strictly off the record of course. You don't often make a habit of reading to your patients," he added, and gestured to the book on Hannibal's lap. "Unless this is some new form of therapy I'm not aware of?"

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"You and I both know that hearing is the first sense to come back to a patient," Hannibal explained, thinking quickly. "I would like him to become accustomed to my voice. If nothing else, it will help to form a bond between us that will aid our sessions greatly. I am simply starting my therapy early, that is all, Jack. I have already carried out my initial assessment of Mr. Lucilfer."

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Jack nodded and glanced back at the sleeping form of Hisoka Morow. "Well, there's a reason you're a leading expert in your field Hannibal. It makes a lot of sense when you explain that way," he agreed readily. "He's not known for forming connections with people, the Arena staff who were willing to be interviewed stated that he was more of a social butterfly. He came and went as he pleased, often only returning for his matches and then vanishing again. I'm sure you can understand why, as a friend, I'd be concerned about you getting too close?" he asked choosing to push the subject of the Phantom Troupe leader to the side for the moment. "Especially with the timing; it's been just over two years since Will. People might talk; they usually do." When Hannibal didn't show any visible signs of concern, he added. "I know that you know I'm more than happy to stifle any rumours the moment they start, and I'm confident that Special Agent Zeller can be relied upon to keep things professional. But I want you to know that I'm also pulling my star pupil, Miriam Lass, onto guard duty as well. She's already showing a great deal of promise. Your patient will be in the best hands I can spare, so you don't have to come by every day. I can't risk any potential rumours of bias getting leaked to the media. I've done what I can with the guard, but I can't control the hospital staff."

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"I understand, Jack, and thank you for your concern, but it isn't necessary," Hannibal assured him. "I have nothing but a professional interest in Hisoka. He needs a guardian, and I need to establish a rapport with the man. However," he said, inwardly wondering why he was feeling so reluctant to make the offer. "If it would make your life easier, I will refrain from any further visits that aren't strictly medically necessary."

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"That would be appreciated, and I'm sure the hospital will inform you if anything changes in his condition. Now, you mentioned you've already spoken to Mr. Lucilfer?" Jack asked, feeling more settled now that he would have one less spinning plate to keep track of. "Do you have any initial thoughts on his suitability for therapy?"

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"He will be an interesting client," Hannibal said, thinking back to the starkly cold and chillingly
calm man he had talked to the day before. The interview hadn't been so much an exchange of words, as it had a silent and highly amusing war of wits. He had come out on top, but he got the distinct impression that it was only due to Chrollo's age; the man was sharp as a blade and he knew it. He was looking forward to the next session already. "He has the potential to benefit greatly from therapy," he lied smoothly. "He is a natural-born leader, and if we can harness his charisma for good, rather than ill, he could be the perfect counter to Mr. Lefort. He is young, handsome and, I suspect, will pull off a great apology speech. People will be eating out of his hands in no time. I'm sure Pariston would be willing to take him on as an apprentice."

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"I see, well, he's certainly capable of organizing groups. The idea of him becoming an activist for the Association is certainly an intriguing prospect. Do you have any initial feelings towards our sleeping friend?" Jack asked with mild curiosity. "I know the files on both men are rather empty; they both appear to value their privacy. But I trust you to have unique insights that no one, bar Will, has been able to match. From what information you have on Mr. Morow, do you think he'll be another interesting client?"

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"I suspect so," Hannibal said, looking down at Hisoka's face and finding a smile tugging at his lips. "He has, so far at least, proved to be a cooperative one. But you should not confine him. Someone with his wanderlust will sour if he is locked in a cell. I know what it is like to be alone and not to be able to rely on anyone. I will be able to get through to him. While Chrollo will need to be kept in a Nen suppressed cell, Hisoka will need to feel as if he is, at least somewhat, trusted. Give him firm limits and boundaries, as well as a constant guard, and he will cooperate. He will weigh his options and realize that the only way out, is through." He held his hands wide to demonstrate to Jack exactly who Hisoka would have to surpass, and to let him know that he wasn't worried.

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Despite the serious nature of the discussion, Jack allowed himself a quiet chuckle at his friend's comment. "Well if there's anyone in the known world who can help, I'm sure it would be you. I'll ensure that your recommendations are included in my next briefing for the guards. Besides, I'm sure, should your patient still decide to try and make a break for it, that your Nen would keep him in line," Jack paused and allowed his gaze to settle on the book Hannibal had brought with him. "I don't suppose I could let my curiosity get the better of me and ask about the book? It sounded like a fairytale from what little I heard when I made my entrance. Forgive me for saying so, but you've never struck me as the fairytale type, but I've been wrong before."

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"It was a hangover from my early years," Hannibal explained. "Did your father never read to you?" He asked, curiously. "I'm hoping that he will find the familiar sounds and rhythms soothing. His breathing certainly appears to even out when I begin to read. So I am hopeful that it is helping his recovery. If nothing else, I know that he is beginning to form an association in his mind. I do not want him to become agitated when I am present."

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"I have one or two childhood memories of my parents reading to me, usually when I was sick. They are fond memories," Jack said thoughtfully as he switched his focus back to Hisoka, checking to see if the man's breathing had changed rhythm; he couldn't see any difference, but Hannibal was still talking. "Well, here's hoping that the association formed is a positive one, and that, should he
awaken to your absence, he's not too agitated."

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"We can but hope," Hannibal said, feigning sincerity. "You mentioned Miriam Lass earlier?" he asked. "Was she the officer on guard with her girlfriend yesterday? She seemed like a particularly astute lady, although, if you don't mind me saying, her bedside manner could use some work."

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"Yes, I believe she's been on duty with Officer McCormick. She's under the impression I need her to act the part; she's one of the strongest officers I have. Rather talented with her Nen; she's an enhancer," Jack advised. "Although there have been rumours about her involvement with her colleague, Miriam is rather keen to keep her private life separate from her work. As such I haven't pried. It's not been affecting their work, so I thankfully haven't felt the need to ask. I'll have a word with her about her bedside manner if you would like?"

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"My apologies if I have spoken out of turn," Hannibal said, bowing his head and inwardly congratulating himself on his correct assessment. Miriam had been bright, but far too eager to be seen as a professional; privately, he gave the romance less than a month. The other woman; he pictured her in his mind and recalled her telling him that she was called Jade, had bristled when Miriam had denied their relationship. "She certainly was an astute and professional young woman. Please do not overly chastise her, but perhaps remind her that Mr. Morow is innocent until proven guilty."

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"I agree; he is innocent of helping to blow up the arena until we can prove otherwise. However, he is still linked to the Phantom Troupe, which may be colouring things a little. I had originally planned to assign her to help with Mr. Lucilfer," Jack explained. "She didn't seem too enthusiastic about the prospect, though. She isn't too happy about guarding Mr. Morow either, but she understands that I need her here. She's still young, but she'll learn. I hope you'll be as willing to help guide her as you are your patients; she has a bright future ahead of her," he said quietly. "Well as long as she can keep her temper under control; she's barely even taken her final exams, and people are nervous about being partnered with her. Fortunately, Agent Zeller seems to get along with her; they're proving to be quite the team so far. I appreciate the feedback; I had to pull some strings to get her the assignment. I can't have her trying to play judge and jury; that's not our job."

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"Ours is not to question why," Hannibal quoted, nodding to his friend. Would you like to stay for the end of the story?" He offered calculatedly, weighing the chances of Jack saying yes against his desire to get back to work. "You look like you could do with a break." He gestured to the sofa that sat unused against the far wall. "It's getting to the good part," he added with a smile.

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Jack shook his head even as he caught himself looking at the sofa and wishing he could stay. "I appreciate the offer," he replied with a small grateful smile of his own. "However, you said it yourself; you've started Mr. Morow's therapy, and I fear I've taken up enough of your valuable time with him. There is no rest for the wicked, and I'm not going to be able to just yet. So, on that note I will have to regretfully bid you a fond farewell," he added and gave his friend a polite bow before
waiting for him to return the gesture and making his way back to the door.

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Hannibal didn't understand why, but a ripple of relief ran through him when Jack left, and he turned to Hisoka curiously. "You are an interesting man, aren't you, Mr. Morow? Here's to hoping that you prove to be as entertaining in your sessions as you supposedly were in your final battle. Now," he said, settling back in his seat, where were we?"

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Zeller looked up from counting the cracks in the tile at the corner of the nurse's desk when the door to Hisoka's room opened, and his boss came out. "All good?" he asked. "No changes? Are we going to get lucky and have him die so that we can start to figure out what happened in that explosion?"

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"Special Agent Zeller," Jack said, greeting the man as he closed the door behind him. "The situation remains the same for now. Mr. Morow is still in his coma. I highly doubt we'll be 'getting lucky' and having him die on us just yet though. And, we're still combing through all the witness statements," he told the guard firmly. "I know you usually work in the labs, but I need you to remain professional. We can't have the hospital staff hear you saying things like that. I need you on this case; your talent will be far more useful for dealing with Hisoka than almost any other. Now, where's Agent Jones? I need to brief you both on what will happen should Mr. Morow wake up."

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"He's gone to the little boy's room," Zeller said, hanging his head, and muttered, "For the fourth time today. I tried to get him to talk to the Doctor, but he insists he's fine."

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"I see," Jack said mildly. "Well, hopefully, he won't be in there for much longer. I'd prefer to brief you both together before I leave to drop by the office."

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"I'm sure he won't be long," Zeller said, trying not to sound like he hoped the man wouldn't come back. "Is there anything I can help with, boss?"

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"There is one thing; actually it's a couple of things, but I think you'd be perfect for the task. As you know, Miriam is relatively new," Jack explained. "I have high hopes for her, and she's got the potential to go far in either field or lab work, which is why I'm happy you both seem to work well as partners. I'm trusting you as an experienced agent to keep her from letting her temper get the better of her. Concerns have been raised; I know you're aware of what happened to her previous partner. Right now, I fear I can't be there for her as a mentor with so many high profile cases requiring my attention. You are one of my most trusted agents, keep your ear to the ground; if you hear anything suspicious, either from Mr. Morow or anyone, I need you to come to me."

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Zeller frowned but nodded. "Sure, I can do that. Is there anything, in particular, you wanted me to
keep an eye on, or are we just talking general, generic bad stuff?" He heard the door at the end of the corridor open and saw Leroy over Jack's shoulder. He was pleased to note that he'd gone slightly pale. Apparently, even he dreaded a dressing down from the Guru.

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"Generally, for now; it's still early days but should anything set off your abilities, please let me know," Jack instructed before turning around to see his other agent had returned. "Ah Agent Jones, I was waiting for you. If you could be so kind as to join us? We have much to discuss."

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"Yes, Sir," Leroy said quickly and hurried to take his place on the other side of the door, ignoring the smirk on his new 'partners' face. "What's happened?" he asked, looking directly at his boss. "Did he wake up?" He tried to peer in through the window, but everything appeared still inside the room.

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Jack shook his head. "No, Mr. Morow has not woken up yet. However, I do need to brief you on the plan, should he awaken," Jack explained and noted the agent's apparent curiosity. "Now, it goes without saying that this information is strictly on a need to know basis, and I expect you both to be professional and discreet. I've come here from a meeting with the Zodiacs; they've decided that Mr. Morow isn't to be housed in Dr. Chilton's facilities alongside Mr. Lucifer. Instead," he paused and glanced down the hall when he thought he heard a member of staff approaching. "As I was saying, instead it has been decided that he will be moved to a hotel until the result of his initial psychological evaluation. Dr. Lecter will be his therapist, and he assures me that his visits are part of his plan for Mr. Morow's treatment. It should go without saying that we do not want Freddie Lounds to catch wind of any of this. If he wakes up, then you are to call me immediately; I do not care what time it is. As soon as he is fit to be moved, then we are going to move him to the Townhilt, and you will continue to guard him during his stay there. Do you understand?"

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"Anything you say," Zeller added, doing his best to hide his delight at the look on Leroy's face. "One first-class prisoner on his way in five to seven working days."

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"I think that might be a little optimistic, but we'll see. I'm counting on you both," Jack replied, fixing his men in his gaze for a moment before nodding. "Any changes, let me know. I need to get back to the office to finalise some paperwork and brief the other members of your team. Before I go, do you either of you have anything you need to raise with me?"

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Leroy considered mentioning the fact that at no time when he'd signed up for work at the BAU, had he been told that his duties would include guarding a criminal, but thought better of it, and instead, remembered the advice of his mentor and stayed calm. "No, Sir," he said at the same time as Zeller, and saluted. "You can count on me, Sir," he added, ignoring Zeller's glare.
"Well I'm glad to hear it," Jack told both agents. "I know this job isn't all glitz and glamour, but you're here because you've proven you can be trusted. Now I must be on my way, don't forget I'll still need your end of shift reports as usual," he added before leaving both men to their duties. Well, this has certainly turned into an interesting day, all I need now is Freddie Lounds to be waiting outside the hospital. Hopefully, I'll get a chance to make some headway on these kidnappings before Hisoka wakes up. Checking the time on his watch, he groaned. Have I really been up for a full twenty-four hours? No wonder Hannibal invited me to stay, he must have realised how tired I am. Still, I'm sure I can safely get back to the office from here, the drive won't take that long. He told himself as he began the slow walk to the hospital's exit. His car was parked two streets away thanks to recent road works, but he supposed the fresh air would do him good, and the paperwork on his desk could wait until after he'd had his first coffee of the new day.

6 Days Later

Sipping at his now cold coffee, Jack winced as he continued to read through the latest reports on the current string of disappearances. He felt somewhat grateful that there hadn't been another high profile ones, but he'd prefer there were none at all. Putting down his cup, he pinched the bridge of his nose; every lead they had seemed to take them to yet another dead end. How many more women are you going to steal away from their families and friends before we find you? he wondered as he looked at the photo of Melissa Fayeweather staring up at him from his desk. The sudden ringing of his phone pulled him back from further contemplation; curious as to who would be calling, he pulled his phone from his pocket. Special Agent Zeller, but I thought he wasn't on shift? He blinked at the caller ID as he accepted the call.

"Talk to me," he said gruffly. "And please tell me you're calling with good news?" He added as he closed the open file laying in front of him.

"He's awake, boss," Zeller said frantically. "And he's pissed. There's four orderlies trying to hold him down. He's saying something about Zombies and bubblegum. Oh, shit, he just punched Mac. Fuck, he's out cold. Oh, wait, Leroy's going in. He's walled him in. Boss, what do we do? The nurse was screaming, so we restrained him. He's really pissed."

"Did nobody think of trying to sedate Mr. Morow before using Nen on him?" Jack asked with an exasperated sigh. "Look, right now he's probably wondering where he is. We need to get him calmed down, so that Dr. Lecter can explain his situation. Dr. Lecter has been allowed to act as next of kin. I'll make sure he's been made aware of his patient's current state, until then, just keep him at the hospital...and try to minimize any damages."
“Yeah, Mac was trying, but he’s, well, Hisoka’s stuck in his bed for now. Maybe Dr. Lecter can do it? None of the Doctors here are willing to come into the room,” Zeller explained. “Mac kinda grabbed the needle off one of them and charged in. I think it’s probably a good thing that Hisoka knocked him out; otherwise, he could’ve sued the hospital. How long will Hannibal be? The nurses have been calling people none-stop and...yeah, we need to set up a perimeter otherwise it’s gonna be a media circus around here soon, I can feel it.”

What the hell was Mac thinking? The last thing we need is a lawsuit. "Right, well get Mac out of that room and keep him away from Mr. Morow. Hopefully, he won't recall the altercation, and I'll deal with him after the immediate situation has been resolved. Our priority needs to be getting our suspect into his new accommodations, and making sure the media are kept under control," Jack said, grimacing; he knew he had to act fast to minimize the possibility of Freddie Lounds getting in to speak to Hisoka. "Leroy can keep an eye on Hisoka; I need you to take charge. Make sure the hospital staff aren't talking to the press, and I'll try to call Dr. Lecter and ensure he's on his way. Get the perimeter set up and I'll be there as soon as I can to handle any reporters that show up.”

“Yeah, yeah, I can do that,” Zeller said, trying to plan ahead. “One perimeter coming up. You can count on me, boss. And Leroy. It doesn’t look like Mac’s gonna have any permanent injuries; they’re wheeling him out now. Right. See you soon.” He put the phone down and then realised his boss never said that he was coming over. “Crap,” he muttered and set off to try and find out how to section an entire private ward without breaking the law.

30 Mins Later

“You make quite the impression, Mr. Morow,” Hannibal said, sitting down on the sofa and crossing his legs with deliberate nonchalance. “I have been told that you were rather adamant that you didn’t need sedating. It took me quite a while to persuade Officer Jones to remove his wall from around your bed. Am I going to need to use this?” He held up a syringe for Hisoka to see. The cap was still firmly in place. “Or are you going to cooperate?”

"I'd have broken the wall eventually," Hisoka huffed and crossed his arms over his chest. His hand stung where he'd ripped his IV line out, but he didn't care. "Will cooperating get you to tell me where I am? If the nurse hadn't been screaming like a banshee, I wouldn't have felt the need to shut her up.”

"Of course, I’m a reasonable man,” Hannibal said, twirling the sedative between his fingers and watching as Hisoka’s golden eyes followed the movement. “But I would appreciate it if you
answered my question, Mr. Morow. Do you need this sedative or are you going to remain calm? My name is Dr. Lecter, and I will stay with you until you can prove to me that you are not a danger to yourself or anyone around you.”

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Hisoka eyed the syringe warily before looking up into Dr. Lecter's eyes and asking, "So that's not going to put me back to sleep? I think we both know the hospital staff think I'm dangerous, regardless of what I say, Doctor. Until I know what's going on, and what your drugs will do to me then, I'm unable to answer your question."

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“This will calm you,” Hannibal said evenly, not rising to the bait. “But it won’t put you to sleep. You will feel more inclined towards affection, than aggression,” he explained. “And fear not, I am not a member of this hospital’s staff. I have been privately contracted to treat you, so what you say to me in here will not leave these walls. You are being held in police custody, pending further investigation into the small incident at Heaven’s Arena. You have been in a coma for the past 17 days. Do not be concerned; I ensured that your treatment was the best available, and no one treated you without my permission. I hope you won’t mind, but as you have no registered next of kin, I acted on your behalf whilst you were incapacitated.”

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"Give me the injection," Hisoka growled and held out his arm. "I'm not going to get all cuddly with you, just so you know. Also, there won't be any next of kin, I have no surviving family, so if you're a Lost Hunter, then you can save yourself the trouble." Although, there's something about your voice...it's familiar...but it's not important; I'm alive, and that's what matters. If playing nice will get me out of here faster then I'll do it, he thought with frustration and watched Dr. Lecter curiously, as he waited to see what the man would do.

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“As you wish,” Hannibal said, rising to his feet and preparing the needle. “Don’t worry, it would be highly unprofessional of me to even allow you to ‘get all cuddly’ with me,” he assured Hisoka, flicking the syringe and checking the dosage before sticking it into his arm. “It will take around five minutes to fully take effect. Would you like anything to drink? I can offer you water or a lovely new IV bag?”

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Hisoka watched as the sedative was injected and sighed; the only thing he wanted was answers. "I don't think the nurses are going to want to replace my IV, and I’m not thirsty," he told Dr. Lecter rather sullenly. "Which hospital am I in? Am I going to be moved to a cell now that I'm awake? You said police custody, that would explain the straps that I broke," he added with a smirk. Keep talking, the more you talk, the better chance I have of working out why you sound so familiar. "Do you often get contracted as a professional family member for people like me?"

***

“You are in Yorknew general, you will be housed in the Townhilt Hotel and no, not often,” Hannibal said calmly, pressing a cotton swab to the injection site and firmly holding it in place. “But I have occasionally done so in the past. I know what it is like to have no voice. How are you feeling? I will happily answer anything that I can, but I must stay with you for now.”
"But Yorknew’s in Saherta?" Hisoka countered. "That makes no sense; I was in Heaven's Arena, you said I was in a coma. There's no way I got here on my own, did you bring me here? Why?"

“You are in the custody of the Hunter Association who are working in partnership with the BAU,” Hannibal explained patiently. “Look up at me, I need to check your pupils,” he ordered, putting his hand underneath Hisoka’s chin to tilt his head slightly. Do you have any shortness of breath? Are you feeling dizzy? I understand that the hospital staff conducted a basic assessment whilst Mr. Jones’s wall surrounded you, but I must ask, do you have any pain anywhere?’

"I feel like I've just woken from a long sleep." Hisoka replied glowering up at the Doctor. "That wall was an impressive conjuration, and I hurt my hand when the IV got ripped out. It's more of an irritation than a pain though.” He wrinkled his nose to emphasise his point and sighed when he didn’t get a reaction from Dr. Lecter.

Deciding to switch tactics, he added, “So I guess Danchou and I must have caused quite a scene if the Hunter Association had me moved here. Does that mean all that rubble falling on me wasn't just a bad dream?"

“It does. You survived a situation not many others would have,” Hannibal said calmly, observing Hisoka’s face for any signs of an adverse reaction to the sedative. “I am curious as to how you managed such a feet. You had severe crush damage amongst many other injuries. Are you an enhancer?”

Hisoka smirked and tilted his head slightly. "No," he said. "I'm not, but I am a rather talented Magician." So you don't know much about me, or you're playing dumb. I'm honestly not sure which. Sighing, he tried to shift into a more comfortable position, and groaned a little when he put weight on his already sore hand. "I guess I'm just very lucky to be alive?"

“I guess you are, Mr. Morow,” Hannibal said, lifting Hisoka’s hand after he’d taken the pressure off it, to inspect the damage. “One who heals at an accelerated rate, it would seem. Although I would advise that the next time you find yourself in a situation like this, you don’t attack the hospital staff. Assess, think and then act. It doesn’t look like you have caused yourself any lasting damage, though I will have to carry out a basic cognitive assessment.”

"I wanted her to be quiet," Hisoka complained resisting the urge to pull his hand away from his Doctor. "I asked her to shut up, she kept screeching, and it was giving me a headache. It's hard to think clearly when you've just woken up in a strange place to somebody screaming. Grabbing her by the neck to silence her was the quickest way I could see to stop the noise. She'll barely have any bruising; I was gentle."
“I quite understand,” Hannibal said, turning Hisoka’s hand to make sure there was no hidden bruising. “And I am sure you will be glad to hear that Nurse Midgen is not going to be treating you. I managed to talk her out of pressing charges. Now, you will need another MRI and a few more tests, but I should be able to see that you are clear to leave the hospital by this afternoon. Now, I am going to need you to stand for me and walk in a straight line with your hands stretched. Judging by the precision of the blow you gave Mr. McArthur, I would say that your coordination is not impaired, but I have not seen you walk. Your most recent X-rays show that your bones are fully healed,” he assured him. “Medically speaking, you appear to be in perfect health.”

***

Resisting the urge to roll his eyes Hisoka nodded as thought to himself. Just do as the man asked, the sooner he ticks off his little checklist, the sooner they’ll put me up in that hotel. At least I can get a stiff drink there. Moving carefully, he swung his legs over the side of the bed and got to his feet. Holding his arms out by his sides with a grin, he traced the line between two rows of the floor tiles with the precision of a tightrope walker. Pirouetting on the spot, when he reached the wall, and walking back to his bed before sitting back down with a haughty expression. As he looked over at Dr. Lecter, he asked smugly, "Do I pass?"

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Hannibal smiled at Hisoka’s display and nodded. “With flying colours, now, who is the current chairperson of the Hunter Association?”

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8 pm - At the hotel

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When he’d arrived and been shown to his room by Dr. Lecter and the young female officer who’d glared at him the whole time, Hisoka had been pleasantly surprised. The room he’d been allocated had a decently sized ensuite and a pleasant enough view to keep it from feeling too claustrophobic. I suppose I should be grateful that they shipped my stuff over to Saherta along with me. Three miles isn't much of a radius to be given to move around in, but at least I can leave the hotel.

He explored the room, tested the bed and had a shower, but after a while, however, the allure of people, and the bar below had grown too much. He’d left the room in search of someone to keep him entertained, and his sullen guard had shadowed him, managing to somehow appear both disapproving and professional at the same time. Hisoka was a little impressed.

After getting himself a drink, he glanced around the half-empty bar, nursing his glass of whiskey, and pondering his options. Perhaps I can find some way to entertain myself while I wait to see what happens next? At least the infuriating Doctor’s left me alone, but the cop seems to want to burn a hole in my chest judging by the way she’s glaring. Chuckling, he waved to her before holding up his glass in a one-man cheers, delighting in the way she rolled her eyes at him as he leant against the bar. Surveying the rest of the patrons, he smirked when his gaze fell on a young couple sitting in a quieter part of the bar. Hmm, they look like they could be fun, shame I won’t be able to kill either of them. Although it’s been a while since I had both a man and a woman at the same time. Decision made, he sauntered over to the unsuspecting couple, with a friendly smile plastered on his
“Room for one more?” he asked silkily.

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“Excuse me?” Mark asked, looking up from his phone. “There are plenty of tables over there.”

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“Honey,” Joanna replied. “Don’t be so rude, please, feel free to join us. I know what it’s like to travel alone. Have you come far?” she asked, ignoring her husband’s incredulous look.

***

Hisoka ignored the man who was staring at him and focused on the woman who seemed more susceptible to his charm. "You're most kind," he replied cheerfully as he slipped into the booth across from her. "I've recently returned to Saherta after visiting Jappon," he lied smoothly. "How about yourselves?"

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"He’s a wanted criminal under police custody,” Miriam said, walking over to the table and scowling down at Hisoka. “I don’t know what you’re planning, but these people don’t need you ruining their night.”

***

When the man went white, and dropped his phone, Hisoka glanced up at his guard at the same time as the woman who had been talking covered her mouth in shock. "Can't a guy make friends? Or is trying to make polite conversation now a crime as well?” he asked curtly returning the frown with a smirk and an arched eyebrow.

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“You mean you are a criminal?” Joanna shrieked. “Get away! Get out of here! Why aren’t you locked up?”

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“Believe me, Mam, we’re working on that,” Miriam said, taking Hisoka firmly by the arm and adding some Nen to her grip so that the man couldn’t pull away. “We’ll be leaving you now.”

***

"Well, I hope you both enjoy your time in Yorknew," Hisoka said to the couple as he was dragged away by his guard, and bit his lip, to fight against the urge to moan with delight. *Fuck, you're stronger than you look.* "So does this mean you’re going to entertain me instead?” he asked teasingly. “I mean you're on babysitting duty, aren't you?"

***

“At least we’re both on the same page when it comes to your mental age,” Miriam snapped, shoving Hisoka down onto a barstool. “Stay,” she commanded. “I have no intention to be your ‘entertainment’, but if you lie to anyone about who you are or why you’re here, I will step in. I can’t stop you from talking to people, but I can make sure they understand their situation.”

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"Oh sweetheart," Hisoka purred as he looked up at his guard through his lashes. "You're already entertaining me, but if you prefer I can entertain you instead?"

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"Don’t push it," Miriam warned. "I assure you, there is nothing that you could do for me, and if you think fluttering your eyelashes is going to make me forget what you’ve done, then think again. You’re gonna swing, and I’m going to pray that you go the hard way. I don’t know what Nettero was thinking, letting people like you get a licence."

***

"He probably believed that the strong were worthy; still, it's not like I can ask him now. Seeing as he apparently died fighting those ant creatures," Hisoka mused patting himself on the back for using his Nen to ensure that he didn't lose his drink. "As for swinging, well my Bungee-gum is more than strong enough to hold my weight, I could dangle from the ceiling for you if you asked nicely enough. Pity that's not the swinging you mean really," he looked her up and down and gave an appreciative hum. "You'd be prettier with your hair down, but I understand why you'd tie it back for work. Do you feel like you have to butch up to be taken seriously?"

***

“You don’t know, do you?” Miriam asked gleefully, ignoring his comment about her looks. “You’re up for execution. I don’t know who pulled the strings to keep you out of a prison cell, but if half the things I’ve heard about you are true, your days are numbered, and no amount of gum is gonna save you."

***

Hisoka took a sip of his drink as he contemplated his next response. You're rather feisty, aren't you? Is that because you feel you have to prove that you can handle me? "I don't know who my guardian angel is," he drawled. "But I'd be curious to know what exactly you think you know about me? Honour a man's last request?"

***

Miriam looked around the room to check if there was anyone that could overhear them and leaned in close to Hisoka’s ear. “How dumb do you think I am?” she whispered and forced herself not to smack the man over the back of his head. Leaning back up, she sneered down at him. “If you’re trying to get me sacked, then good luck. I’m being paid to make sure that you get to your ‘appointment’ in one piece, and that’s what I’m going to do. It’s going to be a fair trial, too; you deserve everything that’s coming to you."

***

"Got to have me in one piece for your little game of hangman," Hisoka retorted with a shit-eating grin. "Which means that you can't let any harm come to me, right?"

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“Within reason,” Miriam said, raising her brow. “I’m allowed to restrain you for your own safety and if you try to make the joke about handcuffs that I think you’re going to make, then don’t bother. It isn’t funny, and it most certainly won’t get you laid.”

***
Hisoka sighed in mock disappointment. "Handcuffs are so uninspired," he grumbled as he swirled the remains of his drink. "Then again, I shouldn't be too surprised. I mean you are an enhancer, straight forward is your shtick after all. It's a pity I can't fight you." He paused to down the rest of his whiskey. "That would be a better distraction than sex, not that I'd say no to you if circumstances were different. So tell me, Miss Babysitter do I have a bedtime? If I'm an especially good boy, are you going to read me a story?"

***

"No," Miriam said, feeling her phone vibrate in her pocket. "That’s not my thing. Now, quite frankly, I couldn’t give a crap what you do, as long as you don’t break the law or lie to the people you’re doing it with; and by the way, I’m not going to be one of them. Whether you cooperate or not is up to you, but I assure you, the Yorknew Prison for the Criminally Insane doesn’t come with whiskey or a view, so think before you screw this chance up. You aren’t going to get another. If it were up to me, you’d be dead already, but it’s not, so enjoy your freedom while you can. It’s the Doctor that you have to convince to keep you alive, not me."

***

"Right, my legally mandated therapy to prove I’m capable of being a productive member of society. Do you really think I wouldn't be running the asylum in a month?" Hisoka asked with a challenging stare. "When I really want something, I find a way to get it. You and your colleagues are not so much an obstacle as an interesting diversion. There's always fun to be had if you look hard enough. How closely do have to follow me? Please tell me if you have to share the room with me; I prefer to sleep naked, so if that's going to be an issue I'd like to know beforehand."

***

Miriam rolled her eyes. “Has that line ever worked on anyone?” she asked, staring at Hisoka in disdain as she felt her phone buzz again. “And I don’t care if you do think you’d run the place, you’d be out of my hair so I can,” she quashed her urge to say ‘get back to doing my real job’, remembering Jack’s impromptu speech about her ‘bedside manner’, and instead said, “help people who want and need it.” Shaking her head, she looked back at Kyoya, who was calmly looking around the bar for potential threats, and sighed when her phone buzzed again. She knew who it would be, and she didn’t want to look at what would no doubt be a string of angry messages.

When she saw Kyoya reach into his pocket and pull out his phone, she stared incredulously. Surely she hadn’t messaged him? When she saw him wandering over to them, she had her answer; apparently Jade really was that petty. Some of us can’t just pull a sickie, she thought angrily and waited for her partner to pass on whatever message was so urgent that it couldn’t wait until after she’s finished talking to Hisoka.

***

“Urm,” Kyoya said awkwardly, noting the look on Miriam’s face and wondering if telling Jade he’d pass on her message was such a good idea after all. “Jade says that you need to have your stuff out of the house by seven tonight because she’s changing the locks? I’m not going to ask why,” he added, seeing his friend’s disbelief turn into hostility in a flash.

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“Please remind her that it’s my house and if she does that I will make her life a living hell. She may have passed her training, but I know the actual law,” Miriam snarled. “She is free to leave whenever she likes. Now, I will message her when I’m free, until then, please remind her that I’m
on shift and that I will sort out any issues that she may have after I am finished."

What are we, six years old? I’m not going to play ‘pass the message’ with her. I thought she was better than this. We were happy. Just because I said we weren’t a couple to Hannibal, doesn’t mean she had to...no. I’m not thinking about this. I’m on the job, and Hisoka is going to be enough to handle all on his own. She can find a place. I saw some nice ones on the net when I looked, and Kyoya’s already offered to put her up. She’s going to be fine. I’m not going to play this game. She saw Kyoya nod and start typing into his phone. Not here, you moron! Oh, for pity’s sake.

“Kyoya, if you wouldn’t mind, I was talking with Hisoka,” she said as calmly as she could manage, and gestured to the redhead beside her, who was, unfortunately, looking rather amused.

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"It’s fine, Kyoya was it? I know you both can't leave me unattended," Hisoka said with a devious smile. "If your friend lives within my radius then, well, I'll let you cuff me and put me in the back of your car. Then you can sort out whatever trouble has occurred without neglecting your duties?" he offered playfully. Seeing the glare he received from the woman guarding him, he added, "You can blindfold me too, I don't need to know where you live."

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“Now,” she added, pointedly changing the subject. “I believe we were talking about you. Behave, and we won’t have any issues, but cross that line once, and I’ll make sure you end up in Dr. Chilton’s ‘care’, not Dr. Lecter’s.”

***

Watching Kyoya flee, Hisoka clucked his tongue in disappointment. Pity, he was rather cute, if a little low on my scale. Looking back at the woman who was watching him like a hawk, he chuckled and said, "Woof. Do I get a treat if I do tricks? You know I still don't know your name, but you know mine. Maybe I'll behave better if you tell me?" Dr. Lecter? The man with the familiar voice? Wasn’t he assigned to be my next of kin?

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Miriam gave Hisoka a weary stare. “We were introduced back at the hospital, are you messing with me, because if you are, I suggest you up your game a bit.” When he frowned at her, she sighed and sing-songed, “My name is Miriam Lass, his name is Kyoya Kojima, and you’re Hisoka Morow.”

***

"I know who I am," Hisoka retorted. "In case you weren't aware, your friend, the Doctor, pumped me with some sedative and my memory’s rather hazy, OK? Still, thank you for humouring me, Miriam. I'm sure if you try to look past my reputation, you'll find I'm not that bad; I can be a nice guy if you let me. I'd bet a small fortune that whatever you think you know about me, is more than likely wrong."

***

Miriam raised her eyebrow sceptically. “So you don’t kill people for fun?” she challenged.
"I kill people for a lot of reasons," Hisoka replied cheerfully. "Fun is just part of it; they have to interest me first. If the act of wanton murder were enough to be entertaining I'd have racked up a much higher body count."

"Then we don’t have anything more to talk about. You break the law and wreck lives for your own amusement. The fact that I am being paid to protect you means that I have to be polite, but that’s all," Miriam said stiffly. "People like you are the reason I became an officer of the law. I don’t know what they were thinking when they decided to put you up here, but I’m going to do my job. But I’m not going to make small talk with serial killers who got themselves a ‘licence’ to cover up their crimes."

Hisoka nodded with a thoughtful hum before asking, "So does doing your job mean that I am not allowed to pick up cute guys and girls from the bar to take back to my room? I'm not stupid enough to kill anyone here; they'll leave in one piece. Maybe they’ll limp a little...but they'll recover after a good night of rest."

"You know, I know you’re lying about the sedative, right? It doesn’t affect people’s memory,” Miriam said flatly. “I just told you that I don’t care what you do, but I’m going to make sure, that while I’m on shift, those ‘cute guys and girls’ know who they’re talking to. You lied to that couple back there, and I thought it was only fair that they know the truth.”

"How do you know I wasn't in Jappon before I had my deathmatch?" Hisoka countered with a smirk before shrugging. "As for the sedative...I don't like hospitals, and I don't like Doctors. I stay away from them because your fancy medicine never works the way it is supposed to, so then I get asked to stay for more tests. Which no doubt would lead to even more tests," he paused and narrowed his eyes. "I'm many things Miriam, but I am not a lab rat. I didn't appreciate your colleague rushing me with a needle; he's lucky my memory’s impaired. If I could remember it clearly, I might decide to press charges against him."

“You were deliberately misleading them, and I stepped in before you could con them out of whatever you were looking to get from them,” Miriam said with as much dignity as she could manage, given the fact that her phone was now silently ringing on vibrate in her pocket. “I’m not responsible for what the hospital staff decide to do, he is not my colleague, and Dr. Lecter is a world-renowned expert in his field. He wouldn’t give you anything that could harm you. There’s a reason my boss called him in. Now, I have to take this call,” she added, picking her phone out of her pocket and noting that she had three missed calls from Zeller.

"I wanted company, which you have been providing. As for the man who rushed me, I'll correct my earlier statement; the hospital is lucky then. Also, Dr. Lecter is not an expert on me and my body. I am the only person who can claim that title," Hisoka advised patiently before sighing and
giving a dismissive wave of his hand. "I'll stay here, go sort out whatever it is you need to do."

***

Taking the call when Zeller rang for the fourth time, Miriam sighed and gestured for Kyoya to come and replace her. "What?" she said into the phone as he nodded and they switched places. When Zeller muttered something about 'Jade called', she saw red, and decided that going out into the corridor would be her safest option. She really didn’t want Hisoka knowing any more about her personal life than he already did.

***

Kyoya gave his friend a worried glance when he saw her leaving the bar, but decided that he really didn’t want to know what was happening. Whatever was going on was her business, not his.

Strolling over to Hisoka, he nodded, and smiled at him."Hi," he said. "How’s the whiskey? I heard it was good here. It’s a bit too expensive for me, but from what my friends have said, it’s not something to pass up if you get the chance to try it."

***

Hisoka returned the smile as he gestured to the empty stool beside him. "It's one of the best, to be honest with you. If you're a fan of whiskey, and get the chance to treat yourself, then I'd encourage you to do so. You can sit if you want," he offered. "I don't bite, unless you ask nicely."

***

"Yeah, not gonna do that," Kyoya said with a chuckle, taking the seat next to Hisoka and wistfully staring at the selection of drinks on display. "And I’m not likely to get a chance to sample those either, unfortunately. "By the way," he added, lowering his voice. "You probably don’t want to piss Miriam off right now, she’s got a bit of trouble at home, and she isn’t too happy about being taken off her case to guard you. Apparently she was close to figuring something out when the boss pulled rank. Just a heads up."

***

"I see," Hisoka replied as he followed Kyoya's gaze to the drinks display. "Well, she should be pissed off at Danchou for cheating then; it wasn't my idea to blow up the arena. That place was my home; I'd have nothing to gain from its destruction. As nice as this hotel is, it's a far cry from my Floormaster apartment. But you're not here to listen to me complain; I'd offer to buy you a drink, but you'd probably get in trouble if you said yes," he said, looking at the young officer sitting beside him. Deciding that he wasn't as impressive as Miriam, he asked, "Does she ever smile though? I bet she'd be much cuter with a smile, although I think I'd get a slap for saying that to her face."

***

"She doesn’t so much smile as kinda get this look on her face that says she thinks you’ve done something smart," Kyoya said conversationally. “Generally, she’s too focussed on trying to solve her case to spare much thought for things like smiling. One of our colleagues was killed,” he explained. “It was really brutal, and solving it would have been her big break. It’s a long story, and I’m sure you don’t want to hear it, but yeah, I agree, she needs to relax. I thought Jade would help, but apparently, it’s not worked out that way.” He sighed and stared at the drink in Hisoka’s hand. “Any advice on how to avoid playing piggy in the middle? So far I’ve just been trying to stay out
of it, but this looks like whatever they’ve got going on, is gonna drag all of us down with it.
Miriam’s all business and Jade...well.” He tried to think of a nice way of describing his best friend
that didn’t involve the phrase, ‘drama queen’ and came up with, “She’s more focussed on the
social side of life.”

***

"I'm afraid I don't, as I've never been in that situation. Relationships aren't really my thing, I have a
lover, but we're not exclusive. The person I was sort of dating...if you could call it that, well they
want me dead? I'm not the best person to ask for relationship advice. If you wanted sex tips, then
I'd be able to help you there," Hisoka replied mildly as he turned his glass on the bar in front of
him. "Or magic tricks and fortune-telling? I doubt you'd want my opinion on crimes and how to
commit them. You are on the wrong side of the fence for that, and I doubt you have the authority
to make a plea bargain with me. I'm sure I could solve a lot of cold cases for your bosses if I had
the chance."

***

Kyoya snorted and shook his head. “What, like, ‘Oh yeah, that was one of mine’, and, ‘Oh, I know
the guy that did that one, they live in France now’? I bet you could, but the boss would never let
that happen, and I can’t really see you enjoying playing for my team.”

He felt a chill run over him and turned to the door. Miriam was on her way back, and she looked
like she could kill someone. “Oh God, please don’t piss her off,” he whispered. “I actually don’t
think you did anything wrong at the Arena and I don’t want you to be executed. You're a good
fighter.”

***

Hisoka blinked in genuine surprise at Kyoya's words and smiled warmly. "That's kind of you to
say," he whispered back. "I'll try to play nice, but bad things tend to happen when I get bored. How
about I agree to stay in the hotel and in return you guys let me pick up people for sex, and I
promise I won't do anyone any permanent damage? That will keep me out of trouble, and you'll
know where I am?"

***

“Sounds good to me,” Kyoya said quickly. “But I’m not the one in charge; it’s her you have to
persuade. Hi, Miriam,” he added as cheerfully as he could. “Everything OK?” he asked innocently.

***

“Perfectly fine,” Miriam said with false cheer. “How are you two doing? Managing to stay out of
trouble?”

***

"I'm doing my best," Hisoka replied quickly. "We were just having a nice conversation about
whiskey and my areas of expertise. I'm a magician, you see," he continued with a grin. "I specialise
in card magic; I'd be happy to show you?"

***

“You’re OK,” Miriam said dismissively. "Kyoya,” she added, turning to her friend. “Zeller needs
your help. I'll be fine here for a few minutes if you could call him and arrange shifts. Apparently,
our colleague is sicker than we thought, and she won’t be joining us for the rest of the week. I’ve
told him that I’m happy to let the two of you arrange our shift patterns to cover for her.”

***

“Right, er, OK,” Kyoya said, getting to his feet. “I’ll talk in a bit, and I’d love to see your tricks
sometime, if you want to show me. I really liked watching you in the Arena. The thing you did
with your hands in that match against Kastro was amazing.” He caught sight of the glare Miriam
gave him and added, “But another time. I’ll call Zeller. See you later.”

***

"Of course, it’s not like I'm going anywhere. Another time," Hisoka agreed as he waited for Kyoya
to leave. **OK, how do I not piss you off when you already clearly hate me? Plus you already made
it clear you want me dead.** Offering his guard what he hoped was an inviting smile, he patted the
stool that had just been vacated. "You're allowed to sit and talk to me, right? I get the impression
you'd rather be anywhere else, and please don't take this the wrong way, but that feeling’s mutual.
So here's my proposal; let's try and have a civil conversation, like adults. It'll keep me out of
trouble?"

***

“Well, no offence to you, but I don’t see what we could possibly have to talk about. You’re a
murderer and a con man, and I’m an officer of the law,” Miriam said sharply, staying exactly
where she was. “You’re going to have to learn how to entertain yourself. As you said, we’re both
adults, so I’m sure you’re capable of learning how to have fun without spilling blood. I’m here to
make sure no one kills you before you can stand trial. That’s it.”

***

Hisoka chuckled and stood up, surveying the current patrons of the hotel bar and picking his new
target. **Well, you're not going to give an inch, and I told Kyoya I'd find myself a playmate in the
hotel. I should try to honour my word, even if it's nothing more than a gentleman's agreement.**
Pointing towards a less crowded corner of the bar, he indicated a young woman sitting by herself.
"If you don't want to talk to me," he drawled. "Then I'm going to see if she’d appreciate some
company. Don't worry; I'll tell her my name," he added when he saw Miriam open her mouth to
argue before turning on his heel and walking away.

***

“Be sure that you do,” Miriam said, glowering at his retreating back. The woman was pretty, but
looked skittish as hell. There was no way she’d stick around when she heard who he was, and if
she did, then she was an idiot.

To her surprise, Kyoya appeared at her side, and seemed to have a genuine smile on his face.
“What’s gotten you so cheerful?” she asked suspiciously.

***

“Oh, nothing,” Kyoya said amiably. “I just have a bet on with Zeller to see how long it’ll take you
to knock Hisoka out. Zeller doesn’t think you’ll do it, but I’m hoping you’ll snap by the end of the
week. That fight would be epic.”

***
2 Hours Later

***

Freddie smirked when she saw the balding guard - Larry Jenkins, or something like that - leave for yet another ‘patrol’. She’d followed him a few times and had been mildly disappointed to find that he was just sneaking away for smoke breaks. But, any vice could be turned to her advantage, and right now, there was an opening.

Peering through the peephole of her hotel room, she watched with delight as the woman Hisoka had picked up in the bar, was led away by the overly dramatic blond guard. She watched as the woman patted the sobbing redhead on her back consolingly and listened as she explained that Hisoka had asked her to ‘slice him up’ with a pocket knife.

So, you like pain? That fits with everything people have told me. I can work with that, she thought and undid the top three buttons of her black shirt. Hitching her skirt up so that it rested just above her knees, she plastered a lascivious smile on her face and waited for the officer to get into the elevator with the hysterical woman before she slipped out of her room and knocked on Hisoka Morow’s door.

***

Hisoka frowned when he heard a knock on his door; Michelle had been fun for a while until she’d baulked at his request for pain. What do you want now? Are you going to shout at me about my kinks, Miriam? he wondered as he approached the door in just his underwear. He’d been mid-way through getting dressed to go and find someone who didn’t just claim to like ‘unconventional sex’, and he allowed his irritation to show as he opened the door. "Is having a kink also a crime in Yorkn-" he began to ask, then stopped when he saw the unfamiliar redhead. Clearing his throat, he added, "My apologies I was expecting somebody else, can I help you, Miss?"

***

Freddie looked Hisoka up and down, then licked her lips and let her weight fall onto one leg. “So,” she purred, striding past the wonderfully muscular man and looking at the half-made bed. “Are you ready to play with the big girls?”

***

Laughing, Hisoka closed the door and watched the woman pick up the knife that Michelle had left on the bed, and twirl it in her fingers. "I'm always ready to play," Hisoka replied in a cheerful tone. "But does my new playmate have a name?" Maybe I don't need to leave my room, after all, he thought. You seem like you'll be entertaining.

***

“Jessabell,” Freddie lied easily, bringing the knife to her lips and licking along the blunt side of it absentely. “And I hear you’re in need of a little discipline. Apparently, you’ve been a very bad man.” Pillow talk really will be the most amusing way to get the information for my latest story, Freddie thought, feeling her pulse quicken at the look Hisoka gave her. And this one should be worth a repeat performance.
"Jessabell? Hmm, I'll remember that," Hisoka replied as he watched her with interest. "I have to confess I've been extremely naughty," he teased as he approached the bed. "It's so wonderful that you're here to discipline me, should I assume the position?"

Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:
Hannibal, Zeller, Leroy, Freddie, Miriam & Kyoya

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:
Hisoka, Jack
Chapter Summary

Hisoka and Hannibal finally have that 'little chat' Hannibal had been looking forward to, and Hisoka tries to figure out how this whole 'therapy' thing works.

Hannibal looked up from Hisoka’s file and noted the time. It was 1 pm, and the man in question was waiting outside his door. He smiled to himself and took a sip of his water. He had hoped that Hisoka would be at least as entertaining as his file suggested, and after meeting the man, earlier in the week, he was happy to say that he hadn’t been disappointed. There was something unusual about him, and the effort he’d put into ensuring that the man would owe him more than one favour, he knew, would not have been wasted. He was a rising star, and Hannibal was keen to attach himself to this particular curiosity. Apart from anything else, he was looking forward to finding out how he’d healed so fast and why he’d been so drawn to the man, when on paper it was Chrollo who was far more interesting.

Rising gracefully to his feet, he ensured that everything was neatly in place and that his qualifications were on full display. His Hunter card sat inside its frame, in between his qualifications as a Psychiatrist and Surgeon. They’d been carefully displayed on the back wall, and he’d found that they worked well there. His patients tended to either need the reassurance that they provided, or a reminder that he was more than capable of providing the help they required. He also found that it was useful to observe just how much detail they took in when entering the room. The large, open window, the library on the platform above them and the warm log fire were carefully designed to simultaneously intimidate and place his patients at ease. He’d chosen the chairs himself and had placed them in the centre of the room, facing each other. They were just far enough apart to enable his patients were able to relax. He couldn’t afford for them to feel like he was a threat.

Adjusting his waistcoat, he took a breath and opened his door. “Hisoka?” he said politely, keeping his voice carefully neutral and making sure his face was a calm mask of professionalism. He wondered how the man had reacted when he’d seen his name on the appointment slip.

***

Sitting out in the waiting room, Hisoka found that he was feeling more than a little bored. He didn't understand why he'd been sent here. It's not like he'd intended to kill the referee; it was Chrollo's fault. He'd been fighting the temptation to just walk out of the plush office for the last ten minutes; underneath the boredom, he'd found that there was a small sliver of curiosity remaining and one thing he needed to understand: Why is Dr. Lecter, my therapist? I thought he was the person who was acting on my behalf back at the hospital?

He’d been idly flicking through one of the magazines that had been left out for patients on a small glass table, when the door had finally opened, and he'd heard that annoyingly familiar voice calling his name. Feigning a ‘put upon’ air, he let the magazine fall from his hand and stood up. "You know if we keep meeting like this," he said with a playful tone colouring his words and a smirk to match. "This is what, twice in one week? We'll be the talk of the town at this rate."

***
Hannibal stood aside to let Hisoka into his office, fighting to keep the smile that tried to tug at his lips under control. He looked different now that he wasn’t in his hospital scrubs. His red hair was styled to stand up and away from his head, and he was wearing a white and blue stylised circus outfit, along with high heeled boots and two golden, heart-shaped pendant earrings. His face was artfully made up with makeup to match his dress; he had a star on his right cheek and a teardrop on his left.

Clearly, the man liked to make an impression. “Welcome,” he said politely and gestured for Hisoka to enter. “I’m glad you remember me; I’ve been told that you had some trouble with your memory after I gave you the sedative. I can only apologise for any distress caused, please, take a seat.”

***

"You weren't to know; things are just a little muddled. Nothing major," Hisoka replied, making his way across the waiting room, to where Dr. Lecter was standing. Deliberately pausing for a brief moment, he sashayed past him into the office, mirroring the walk he’d done for him on the day they’d first met.

It was a much larger room than he had expected, and far more homely than he’d imagined while he’d waited. What caught his attention almost immediately, though, was what appeared to be a Hunter’s Licence hanging on the wall. It was styled differently to his own, which meant that either the Doctor had passed the exam some time ago, or it wasn't real. Ooh, how interesting, he thought, filling the detail away for later. He let his eyes wander across the rest of the room, and took in the large desk, the numerous bookcases and then finally, the fireplace; That explains why it's so warm.

Not waiting to be told where to sit, he strode over to the chairs, and gracefully lowered himself into the one furthest from the door. Crossing one leg over the other, he rested his ankle on his knee and watched for his Doctor’s reaction. Fighting the urge to grin, he kept his expression neutral, but allowed a hint of mischief to show in his eyes.

Let’s see what you can do, Doctor. The show’s already started; your move now.

***

Confident, arrogant and observant. Those were his initial impressions when he’d first met Hisoka in the hospital, and he found that he didn’t need to revise his opinion now. If anything, he would have to add ‘dramatic’ to his list. He had smelled the sweet scent of Dogwood blossom on Hisoka’s clothing as he’d passed him, and he knew that the only tree within Hisoka’s radius came from the tree in his office’s back garden. Apparently, the Hunter was in the habit of scouting out a space before making his entrance.

And what an entrance it was. The subtle sway of his hips, the strategic nonchalance and the provocative placement of his long legs, all combined to telegraph a devilish sexuality that tugged at something deep inside Hannibal. What is it about you, I wonder. Chrollo had power, but you; are you a moth, or are you the flame? You play dangerous games, don’t you? Which of us will burn in the end, I wonder?

With a flicker of a smile, Hannibal strode calmly over and sat down opposite his patient.

“You do like to make quite a lasting impression, don’t you, Hisoka? Is that how you entered into Heavens Arena? I am told you made Floor Master, well done.”

***

Hisoka allowed himself his own small smile at the compliment. He wondered if Dr. Lecter was
aware of any of his other fights, beyond the one that had gotten him sent here. It could make the visit a bit more interesting if he was, but from the way the question had been worded, it was likely that he wasn’t a fan of his work. He looked at his nails as he replied, "Not quite. You see, in the Arena, they would have an announcer, spotlights and..." he paused for effect, "ah yes, entrance music for both fighters. It is quite a thrill; I can assure you, Doctor."

Straightening up in the chair, he allowed his gaze to fall on the man sitting across from him, noting the choice of a three-piece suit, the smart shoes and impeccable grooming. So the outfit you had on at the hospital is your idea of casual wear? I wonder what you think about my clothes? he thought remembering Hannibal’s choice of trousers, coupled with a button-down shirt under a jumper on the day they’d formally met.

"Have you been to the arena, Doctor?" he asked, trying to sound more interested than he actually was.

Hannibal smiled happily at the memory the man’s question had stirred. “Yes, in my youth. I found the experience to be rather enjoyable.” He kept his gaze soft and unthreatening, deliberately relaxing his posture to make sure that Hisoka knew he still wasn’t intimidated by him, despite the provocative way he was dressed. “Would you have preferred it if I had arranged for an announcer as you passed through my door? Or was it the music that caused you such a thrill?”

***

The suggestion made Hisoka's smile widen, Oh, how amusing! he thought, and bit back a small chuckle. He made a show of looking around the room as if checking for something, before replying, "I suppose that could have been interesting, but I wonder what the others would have thought if they heard an announcement for the 'Grim Reaper'; you see, that was my Floor Master title."

***

“I don’t know, what do you think they would have thought? What others are there here, but the two of us?” Hannibal made a mental note of the way Hisoka was taking in his surroundings and kept deliberately still. Death was apparently something this man embraced, or at least pretended to. He wondered if he knew that he’d temporarily succumbed to it under the rubble of the Arena before he’d been pulled out by the survivors?

***

Hisoka arched an eyebrow; he hadn't expected such a passive response. This man was starting to become interesting, for now at least. Maintaining his upright posture, he settled his sights on the fireplace, schooling his features into one of thoughtfulness as he mulled over how to respond.

"Oh, I don't know, I’m just finding it a little strange that they allowed me to come inside on my own. They escorted me here from the hotel, and I can only assume they’ll do so whenever I leave to go somewhere else." He looked back to the Doctor.

***

“Your escort is there for your safety as well as others. I do not fear you, nor do I require assistance when speaking with my patients. Besides, it is the height of rudeness, not to mention counter-productive to a therapy session, to have an outside authority present during our time together,” Hannibal said, casually crossing his left leg over his right and smiling.
“Typically we personify death to better understand it, but you became the Reaper himself. Tell me, what did it feel like when you heard them announcing you in such a way to the crowds?”

***

Once again, this man seated across from him had managed to catch him off guard. Despite his reassurances that they were indeed alone, he wasn't quite content to lower his defences just yet. How had he felt standing in the arena hearing them announce him in that manner? He hadn't given it much thought, if any, at the time. His sole focus had been on Chrollo. Thinking of the troupe leader made him break out in a wide grin, and he couldn't stop the pleased hum from escaping his lips.

"Danchou" he whispered, he wondered where Chrollo was right now. Had they also sent him to a room with an intriguing Doctor as they had done with him?

He shook the thoughts away; he couldn't afford to get excited. Keeping his composure was necessary, he wasn't a fool, despite how he liked people to perceive him.

"I was more focused on my opponent," he answered eventually.

***

Hannibal cocked his head slightly. “Really?” He asked softly. “Earlier you told me you found the experience of walking into the arena to be thrilling. Your Danchou must be quite someone to be able to capture your attention like that. Please, tell me about them.”

Hannibal hadn't missed the desire that flowed through Hisoka as he’d whispered the title Chrollo Lucilfer’s Troupe had given him. His session the previous day with the man had proven to be equally as interesting as this was becoming. The two men were almost polar opposites: Hisoka wore desire like armour, whilst Chrollo projected a detached calm that even Hannibal found intriguing.

He was looking forward to seeing how the rest of his time with the two men played out.

***

"I wasn't lying about the thrill," he said quietly, narrowing his eyes slightly in displeasure; he didn't like the insinuation that he hadn't been truthful. He lived for the fight, the announcer's voice presenting him to the audience, the light shows, and the music had just been the icing on the cake for him. At the arena, he had found a temple to his first love: Battle.

Then there was Chrollo, his Danchou. What could he say? Facing off against the troupe leader after years of research, then the stalking and trying to get his favour to actually join the troupe. Then the nearly three years of playing the loyal lapdog just for that Kurta to come in and seal his Nen...he gripped the arms of the chair a little more tightly. No, forget about that, Kurapika had his reasons.

"Have you ever worked for something for so long, only to have it snatched away from you at the last moment?” he frowned. "Then you find yourself offered a slim possibility of hope that your efforts weren't in vain. So you follow the trail like a starving man, following the scent of baking bread, until you finally get a second chance?"

With a flourish, he pulled a playing card out of what appeared to be thin air and tapped it to his nose thoughtfully. It was the Ace of Spades. "Standing in the arena, in anticipation of that fight I’d been working for, for so long was like tasting fresh food after starving for weeks. The normal thrill
just can't compare."

Satisfied with his answer, he vanished the Ace into thin air, before producing a deck of cards. Absently he began to shuffle them. "I hope you don't mind, but I like to keep my hands busy," he offered by way of explanation.

***

Hannibal took note of the card that had appeared in Hisoka’s hand for a brief moment; the Ace of Spades. The symbolism wasn’t lost on him.

“I have felt many types of starvation and deprivation in my life. I dare say I can entirely understand your desire, but no work is ever wasted. We learn something new from every experience. For example, your card,” he pointed towards the pack Hisoka was shuffling. “The Ace of Spades. It has many meanings; most of them are of a combative nature. Was your conjuring of it in response to the memory of your fight, or are you, perhaps, feeling threatened? After all, I can’t imagine this is the most comfortable of experiences for someone such as yourself?”

***

As if trying to prove that he wasn't being affected by Hannibal’s words, he continued to play with the cards. Sending them soaring through the air between his hands with the precision of a casino blackjack dealer. "Oh?" he finally said in response, feigning surprise.

"I’ll confess a familiarity with the symbolism, but it was just a random draw," he said, keeping his voice neutral, "I didn't really give it much thought, but cards were always a constant companion for me for a long time. It just feels natural. I suppose you think having the black suit symbols on my chest as opposed to the red ones means something too? Here I thought they'd sent me to a renowned Doctor, not a card reader."

He stopped shuffling for a moment and decided to look at the top card. "You can ask me to put them away if you like, it is your domain we’re in, after all," he drawled.

***

Well, that didn’t take much, Hannibal thought, choosing to ignore Hisoka’s more pointed and deliberately provocative remark, and instead, smiling warmly, “Can one not be both a Doctor and a seeker of knowledge?” he asked, focussing on Hisoka’s golden eyes. “For example, you’re a Magician, Hunter and Mass Murderer. You have multiple and varied skills, would it not follow that I too have that capacity?”

***

Never one to back away from a challenge Hisoka stared back into Hannibal’s piercing gaze. He hummed in response, still holding the single playing card in his hand that he had drawn earlier. As his lips pulled up in a sly smile, he said, "I never said those were incompatible, besides you missed something from your list.” He flipped the card to face the Doctor, revealing the two of hearts. "I'm also an exceptional lover,” he added with a flick of his wrist to send the card flying at his therapist.

***

Hannibal smiled in genuine pleasure as he caught the two of hearts neatly in his hand. “My apologies, Hisoka. That was something the authorities had failed to make a note of when they referred you to me. I will be sure to correct the mistake.”
Placing the card neatly on the table beside him, he quickly used Gyo to make sure the Magician hadn’t attached his Bungee gum to it. There was none, but the card itself was infused with Nen, but he had expected nothing less from a man like Hisoka.

Sex and Violence, yes, that seemed to sum him up perfectly.

“I would, however, politely request that you keep the rest of your possessions to yourself,” Hannibal said with a deferential nod.

***

"Of course Doctor, my apologies," Hisoka replied in an unusually deferential tone. He hadn't missed how easily he had caught his card, and his heart had sped up with a hint of excitement. *Just like the examiner back at the swamp, maybe he is the real deal after all?*

He returned to shuffling his cards absentmindedly.

"So how does this therapy work exactly? You're a Doctor, so do we just talk until you decide I'm cured?"

***

Hannibal noted the change in Hisoka’s demeanour and language. So the card had been a test.

“That would depend upon whether or not you are in need of curing,” Hannibal said mildly. “It is my job to assess whether or not you are a risk to the general population, and to act accordingly. If I feel that therapy would be of benefit to you, then at the end of this session, I will make my recommendation to the authorities as to how we shall proceed.” He leaned forward slightly and placed his hands on the top of his knee. “Tell me, Hisoka, what would you like to gain from our time together?”

***

In response, Hisoka gave an inattentive chuckle, "I don't suppose telling you that I don't suffer from insanity, I actually enjoy it, would win me any brownie points then?"

He shrugged when he didn’t get a response from Hannibal and, instead mused over the question he’d been posed. What did he want from this experience? It wasn't like he saw anything wrong with being the way he was. The general public didn't interest him; most people were boring. However, the man sitting across from him; there was something about him that reminded him of somebody. If only he could place it.

"I don't really know. If you want me to be bluntly honest, the general populace isn't of much interest to me,” he said, deciding to deflect, for now, hoping to buy some more time to consider his answer.

***

“In my experience, sanity is rather relative. I feel for those who are burdened with an overabundance of it,” Hannibal said, leaning back in his chair. He could see the man across from him, beginning to think, rather than react and knew that he was starting to make progress. He enjoyed watching people think, and people like Hisoka were always the most interesting.

"*If you want me to be bluntly honest the general populace isn't of much interest to me."* Yes, Hannibal could relate.
“Well,” Hannibal paused as if considering for a second. “If you don’t really know what you want from this session, perhaps you could tell me what you wish for in your life? What is it you want to achieve?”

***

The question was an interesting one, "What is it you want to achieve?"

It made Hisoka freeze for a second before he resumed toying with his still present deck of cards. Images came to mind of a young Gon yelling at him, holding out his number forty-four examinee badge on Zevil Island. Chrollo standing in front of that airship telling him that he wasn't worth fighting. He found himself thinking back further than he would normally allow himself, to the night he saved his fellow performer, Abaki from the 'John Doe' killer in his youth. Of how he’d learnt Nen from his mentor Moritonio.

Moritonio... he thought back to how it had felt to take the man's life; the giddy feeling of power, how he’d expected to die but had still managed to survive. Haven't I already gone further than I ever thought I would? It was a question he found himself struggling to answer. The past was meaningless to him; he lived for the present. He was the strongest, and he took great pleasure in proving that to those who thought otherwise.

"I prefer to live in the now. The past can't be changed, so I care little for dwelling on it. As for the future, well, I have more options open to me than I ever dreamed I would. Or so I thought." He shifted in his seat. "It's hard to say what I could hope for from these meetings when it's not like I chose to be here. Surely you are aware that I was instructed to attend this little session today?"

***

Hannibal could almost see the shift in the man's demeanour as his memories flashed before his mind's eye. The mixture of bitter fear and mouth-watering joy that poured from him caused Hannibal’s heart to dance. He imagined, for a brief moment, what it would be like to sink his teeth into Hisoka’s strong muscles and had to recross his legs, to disguise his need to take a calming breath. Hisoka would be magnificent.

“I am aware, yes,” he answered calmly. “But that does not mean that you can not gain something from our ‘little session’, as you say. What were the options you foresaw in your future, before your unfortunate incident in Heaven's arena?”

***

That Hannibal had, for the first time, appeared to shift involuntarily didn't go unnoticed by Hisoka. However, he pretended not to have seen; he much preferred to be underestimated when trying to gauge new people. It was a tactic that had served well in the past.

"Well, I should start by saying, should I have survived the fight, then I could have had the honour of being the one to rid the world of the Phantom Troupe.” He smiled at the thought of exterminating the infamous spider. "Other than that, well, I have a few, shall we say...fruits I wish to help grow to become big and strong.”

***

“I see, so you wish to perform public services. Ridding the world of criminals is, indeed, a worthy cause,” Hannibal said, noting the relish on the Magician’s expressive face. “I have to admit, I am intrigued to hear more about your, fruits,” he said with genuine interest. “It is rare for a man of
your background to be inclined towards nurture.”

***

"A man of my background?” That caught Hisoka's attention more than anything else that had been said so far. Just what information did they manage to dig up on him? Hadn't he taken great pains to bury that stuff?

"What is there to tell, I hope to see my little apple grow up to be a strong opponent who will be worth killing..." he shifted position again. He was at risk of becoming excited if he let himself think too much about Gon. "Until then, I won't allow anyone else to touch him or harm him. Does that sound more like a man of my background, Doctor?" he asked, his golden eyes slightly narrowing; Gon was his after all.

***

Hannibal nodded his understanding. “It does, thank you Hisoka. In my experience, those who relish destruction, rarely enjoy the process of creation.” Hannibal tilted his head slightly. “Tell me, what has this person done to gain your interest?”

***

Allowing himself to think back to his first encounter with Gon, Hisoka smiled in a predatory way. It still gave him chills when he pictured the look on the child’s face as he held him aloft in the damp swamp air. Oh Gon, my little apple, he thought, and subconsciously licked his lips. Gon had been fascinating to him ever since he'd struck him with the lure of his fishing pole. Standing there definitely, with less fear than men more than twice his age, and more determination than adults over twice his size.

"Oh nothing much, but wouldn't you say that a twelve-year-old boy who can outperform veterans of the hunter exam..." he paused briefly to consider his words, "Who also passed said exam on his first-ever attempt, I should add, was worth watching? During the trials, he surprised me, not just once, but multiple times. When he managed to sneak up on me and cleverly steal my tag as per the task at hand." Hisoka stopped, and gave a contented sigh, closing his eyes. "Let's just say that I knew that at that moment, I had to have him." He opened his eyes and looked back at Hannibal, gauging his reaction. "He's not ripe yet, so I have to wait and be patient."

***

Hannibal watched, carefully ensuring he kept a neutral expression on his face, as Hisoka groaned at the thought of killing the young boy - or rather, of killing him once he had reached his full potential, whenever that would be.

Psychopaths were not a rarity amongst Hunters, and as a Blacklister himself, Hannibal worked with many. Most were contemptuously predictable. All one had to do was learn how they thought and where their buttons lay. This man, however, this one was more than he appeared.

Hisoka desired nothing more than the pleasure of the fight and Hannibal wondered if the only way the man ever derived any true satisfaction was through violence? How many had died beneath his hands, solely for the thrill of domination; for Hisoka to feel the delight of his victory?

Hannibal allowed curiosity to appear in his eyes. “I see, and when will your apple be ripe enough to pluck?”

***
"It's not an exact science, predicting these things, I'm afraid. One may as well ask how long a piece of string is," Hisoka said dismissively, waving his hand. "Besides, it only takes a mere second for treasure to turn to trash."

He glanced back over at the back wall momentarily as if pondering a question of his own.

"The last time I saw him, he was well on his way to exceeding my expectations. I'd say he was easily in the mid-eighties at the time." He glanced back at Hannibal. "Although I expect him to reach 100 and even beyond, given enough time. I can be patient; I just have to make sure that the Kurta boy doesn't break any more of my toys."

Having finally put his cards away, he leant forward. "Is that more in line with what you would expect, Doctor?"

***

Ignoring the aggressive question, Hannibal focussed on the rather interesting words that had casually left Hisoka’s elegant lips.

“Kurta boy?” he asked, interested despite himself. The Kurta’s as a clan were supposed to have been wiped out entirely. He had a set of their eyes in his possession, and he’d sampled another out of curiosity; they’d tasted astonishingly good. The thought of a fresh pair made his mouth water.

***

So I finally found something that interests you other than myself? Hisoka thought. Kurapika has taken great lengths to hide his identity as the last of the Kurta. What will you do with that information I wonder? Sensing that he had found a thread he could tug on to get some insight into his Doctor, he decided to give it a gentle pull. I’d much prefer not to discuss Gon with you.

"He was one of the other examinees when I took the exam for the second time. We had an agreement regarding the spiders, although sealing Danchou’s nen wasn’t supposed to be part of that..." he let the words hang between them. He remained leaning slightly forward, his elbow resting on his leg as he laid his chin on an open palm, regarding the other man with curious eyes.

***

"It seems as if this boy has earned your ire. I assume that he was the setback you were talking about earlier? He stood between yourself and your goal of fighting Chrollo Lucilfer?" Hannibal said, carefully phrasing the statement as a question.

***

Never one to miss a chance to show his brilliance, Hisoka leant back in his seat once again, reclining in a rather regal way as he moved, and smirked. "Well, I was able to fix that little problem, or else I wouldn't be here right now." He smirked wider, "Danchou has his Nen back because I found a rare talent on Greed Island, and that also allowed me to observe how my fruit was doing." He subconsciously looked at his hand, recalling how he had dislocated all of his fingers in that dodgeball game. It had been worth it to earn the boys gratitude.

***

The mention of Greed Island tied a few details together for Hannibal. He had heard about the child that had managed to complete the game - Gon Freecss, along with his friend Killua Zoldyck. Was Gon the fruit Hisoka was talking about? The chances were high. He had met Gon’s father, Ging, a
few times in his life, and he could very easily believe that his child would be as strong as Hisoka
was claiming.

The fact that the man was clearly fixated on the child was evident for all to see; he had made no
attempt at hiding it, and so Hannibal doubted that he would do so in the outside world. The Hunter
Association were evidently not overly concerned about the safety of Ging Freecss’s offspring...but
if he could use that to his advantage, as leverage to keep Hisoka in therapy, then he certainly
would. He wanted to know more about the Kurta boy.

“It would take an exorcist to forcibly unseal a Nen Binding once it was in place. You found one in
order to arrange your fight with Mr Lucilfer? You are clearly very dedicated to your art.”

***

Hisoka beamed at Hannibal’s words, choosing to take them as praise. "I can assure you, Danchou
was worth the effort. After all that time, I couldn't simply let him get away so easily."

He uncrossed his legs and recrossed them with a thoughtful expression on his face as he regarded
his therapist. This was proving to be much more interesting than he’d expected.

"Unfortunately, I haven't been able to keep track of the Kurta for a while. They've dropped off the
radar, last I knew they were working with a mafia family," he said, deliberately mentioning
Kurapika once again in the hopes of testing the theory forming in his mind.

***

“I find it hard to believe that you aren’t keeping tabs on an individual who could potentially break
your toy again? So shortly after you went to such great efforts to fix it as well?” Hannibal asked,
watching Hisoka with a carefully neutral expression. The man seemed to respond well to praise,
and Hannibal was keen to keep Hisoka’s guard down.

Like himself, every move the Hunter made was deliberate; but unlike Hannibal, who had tailored
himself to be as unthreatening as he was capable of being, Hisoka lived to provoke. He was subtle,
but Hannibal knew a trap when he saw one. “I can only assume that you are satisfied with the
outcome of your fight with Mr Lucilfer?”

***

Hisoka tilted his head slightly, "I have faith that Danchou isn't keen to run into the boy, and will be
going to great lengths to avoid him. Besides, he's on a very personal quest right now; locating all
those lovely scarlet eyes."

He lowered his gaze, *Am I satisfied?* he pondered the question.

"Satisfied? I am not sure; he promised me a battle to the death..." he gestured to the room he was
sitting in with a wry smile, "Unless this is my afterlife I'd say he still owes me."

***

“So,” Hannibal said calmly. “What do you intend to do about that?” he asked, letting his gaze
remain soft and observant, but non-threatening. This was why the man was here after all, and they
both knew it. *Afterlife indeed, was that a joke or do you really not know that you died in the
Arena?* he wondered.

***
Hisoka involuntarily tensed in his chair for a moment before commanding his body to relax once again. Trying to appear more relaxed about the turn in the conversation than he was. With the ease of a practised con man, he gave a small chuckle. Once again, he leant forward to meet Hannibal’s gaze, with an unspoken challenge in his golden eyes, he purred, “Well, that depends on what he does now, doesn't it?"

***

Hannibal lived for moments like this and allowed a little steel to enter his spine but otherwise remained relaxed. “And what if Chrollo Lucilfer were to pursue Gon Freeces? What would you do then?”

***

"He would live to regret it," Hisoka growled reacting immediately. "But he would wish he hadn't." His eyes were narrowed as he all but glared at his therapist.

"Gon is mine!" he stated firmly. "If he dared to go after my fruit then I won't hesitate to kill off his troupe. I can assure you, Danchou cares about his precious Troupe surviving just as much if not more than I want Gon."

***

And there it was. This was the reason they had sent Hisoka to him, even though he was also ‘treating’ Chrollo Lucilfer; no other therapist was equipped to handle an obsession that ran as deep as this. In a man such as Hisoka Morow, it could cause more than a few hundred deaths. This was all he needed to ensure Hisoka remained his for the foreseeable future.

“Is Gon Freecss aware of your desire to kill him?” Hannibal asked, making sure the intensity of Hisoka’s response wasn’t mirrored in his own tone, and wondering exactly how he could use the information about Chrollo’s Troupe to his advantage in his next session with the man. Hisoka’s theory would need testing.

***

The unexpected question caused Hisoka to pause and sit upright. Does Gon know? Why yes he does, I made that clear during the exam.

He gave Hannibal his most charming closed-eyed smile, holding a hand up in a disarming gesture as he did so. "Why, of course, I told him during the exams fourth phase. Does your file also tell you that he still sought me out at the arena? As well as for help on Greed Island. He's clearly not afraid of me."

***

“And you expect a twelve-year-old boy to have the mental capacity to understand the danger that a psychopathic serial killer truly poses to him?” Hannibal asked, mildly.

He had to ensure that he had accurately assessed Hisoka’s mental state. Hannibal himself had killed at a young age, he understood that youth did not always equal innocence; but if Gon was aware that Hisoka wanted to kill him, and still sought him out, then he was either extremely brave, profoundly foolish or a psychopath himself.

But it was not Gon that Hannibal was being paid to assess. Hisoka was the one sat before him, and the pull he felt towards the man was stronger than ever.
His charming smile, the glib attitude and the offhand tone led Hannibal to believe that Hisoka, at least on some level, understood that Gon wasn’t truly aware of the threat he posed to him, but that didn’t mean that he was consciously aware of what he was feeling. What Hannibal had to work out now, was precisely how much that fact excited the Hunter, and why Hannibal wanted him to smile like that when he thought of him.

***

Hisoka opened his eyes and looked at Hannibal with a genuinely puzzled expression. Why wouldn’t Gon understand? He sat there silently for a few minutes as he mulled over what he’d been asked.

He thought of the way Gon would look at him, and had to fight back a groan. But that wasn't what he was being asked about, and it wasn't relevant. Once again, and entirely unbidden, he found his mind sauntering down memory lane to a time he had tried his best to forget. A city under the grip of a serial killer who could change their face, and a name on the tip of everyone’s tongue: The John Doe killer.

Surely he couldn't have been much older than Gon back then? He felt his face change to a more pensive expression. When he finally spoke, his voice was barely above a whisper. "Why wouldn't he?" he asked.

***

Hannibal smiled inwardly. He had been right in his judgement; Hisoka did not fully understand.

“Gon is a child,” Hannibal said. “He may indeed have great skill; he would have to in order to pass the hunter exam at such a young age and complete his Father's game, but he is nonetheless, still a child. Our capacity to entirely understand the consequences of our actions is not yet fully developed at twelve years old.”

He paused thoughtfully for a moment to let that information sink in, before asking, very gently, “When was your first kill, do you remember?”

***

At the rebuke, Hisoka narrowed his eyes and opened his mouth to snap back in his own defence but thought better of it. He had to tread carefully; this man was in a position to affect the rest of his life if he said the wrong thing. Hisoka wasn't stupid, he could understand that much quite easily. He thought back to the dodgeball game, the way Gon had treated his 'best friend' so casually, like a tool, and Killua had accepted it.

Growling quietly, he slouched in his chair, and folded his arms over his chest in a rather childish action, but managed to hold back his pout.

"Have you ever met Ging Freecss?" he said, trying to keep the defensiveness out of his voice, but failing. "Because if you do, I suggest you tell that to him. Seeing as he had previously convicted and dangerous criminals on that island playground of his; which I was led to believe, he designed especially for Gon. You weren't there in that gymnasium during that dodgeball game Doctor, I can assure you, I was nearly seriously injured by that Razor fellow...Luckily I have fast reflexes."

***

Hannibal had clearly struck a chord. He wondered how much Gon reminded Hisoka of his childhood self, and how much he unknowingly resented Ging’s child because of it.
“I am not here to assess Ging Freecss, Hisoka, nor am I here to comment on how he shows affection towards his son, I am here to assess you,” Hannibal said evenly. “And you have avoided my question. I would very much appreciate it if you could give me your answer.

He picked up the card still resting on his side table. “Here,” he said and held it out for Hisoka to take back. “I wouldn’t want you to forget this. It’s quite beautiful by the way,” he added conversationally. “Such a simple design, yet, so elegantly executed.”

***

Still feeling rather childish Hisoka rolled his eyes. Of course, he thought sourly. Looking away, and choosing to watch the fire for several moments, he sat in silence, before he gave a drawn-out sigh. "I already told you. The past is meaningless to me,” he said, glaring at the flames.

***

Hannibal felt the corner of his eyes tighten in annoyance and quickly smoothed the expression away. Hisoka had, once he’d realised that he was no longer in charge of the conversation, reverted to a rather juvenile tactic to regain control of the situation. He knew how to deal with temper tantrums.

“Hisoka,” Hannibal said assertively, making sure to keep any aggression out of his voice. “Your card.” He placed it on the table beside Hisoka’s chair and waited. Patience, stability and consistency were what would see him through. If he rose to Hisoka’s bait, the man would win, and he would lose all authority.

***

Sensing movement, Hisoka glanced out of the corner of his eye, and tried to act uninterested as he saw that the Nen infused card had been placed next to him. He waited for Hannibal to move back to his original position before looking at the two of hearts he had flicked at him earlier, and smiled a little. He waved his hand over it, but didn't pick it up, instead choosing to leave it where it was, facing up on the table beside his chair.

Instead, he produced his cards once more and resumed his earlier shuffling activities with a wry grin. "But I have all my cards here, Doctor..." he made them fly in an arc between his hands expertly, stopping his shuffling and holding the deck to show the bottom card. It was the two of hearts.

He watched with interest to see what his therapist would do, how he would react to his little trick. On the table, now he had removed his nen, was a blank card that read, ‘Made You Look’.

***

Hannibal offered Hisoka a small smile. “It is rude to keep ignoring my question, Hisoka,” he said as he sat back in his chair, refusing to rise to Hisoka’s distraction.

***

The magician frowned slightly; he was sure he would have gotten some sort of reaction out of the man with his trick. Perhaps he was refusing to acknowledge it until he gave him what he wanted?

He didn't want to remember that far back. He didn't see any use in digging up the past. Pursing his lips, he wondered if saying that he didn't remember would buy him some more time? Probably not.
Trying to figure a way out of this enforced trip to his most hidden memories, he leant back, vanished his cards once more and closed his eyes. So far, he had avoided the question three times. Clearly, this man wasn't going to drop it; he would have to play the game. Perhaps he could tell them a partial truth? Just enough to keep him happy?

Hisoka sighed and resigned himself to his current fate. He couldn't see a way out of this that wouldn't make things worse.

"I don't remember it clearly; I was fairly young at the time..." he opened his eyes to stare at the ceiling; he didn't want to see the way he was being observed right now, even if he could feel it, "I didn't actually understand what I had done until later. Is that what you wanted to know?"

***

Hannibal offered the man a small smile, even though, right now, he wouldn't be able to see it. He allowed the warmth to enter his voice as he said, “You were too young to fully comprehend. As was I, the first time I took a life. It is an instinctive action, born of necessity or need and yet, comprehension often comes after the act, which can never be taken back. If you and I were too young to understand, why is it that you think that Gon Freecss is somehow different?"

He watched the restless man closely. Like Hannibal, the past didn’t seem as if it were a pleasant place for him to visit, but unlike Hannibal, Hisoka had clearly never made peace with his. He wondered what he would find there when they travelled down that particular road together. He would have to be careful; Hisoka was volatile, but, Hannibal smiled, he had ways of dealing with that.

He would just have to be wary of Hisoka’s misdirects. He had details of his abilities in his files, and he knew that his cards weren’t just toys, and that he was just as adept at disguise as he was his card tricks. His little stunt with the two of hearts was evidence enough for that.

Yes, Hannibal thought. Caution. Caution and assertiveness. He could show no weakness to Hisoka Morow.

***

Sitting there with his eyes closed, Hisoka listened, unmoving to the words being spoken to him. The comparison between himself and the therapist, followed by the comparison to Gon, felt strange.

He bit down on his bottom lip, drawing a drop of blood in an attempt to ground himself. Physical pain he could deal with. The sensation was one he was intimately familiar with. Gon... he licked the blood of his lips absenty. He felt like he was fighting against the current, trying to stop himself from being pulled into his past. But I was younger than Gon back then...wasn’t I?

Hisoka could feel his pulse quickening; his heart raced as he fought against his baser instinct to try and flee. He was Hisoka Morow after all. The lethal magician, the arena's Grim Reaper; he did not run.

He listened for the sounds in the room; the crackle of the fireplace, the ticking of a clock, the other man's even breathing. "I was..." he was surprised at how strangled his voice sounded, how childlike he felt.

"I wasn't the same age," he managed to spit out the words that were forming a lump in his throat, as old fear and apprehension threatened to overwhelm him. "It wasn't my fault... it was an accident..."
This was what Hannibal wanted. This was going to give him what he needed. “Accidents happen,” he said gently, and let the Hunter sink deeper into his memory.

Feeling a little lost, Hisoka allowed his head to fall forward, still not meeting Hannibal's eyes, and stared at his hand; it had been just an accident, hadn't it? He felt his leg starting to bounce in his restless unease.

This feeling of being unable to leave, being unable to do what he wanted was suffocating him. In an effort to stop the movement, he put his hand on his thigh, slightly digging in his nails. The sharp sting of pain that blossomed from his leg acted like a lifeline, and he took a deep breath to regain his calm. Counting backwards in his mind, he found his centre once more, and said, "Yes they do," he agreed, and once again allowed himself to make eye contact. With a deliberate smile on his face, he added, more calmly, "Accidents happen. The past can't be changed. I see no reason to dwell on such trivial matters...Or how this relates to the reason I was sent here."

“It helps me understand your motives and motivations,” Hannibal said simply, relaxing and meeting Hisoka’s piercing eyes with his relaxed, half-lidded gaze.

Tilting his head to the side, he asked, “Do you often find that pain helps alleviate uncomfortable thoughts?” He nodded towards Hisoka’s hand and the vice-like grip the man had on his leg. The blood from where he had bitten his lip earlier had stopped flowing now, but its smell had been tantalizing nonetheless. Hannibal had easily been able to resist it’s draw then, but he would have to step in if Hisoka took the self-harm too far. He couldn’t allow a patient to leave his office injured.

Hisoka dropped his gaze to his thigh, seeing that he hadn't let go yet; he mentally commanded himself to do so. The pain was still there, he could still feel it, and there was just enough to get through the rest of this pointless meeting.

"Pain and I are old friends, Doctor," he drawled silkily, with a hint of arousal in his tone that he couldn't quite hide.

“And do you become sexually stimulated when you feel it, or was the slight moan merely for my benefit?” Hannibal asked evenly, wondering exactly how masochistic the man truly was.

He had read that he hadn’t so much as blinked when he’d had both of his arms sliced off above the elbow, but he hadn’t believed it, until now. If Hisoka derived a sexual thrill from pain, then that would explain why he apparently sought it out so readily. Hannibal inwardly smiled, and why he was trying to get a rise out of him now. It was something he was intimately familiar with, and something he could certainly use to his advantage in their later sessions.

Hisoka couldn't help the lascivious smile that had appeared on his face when he heard Dr. Lecter’s question; he wanted to laugh. His therapist was so amusing.
First, he appeared to want to talk about his childhood, and now he seemed to be questioning his sexuality? *What next?* he wondered idly, as he enjoyed the throbbing he’d caused himself with his nails.

"I assure you, if it’s for anyone's benefit, *Doctor Lecter,*" he said with a hint of amusement flickering in his gaze. "It would be for me."

Fighting the urge to chuckle, he straightened up in his seat once more and crossed his legs once more.

***

Hannibal allowed the amusement he was feeling to show on his face. “Well, that is good to know Mr. Morrow,” he said evenly. “I would ask that you refrain from drawing any more blood in my office, though.” He bowed his head slightly. “I can offer you alternative methods to ground yourself if you find that they will be needed. However, whilst you are with me in a professional capacity, I can not permit you to cause harm to yourself or others. I’m sure you understand.”

***

Hisoka grinned as he spotted the loophole in Dr. Lecter's warning. Oh, he could have some fun with this, and he could give him a taste of what he wanted at the same time: Two birds one stone.

He shifted his position slightly, just enough to be inviting, and tilted his head. Keeping his lascivious smile in place, he let his eyelids drop slightly and lowered his voice to a purr.

"You never said *you* couldn't cause harm though...what did you have in mind?" he allowed his eyes to roam over Hannibal’s seated form, "Maybe you could take your belt to me and make me call you Daddy...no, I think you're more of a *Master.*"

Feeling amused at his own antics, Hisoka allowed himself a quiet snicker. He couldn’t wait to see what would happen next.

***

Hannibal remained calm under Hisoka’s assessment. The man had brightened again at the hint of sex and had seized the opportunity he’d been presented to escape talking about his past. Hedonistic was another trait he could now add to his growing list of characteristics for Hisoka Morow.

Allowing a little darkness to show in his eyes he asked, “Would that give you back the sense of control you crave, Hisoka, if I did take you over my knee and spank you?”

***

Hisoka hummed in reply, and there was a slight hint of disappointment in the tone. The response had been rather tame, he'd hoped for something a bit more interesting, if not more enticing. No matter, he could always push for what he wanted. He was no stranger to this game.

Keeping to the same soft purring tone to his voice, he continued to watch for a reaction as he said, "Surely you can do better than that, Doctor?" He quickly flicked his eyes to the bookcases and then back to the man, before adding, with a hint of challenge to his voice, "A well-read and knowledgeable man like you?"

***
Hannibal had to work hard not to allow his more carnal emotions to show on his face, but it did amuse him to see Hisoka trying to play this particular game.

He addressed the man’s last point first. “I assure you, as both a Surgeon and a Psychiatrist, I am well aware of how to inflict and the effects of pain upon the human body.” Pausing for a brief moment, he pretended to think over his words before asking, “Do you always antagonise your lovers in such a way? Would the idea of seeing me out of control and enraged excite you, Hisoka?

***

Continuing to watch through his half-lidded golden eyes, Hisoka allowed his smile to broaden. With an elegant hand gesture, he materialised another single card, this time it was the Jack of Clubs. He regretted not having his actual tarot cards with him; the symbolism wouldn't quite match, but he was curious to see if Dr. Lecter would figure it out.

"No, I don't always do anything with my lovers..." he paused and licked the card suggestively, maintaining his eye contact as he did so. "I like variety. Sometimes I am on top, with others...well, I've been told I do a good impression of a cheap whore..." he narrowed his eyes as he spoke the last few words, and vanished the card as quickly as he made it appear.

***

“And you think that I am using you as such?” Hannibal challenged, openly watching as Hisoka licked along the length of his card. “It is true that I stand in between you and your freedom, but I assure you, Hisoka, I do not see you as a cheap anything. Quite the contrary, I don’t think many people would be able to afford the real you.”

He allowed a predatory smile to show in his eyes; the man was clearly looking to provoke a reaction, and unless he got something he wasn’t going to be satisfied. He would be lying to himself if he didn’t at least acknowledge that the idea of hearing Hisoka scream excited him, but what Hisoka was asking for, and what he would get, if Hannibal gave in to his urges, were two very different beasts.

***

Hisoka dropped the smile, in favour of a brief frown, before his lips pulled back into a sneer.

"And just what would be ‘the real me’?” he challenged, cocking his head to the side. "My body? My mind? Perhaps both together?"

He rolled his shoulders to loosen up his tensing muscles. His clear flirtation was being skillfully ignored, or maybe he’d missed his mark. *Hmm, perhaps the good Doctor just isn't into men.*

***

“Not a whore for sure, Hisoka. Whore’s work for money, gold and jewels.” Hannibal uncrossed his legs and allowed them to fall slightly open. “We are far more than our actions. How we choose to present ourselves to the world, is not always who we are at our core.”

*Defensive,* Hannibal thought and added that below Hedonistic on his mental checklist. Either Hisoka didn’t have a clear sense of self or he, like Hannibal, kept his true nature well hidden.

“Would you not agree?” Hannibal asked, allowing his legs to fall ever so slightly wider as he spoke.
Hisoka allowed his boredom with the conversation to show on his face. How long had he been in this room now? Just how long was one of these sessions supposed to take anyway? He very much wanted to be done with this smart suited Doctor and get back on track with his life.

"It’s actually very simple, you see." He paused for effect. "As I said earlier, I prefer to live in the present."

He held his hand up and glanced at his nails, "Money is not really a concern when you have a Hunter license, and especially not with the money I’ve made through my battles at the Arena. So I will continue searching for those who can be a fun challenge."

“And seeing if you could get my licence revoked was a challenge until I didn’t respond in an overly positive manner to your advances?" Hannibal asked curiously. Hisoka really was like quicksilver and his moods, at least when he appeared to be frustrated, were as changeable as a teenager’s.

"Would you have responded if we had met under different circumstances then?" he asked, maintaining his bored demeanour as he swapped his attention to examining the nails on his other hand. "I am aware that not everyone is attracted to men."

“I think that would depend upon the circumstances, and what type of response you were looking for,” Hannibal said, watching Hisoka’s feigned dismissal.

He really did have the affect of a child. The moment he didn’t get what he wanted, he would switch his tactic, probing to find a weakness. It was quite disarming, and Hannibal could understand how many would underestimate the man because of it.

“And I’m curious,” Hannibal added. “Would the challenge not be too simple if your partner responded too readily to your advances?”

At first, Hisoka didn't respond, deciding to give some thought to his answer. Would it have been too easy if Hannibal had given in? Usually, he would have to agree with the Doctor. However, on this occasion, he was expecting to have to try and top from the bottom, which was a whole different challenge.

The thought made him smile slightly. It had been a while since he'd found somebody he was willing to play submissive to, and there was something commanding about the man’s presence; although it paled in comparison to the effect, Chrollo could have had on him, if the man had actually tried.

"Sometimes, there’s more to it than what you see on the surface,” he said eventually, with a bemused smile still on his lips.
“I couldn’t agree more,” Hannibal said happily, rewarding the insight with a genuine smile. “Thank you for your honesty.”

He looked at his watch. His assessment was nearing its end, and it was clear that Hisoka would need time to reflect before their next session - and there would be a next session. Hannibal was far too drawn to the man sat across from him for there not to be. Unbidden, the question of whether he was a man at all rose in his mind, but he dismissed it almost instantly. This wasn’t going to be another Will.

“I think we shall leave it there. Thank you for your time, Mr Morow. You shall be hearing the results of your assessment in a few days.” He rose from his chair and waited patiently for Hisoka to follow suit.

***

To say that he was relieved, would be an understatement. Hisoka hadn't been sure how much more he could have taken, and he watched silently as his therapist stood from his chair. Following suit, moments later, with his usual poise, he said, "I shall look forward to it Dr. Lecter." and deliberately kept his tone polite. This time, he wanted to get out of the office as quickly as possible. "You'll also be informing those who made my referral as well I presume?" He made sure to phrase the comment as an offhand question and made a move to leave.

***

“Naturally,” Hannibal said and followed Hisoka over to the door, opening it politely and standing back to let the man pass. “It has been a pleasure getting to know you, Hisoka.” Hannibal said, and bowed slightly before adding, “I hope you have a pleasant evening.”

***

Of all the things that would stick in Hisoka's mind after his hellish meeting, it was seeing the other man bow to him, however slightly, that completely unnerved him. It was not a gesture he’d ever been on the receiving end of, and it felt strangely uncomfortable. “Thank you, Doctor,” he eventually replied, feeling a little confused, "Have a pleasant evening."

Not wishing to linger, he quickly made his way through the waiting room and to the exit where his guards were waiting. He wasn't sure where he was planning to go next, but as long as it was as far away from this place as he could get, it was fine by him.

***

Character played by Muffinamndness in this chapter was:

Hannibal

Character played by themadnovelist in this chapter was:

Hisoka
Chapter Summary

Hisoka is reeling from the most unnerving interview of his life and decides to give his best friend and lover, Illum Zoldyck a call to help straighten things out. What he receives is not what either of them expected.

It was already afternoon on the day after Hisoka had met with Dr. Lecter, and he was still lying half-dressed on the hotel room bed. He'd barely managed to get that far, as he’d staggered back from the bar to his room the night before. Wincing when he opened his eyes to the daylit room, he raised a hand to shield them.

"Where am I?" he wondered out loud to himself. He tried to sit up, but the room felt like it was slowly spinning around him. He must’ve been drinking pretty heavily if he hadn't managed to sleep through his hangover completely. As he sat on the bed and waited for the dizziness to pass, he couldn't help thinking back to the previous day. The meeting with his so-called therapist and how tedious it had been, and he’d been so relieved when the man had finally let him leave.

I should try and call Illu-chan, he thought.

That left one small problem, where had he left his phone? Realising looking for it meant that he had to move, he groaned out loud. He wasn't too sure that he could stand, but he decided to try it anyway. As he stood, he fell to the floor and twisted his ankle and groaned - apparently he'd still been wearing his heeled boot. His other foot was bare, and he spotted the unworn shoe near the room’s door. With a low growl in his throat, he reached out to push himself back up, and managed a grin when his hand landed on his missing phone.

Not bothering to try and get up from his haphazard position on the floor, he eagerly unlocked the phone and searched for Illumi's number. Pressing the call button with more force than needed, he held it up to his ear and waited.

***

Illumi was just placing the final pin into his target's neck when he felt a vibration in his pocket. There was a quiet whimper and then silence as Illumi struck home.

Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out his phone and looked at the screen: Hisoka.

Frowning slightly, he answered on the fourth ring. “Hisoka-san, how may I be of assistance?”

He looked around the room to make sure that they truly were alone. There was no one there, and he’d disabled all the security cameras half an hour ago.

***

"Illu-chan!" Hisoka purred, far too loudly, and winced at his own volume. "Where are you, my Illu-chan? I miss you..."

He managed to move so that he was now lying on his back. He'd removed his lone shoe and was
nursing his sore ankle with his free hand.

"I had the most horrible day yesterday, Illu-chan" he continued not giving the man a chance to speak. “It was simply dreadful.”

***

Illumi held the phone slightly away from his ear as he heard Hisoka shout his name. He listened as his lover crooned that he missed him and without missing a beat went on to declare that yesterday was a write-off.

He knew that if he let him continue, he wouldn’t have a chance to speak for the next ten minutes.

“How can I help, Hisoka-san? It sounds as if you are drunk, what time is it where you are?”

***

At his lover’s question, Hisoka paused and tried to look at the window. He couldn't see the clock from where he was, and he couldn't see a clock through the window either.

"Daytime Illu-chan" he replied, deciding that that made the most sense.

***

Illumi sighed. Hisoka was definitely drunk. Looking at the screen on his phone, he did a few mental calculations. “It’s four o’clock in the afternoon, Hisoka-san, have you been drinking this morning, or are you still drunk from last night?

He decided that he would have to leave his target’s room through the back entrance now; talking on the phone would draw too much attention if he left via the front door.

***

Hisoka chuckled, surely it wasn't that late, he'd only just woken up. "Don't be silly; I've just woken up. So, of course, I'm not drunk."

He tried rotating his foot to test his ankle and made a sharp exhale of breath in response to the pain.

"I may have been drinking last night though, I can't quite recall. Just that it was a horrible day...are you on a job?"

***

Illumi vaulted out of a window after spotting a civilian heading to the smoker's lounge and landed with cat-like grace on the garden wall below. Hopping down into the quiet back alley, he answered, “No, and if you are still drunk from last night Hisoka-san you really should make sure you at least drink some water whilst we talk.”

He took a deep breath and mentally prepared himself for what was to come.

“Tell me about your bad day, Hisoka-san.”

***

The suggestion he should drink some water seemed sensible enough, but his ankle was still very
painful. He didn't want to move.

"I take it you heard about the explosion at the Heaven's Arena?" he tried to keep his voice down so as not to hurt his own ears.

***

Illumi narrowed his eyes as he walked calmly towards the town centre. “I did, yes. I also heard that you were involved and had been taken into custody by the authorities.”

***

"Well, I got blamed for it, but it was Danchou who blew the place up," Hisoka grunted a little as he tried to change position. "He's got this new ability that lets him cause explosions. Nearly got me with it too; they arrested us both."

He stopped talking for a moment to hoist himself up onto the bed, "They've sent me to a therapist, Illumi!" he wailed. "Me? Talking to a shrink! It was awful."

***

Illumi wasn’t usually one to express emotion of any kind, but he found himself stopping in his tracks as he heard his lover say that he’d been sent to a therapist. There was only one therapist that Illumi knew of who was powerful enough to stand a chance of surviving an assessment with individuals like Hisoka-san and himself. If he was correct, then his life was about to become a whole lot more complicated.

“Hisoka-san, can you remember your therapist's name?” he asked as he resumed his walk.

***

Could he remember the man's name? he racked his booze dulled memory, It was Lecter, wasn't it? Dr. Lecter?

"Of course I can remember!" he said, raising his voice again, happy that he’d been able to recall something that was clearly important. After all, his Illu-chan wouldn't ask if it wasn't. "It was Dr. Lecter," he replied proudly.

***

Illumi pinched the bridge of his nose and felt his heart stutter.

“Hisoka-san, I need you to listen to me. This is very important, so please, stop whatever you might be doing and pay attention. Were you, at any point, rude to Dr. Lecter?”

He at least knew one thing; Hisoka-san hadn’t been overly rude. He wouldn’t have made it out of the man’s office if he had. He picked up his pace, suddenly making it back to his hotel room felt a lot more urgent than before.

***

He tried to think back to the meeting with the Doctor; had he been rude? Hisoka wasn't sure. When he thought of the meeting, he felt a sense of unease. Dr. Lecter had been fascinating, but he’d felt as if he were being catalogued when he felt the Doctor’s gaze on him. It wasn’t an experience he was eager to repeat.
"I really don't know..." he said, flopping back onto the bed, and dropping the phone onto the covers. He scrambled to pick it back up, "Do you know the Doctor? Should I be worried?"

Sensing concern from his lover was sobering, to say the least.

***

Speed walking turned into a full jog as he heard his lover drunkenly trying to recall his time with the Doctor.

“I really don’t know...” Illumi looked around to see if there were any nearby taxis. He was an hour away from the airport. “Do you know the Doctor? Should I be worried?”

How best to answer without making the situation worse?

“I have never personally met Dr. Lecter. However, I am aware of him by reputation. He is one of the most powerful Blacklist Hunters alive, and he does not take kindly to any form of rude or disrespectful behaviour, He has been known to hold a grudge for years. Can you recall any of your conversation with him, Hisoka-san?”

***

Hisoka frowned. The way his Illu-chan was talking didn’t sound great. Had he fucked up? Maybe I shouldn't have tried flirting with him?

"We talked about various things...he poked at what I would do next in terms of chasing Danchou...Gon came up...as did Kurapika..." he paused; that felt important. "He seemed quite interested when I mentioned Kurapika?" he added trying to helpful.

***

The Kurta wasn’t Illumi’s concern. Finally finding a cab to hail, he did so, and gave the driver instructions to head to the airport.

“What did you tell him about your intentions towards Chrollo and Gon?” Illumi asked, trying to foresee the possible ramifications of Hisoka-san’s desire to fight and kill both. He wouldn’t have hidden that; he wouldn’t have understood why being so open about his desires was dangerous.

Praying that he was wrong in his predictions, Illumi sat back and listened to his lover's increasingly confused voice.

***

"Well, I don't know where Danchou is, so it depends on what he does, doesn't it?" Hisoka asked. He was worried that Illumi was so concerned. It wasn't like him.

"Gon isn't ready; you know that. So that's what I said." He frowned. "Wait you said he's a Blacklist Hunter? So that license in his office wasn't a fake?"

***

Illumi felt a strange cold sensation run through his body at Hisoka-san’s words. It was confusing. His mouth had gone dry, and his throat felt tight. Hisoka had thought that Hannibal’s qualification had been fake?

“No, Hisoka-san,” Illumi coughed to try and clear his throat. “That qualification was most certainly
not fake.” He tried to swallow. Was he ill? “Did you, by any chance, mention anyone else when talking to Dr. Lecter? Were there any other topics that had come up in your conversation?” He needed all the information he could get if he were to face Dr. Lecter in battle. He could not allow him to take Hisoka-san from him.

***

His memory was starting to return as he continued to sober up. Part of him was worried that he’d made a significant mistake; he just wasn’t sure how to tell his friend and lover about it. It had taken him a long time to get Illumi to let him in, to begin with, and he didn’t want to lose that.

"Gon's absentee father..." he said quietly, he tried to recall other things. "He seemed quite interested in when I first killed, but I didn't want to talk about it. I did try to be polite in my refusal. I explained that I live in the present and that the past means nothing to me."

He knew there was more, but he didn't want to tell Illumi that he'd offered himself to the Doctor as a sex toy.

***

Illumi listened attentively, running through the ramifications of each topic as they came up. Gons absentee father - that would give Hannibal insight into how Hisoka-san felt about his own father. Hisoka-san’s first kill - Illumi couldn’t understand what significance that would have to anyone, but if Hannibal had asked about it, then it was something of importance; and at least Hisoka-san had tried to be polite...

“Hisoka-san,” Illumi said calmly, spotting a loophole in his lover’s words. “You said you tried to be polite. That leaves room for the possibility that you weren’t entirely polite. I need you to be specific with me. How did you respond to Dr. Lecter’s questions about your past?”

***

"I may have tried to deflect the question a...a few times." he swallowed; his throat felt tight. He knew what he’d done, and that he had alluded to his own childhood. But they were things that he couldn't remember if he’d told Illumi about or not.

He remembered that the Doctor's stare had reminded him of somebody from his past, but he couldn't quite place who. He felt the familiar twinge at the memory of Abaki and his time with the circus.

"I may have also tried to show off my magic tricks a bit; you how I get in uncomfortable situations Illu...I need to keep my hands busy."

***

Illumi, still and passive at the best of times, became almost motionless as he listened to his lover’s evasive reply.

“So you deflected Dr. Lecter’s questions with magic tricks?” he asked, seeking as much clarity as he could without being able to read Hisoka-san’s body language. Illumi had been trained from birth to read people, it was a skill, just the same as any other, and right now, the tone of Hisoka-san’s voice had him worried.

***
There was a short pause before Hisoka responded, as he stood in the ensuite bathroom cleaning the previous days smudged and caked on face paint from his chiselled features. Narrowing his golden eyes at his reflection, he took himself in.

"He kept asking me questions that I didn't feel like I could answer..." he said as his voice hardened. "He was asking about my past. You know how meaningless that is. I did explain that to him early on, but it didn't stop him trying to bring it up again later."

He twisted his usually attractive features into a snarl and directed it at himself for a moment, before schooling his face into a neutral expression.

"Lulu..please be honest with me here...do you think I might be in danger?"

***

"Yes," Illumi said bluntly. There was no point in sugar-coating his reply. "If you deliberately avoided answering Dr. Lecter’s questions, repeatedly, then he may well have seen that as rude. If you deflected with magic, then he will either have been entertained or annoyed. Either way, you may have at least irked him. I can tell you that you did not anger him, as you survived your encounter. I am starting to worry that you may have gained his interest, which could be equally as dangerous."

Illumi tried his best to relax.

"You mentioned that he showed an interest in your past, Gon’s father and your relationships.” He paused and took a calming breath. “Did you discuss any of your lovers with him? I am aware that sexual relations are often talked about during a therapy session, as they often provide insight into the mind of the patient.”

***

"Don't worry. I didn't mention that I'm sleeping with a Zoldyck family member, my little Lulu," Hisoka assured. "But he's definitely aware I'm masochistic..."

He leant back against the sink and ran his hand through his messed up hair.

"I couldn't help myself, all that talk about Danchou and my little apple...I may have gotten a bit excited...and inflicted a small amount of pain upon myself to remain calm."

***

Illumi let out a sigh of relief that he hadn’t been aware he was holding. “Thank you, Hisoka-san,” he said as earnestly as he was able to manage.

He didn’t particularly care about any of Hisoka-san's other lovers; they weren’t his problem.

"As for your masochism, I don’t think you have to worry. It is not something that is uncommon, especially amongst people who experience pain on a regular basis. As long as you didn’t make a spectacle of yourself, then I think we will be fine.”

***

"Define spectacle, Lulu?" Hisoka asked in a rather uncommonly bland tone.

He had learnt a long time ago that his idea of a 'spectacle' and what others thought it was, tended to
“Any form of overt displays of sexual arousal,” Illumi said patiently, recalling the dictionary he had used to memorise the terms he’d needed when talking to Hisoka-san. “Any declarations of intent to perform egregious acts of violence or acts that would be deemed sexually inappropriate. Those would be expressions of desire towards children, animals or those without the capacity to understand your advances.”

There had been one more item on the list. He closed his eyes as he recalled the page.

“And any expressions of violence or sexual advances towards a person of authority that you are not already in an established sexual relationship with.”

***

Hisoka listened intently to his lover's explanation. As the words rolled off his tongue, he felt his mouth becoming dry and a lump starting to form in his throat.

He’d been quite forward in his 'flirting', even insinuating that the Doctor could hurt him for his own sexual pleasure. Once again, it seemed his different perceptions had landed him in hot water. He felt his grip on his phone loosen and heard the phone clatter to the floor before he’d registered that he’d dropped it.

Too lost in his memory, he ignored the sounds coming from the small speaker in his phone. He'd hoped that he could convince Dr. Lecter to release him early. His chest felt tight; it was an odd feeling. Part of him said it was familiar, but it had been so long since he’d last felt like this, that he couldn't be sure.

***

Illumi heard the bang as something clattered to the floor. He deduced it was the phone when there was no answer to his repeated requests for one. He did his best to remain calm. Getting upset in this situation would be entirely counterproductive. The one thing that he could deduce from Hisoka-san’s response was that he had made a spectacle of himself. He doubted that he had threatened Dr. Lecter directly - if he had Illumi would never have heard from him again, and he would have had to spend the next few years tracking down, and killing, Lecter.

He looked out of the window and did his best to gauge how far they were for the airport. By the looks of things, they were about 20 minutes away by car, 30 by foot. It was still faster to remain in the taxi.

“Hisoka-san?” he said again, doing his best to keep any trace of worry out of his voice. He did not wish to gain the attention of the driver.

***

It didn't take long for Hisoka to come back to his senses. When he did, he heard a voice, but it sounded very small; as if it were far away. He looked at his hand, and his eyes widened when he realised that he wasn’t holding his phone. He groaned audibly. *I have to tell Lulu...he's probably going to be mad.*

Gingerly, he bent down, trying to avoid putting all of his weight on his ankle and picked up the phone with delicate fingers.
"Lulu" he croaked, "I need to confess something to you..."

***

“You did something inappropriate?” Illumi said flatly as he stared out of the window. Soon enough, it would be equally as quick to reach the airport by foot. Once that happened, he would get out and leave the driver a generous tip. Too many questions would be asked if there was a body left behind.

***

"You could say that..." Hisoka's voice was quiet, and he ran his hand through his hair tugging on it slightly, in search of a way to stay grounded. "I may have...how do I put this...insinuated that I would have," he paused and wet his lips. He needed to find the right words.

"He asked me about masochism..." he took a deep breath, tugging a little harder on his hair. "You know pain grounds me, helps me to focus...well he asked about that..."

He closed his eyes. He knew he was stalling, but he was worried about how his lover was going to react. "I may have offered to allow him to hurt me sexually if he wanted to."

***

Illumi blinked. “That would certainly class as sexually inappropriate,” he said. “Tell me, how did Dr. Lecter respond to your advances?” he asked; after all, that was the critical part.

***

Regaining some of his usual confidence Hisoka, responded quickly, "Well he didn't take me up on it if that's what you're asking Illu-chan." he said with a sigh.

"I suggested that he take his belt to me..." he paused to let that sink in for his lover. "He responded with a tamer suggestion and asked if that idea was exciting to me or not. I was slightly disappointed."

***

Illumi was mildly confused by the suggestion that he would be worried by the Doctor taking Hisoka up on his suggestion. “I’m actually disappointed that he didn’t agree to your proposal. That would have been far more beneficial.”

The taxi was almost close enough.

“I understand your disappointment, Hisoka-san, but I believe we may have a slightly larger issue on our hands.”

***

The lack of rebuttal from Illumi brought up Hisoka's fluctuating mood. "I knew that there was a reason I liked you, Lulu," he said contentedly. "What would the larger issue be?"

***

Illumi froze for a moment. Hearing such words from Hisoka-san never failed to make him feel...strangely warm, and ever so slightly terrified.
Trying to focus on the issue at hand, he said, “The fact that the Doctor did not take you up on your offer means that we can not file to have him struck off.” He took a breath. “And the fact that he did not outright deny your advances suggests that you have caught his attention. He is an expert Hunter. He does not allow his prey to escape.”

***

“Well, hopefully, he won't request more sessions with me. I don't think I could go through yesterday's experience again Lulu,” Hisoka admitted. He was starting to relax; talking with Illumi had that effect on him, and it was one of the things that had drawn him to the Assassin.

"I was told I was to attend an assessment with a world-renowned therapist who would decide if I needed therapy. They said that he could refer me for further appointments elsewhere, keep me on himself, or recommend that it would not be of use to me." He tapped his fingers on the sink. "I'm supposed to wait for his report."

***

Illumi heard the relaxation setting into Hisoka-san’s voice, and briefly contemplated not leaving his taxi early, but decided against it. It would still be more reliable for him to move on foot at this point.

Visibly removing a wad of notes from his wallet, he held it up for the driver to see in his rear mirror. He watched the man’s eyes widen as he indicated that he should pull into the side of the road. Once the driver had complied, Illumi passed the money through the hatch and got out without saying a word.

Breaking into a run, he tried to soothe his lover further. “I am on my way; I will be with you in approximately three hours. I will need to know which hotel you have been placed in and how wide of a perimeter you have been permitted. I will wait with you, Hisoka-san.”

He highly doubted this would be the last time they encountered Dr. Lecter, not after what Hisoka-san had said, and he couldn’t afford to allow the man to take him from him. Not after everything he’d discovered about himself over the past two years. Being with Hisoka-san had changed his life, and no one was going to take him from him now.

***

Hearing that Illumi was coming to see him, made Hisoka’s heart speed up in anticipation, they hadn't seen each other face to face in months. "Oh Lulu, I can't wait to be able to see you, and hold you in my arms...and, well, do lots of other things too,” he purred.

"They've got me staying in the Townhilt hotel not far from where they have the auction every year in Yorknew. I'm in room 444; I'll need to inform my guards, they'll be able to tell the receptionist I'm expecting somebody. As for the radius, I believe they gave me three miles from the hotel. To enforce it they've got some Nen ability stuck to me that I can't remove. Apparently, if I try to go further than that it’ll give me a warning for another half mile, after that, I’ll supposedly die.”

***

“Do not try to remove it Hisoka-san,” Illumi said as he ran. “Stay in your room. I will be as fast as I can. I am very much looking forward to seeing my...Master, again. I will contact you when I land.”

With that, he closed the phone and sped up. If he paid a little extra, he might be able to catch the express Zeplin to the city.
Hearing his lover refer to him as Master made Hisoka shudder in anticipation. Yes, he was most certainly looking forward to seeing him; it had been too long since he had renewed his claim to Illumi’s body. Thinking about all the things he could do, he licked his lips and made his way from the en-suite, into the bedroom. He stared at the large comfortable bed that dominated the room, then looked down at his own state of semi-nakedness.

*I suppose could just entirely strip off and wait for him? Hmm, I should tell the guards about his arrival first, and ask them to tell reception to send him straight up.*

3 Hours Later

Illumi knocked on the door of room 444 before using the guest key to let himself in. He had received a text from Hisoka two hours ago, telling him that reception had been informed of his arrival and that the guards knew he would be letting himself in, but it had felt wrong to do so unannounced.

“Hisoka-san,” he said as he opened the door, ignoring the strange looks he was getting from the curly-haired man on guard. When there was no reply, he entered the room, and closed the door behind him.

Hisoka was lying on the hotel bed, naked. Illumi knew that his Master’s body’s natural reaction to large amounts of drink was to sleep. After he had gotten comfortable, he had, apparently, failed to factor in the length of time it was going to take for him to arrive.

“Hisoka-san!” Illumi said, raising his voice. He absently checked for a pulse and was reassured to feel the steady beating of his Master’s heart. He allowed himself a relieved smile and sat himself on the bed beside his lover, and ran a gentle hand through the man’s unkept hair. “I’m here, Master,” he whispered. “I’m not going to let him have you. You’re safe now.”

With a sleepy hum, Hisoka tried to move closer to the quiet voice and comforting feeling of the hand stroking his hair. Wanting whoever it was to stay, he reached out, in his desire to make them stay.

“Hisoka-san, wake up,” Illumi said as he felt Hisoka’s hand trying to pull him closer. “I am here. You need to get up.”

Gently tugging on his Master’s hair, he ran a thumb over his un-creased brow. He really did look so peaceful when he slept.
The sudden change from soothing stroking to sharp tugging was enough to pull Hisoka from his slumber. *Who's talking to me? Did Jessebelle come back? She liked pulling on my hair, but she has to go, I'm waiting for Illumi.* Allowing a small yawn to escape he tried to look up through one eye and mumbled, "I'm waiting for Illumi. Let me know when he gets here? I'll be here."

***

Puzzled, Illumi frowned. "I am here, Hisok-" he hadn't responded as Illumi had hoped to the usual honorific, maybe..."I am here, Master. It is time for you to wake up."

***

That voice was still talking to him. He frowned slightly, trying to make sense of things in his now half-asleep state. He was sure he knew the voice, but he wanted to sleep, why couldn't they let him sleep and wait for his lover?

"I am here, Master," the voice said gently. He opened his eyes and tried to look at whoever was talking. Only one person called him by that title currently, so it could only be one person.

"Lulu?" he asked, groggily lifting his head from the pillows. "You're here with me?"

***

"I am, Master," Illumi said calmly. "And you smell of alcohol. Your ankle is also mildly red, and you appear to have slept through most of the day."

Illumi paused to try to think about what the best thing to do would be.

"I can go and obtain refreshments if you wish? As well as a bandage for your ankle?"

***

Hisoka gave a pleased hum at the confirmation that his lover was indeed with him once more. He didn't try to hide his smile, and said quietly, "I'm never drinking again." Looking up into Illumi's face, he purred seductively, "I missed you, Lulu."

Craving the physical contact, he tried to move and accidentally brushed his foot against his ankle. He gave an unexpected yelp of pain, and agreed, "A bandage might be a good idea..."

***

"I would recommend only refraining from alcoholic beverages in the future, Master. Swearing off drinking altogether would not have a happy conclusion," Illumi said mildly.

Looking around himself, he tried to find the entrance to the room's bathroom. He knew that there would have to be a first aid kit in there somewhere. Spotting the small door, he got up to retrieve what he was going to need and saw a pile of crumpled clothing on the floor. Deciding that the clothes were not necessary right now, he went to retrieve the first aid supplies, and maybe a glass of water if he could find one.

***

Hisoka chuckled. "Oh my Illu-chan, that's what I mean." He tried to sit up again, this time paying more attention to what his lower body was doing. As much as he didn't mind pain, the throbbing in his ankle wasn't exactly what he wanted right this moment. He groaned at his body's rather
noticeable reaction to the stimulus. *Sometimes being a masochist is such pain.*

"There should be a glass in the bathroom, in the sink from earlier," he called after his lover as he checked the en-suite once he’d stopped laughing at his own internal joke.

***

The glass was easy enough to notice, but he appreciated his Master’s attempt to help with the situation. The first aid kit was a little harder, but not by much. Hisoka had apparently moved it from its spot in the cabinet above the sink, to beside the shower, and forgotten.

Collecting what he needed, he returned to the bedroom to find his Master propped up on one arm, fully aroused and waiting for his return.

He cocked his head to the side and asked, “Which issue would you like me to deal with first, Master?”

***

"What do you me..." he was going to ask what Illumi meant when he glanced down to his crotch. "Ah. Well, I think it might be a good idea to get that bandage on my ankle before I do any more damage to myself." Giving Illumi a reassuring smile, he patted the bed to signal for him to come closer.

***

Illumi nodded. “As you wish, Master,” he said, laying the glass down on the bedside table and moving to dress his Master’s ankle.

A visual examination showed no outward signs of lasting damage. “Do you remember how you injured yourself?” he asked as he looked closer. “I’m going to have to examine you physically,” he added and reached to feel the reddened skin.

***

"When I tried to get out of bed, to call you," he said, trying to recall the exact sequence of events. "I may have fallen because I was only wearing one shoe and not knowing about it until it was too late."

Upon realising that Illumi would need to touch his ankle, his breath hitched in anticipation of the pain. This was the main reason he’d asked his lover to tend to his ankle first. As lovely as the offer to deal with his throbbing dick had been, he would have only ended up back at square one after Illumi had bandaged his ankle.

***

Hearing Hisoka groan like that had an immediate effect upon Illumi, and he felt his trousers becoming awkwardly tight. It had been so long since he’d been this close to Hisoka-san. “I will need to know if the pain is ever severe,” he said as he felt the whole way around the ankle. “It is likely just a sprain and will heal fine with bandaging and rest, but I want to be sure that there are no fractures.”

Pushing his own desire from his mind, he concentrated on making sure his lover was as well cared for as the circumstances would allow. He was here to protect him, and his Master would need to be in full health for that to happen.
Hisoka hadn't been able to fight back the groan when he felt his lover's touch, and he threw his head back, closing his eyes. The pain felt wonderful, and his cock twitched in response.

"I don't think it's broken, don't worry," he said, trying to reassure his lover between deep breaths as he tried to keep himself under control. "I can still move my foot, so that's a good sign, right?"

"It is, yes Master, but please don't," Illumi said, foreseeing a demonstration. "A fracture is still a slight possibility, although the treatment will be the same, you will just take longer to heal."

Deciding that, under the circumstances, the best thing he could do for his Master would be to wrap his ankle and keep a steady pressure around the area. He did just that; listening to the pleasured moans coming from Hisoka-san and doing his best to ignore his own growing need. As far as foreplay went, this was one of his Master's stranger experiments, but he had to admit, it was working for him.

"Master," Illumi said, trying to maintain a clear, calm tone. "Your leg is fully bandaged, I suggest we try to keep it elevated for now."

Hisoka was struggling to focus, the endorphin rush had kicked in, and in his already foggy state of mind, he'd been overtaken by it. He whimpered when he felt his lover's hands leave his leg.

"How do you suggest we do that?" he asked when he heard Illumi's instructions. If they were going to have some fun with each other then he wasn't sure how he could stop himself from causing any further injury to his ankle, "Lulu, I wanted to play," he whined, not caring about how petulant he sounded.

Illumi's already tight trousers became painful as he listened to his Master moan that he wanted to play. "We can still do that, Master," Illumi said. His throat was tight, and he knew that his pupils would be blown wide. "I, I can think of various ways I can please you and still ensure your leg is safe. That is, if you wish for my input," he added, remembering back to a few occasions when such ideas had not been welcomed.

Looking down at his Master, who appeared to be practically writhing on the bed, he sincerely hoped that he would welcome his advice.

"We can still do that, Master," Hisoka's golden eyes widened in anticipation. Oh, how he needed to do something; he felt like he was going to explode. He felt like an addict riding a high that was all promise, but wasn't quite good enough. He needed more. Unfortunately, he wasn't sure how to ask for what he needed from his sweet Illu-chan.

Trying to keep himself in check, he allowed his curiosity to take over as he said, "What do you have in mind, my darling Lulu?" His voice was thick with need.
That voice. That voice had seen him through countless nights of frustration, loneliness and pain. That voice alone had sent him to places he had never known were possible. Now...now it was asking for his opinion.

Swallowing, Illumi somehow found his voice. “I could use my mouth on you, Master; prop your leg up over my shoulder, that way it will remain elevated throughout. Or,” Illumi paused to take a breath as the idea took hold, “I could...I could lift your leg and penetrate you, Master if you would permit. It would be the safest option, as I would have full control and ensure no harm came to you throughout.”

Illumi looked down at his Master's wild eyes. “The choice is, of course, yours. I will comply with whatever you demand of me.”

***

He could barely think through the fog clouding his mind. He hadn't felt this hazy in a very long time, and the wild, out of control feeling was heady. But he knew his lover was waiting for his answer. Pouting a little, Hisoka tried to focus, but he didn't seem to be quite able to hold onto the words. All that kept coming to mind was how lovely his Lulu's voice sounded, how pretty he was, for a man. Eagerly he reached out and grabbed him, and pulled him down so that he could capture his lips with his own. The kiss was full of passion and desperation as he tried to convey everything he couldn't say. As he struggled to find the words, he flailed around slightly with his free hand, to grasp Illumi’s, and smiled into the lip-lock once he found it.

Yes, he could show him what he wanted; he'd never been allowed to ask for it, but that didn't mean he couldn't show him. Gently he placed his hand on his own throat and hoped that he would understand. After all, this was something he had done with him the night he had claimed him as his.

***

Illumi pulled back from the kiss, his eyes wide and lips pulled up into a smile. “As you wish, Master,” he said softly, squeezing carefully as he moved over his lover’s body. It was rare that he was allowed this kind of pleasure, and he savoured it as he felt his Master’s legs wrap around him. He heard the man gasp as his grip tightened ever so slightly. Making sure that his Master’s leg was safe from any risk of further damage, he looked down into his eyes for final confirmation, reaching over to the nightstand for the oils he’d need.

***

Yes! Hisoka’s heart sung as he felt the firm grip around his throat tighten. *Lulu, my Illu-chan*, his eyes rolled back in response to the grip; instinct taking him over, he wrapped his legs around the slim waist above him. This was what he needed.

Yes, he had been right to pick the Assassin for his lover. His gamble had paid off, Illumi was well versed in reading him. Hisoka knew he had trained his partner well, and he wouldn't be disappointed. Letting his arousal speak for him, he tried to raise his hips to grind against his lovers.

***

Illumi groaned when Hisoka pushed up against him, lust crackling between them as he reigned in his instinctual need to *keep on squeezing*. That was not what this was about.

His free hand closed around the lubricant, and he let his weight fall down onto his lover, pinning
him beneath him, and knocking the remaining breath from his lungs. More importantly, it allowed him to release his hold from Hisoka’s neck, to open the small bottle of oil.

“Master,” he breathed as he moved himself into position. “Do you need this to hurt?”

***

He felt breathless as his lover's weight held him down; it was a strangely comforting sensation. Hisoka wanted to press himself against his body. He wanted more; he needed more. The withdrawal of the hand from his neck nearly caused him to whine, but he clamped a hand over his mouth. Something in the back of his clouded mind was telling him that he wasn't supposed to speak; he mustn't make a sound.

“Do you need this to hurt?”

The gentle, soothing tone of his Lulu's voice came through the clouds. Hand still covering his mouth, he nodded as his heart sped up with excitement at the prospect of more pain.

***

Illumi kissed the back of his Master's hand, spread the oil over his fingers and pushed them roughly inside his ass. He felt the resistance as his body instinctively tried to block the intrusion, felt Hisoka-san go rigid for a moment as the sudden pain hit and smiled.

He was so beautiful.

“I’m going to make this good Master. I’m going to give you what you need.”

***

The gentle brush of Illumi's lips on the back of his hand, along with the contrast of the rougher sensation filling him as he felt those long fingers push inside his body, only served to further overload and overwhelm his already heated instincts. He bit back the moan forming in his throat; he had to stay quiet, but it was so hard.

His golden eyes locked with his lovers, and he tried to wordlessly convey his need for him to continue as he tried to command his body to relax once more. Despite everything he trusted that Illumi would provide the fix he was desperate for.

***

Illumi moved his fingers steadily, sliding, widening and filling his Master. He knew it wasn’t enough, but he refused to cause Hisoka-san actual harm after he had promised to take care of him.

Letting his teeth graze over the hand still clamped over his Master’s mouth, Illumi bit down on his middle finger, using his teeth to guide it away and reveal Hisoka-san’s beautiful lips.

He understood why the man beneath him was silent.

Looking down into his eyes, he said, “You will be silent for me, Master, won’t you? You will let me give you what you need?”

***

The sensation of being filled made Hisoka’s hips buck up against Illumi’s hand, and he gasped quietly when he felt teeth grazing his finger; he didn't bother to fight as his hand was moved away
from his mouth. He let his lips fall open as he panted lightly.

Warmth blossomed in his chest when understanding passed between them, the verbal permission for him to give in to his instinctive need to keep quiet was exactly what he needed. He smiled ever so slightly and nodded slowly.

Hisoka couldn't quite remember the last time he'd felt like this, but at this moment he didn't care. It didn't feel important. He moved slightly, wanting to kiss Illumi, but unexpectedly confused by the conflicting instincts battling inside his head. He was still 'Master', but at this moment he didn't feel like he could move without instruction. The disconcerting emotions were oddly paralysing, yet somehow thrilling at the same time. He looked up at his lover as his breathing becoming heavier and his desire intensified.

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Illumi looked into his Master’s golden eyes and saw a wild hunger that he understood all too well.

Reaching up to his shoulder, he tore dispassionately at his sleeve and balled it up before shoving it roughly into Hisoka-san’s mouth.

“Now, Master, you can scream if you wish,” he said and with no further warning, pulled his fingers out of his Master’s ass, unzipped his pants and pushed his aching cock fully into him.

***

He hadn't expected his lover to tear his sleeve, and the noise of ripping fabric caught his attention. Just barely. His eyes widened in surprise when he felt the material being forced between his lips, and he opened his mouth in a moment of instinctive panic. The cloth silenced him, and prevented him from breaking role. This wasn't what normally happened, had he done something wrong?

He didn't have long to think about it as he felt the fingers pull out of him. Frantically, he tried to get his lovers attention and heard the instruction that he could scream if he wanted. Why would he need to scream? He wanted to ask, but the gag in his mouth and instinct both prevented him.

Suddenly, as soon as the emptiness had arrived, he felt the sensation of Illumi’s cock pushing roughly into him. The harsh entry dragged him back into that hazy fog, and he gratefully surrendered to it. The familiar pain, he knew, would pass; it always did. Hisoka bit down on the gag. He wouldn't make noise; he knew he could withstand whatever he threw at him.

***

His Master was so tight, it almost hurt and Illumi, for a brief moment, nearly gave in to the desire that always accompanied the feeling; but pulled himself from the edge as he saw Hisoka-sans briefly panicked eyes cloud over once again.

The fear awoke something in him that had been dormant for far too long. The predator that emerged every time he gave in to his bloodlust, and killed simply for the thrill of it, growled within his chest. He pulled back and, with a snap of his hips, pushed deeper into his Master’s body. He wanted to see him shatter. He wanted to see him break. He wanted to see just how much love he could pour into this man’s perfect body.

He lowered his head to his Master’s ear and licked along the lobe, setting a steady, punishing rhythm with the movement of his hips.

“Mine,” he whispered in a voice that only distantly resembled his own. “Mine.”
This was what his body had been craving, what his mind was crying out for. The stinging sensations shooting from his ass were familiar and in that familiarity was precisely the kind of comfort he needed. With the welcome feeling, the brief panic melted away into the fog of his mind. He did his best to breath through his nose rather than risk asphyxiating himself on the gag.

Hisoka allowed himself to surrender to the feelings flooding him, and laid his head back against the pillows, closing his eyes tightly. His hands were clawing against the blankets beneath them, and his body moved instinctively with the rhythm Illumi was setting.

Feeling the brush of the long black ponytail against his bare skin as Illumi lowered his head, he shivered a little. When he licked his ear lobe and whispered, he couldn't help the shudder that ran down his spine. *Mine*, the voice had said. It was so soft.

It felt like a gentle caress, starkly different to the rough thrusting of the man's hips. He wanted to reach out, he lifted a hand from the covers for a moment and held it there, hesitating. Was he allowed to touch? He didn't know; things hadn't gone exactly as he'd expected.

*Mine*, the voice was speaking again; he lowered his hand. *Yes*, he thought in response; the idea sounded delightful at that moment.

Illumi thrilled at the touch against his still clothed back. He had felt his Master’s hesitation, the uncertainty over what he could and could not do in this new situation, but Illumi didn’t let up the pressure.

His voice was almost a growl as he said, “You’re mine Hisoka-san, just as I’m yours, you belong to me now. I am here to keep you whole. I will give you what you need if you let me in. Let me see you, Hisoka-san. Show me your beauty.” He wanted the man beneath him so much; wanted to know him, to taste him to be inside of him, forever. “Show me Hisoka-san. Touch me.”

Show me your beauty, the voice said. It was still low and quiet but was harsher this time. Hisoka opened his eyes wide, in an automatic response to the command. Did his lover think he was beautiful? His breath hitched at the implication of those words, and he laid his palm flat against his back. He could feel the well-toned muscles of his lover's body as he moved, surely he hadn't heard that right?

To Hisoka, it was his Lulu who was the pretty one; he was the Beauty to his Beast.

Still, the words felt nice as they bounced around his head. He didn't know how much longer he could last, he lifted his other hand from the bed and pulled Illumi flush against him, tightening his legs around his waist in a clear cry for comfort. He was confused, and he couldn't keep up with what was happening. All he knew was his instinctive need to feel.

Illumi moved with his Master as he pulled their bodies into alignment. He felt the man’s legs squeeze around his hips and understood what he wanted.

Looking down, he saw desperate golden eyes staring at him and fought the urge to rip; to tear the beautiful creature below him apart.
“Mine,” he growled and sank his teeth into the tough skin at the base of Hisoka-san’s neck, drawing blood and sliding his other hand between their bodies to wrap it around his Master’s cock.

He knew Hisoka-san wasn’t going to last much longer, but that was OK. When his Master came, that was when he was allowed his release.

***

Hisoka barely had a moment to process the repeated claim on him when he felt teeth grazing his neck. Ever a creature of instinct, he tilted his head to the side, exposing his throat for his lover. Yes, this was everything he needed.

This, he could understand. Did Illu-chan want to mark him?

He found that, in this blissful moment, he didn't mind the idea, after all, hadn't he marked Illumi multiple times since they started this strange relationship? The thought was blown apart as quickly as it formed when he felt a firm grip around his straining cock; barely able to hold himself back from bucking into that enticing hold, he tensed around his gag to keep in his growl; he wanted to cum.

***

Illumi snarled as he felt his Master expose his throat further to him and revelled as he felt the tension in the man’s body at his touch.

He felt as if it had never truly understood desire until this moment. “Move,” he ordered and lapped at the blood seeping from his Hisoka-san’s neck.

***

The command for him to move was like a bolt of lightning down his spine, Hisoka's body jerked up without him ever having to think. He simply acted, he was utterly lost in the sensations around him.

The smell of his own blood filling his nostrils, the feel of Illumi's tongue tasting him, the sound of his command and breathing all combined to send him toppling towards the edge. Through their close proximity, he could feel not only his own quickened pulse but the excited pounding of his lover's as well. Layered on top of this came the waves of pleasurable pain from between his legs, it was too much.

Hisoka's world went dark and then white. Everything felt like it was sparkling as his orgasm shot through him. Desperate to keep quiet, he bit his own tongue through the cloth gag. Inside his head, he was screaming his lover's name.

***

Illumi felt his Master buck up against him at his order and thrilled at his newly discovered power. He was so close, but he could not cum until his Master had; that was a rule that was never to be broken, not under any circumstance. He gritted his teeth and growled as Hisoka-san became impossibly tight around his cock. He kept up his pace, forcing himself to hold on until his Master had experienced everything he knew he needed. He watched carefully, saw the expression of pure delight on his face, and felt the wetness against his hand.

He could let go.
“Master!” he gasped and allowed the surging pleasure to roll over him as blissful blackness took him into oblivion.

***

Hisoka’s unfocused golden eyes stared blankly up at the hotel room ceiling. As he lay underneath his friend and lover, he breathed heavily; his mind was coming down from the overstimulation that was still threatening to conquer his thoughts. Almost forgetting that he’d been gagged, he tried to take a deep breath and failed. Instinct, taking over, he tried again, but this time via his nose.

He was trying to process what had just happened; he’d heard Illumi’s cry of ‘Master’ as he’d climaxed inside him and he frowned, had he allowed his Lulu to top him?

Trying to focus on how his body felt, he realised that, yes, that was, in fact, the case. Had the therapist gotten to him that badly? But, still, his pet saw him as ‘Master’, despite his submission; the thought made him smile.

Starting to come back to himself, he unwrapped his legs from his lover’s hips, and gently stroked his clothed back affectionately.

Yes, I chose well, he thought to himself with a pleased hum.

Tapping Illumi on the shoulder, he gestured to his mouth to check if it was ok for him to take out the gag.

***

Illumi blinked a few times, coming down from the glorious high, and smiling at his Master beneath him. He was looking questioningly up at him and pointing to the torn shirt still lodged in his mouth. Tasting blood on his own lips, he nodded serenely and lifted his weight off of him, glad that they were in a hotel room and not Hisoka-san’s home. He wouldn’t have to deal with cleaning the sheets in the morning.

Still smiling, he felt an unfamiliar urge to offer his Master a compliment. He knew he had said things during sex, but Hisoka-san had reassured him that that was normal. Was this?

He had long ago learned that he could trust his Master. He knew they were both broken. They had their own uniquely damaged minds, and that’s why they worked.

Too tired to try to fight, he gave in to his urges and whispered, “You were so beautiful, Master. Thank you for letting me see.”

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Seeing the slight nod of confirmation, Hisoka pulled out the makeshift gag and tossed it towards the bin, wincing slightly as he tried to move his jaw. Now the cloth was gone he realised he had a bad case of cottonmouth and reached for the previously forgotten glass of water. In all the excitement he had forgotten even to take a small sip of it.

He nearly choked, however, when he heard his lover repeat his words from earlier. So it appeared he hadn’t misheard.

Forcing the drink down his parched throat, he plastered a smile on his face; he knew Illumi would want his approval. He was the man’s Master. Turning to look back at him with half-lidded eyes, he said, "I should be thanking you, Lulu, for being so perfect for me." He closed his eyes and gave a contented sigh. "I am very tired now though, take a nap with me? Surely it's getting rather late.”

***
He watched his Master choke on his drink and realised that maybe what he had said was actually inappropriate for the situation. He hadn’t lied, he knew that, but, perhaps he should have waited for a different time?

“I should be thanking you, Lulu, for being so perfect for me...”

Oh, Illumi thought. Perhaps that was what he had not understood? He had misread his role?

“Of course, Master, my apologies. I believe I have misread the situation.” He tried to stifle a yawn. Hisoka-san wanted to sleep, and that didn’t sound like a bad idea, not at all.

“May I suggest we move to the other side of the bed, Master?” He hoped this would be a more acceptable thing to say. He felt slightly confused, but not enough to worry about it. He’d found that most things, where Hisoka-san was concerned, worked out in the end.

***

Hisoka watched his equally tired lover, yawn. How adorable, he thought allowing himself to smile, genuinely this time.

"That sounds fine Lulu," he said softly and reached out to touch his lover's cheek, before leaning in to place a gentle barely-there kiss on his lips. "I would very much like to hold you close tonight. It's been too long since we had this."

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Illumi closed his eyes as he felt his Master touch him. The kiss was almost too much. He was right; it had been too long.

Taking a risk, he lowered himself down again and wrapped his arms around the man beneath him, before rolling them both away from the damp spot on the sheets. He made sure they stopped when his Master was above him. He knew where he belonged.

***

As he felt his lover's embrace Hisoka gave a small intake of breath, he felt them start to roll and relaxed into the motion, smirking down at Illumi once their positions had been reversed. Seeing the opportunity, he bent his head and claimed Illumi’s lips with his own once more, savouring the lingering taste of his blood.

"Hmm..." he purred. "I do taste wonderful, don't I?" he chuckled, before stifling a yawn. He changed their positions, so they were lying side by side, and pulled his Lulu flush against his chest, resting his head on his shoulder. He allowed his hand to card through Illumi’s long raven hair, and, content; he closed his eyes. "We should sleep, sweetheart," he whispered.

***

It was a rhetorical question, Illumi knew, but he couldn’t help the tiny flicker of arousal that stirred within him at the mention of how good his Master tasted. He had to take a deep breath as the memory of sinking his teeth into his flesh returned. He was used to falling asleep frustrated and aroused; it was a favourite game of Hisoka-san’s to play; he would wind him up to the edge of orgasm and forbid him from finding his release. But being this close to his Master and feeling so many strong emotions had left him slightly overwhelmed.

"We should sleep, sweetheart.”
He blinked once or twice and looked down at the man now nestled beside him. He’d grown used to the odd pet names his Master had for him, but this one was new. He wondered where it had come from and where Hisoka-san had heard it before.

“As you wish, Master,” Illumi said quietly, and obediently closed his eyes. Behind his lids, Hisoka-san writhed, moaned and danced; his liquid golden eyes were always wicked, and his ever-present smirk cut like the blade of a knife.

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Character played by Muffinamdness in this chapter was:

Illumi

Character played by themadnovelist in this chapter was:

Hisoka
Curiosity

Chapter Summary

After an intriguing start to Hisoka's therapy, Hannibal meets again with Chrollo Lucilfer and begins to piece together his mental landscape surrounding his two High Priority clients.

Hannibal looked at the well-dressed man sat across from him. He had already been through the assessment session with Chrollo Lucilfer, and it had been enough to pique his interest.

"You said in our last session that there were two members of your Troupe in particular that you wished to reunite with, why is that? Do they have any special significance to you?" he asked.

He was genuinely curious, and he let it show on his face. He'd worn a less gaudy suit than he usually would for the meeting. He knew he had a flair for the dramatic, but he recognised a sobriety in this man that, at least for now, would likely not respond well to some of his more artistic outfits.

Leaning back in his chair, he crossed his legs politely, waiting to hear Chrollo's answer.

***

Sitting back in his own chair, Chrollo let his thoughts flicker to Shalnark and Kortopi; had they any 'special' significance? Chrollo kept his expression neutral as he regarded the Doctor. He hadn't missed the choice of a plain-looking grey suit for this occasion, and his natural curiosity wondered if it was for his benefit.

"No, I wouldn't say they hold any special significance. We are all but parts of the whole." He tilted his head slightly. "If you don't mind me saying, Dr.Lecter I do find that you suit the grey suit much better than your last one. However, you didn't have to dress down for my benefit."

***

"You do?" Hannibal asked casually, glancing down. "I find on rainy days like this, that my inclination tilts towards the grey. But I am glad that you approve." He smiled again, genuinely happy to have read Chrollo's tastes accurately.

"We are all but parts of the whole." A machine, well oiled and created to function long past its maker's demise. Hannibal longed to understand. Had Hisoka been right? Would this man be fazed by the loss of one cog, or would it take more to bring him to a grinding halt? What would Chrollo look like when he did, how would his voice sound, cracked and defeated as he let his sorrow flow from him?

"I would like to know the reason you wish to meet with these two particular Troupe members if they hold no special significance to you?" he said, maintaining his professional facade for now.

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Chrollo inwardly smiled to himself; however, he didn't let it show.
"I fully understand, after all, the weather can have a strong effect on a person's mood, can it not? As for my members..." how should he put this? The man he was speaking to was not one of the spiders; he didn't need to know the full details. "I need to return a few things that are very important to them."

"You have possessions that belong to them?" Hannibal asked curiously. He had read the incident report sent to him and was a lot more 'in the loop' than the average office worker. Chrollo's reputation preceded him.

It seemed as though he was looking to return his Spider's abilities to them; without them, they'd be vulnerable. He kept his smile internal as he thought of what Hisoka had told him yesterday. The two men really were polar opposites. He could work with that.

***

*Possessions?* Well, that was certainly one way of looking at it. Chrollo inclined his head slightly, allowing himself a slight smile. Trying to look relieved at the Doctor's understanding.

"You could say that, Dr. Lecter. Forgive me if I am unable to elaborate further as it is a rather personal matter. Surely you understand, as their elected leader I have to live up to their trust in me."

***

"I most certainly do, but I would hope that you grow to trust me too, Chrollo. I am a licenced therapist, and everything you tell me in this room will be treated with the utmost confidence. Whilst this therapy is mandatory, it does not mean that our time spent here is not for your benefit," Hannibal said and smoothed out an imaginary crease in his trouser leg. "I hope that you come to trust in our relationship. I, like you, am a man of principle."

He had watched the small smile flit across Chrollo's face. The man had been, for the most part, cold and blank throughout their last session. Hannibal understood all too well how that came about. Whilst he, himself, could not be fully classified as having Antisocial Personality Disorder, Chrollo certainly could. They both had an emptiness inside though, that was clear. Whatever emotion Chrollo displayed, was entirely for Hannibal's benefit, and was being skillfully used in order to tell a particular story.

He was, however, interested to see what that story was.

***

"That is very reassuring to hear, Dr. Lecter," Chrollo said, and kept his smile in place. He didn't move his head from it's titled position. "It is a rare thing these days. I am sure you'll agree."

The Troupe leader allowed a few moments of silence to pass between them, pretending to consider his next words. He already had them in mind as soon as he finished his last response. It didn't matter to him if he had consented to be here, the others had not.

"One could argue, however, that I am the one attending therapy and not my Troupe. I am indeed their leader, but they are not blind followers. The head is not always more important than the legs; I am replaceable."

***

"Do they feel the same way?" Hannibal asked, noting the subtly bowed posture Chrollo had
adopted; his body showed deference, whilst his words remained defiant. He was wonderful.

***

At first, Chrollo didn't respond, choosing to remain stoically silent. Instead of speaking, he shifted his position, leaning forward slightly, his elbows on his already open legs. He rested his chin on his hands, intending to look as if he were deep in thought. He closed his eyes for full effect. It was clear his actions were being taken into account as well as his words; he had to tread carefully.

"When I accepted my role as their leader..." he paused, pushing the idea that he was thinking things through, "It was what we agreed upon as a group, that the whole is more important than the individual. Should anything happen to me, I am confident that they will function on their own, without me."

He opened his eyes to meet his therapist's gaze; there was a slight hardness to his look. "Would you agree that sometimes the many must come before the few Dr. Lecter?"

***

"I would say that would entirely depend upon the context of the situation," Hannibal said, leaning forward in a soft mirror of Chrollo's posture. "If, for example, sailors were stuck at sea without supplies, then I do not feel that it is unwarranted for them to draw lots, in order for one to be sacrificed, so that the many could survive. "However, should the survival of the many be placed in jeopardy by the removal of the few, I would argue that, maybe, the value of the group is not evenly distributed. Life is not always fair, nor are we all presented with equal opportunities and experiences. It is what shapes us as individuals."

Hannibal looked curiously at the man across from him. "If you see yourself as replaceable, then it must also follow that you do not believe that you are unique, is that true?"

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"Where I come from, Dr. Lecter, being unique does not equal usefulness or value." He gave the same slight smile again, but he knew that it did not reach his eyes. "For example, I could bend a fork. That fork is then unique, in that it no longer looks like the others, but is it of any value?"

_I wonder how you'll use your pretty outsider's words now, Doctor_, he wondered continuing his careful observation of his therapist.

***

"Do you see yourself as broken then, Chrollo?" Hannibal asked smoothly, not missing a beat.

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Chrollo let the smile fall away at the Doctor's question. His thoughts went back to when he was last in Yorknew City with the rest of the Troupe. The night he had encountered Gon Freecss and the way the child had dared to not only oppose him but shout at him.

"Would a broken puppet know that it is broken?" he replied.

***

Hannibal smiled and relaxed back into his chair. Yes, he was very much going to enjoy his time with Chrollo Lucilfer. "That depends entirely upon whether the puppet is aware that it is a puppet.
What do you think?"

***

He allowed himself to smile once again; this time, it was more genuine. *Yes, you are quite interesting,* he thought to himself. *But you are still an outsider.*

"Let me tell you a story, Dr. Lecter, my information is a bit sketchy, as it was before I was born, and not many people from Meteor City are *educated.*" He paused to highlight the emphasis on the last word. "There was a time when a large group tried to attack our city; our elders had to decide how to respond. Did we defend ourselves, or did we give the attackers what they wanted?" Chrollo closed his eyes, "One of our elders decided that some had to be sacrificed."

He paused again, opening his eyes to watch the man in front of him for any reaction, "Using a rather interesting ability, he turned some of the residents into bombs as a message. I am not aware of how they were selected, some say it was lots, others insist that they were criminals, even by our standards. My point, Dr. Lecter, is that the elder saw little difference between humans and puppets. Based upon my experiences, so far, I am inclined to agree."

***

Hannibal's mild expression didn't change. He listened as Chrollo told his story, and felt his own memories surfacing, but he didn't allow them to overwhelm him. He had made peace with his past long ago. It had been criminals that had been chosen; a last act of redemption for crimes too hideous for even those of the city to forgive. He had been young at the time, too young to even fully understand the danger they had all faced, but he remembered.

"My point Dr. Lecter is that the elder saw little difference between humans and puppets."

Yes, the city did teach you that. It was a lesson Hannibal had learned the hard way. He had the scars to prove it.

"I am curious, in your analogy, who do you see as the puppet master?"

***

The question surprised Chrollo, but he did his best to cover it up. It was a question he didn't really think he had an answer to. But there might be a way for him to turn it back on Hannibal?

"I would think that we are all searching for that answer, Dr. Lecter." Another deliberate pause, he had to pick his next words very carefully. This man was not like most he had entered into discourse with on this subject. "If I may ask a question of my own, I would like to know how often your days differ from your usual routine? Most people in a city like this get up, go to their jobs, return home. It's a cycle. Who would you think they'd view the puppeteer as?"

***

Hannibal leaned his head back to look at the light shade on the ceiling, exposing his throat and avoiding eye contact with Chrollo. It had been a subtle deflection, but a deflection nonetheless.

"I have had many Masters in my life. Growing up, it was my parents, then, when they passed, various mentors and for brief periods, even a few lovers. Now though, I like to think that I have gained enough insight and skill to pull my own strings. It was an active choice, one that few make." He looked down again and faced Chrollo. "If you had to guess, Chrollo, who would you say pulls your strings?"
Seeing his therapist move position, Chrollo allowed himself to sit up straight one again but kept his hands lying on his legs. He listened intently to the answer; it was one he hadn't heard before.

*Am I choosing to pull my own strings?* He contemplated the idea, and decided that he wanted to think that he was, but couldn't agree entirely with the sentiment.

"My gratitude for indulging me, Dr. Lecter, I do appreciate it." He kept his tone light." Isn't that the age-old question man has always asked himself? Is it God, or another force guiding us onwards? Are my choices really my own, or were they predetermined before we took our first breath?" he asked rhetorically. "If I was pushed to answer, I don't believe in fate, but I think the past shapes the future. Although I doubt anyone can truly know the answer until they shake off their mortal coil."

* * *

"Is that what drove you to such an extreme act of violence? Do you seek to understand the uncertainties of life through controlling death?" Hannibal asked gently, allowing his body to relax into an air of confident curiosity.

* * *

"Hisoka was becoming tiresome, I wanted to be done with him," Chrollo replied quickly, he didn't need to give that much thought. "As I explained during our last meeting, I believe. Hisoka wouldn't be the sort to stop chasing me until either of us were dead."

* * *

Hannibal nodded. "I understand the tedium associated with the Hunt. However, Hisoka Morow was one man; you chose to kill hundreds, was such an extreme necessary?"

* * *

For the first time, Chrollo allowed some semblance of genuine emotion to flicker across his face, if only for a moment.

"You call it extreme... I would rather consider it to have been the second movement of Uvo's requiem." He raised his hands as if he was a conductor, "After all, we killed many in this very city to honour his memory and wish...to wreak havoc."

* * *

"Uvo was a member of your Troupe?" Hannibal asked softly, watching as Chrollo silently conducted his players. If the man's mind had not decided who his puppet master was, then his body certainly had.

* * *

Hannibal's voice pulled Chrollo back to the present, and from his memories of the chaos they'd caused in his fallen comrade's name. He opened his eyes once more to regard the Doctor, and faked a look of apology as he settled back down into his previous position.

"Uvo..." he said quietly. "Was there at the beginning of the Troupe, and was the best friend of another member. He was killed by a skilled nen user who was *assisted* by Hisoka."
Hannibal watched the man return to the present, and wondered just how much of what had happened had been an act for his benefit. If he were lucky, he would have gambled on half, but he doubted that was the case. Maybe 80%. That left 20% as the man's genuine unconscious action.

If he saw himself as his Spider's head, his Troupe as its legs, then who, Hannibal wondered, was its heart.

The heart could, Hannibal knew, be fickle.

"I wonder," he asked. "If you were to choose, who would you cast as your Spider's heart? The head and the heart do not always agree. One often betrays the other, but should one die, the other can no longer live."

Hannibal watched the man across from him carefully. "Remove enough of a spider's legs, and it will starve, take away it's head, and it can no longer think for itself...break its heart, and it will lash out blindly, causing pain and chaos until it can no longer feel."

Despite himself Chrollo inwardly flinched at the question; it hadn't ever seemed important before. Who was the heart? Had it been Uvo? No, Uvogin was far too brash to be seen that way, even if he could be prone to random bouts of physical affection. The time he had kissed Shalnark almost caused an unconscious smile to cross his face.

*It's of no significance, we have our own rules for internal disputes,* Chrollo decided after thinking it over. However, that did not mean that he would volunteer the inner workings of his Troupe to this man.

"Perhaps a better question, Dr. Lecter, would be who the body of the Spider is? Following your logic, the Spider needs to be more than it's head and it's legs, correct? I would be most surprised if you weren't aware of arachnid anatomy, they don't have the same internal organs as mammals."

Hannibal smiled. "Then, who would you say was the body? No part of the whole is without its importance."

Without missing a beat, Chrollo tilted his head and replied, "I would have thought that would be fairly obvious. Your point is that the head and the legs have to extend from the body, is it not?"

He paused, "Surely, your file tells you where I am from?"

"Meteor City," Hannibal nodded as he answered politely. "A home of the forgotten and lost and a shelter for all." Hannibal waited for a moment before asking, "So you see no importance to the heart of your spider?"

"We'll accept anything you leave here, but don't ever take anything away from us," Chrollo
responded calmly; it was the city's motto. "It is not our lot to decide the heart of the city, Dr. Lecter."

He leant forward slightly, choosing to lean on one arm and look off to the side.

"Even by Meteor Cities ideals, we are considered outliers, but we know where we came from. It binds us together."

***

"So," Hannibal observed. "You choose your legs, your head, and where your body is located, but it is not for you to choose your heart? Does that not dictate then that the heart is chosen for you, and is a reflection of the whole?" he asked, carefully observing the man across from him.

He had clearly touched a nerve, but only just; he had not, and would not for quite a while, reach down to the core.

Tilting his head ever so slightly, he asked, "A better question then, may well be, what is the nature of the spider?"

***

Chrollo didn't turn his gaze to look at Hannibal, but he listened carefully. He had not expected this conversation to go this way. The first time he had sat in his office, in that comfortable chair, things had felt very different. It had been almost as if he were dealing with a potential mark; he could remember seeing a lot of valuables on display, and he'd wanted to get a closer look at the bookcases especially.

But, nonetheless, this has given me a lot to think about, he reminded himself. Maybe this really will help me gain a better understanding of myself?

"Does not a reflection of each of us exist in everyone we interact with?" he asked eventually, in a thoughtful tone. "The heart is chosen for me...how interesting..." he tilted his head back, glancing at the ceiling and continuing to process the question.

"The Troupe was formed by more than an individual. Therefore I do not feel that I am by myself...as an individual, I mean...qualified to answer your question."

***

"Perhaps your heart has already been chosen?" Hannibal suggested. "The spider as a whole grieved the loss of one of its legs and lashed out, but after the initial pain, it looked inwards, to the source of its grief."

Hannibal turned towards a shelf of neatly arranged books. "In ancient times, it was believed that the source of our emotion was the stomach, but in a much more recent metaphor, it is thought to be the heart. Is there not a member of your Troupe that you wish to see punished for causing your spider pain, Chrollo?"

***

Chrollo stared at the Doctor when he heard the question. Do you honestly think Hisoka was the heart of the Spider?

"You're talking about the clown, aren't you," Chrollo asked curiously. "The thing is, Dr. Lecter, all
of the 'legs' have a symbol of loyalty on their body. It solidifies their place as a member of the Spider. Hisoka never actually went through with it."

He thought back to Hisoka's challenge of battle after the Kurta had used his judgement chain on his heart. The memory of Hisoka pulling the skin from his back, only for it to change to cloth was still vivid in his mind. "He was never a member of my troupe, not really."


"And yet, you feel strongly enough to destroy a stadium, sew chaos throughout a city and seek vengeance for the pain he has caused," he observed. "The heart is a fickle thing; free and prone to whimsy. It defies the logical boundaries of the mind and plays a powerful role within the health of the whole...and should the heart become poisoned, it is the extremities that are cut off from the blood supply first."

He leaned forward slightly as he added, "Each of us, at one time or another, have wished we could slice it from our chest."

"We'll accept anything you leave here, but don't ever take anything away from us," Chrollo said, lowering his tone by a few octaves. He tried to maintain his eye contact from before, an unspoken challenge in his eyes.

He didn't quite understand where the Doctor was going with this talk of Hisoka in relation to his Spider, but he was sure that he wanted to find out.

"And what happens if they do?" Hannibal knew the motto well; it seemed as if Chrollo had taken it to be his life's mantra.

Hannibal was curious if the man truly did not see, or maybe could not understand, the living metaphor that he, himself, had created. It was obvious to Hannibal. Though he'd only known Hisoka for less than a week, he could already tell that the man held no allegiance, would take any opportunity he could to gain the advantage, and was as pure an expression of the notion of 'predator' as Hannibal had ever met. Hisoka was the living, breathing heart of Chrollo's beast; and it had betrayed him.

Chrollo did not understand the pain he was experiencing because he could not understand his own emotions; he was so interlaced with his Spider that separating him from it would be quite the challenge.

Hannibal had the heart, now all he needed was the head to complete his set. The idea sent a quiet thrill running through him. He forcibly relaxed and waited for Chrollo's answer. Now may not be the time to push his point. There would always be another appointment.

Not breaking the eye contact Chrollo pretended to think about the question. Surely this man didn't need him to answer that? He resided in Yorknew City, and as far as he was aware would have been resident when they'd robbed the mafia.
He had also been sent here because of his actions, to nip the situation with Hisoka in the bud. It had grown long in the tooth after all.

"Surely you don't need me to answer that Dr. Lecter, you live in this city after all."

***

"Are you referring to the incident involving the mafia? I'm afraid I was away on business at the time," Hannibal replied offhandedly. "Did they break the rule of Meteor City?"

***

"The incident involving the mafia, as you call it..." Chrollo said, taking a moment to choose his next words. "No, it wasn't about that. We had lost Uvo to the Chain Bastard. The chaos was to be his requiem; it was dedicated to him."

He closed his eyes for a moment; it was still hard to think about the first loss of one of the founding members.

"The Chain Bas-" he stopped to recompose himself. "I mean the Chain-User was the Nen user who took Uvogin from us and then later pursued me. Going as far as to kidnap me, threaten the rest of the Troupe and seal away my nen."

***

"I see, and so, you channelled your pain through destruction. There's a solemn poetry to such an act."

He had not missed the anger that had flared in Chrollo at the mention of the Chain-User, nor the use of profanity from the otherwise calm and polite man.

"This Chain-User, I assume they are now dead? I can't imagine you would allow someone who took from the city to go unpunished."

***

Chrollo paused; yes, he did want to fully avenge their fallen with the death of the last Kurta. However, with his Nen sealed, and the conditions placed upon him, he had been helpless to do anything towards that goal. As much as he hadn't wanted to rely on the magician, it had been Hisoka who had come to his aid. It was troublesome, to say the least.

But he didn't want to share that with the therapist. Instead, he plastered on his best mysterious smile.

"Well, of course, how better to celebrate Uvo and his love of destruction? As for the Chain-User, I believe he's preoccupied with his clan's missing eyes; and as Hisoka was actively chasing me around the known world, I felt I had to deal with him first."

***

Hannibal very carefully didn't over-react when Chrollo let slip that the Chain-User was a Kurta; only raising an eyebrow as he made the passing comment about him chasing his clan's eyes. Now he knew that the Kurta could seal Nen and had some sort of ability that involved a chain. He could work with that; he had plenty of contacts.
"And do you consider Hisoka fully dealt with?" he asked.

***

"In a word Dr. Lecter, the answer would be, no," Chrollo said firmly, noting the change in expression.

"It is likely Hisoka will continue to chase me until the day he sees me die, or I manage to kill him."

***

"And in this pursuit, how many bystanders do you foresee dying along the way?" Hannibal asked. Now was as good a moment as any to maintain his facade; he was here as an authority, after all. He had to maintain the illusion that he cared about bystander deaths. If he could establish that his two clients were a real danger to the outside world, then the plans that were slowly forming in his mind would come to pass.

***

How many bystanders? Chrollo didn't have an answer for that, and he didn't really care to try and estimate. If somebody dared to get in the way of his goal, then they wouldn't be a bystander.

"I'm afraid I can not answer your question, Dr. Lecter, my apologies."

***

"So you expect that there will be collateral damage from your pursuit of Mr. Morow?" Hannibal asked calmly.

***

"What I expect, Dr. Lecter, with all due respect, is that a man like Hisoka cannot be predicted." Chrollo responded smoothly, "I would expect that even you would have issues trying to predict what he will do next."

***

"Thankfully, Mr Lucilfer, it is not my job to do such a thing," Hannibal said calmly. "I am here to try to help you better know yourself. To help you identify and reconnect with the parts of you that you have become distant from, and to ensure that you grow as an individual."

He gave Chrollo a moment to process what had been said, then asked, "If you fear for the life of your Spider, why have you not sought help to solve your problem? It seems to me that you are fighting a war on two fronts?"

***

"Just who do you think would be willing to help a man like me, Dr. Lecter?" Chrollo asked, feeling a spark of curiosity spike once again. He schooled his face into his usual calm mask, allowing himself a moment to think.

Once he'd found his answer, he smiled and shook his head with his eyes closed. "Who would care enough to help a nobody from Meteor City? The mafia? They're not exactly fond of me."
Hannibal sat up straight in his chair. For the first time in their conversation, he found himself genuinely surprised by the answer Chrollo had given.

"The Zoldyck family are world-renowned Assassins who do not care who you are, so long as you have money; something that I am led to believe, you are not short of. You are also a member of the Hunter Association, Chrollo. You have options. There is a reason you are talking to me right now and not being mourned by your Troupe."

***

The suggestion actually took Chrollo by surprise. He was aware of the Zoldycks; he'd hired one of them before, but he hadn't thought that the Hunter Association would help him. "Thank you, Dr. Lecter. I will give your suggestion the consideration it is due."

***

"You're very welcome, Chrollo. I think that would be a good place to leave things for the day. Thank you very much for your time. It has been a pleasure to talk with you," Hannibal said and offered Chrollo a polite bow as he rose from his chair.

***

Seeing Hannibal stand, Chrollo followed suit, going as far as to return the bow out of politeness. "Thank you for agreeing to work with me, Dr. Lecter," he said. "I apologise if I have been...difficult. You have certainly given me a lot to think about."

***

"As have you for me, Mr. Lucilfer. As I said, I have very much enjoyed our conversation," Hannibal said and made his way towards the door of Chrollo's cell. Pausing in front of it, he turned and added, "I will see you again in our next session. If you have any further questions for me in the meantime, please do not hesitate to pass on a message via the staff."

***

Chrollo nodded and watched Hannibal leave, remaining impassive. "Of course, Dr. Lecter, I'll be here. I promise," he said to his retreating back, deciding, at the last second, to make a light-hearted joke.

***

Character played by Muffinamndness in this chapter was:

Hannibal

Character played by themadnovelist in this chapter was:

Chrollo
Jack calls on his two most trusted Agents for a status report and Zeller gets more than he bargained for when he passes Hisoka a message to keep the noise down.

Jack walked into the staff room as he continued to search for the agents he had posted to keep tabs on Hisoka Morow. "I still don't understand why the Zodiacs agreed to this ridiculous idea," he grumbled to himself.

Spotting Miriam Lass sitting alone at one of the tables, he quickly made his way over to join her. "Miriam, I'm sure you know why I'm here. I need your status report on Mr. Morow."

***

Jumping slightly, and doing her best not to choke on her coffee, Miriam sat up straighter in her chair.

Coughing, she said, "Yes, Sir. So far this week he's had five different...guests...in his room. I've checked the backgrounds on each of them, and only Freddie Lounds stood out. She wasn't supposed to be able to get into the hotel after the last...incident."

Miriam shuddered as she remembered the dreamy expression on Freddie's face when she'd escorted her, dressed only in a towel, out of the back door of the hotel.

She sighed, knowing what a pain this would be, but said it anyway. "I believe she must have bribed one of the Hotel staff to let her in. We need to station guards on every exit."

***

"She came back again?" Jack sighed, exasperated. "I'll see who we can transfer over to help keep her out. Don't forget; we have to provide guards to Dr. Chilton to help keep an eye on his guest as well."

Drumming his fingers on the table, Jack contemplated trying to appeal to the Hunter Association's new Chairwoman. "I still don't understand why Chairwoman Yorkshire went along with this plan. I'd have expected it from Chairman Netero, but she's normally much more sensible. Was there anything worth noting about his other...guests?"

***

*Other than their volume levels and the fact that they could hardly walk when they left the room?*

"No, Sir. Nothing," Miriam said flatly. She looked over at the door when she heard it's telltale squeak, and felt her eyebrows raise.

"Zeller? What happened?" she asked, trying to remember what he'd been called away to deal with. Surely it couldn't have been that bad? He'd only been gone for twenty minutes.
Entering the staff room with a blank expression, Zeller silently walked over to the coffee machine. *OK, now I wish we had something stronger than espresso,* he thought, as he collected his drink from the vending machine and turned to see Miriam and Jack sitting together at a table in the corner. Wordlessly, he walked over to them, and sat down next to Miriam, placing his drink on the table to cool.

"Nice of you to join us, Zeller, I was just checking in with everyone to get their status reports. Miriam was telling me you've been having further issues with Freddie Lounds. Do you have anything you'd like to add to that?" Jack asked. Noting that his agent looked like he'd seen a ghost, he added, "I trust everything's alright? You haven't had any issues with Mr. Morow, have you?"

Zeller shook his head in response to Jack's first question, and picked up his drink, sipping at it while he tried to process what had just happened. "No Sir, I haven't got anything to add to the situation with Freddie Lounds."

"I see, and Mr. Morow?" Jack prompted, in a sterner tone.

Wincing slightly Zeller cleared his throat, "It depends on what we're defining as an issue, Sir. I mean I just came from room 444...that is to say Mr. Morow's room. The hotel staff asked me to pass on a noise complaint."

"Oh," Miriam muttered. "Now, I understand."

Jack gave Zeller an appraising look, *Just passing on a noise complaint shouldn't have been that difficult, we've all dealt with worse in the field.*

"I see, and how did our guest react? This isn't the first time the staff have complained, I understand." Jack asked.

"Well, I think...the conversation went well? I mean he didn't threaten me, or try to attack me. If anything he's a very charming man?" Zeller paused to sip at what remained of his drink. "You'd almost forget he was a serial killer if you talked to him for long enough, and if he didn't look at you in that...you know what I mean, right, Miriam? That weird look he gives people?"

"Mmm-hmm," Miriam said, nodding and sipping at her drink.

*Oh, I remember all too well. Now maybe you'll stop taking the piss out of me when I have to do the overnight guard of his room.*
"He's a very charming man, but then again," she gave Zeller a deadpan look. "That's how they get you to go into the room full of certain death. Please tell me you didn't go into his room?"

***

"Room of certain death? Please tell me that nobody has left that man's room in a body bag?" Jack interjected. Turning to Zeller, he added, "Did you go into the room?"

***

"No, everyone who goes in has come out...happy? And I didn't go into his room, don't worry. Although he did invite me to join him, that was awkward," Zeller replied, rubbing the back of his head absently. "Has he invited you into his room?" he asked Miriam.

***

"I've lost count of the number of times," Miriam said flatly. "The man's a dynamo bunny. He went through three women and two men when that convention was on the other Saturday. He left one of them in the elevator with a post-it on saying, 'It broke, fix it'." She took a deep breath and said. "It wouldn't have been so bad, but that was the guy running the whole event." She turned to Jack. "Seriously, Sir, is there no way we can get him transferred? The man's a menace."

***

Jack sighed, "I appreciate what you're both telling me, but we can't transfer him for being a potential sex addict. Now if you tell me that these partners were not consenting to Mr. Morow's advances, then we can bring more charges against him. So I have to ask you; these people he's taking to his room, are they consenting?"

***

Miriam slumped in her chair. "Even Colin, the guy running the event, asked if he did round two's." She looked forlornly at Zeller. "They all consented...repeatedly...very loudly... we've had to permanently book the rooms either side of his to keep the complaints down."

***

"Don't forget that Freddie keeps coming back, it's more than just round two for her, more like six?" Zeller added. "She's one of the only one he's shown that much interest in, now that I think about it. Maybe we could use her to keep him under control?"

Seeing the look of irritation on Jack's face, Zeller shrunk back a little. "It was just an idea, I mean the guy doesn't really respect authority. Plus we know so little about him; even the file on Chrollo Lucilfer contains more than his."

***

"It should go without saying, for both of you, that you are not to approach or make any deals with Freddie Lounds. She is not to be trusted. As for the lack of information we have on Mr. Morow, well, that is precisely why I requested you both for this post," Jack said, placing both his hands on the table as he leant forward. "Seeing as we've booked those two rooms, I trust that you've been using them? It would make sense for those on the overnight watch to use the room to keep tabs on his nighttime activities. What can you tell me about his movements; I understand he was brought here under escort from the hospital. Does he leave the hotel? Is he sitting in the bar? If he leaves the hotel, is there any pattern to where he's going? Do we have somebody monitoring his
Zeller flinched at Jack's suggestion and threw Miriam a look of horror before schooling his features into a more neutral mask. "Well... there's no reason why we couldn't use the rooms. I mean they're paid for already..."

"I'll take that as you volunteering for the first overnight stay then, Zeller, thank you. You two are the best agents I have working with Mr. Morow, and I need you to keep close tabs on him," Jack interrupted, acting oblivious to Zeller's discomfort at the suggestion.

Karma's a bitch, huh? Miriam thought, and grinned with satisfaction. "He's not left the hotel yet, Sir, no," she said, schooling her features and turning to face Jack. "But he does spend a lot of time in the bar. We try to steer the potentially...problematic, guests away from wherever he is. And don't worry, Sir," she added, glaring at Zeller. "No one's talking to Freddie."

Jack nodded. "That's good, we don't know much, but we have reason to think that he has enemies. However, as long as he's not harassing the other guests while he's in the bar, then we can't stop him from making use of the facilities, and it'll be much easier to keep track of him here than in a bar or club down the road. We picked this hotel partly for that reason, along with its proximity to Dr. Lecter's offices."

He fell silent as he heard the door open, and looked up to see one of the hotel receptionists. The woman, obviously realising that she'd walked in on an important meeting, quickly held her hands up and closed the door. Jack shook his head and sighed. "We'll need to find a better location to have these meetings. The hotel owner has agreed to be cooperative so long as we aren't interfering with the everyday running of his business. Has Mr. Morow been seen using any other facilities available to him? We don't need him complaining to Dr. Lecter about his treatment here at the hotel."

"He mainly orders room service...but the staff are starting to refuse to bring it to him. He has a tendency to open the door in his birthday suit," Miriam explained and saw Zeller wince. "A lot," she added, laughing as the colour drained from her friend's face.

She tried to calm herself and continued, "He wanders around when he's bored, but we always have someone watching him. He's aware of it, but he doesn't seem to care. His only issue seems to be boredom, and he solves that by flirting with anyone that vaguely looks like they might be able to move. Blinking seems to be enough."

"So how are we handling the situation with the hotel staff refusing to go to his room? Have you and the other agents been dealing with him in their stead? Unfortunately, we can't refuse him use of any of the services on offer without good reason. Has he attacked any of them?" Jack asked with a hint of frustration in his voice.
"I understand you're both frustrated about this assignment; Zeller don't interrupt," Jack warned, raising his hand when he noticed the man open his mouth to speak. "Mr. Morow is clearly aware of his attractiveness and is likely using it as a weapon to get people to let their guard down. When I spoke to the staff over at Heaven's Arena, they reported similar behaviour during his tenure there. Frequent use of their room service, often picking up people in the bars, and sometimes even other fighters," he explained with a sigh. "Just try not to rise to it. If he flirts, just be polite; you are both here on a job. If you can give me something, anything to take back to Cheadle Yorkshire to petition for his transfer to Dr. Chilton's facilities, I will be a very happy man. Do you have anything else you can tell me? Either of you?"

***

Miriam looked at the cup in her hand apologetically. "No, Sir, I don't. He just wanders around and picks up anyone who's willing to go back to his room with him. Although, even that's dropped off since he got himself a guy with long black hair. He seems to be sticking around." She saw the frustration on Jack's face. "I'm really sorry, Sir. It's like he knows the rules."

***

Zeller nodded along to Miriam's explanation before adding, "Now that Miriam mentioned him, I think I did see that guy leaving earlier. Maybe he actually has a boyfriend? I mean he's been less interested in picking random people up in the bar since this guy arrived." Seeing the look he was receiving from both Jack and Miriam, he laughed nervously, "What I mean we don't know much, but we know he definitely likes men and women. Just because he's psychotic doesn't mean that nobody would want to date him. I'd imagine he'd turned some men gay before now."

***

"That's all well and good, but you haven't told me how we're dealing with the staff issues?" Jack asked, pulling the conversation back on track and wondering about the insight.

***

"Well, there are still some members of staff who are willing to deal with him, so it's not an issue yet. However, most of the management are unhappy that Mr. Morow might cross the line, if he hasn't already. If needed, I'm sure that the most senior agent on duty could deal with room service requests, I mean, if he's hungry he'll just take the food and tell us to go away, right?" Zeller said hopefully, catching the glare his colleague was giving him, and adding, "I mean what's he going to do? Let his food go cold for the sake of chatting us up?"

***

"Yes, yes he would," Miriam said emphatically. "He's done it already...he orders again to see who he'll get next time. The man's got more money than he knows what to do with and he's bored...have you not been reading the reports I gave you?"

***

Zeller smiled nervously. "Well, I don't recall that being mentioned. Besides if he knows we're not hotel staff, which should be obvious. Maybe he'll be less inclined to do that..." Seeing the displeased look on Jack's face, he let his words die in his throat.

***

"I'm happy with that, as long as standard procedure adhered to. As for the reports Zeller, I strongly
suggest you re-read them. Tonight while you're on guard duty. If that's everything you have to say, I need to get back to the Association to talk with Chairwoman Yorkshire. I will..." Jack paused, and he stood up. "Pass on your concerns about his sexual proclivities, and make another request for his transfer. I will be in touch when I know more." Not waiting for any further responses, he strode over to the door and left the two agents alone in the staff room.

***

Miriam waited until after Jack had closed the door before turning to Zeller and saying, "What the hell! You do realise what he's going to be like when he finds out that we're sleeping next to him. Have you ever heard his 'boyfriend' screaming for him to smack him harder? Ever had to listen to someone being whipped?" She looked at the horror on Zeller's face. "Well, I'm sure you'll find tonight educational. That's the last time you get to take the piss out of me for complaining about having to carry his toys back to their rooms."

***

"I wasn't joking about the long-haired guy being his boyfriend you know, I mean don't you think they're a couple?" Zeller asked. "I mean...I've already seen more of him than I ever really wanted to. Is he really whipping the people he takes to his room?"

***

"Well he's in there a lot for someone that isn't, don't you think?" Miriam said sarcastically. "I thought Price liked that kind of..." She shook her head. "Never mind. I don't want to think about it."

She sat back in her seat and smirked. "Are you sure you saw more of him than you wanted to? You know when you're embarrassed your ears turn red, right?"

***

Zeller glared at his friend and held his hands over the side of his head. "No, they don't, and you know I don't swing that way! It's not my fault we have the living embodiment of the statue of David under our watch."

***

"Well," Miriam said, still smirking. "You said it yourself; I'm sure he's 'converted' more than one 'art lover'." She took a sip of her coffee and winced. It was cold. "Are you sure you didn't get yourself assigned to the first watch on purpose?"

***

"Hey, you were here for the whole conversation. You know what the Guru gets like, he volunteered us both for this job, remember?" Zeller snapped, before leaning back in his seat and saying, "He answered the door naked...and then...just leaned in the doorway talking to me like it was the most normal thing in the world. I mean, a couple of other guests walked past, and he waved...and said hello to them!"

The image of their horrified faces swam past his mind's eye, and he shuddered again. "If you didn't know who he was, you'd think he was just a naturist...although if he's a grower and not a shower, then I can understand why the boyfriend screams, and probably doesn't mind being cheated on."
Miriam sighed and forced herself to drink the rest of her coffee. "I've seen it," she said darkly. "Believe me; you won't be disappointed. And I know, I've talked to the staff, Zeller. This is what I was trying to tell you! Why do you think I wanted him transferred? But no, you just go and get us extra duties that guarantee we're stuck with him." She glared. "What kind of mojo did he hit you with to make sure you wanted to go back?"

***

"He's a transmuter, not a manipulator. If anything, that means he's not able to use it effectively, so I highly doubt he's manipulating anyone. He's just...naturally...incredibly charming, and the way he acts..." Zeller's voice caught in his throat as he tried to think of a way out of the hole he was digging for himself. "I mean...that doesn't mean I want to sleep with him, OK? Before you say it.

Shaking his head, Zeller got up and put his empty cup in the bin. Shaking his head, he decided to get himself another one in the vain hope that the caffeine would make what he saw go away.

***

"Yeah, Zeller, I know, it's a turn of phrase. God, defensive much? You clearly haven't given this any thought at all, have you?" Miriam said. "Grab me one, will ya?"

***

"Me, defensive? Never. Besides, you get pissy about having to go on shift with your ex. I warned you that she wasn't right for you, but nooo, you always know best." Zeller retorted as he punched in his coffee order, "What coffee do you want by the way?"

***

"That's because you never believed me about what she was like!" Miriam snapped. "But now, it's all Hisoka this and Mr. Morrow has the body of an Adonis." She waited until his coffee had come out of the machine before saying, "Number three with two sugars." She saw the look he gave her. "It's been a long night, and before you ask, it's seven inches...and girthy." She stared blankly at the memory that flashed in front of her eyes. "He had a ruler with him..."

***

The image of Hisoka's very naked, and very erect penis slid across Zeller's mind. Miriam was recoiling in horror as the man proudly held up his ruler to prove just how well he would 'fit her'. He froze as he was about to order Miriam's drink. Deciding to ignore the unwanted insight into his friend's life that his Nen had shown him, he chose to go for the diplomatic reply.

"Why on earth would I ask that?" he shrieked overdramatically. "No," he held up his hand. "Don't answer that... I'm morbidly curious as to why you were in a situation where he was able to measure his dick...but I've got a feeling I really don't want to know."

Grabbing Miriam's coffee as it came out of the machine, he made his way back over to the table. "Tell me if you really want to," he said, but don't expect me to like it."

***

"I think the exact line was, 'Hey cutie, wanna come in and make a movie? I've got the dick of a porn star, and I'll make you moan my name for a week,'" she said, picking up her coffee and blowing on it to cool it down. "I made the mistake of saying that I didn't believe him...about his claims." She stilled and looked Zeller in the eye. "Never challenge Hisoka Morow about anything.
Never.

***

"Right... don't challenge the sex-addicted psychopath," Zeller said sarcastically. "Got it."

Shuffling to get comfortable, he stared down at his coffee. There was no way around it; he could feel Miriam's curiosity as if it were a fog flowing from her. With a sigh, he gave in and told her what she clearly wanted to know. "He just kept talking to me when I was up there, said that he was feeling lonely and asked me if I wanted to come in for a coffee."

***

"I need to know how you got off so lightly. What face did you pull? How terrified were you?" Miriam asked. "Please, Senpai," she mocked. "Teach me your ways."

***

"I don't know," Zeller snapped. "Maybe he was trying to lull me into a false sense of security? I tried to make excuses to leave, but he just kept talking. He offered to let me use his bathroom, his phone...he even offered me something from the minibar. You're right; he must have more money than he can figure out what to do with. Does fighting at the Arena really pay that well?"

***

Miriam stared in disbelief. "Remind me to get Price to take you out of the lab more often. He could probably afford a small country if he wanted to buy one. He got into *Greed Island* because he was bored. Seriously, man, you have to start reading the files I give you."

***

"Hey, a guy can enjoy his job, OK? We don't all like going to clubs and getting plastered." Zeller sipped at his coffee. "Does this guy do everything because he's bored? Maybe we should tell Dr. Lecter to help him lengthen his attention span."

***

Miriam cast her mind back to the smartly dressed man she'd met at the annual Association dinner party, and cringed. He'd given her the creeps, but she had no idea why. Everyone else seemed to like him, and he was practically best friends with Jack. "I'll let you do that, the man gives me the creeps. Do *not* tell Jack I said that."

She drank deeply from her cup and grinned wickedly as an idea occurred to her. "Unless you want me to give Hisoka your number? Maybe you could help him concentrate?"

***

"Only if I can give him yours," Zeller laughed. "Don't worry your secret's safe with me. Dr. Lecter puts me on edge too. You should have seen the way he would look at Will, if you ever met him?"

***

"Yeah, well, they were fucking," Miriam said, rolling her eyes. " Seriously, get out more, please. Or at least talk to someone other than Price on a daily basis."

***
Zeller rolled his eyes. "Yes I know they were fucking, but the way he looked at Will wasn't the way you'd look at your boyfriend. It was more like...I don't know...like he was property? Heck, I'd rather be stared at by Hisoka than have Dr. Lecter look at me the way he looked at Will."

***

"Yeah, well," Miriam shrugged. "Turns out Will was the one that saw people as things, not Lecter. So it looks like you were wrong again. The court transcript said he tricked the guy into cooking someone's liver. I mean, I know Will had that Empathy Nen thing that meant he could get into killer's minds...but still." She felt her stomach churning at the idea. "That's a special kind of sick."

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"Yeah...Price and I heard about that. Couldn't believe it but if you spend all that time inside the minds of criminals, maybe something gets stuck up there?" Zeller said with a sigh and downed the rest of his now cold coffee. "I still think Hisoka's less creepy than Dr. Lecter. So I won't tell Jack if you don't."

***

"Deal," Miriam said, pushing the images of the corpses Will had left in his wake out of her mind. "So, what you gonna bring with you to occupy your time while you're listening to Hisoka's dulcet moans?"

***

"Is he really that loud? I thought you said it was the people he took to his bed that made the racket?" Zeller asked curiously. "Maybe I should read those reports again...you know just in case Jack asks me about them?"

***

"It's a surround sound experience...and it depends who's on top. They like to switch it up," Miriam leered. "And I've got copies...just in case you forgot yours at the lab."

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Zeller shook his head. "Well at least there's a bed in the room next door, beats standing outside or watching Leroy on the floor."

***

"Don't ever tell Jack he sits down on guard duty," Miriam said, shaking her head in disbelief. "I mean, I know you spend most of your time in the lab, but...if you let him fall asleep, I will give Hisoka your number."

***

"I'll give Dr. Lecter yours if you tell Jack anything we've been talking about." Zeller countered. "Don't worry, I plan to take a nap before I'm due to start, and when Leroy joins me, I'll give him your fondest regards."

***

"Yeah, well," Miriam quipped, making sure to look unconcerned. "Lecter won't try to fuck me."
Not to be outdone Zeller added, "OK, fine, I'll give your number to Hisoka's boyfriend so they can invite you for a threesome."

"You assume he hasn't?" Miriam said blankly. "You're so cute."

"Miriam, the guy staying with Hisoka barely talks to anyone, even the staff don't know his name. That's why we just call him the guy with the long hair, or long-haired guy. Unless you've been holding out on me?" Zeller said sarcastically.

"Zeller," Miriam said. "I was meaning Hisoka. The guy's got the libido of a hyperactive rabbit on steroids. He propositions everyone that comes to his door...or guards it. His boyfriend was on the bed in the background when he asked me. He didn't even bat an eye. I'm assuming he's aware of who he's dating."

"Well, if he's letting him whip him, then I'd imagine threesomes are pretty standard," Zeller replied. "He must be good in bed if he can stop Hisoka bringing back people from the bar though, so maybe that's why I got off lightly? I mean he told me he was lonely, and then I saw the long-haired guy coming back. Fuck, he saved me, didn't he?"

"Yeah, sounds like he did, and it's not usually Hisoka screaming for the whipping," Miriam explained. "He's had a lot of people, Zeller. Just...don't let him know you're in the other room. If you do...he likes an audience, and the boyfriend doesn't seem to care. He doesn't seem to care about anything." She frowned and looked at her friend inquisitively. "Have you ever seen him smile?"

"I've seen Hisoka smile...he was all smiles while talking to me earlier, but the boyfriend, no. Although some of the hotel staff are taking bets on if he's a man or a woman if you wanna join in?" Zeller chuckled. "Hisoka does have a strange way of smiling though," he added thoughtfully. "Like he looks pleased and annoyed at you at the same time? Or it could just be me, I mean I did refuse his invitations, repeatedly. When I saw the boyfriend, I pretended I could hear somebody shouting my name and ran for the lift. How do you normally get away from him?"

"I've heard the boyfriend talking... he's definitely a boyfriend," Miriam said confidently. "And I just tell him to go away. He kinda laughs and walks off." She tilted her head and looked at Zeller more closely. "You know, it's OK if you have a crush. You can tell me."

Zeller looked at the door to make sure they were still alone before looking back at his friend.
"Look this absolutely has to stay between us...if Hisoka finds out, I will definitely give him your number, your email and your home address...along with a love letter from you professing your undying affection, but..." He twisted his empty cup in his fingers. "For a man, he's very...good looking. In a handsome, Greek God kinda way. I mean he looks like he's been carved from marble. His muscles are...and his skin; it's so pale. I'm not even gay... I'm really not into men. I've tested back in college."

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"OK, OK," Miriam said, hiding her laugh. "I won't tell anyone, I promise," she added when he glared. "It's kinda cute actually. I mean, the guy's a psychopathic serial killer, but he is an amazingly gorgeous one. Can't fault you there." She softened her expression and smiled at him. "Look, half the guys I helped back to their rooms 'weren't gay' either. Most of them had wedding rings on. The man has a rule book all of his own; it's fine. It's not like you're ever going to do anything about it." She hardened her gaze. "Are you?"

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"Not planning on it, and I'm definitely not gonna risk letting him buy me a drink. The guy with his reputation would probably drug me," Zeller said, laughing nervously. "I mean it sounds like you fancy him too, miss 'he's amazingly gorgeous'."

***

"I'm sure Price would help you out, if you wanted to test to see if anything's changed now you're older," Miriam said, deflecting the topic away from her. "He always did have this way of smiling at you when you weren't looking..."

***

Zeller grinned, "Oh no, we're not talking about Price and the rumours about his little man crush. You like Hisoka Morow, admit it. Besides, it's not like I'm gonna tell anyone; you know that I can keep secrets."

***

Miriam pretended to drink her coffee for as long as she could get away with before sighing. "He's...easy on the eyes," she admitted. "Nothing more. I certainly wouldn't want to do anything with him, not after knowing where his joystick's been." She shuddered dramatically. "And I feel for any woman who ends up with that monstrosity inside her."

***

"Well," Zeller said thoughtfully. "If he's as violent in bed as he's supposed to be in the Arena, I think his 'monster' will be the least of anyone's worries." He softened his expression. "Besides, if I'm going to be on the night shift, I should nip home to get my things. I can grab a nap before the show starts. Just remember," he pointed between them, "This conversation, never happened. I will give him your number if you tell Jade any of this when she stops by to pick up her stuff. I know about the makeup sex, and I'm not above blackmail," he warned.

Ignoring Miriam's glare, he collected both empty cups from the table and threw them in the bin, giving her a cheeky grin as he made his way to the door. Stopping to shoot her finger guns, he whispered loudly, "Never happened." Before letting it close behind him, leaving, he hoped, one amused Miriam Lass in his wake.
Character played by Muffinamndness in this chapter was:

Miriam & Zeller

Character played by themadnovelist in this chapter was:

Jack & Zeller
Zeller learns more about Hisoka than he had ever wished to during his stint on the night shift at the Yorknew Hotel.

21:09 To: Zeller

So, how's it going?

21:14 To: Miriam

Not too bad so far, spotted our man and his boyfriend in the bar earlier, so I snuck into my room. Just been reading through those reports again.

21:16 To: Zeller

Careful, they have long words in, ask me if you need any help.

Are they back yet? Anyone with them?

21:19 To: Miriam

Now you mention it; I think I heard the door open.

They just got back, and I think maybe a little drunk?

Oh, and you're right, that's definitely a man's voice should I tell the betting pool?

21:21 To: Zeller

You actually had a bet going? Do I need to tell you what will happen if Jack finds out?

And...good luck! I'm off for a shower. Just wanted to check in.

21:24 To: Miriam

Come on it won't be that bad. I'm a big boy I can handle it.
21:28 To: Miriam

OK, he really is loud, isn't he?

21:32 To: Miriam

I take back what I said.

Pretty sure I just heard the boyfriend screaming Master?

WTF kind of stuff is he doing in there?

21:36 To: Miriam

Seriously, Miriam, you can't leave me like this! I can hear both of them now! How thin are these walls?

21:47 To: Miriam

How long do you take in the dam shower? I've tried burying my head under a pillow, but I can still hear them, and I can't read the reports if I'm under a pillow.

21:48 To: Zeller

I had to do my hair too. I can't go to bed with wet hair.

And what's the matter? I did tell you what he did last time I was on duty, didn't I? Is he moaning his name yet? Because when that starts, you're in for the long haul. Hisoka likes to play with his victims, and the boyfriend has as much stamina as he does. I'm pretty sure he's as powerful as Hisoka, to be honest. His Aura's...dark. So yeah, good luck!

21:56 To: Miriam

Sorry I was looking for something to plug my ears with, found some complimentary earplugs from the hotel. Can still hear them though.

Not heard names, just Master? Just our luck he's into the really kinky stuff. Not sure if you did mention what happened on your last shift, can't think around the moaning.

21:58 To: Zeller

He told him to call him by his name whenever he was close...I don't know how that man lasted for so long. It went on for three hours. We counted him scream Hisoka-san 23 times. And those were only the times we could hear him through the door. The man's evil.
I'm off to sleep. Only message me if it's an emergency.

22:04 To: Miriam

What? Miriam! You can't just tell me that and then leave!
Don't be so cruel.

22:05 To: Zeller

Night Zeller. You're a big boy. Just remember to use lube.

22:07 To: Miriam

What the hell do you think I'm going to be doing while I'm stuck here listening to them?
Oh God, he just screamed...it was even louder that time. How did you cope with this?

22:10 To: Zeller

Zeller. I told you to message me in an emergency. I have a 6 am shift. And I assumed you'd be relieving some tension so that you could concentrate on the reports. Unless you're fine with Jack knowing you didn't read a word and have no clue what's going on?

22:13 To: Miriam

Do you think I can focus on anything when I can hear the two of them going at it?
I can't even find decent earplugs. Miriam, is 445 the room Freddie Lounds was staying in?

22:13 To: Zeller

Yes. Why? Zeller, what are you going to do? Is she back...because if she is, you'll have to let Jack know and note it in the report. Zeller, what are you going to do?

22:25 To: Miriam

She's left some of her stuff in the drawers, and I think she bought Hisoka a present? Is this what I think it is? It looks like a fleshlight?

He attached a picture of a sex toy still in its box.
22:26 To: Zeller

WHY ARE YOU IN THAT ROOM?

And yes, it is... Don't you have access to the internet? Why are you pestering me with these things?

I did not need that mental image. Zeller...please tell me it's not used...

On second thought, I HAVE TO SLEEP! GO AWAY!

22:31 To: Miriam

Definitely not used, box hasn't been opened.

As for why I'm in room 445, well, isn't it obvious? I was trying to find something better to use as earplugs. I figured a reporter would have some decent equipment, y' know?

OK sleep well, I'll just be in my room, alone, with two men doing the horizontal tango in the one next door. Loudly.

22:32 To: Zeller

Zeller, get out of that room and get back on duty! The reason the earplugs still let you hear Loud Noises is because you are on guard duty and have to hear if bad things are happening, you idiot!

Suck it up, like the rest of us. Read the damned reports and for God's sake, don't forget to do the hourly patrols, OK?

01:13 To: Miriam

Oh. My. God. Miriam, they're at it again! They stopped for a while, not sure why but maybe they had a nap?

Just got back from a patrol, you proud of me?

Anyway soon as I close the door Hisoka started moaning like a banshee!!! I didn't think his voice could go that high.

01:17 To: Zeller

I said emergencies. Hisoka howling is nothing new. Use the Fleshlight. No, I'm not proud, that's your job. I'm going to sleep. Don't make a mess.

01:21 To: Miriam

Don't tempt me, Miriam, it's looking more and more...wait why did you assume I brought it back to
my room with me?

I don't think I'm going to be able to look him in the eye if he tries to talk to me again. Oh, Lord, I think he's letting long-haired guy whip him? I think that was a whip? How do you know if it's a whip?

01:22 To: Zeller

Because I've talked to you for more than five minutes, and you're the forensic detective; you'll figure it out. Good Night Zeller.

03:23 To: Miriam

Oh, man, I really hope Jack can get them to move this guy, really did not need to hear Hisoka telling his boyfriend that he's been a bad boy and needs to be punished.

Share my pain Miriam...share!

03:26 To: Zeller

How. Many. Times. EMERGENCIES!

I HAVE SHARED YOUR PAIN. For the last THREE WEEKS, I've had nothing BUT that pain. Now just jerk off and leave me alone! At least you're in a bedroom and can do something about it!

04:04 To: Miriam

I don't know what's worse; that I'm sitting here listening to them go at it or that I have to type this into a report...which is then going to be read by Jack' The Guru' Crawford.

Least they seem to have stopped. Hopefully, they're just going to sleep, and I can finish re-reading the reports.

04:10 To: Zeller

I'm going to kill you. That's what's worse. I know you know that I can punch a man's head off his shoulders. If you keep messaging me complaining about the fact that your man crush isn't fucking you, and is doing his boyfriend instead, I will use you for target practice. If you wake me up again for anything short of the world ending, then the next time you see me, run. Run for your fucking life.

06:12 To: Miriam

Good Morning! Oh, wondrous light of my life! Just wanted to wish you an uneventful shift dealing
with our resident psycho. Also, it turns out Freddie left some other toys too; there was an unopened magic wand, so I put that in the room for you. Second draw down. You know, just in case you need to relieve some tension.

I'm going to be heading home to bed.

PS: He's not my crush, remember?

06:17 To: Zeller

...Zeller...

There is no way I would ever use something that Freddie... I'm going to start at your knees and work up. Every joint of your body will be turned backwards by the time I'm finished with you.

I wish you a 'peaceful' rest. Don't worry; I'll only message you in an 'emergency'.

Oh, and if I find out you've turned off your phone when we might need to contact you in an actual emergency, I'll make sure Hisoka knows where you live.

06:23 To: Miriam

You can tell him; I live comfortably outside of his range of movement. Plus I told you I'm moving in with Price so we can split bills, you wouldn't want to subject Price to our lovely friend, would you?

06:25 To: Zeller

He won't always have a radius, Zeller. And yes, I know all about your plan to 'split the bills'. I'm sure Hisoka wouldn't mind sharing either. He's good like that.

06:29 To: Miriam

For the last time, I do not have a crush on him!

Besides, do you really think that they'll let him go?

I know Dr. Lecter is heralded as this world-renowned super therapist who can tame the worst criminals, but Hisoka just doesn't care enough about anything; except maybe sex. But do you think he's really feeling any guilt about those people who died? Because I don't.

What's that saying again? You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink?

06:40 To: Zeller

It's too early in the morning for this.
Lecter was the one who got him put into the hotel. I overheard the conversation with Jack. The guy wants him free for some reason.

And, everyone knows you and Price are fucking like bunnies. You really don't have to deny it.

06:44 To: Miriam

This the same rumour that started at the same as the one about you fancying Jack picked up momentum? I wonder who put that one about the office. Price doesn't fancy me.

Anyway, I'm going to be driving home now, enjoy your shift. Have fun flirting with Hisoka.

07:02 To: Zeller

Sweety, everyone knows you started that one, even Jack.

And don't worry, I'll keep you up to date with occurrences throughout the day. Wouldn't want you missing out.

By the way, even Jack thinks you're dating Price. He asked me when your anniversary was last month. He wanted to get you a card for when you finally came out.

07:04 To: Miriam

I'm sure he does, but seriously, I'm not gay, and I'm about to start driving.

Will look forward to hearing all about our boy's antics, don't miss anything out, alright? I want all the details, especially if he starts measuring things again.

Also, what is it with you people these days? Is it really so hard to believe that two guys can just be good friends?

08:17 To: Zeller

Hisoka's boyfriend has bought him Bagels for Breakfast. It smelt like they had salmon in. He stopped off at the stall in the foyer to buy a fruit punch and some chocolate. They've only had sex once so far. The boyfriend appears to have been the one in charge this time because Hisoka was howling Illu-chan, more! For ten minutes until something muffled his speech.

The boyfriend's a polite man. He offered to get me refreshments when he left the room. I did manage to see inside when he came out of the door; Hisoka was tied to the bed. Hopefully, he won't break another one.

And there are friends, Zeller, and then there are friends. I keep telling you; Price looks at you like a love-sick puppy. He'd be happy to help you 'experiment', I'm sure. All you'd have to do is ask.
08:21 To: Miriam

Oh, so we learn the man's name? Sort of, Illu-chan? Gotta be a pet name.

How many beds has our bad boy broken so far, I haven't been counting, would this be the fourth?

You should have accepted the offer, see if Hisoka got jealous or not. Then again, he openly flirts in front of his boyfriend, so he probably wouldn't.

08:25 To: Zeller

'Refreshments' wasn't a euphemism, Zeller. He was offering to get me a drink. Go to sleep. I'll wake you up later. And yes, this is bed number four. I had a specialist use a reinforced frame this time. Jack was not happy until I pointed out that the extra expense would be worth it if it stopped him breaking four more frames.

08:28 To: Miriam

You know what I'm not even surprised. They say opposites attract, right?

I'll look forward to my next instalment from you, you're a star.

Gonna try to get some sleep now, I'll speak to you soon.

One last thing, still NOT gay.

08:29 To: Zeller

How do you know? Did you practice with Price already? That was quick.

Let me know how many times Hisoka tries to get you in your sleep ;)

08:33 To: Miriam

Hahaha very funny, I live more than three miles from the hotel.

Let me know how many times Hisoka tries to get into your pants today.

I am going to sleep now.

08:34 To: Zeller

Night sweety. Give Price a kiss from me too.

08:36 To: Miriam
Only if you give Hisoka one from me.

Night.

08:37 To: Zeller

For the sake of Price's unrequited love, deal.

Sleep well.

08:39 To: Miriam

Oh, and you have to kiss him on the lips, cheek doesn't count, and I demand proof, or I won't believe you did it.

OK for real now. Night.

X

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Character played by Muffinamdness in this chapter was:

Miriam

Character played by themadnovelist in this chapter was:

Zeller
Chapter Summary

Hannibal's next session with Chrollo proves to be more fruitful than either of them had expected.

As Hannibal made his way down the corridor towards Chrollo's guarded cell, he thought about what his goal for this session would be.

He'd piqued his interest, and that wasn't an easy feat. The man appeared to have meticulously constructed himself an identity out of the way he saw himself reflected in others. Hannibal lamented the fact that he seemed to have skipped a few pages in the Antisocial Personality Disorder how-to appear human guide, but fortunately, or, Hannibal smirked, possibly unfortunately for Chrollo, Hannibal hadn't. After their last session, he was looking forward to seeing if his suggestions had had any effect.

Hannibal had already begun to lay the foundations for his design.

Immediately after their last session, he'd begun his research into the Kurta chain user that his two patients had mentioned and had used his contacts within the mafia to send out feelers for him. He had offered a posting for an interested party to consult with him over the acquisition of a pair of scarlet eyes, and had hinted at the fact that he knew where more could be obtained. He hoped that the Kurta would be foolish enough to take his bait.

For now, he would wait.

Chrollo would likely prove to be an interesting distraction.

Nodding at the two guards stationed either side of his patient's door, Hannibal Allowed the Nen in his hand to flare, unlocking the door and entering with silent, measured steps. "Good morning Mr.Lucifer," he said smoothly. "I trust that your guards are treating you well?"

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Chrollo was lying on his side on his bed and had his eyes glued to his latest book. He'd given a sideways glance towards his cell door as he heard footsteps approaching, and had laid his book down when he'd heard the lock open and Dr. Lecter's voice as he greeted him. The tone was as polite and professional as he'd expected, but the words? He was sure those words carried more weight than they appeared to. Chrollo bookmarked his place before, stashing his days reading under his pillow for safekeeping.

The days following his last meeting had been uneventful, and he'd spent more than a few of them thinking about what had been said during his 'therapy'. Other times he'd read, or he'd remained on his cell's bed and staring at the ceiling and wondering about his Troupe. Was his faith in them really as warranted as he had led himself to believe? The Doctor seemed to think his that spider was missing something, he wasn't so sure.

Sitting up in his bed, he offered his therapist a polite smile. "Good Morning Dr.Lecter," he said,
returning the greeting, "It's a pleasure to see you again. I'm sure the guards are doing a fine job, don't worry."

***

Hannibal took note of the unconcern Chrollo seemed to have about his treatment at the hands of his guards and frowned. Had he honestly expected Hannibal to allow him to be mistreated? The thought irked him, and he had to temper his response to keep the annoyance from his voice.

"I am glad, please," Hannibal said, gesturing to the two chairs positioned across from each other in the centre of the cell. "Shall we begin?"

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"Of course, Dr. Lecter," Chrollo said, deciding to keep his response simple and his tone as neutral as he could. Are you like me Dr. Lecter and lacking in emotions or is this an act for your patients? He idly wondered, getting up from his bed to take his seat. Did I imagine that I'd managed to annoy you during our last meeting?

***

"I see you received your books, I am glad," Hannibal said, taking the seat opposite Chrollo and placing his briefcase on the floor by his feet. "I hope they are to your liking?" He'd had them shipped to the facility by first class courier.

***

Chrollo couldn't help but look over to the now full bookshelf and felt a slight smile pull at his face. "I like to consider myself a student of everything the world has to teach. History, in particular, interests me, Dr. Lecter."

He turned back to face the Doctor, "Is there any subject you find particularly interesting? Or would that be a stupid question?"

***

"There are no stupid questions," Hannibal said mildly. "But I fear there may be many uncultured teachers."

He relaxed back into his chair as he thought about Chrollo's question. "I am a student of humanity. Human nature has fascinated me ever since I was a child, and it still captivates me to this day."

He glanced back at the bookcase that he'd filled with books from his own collection and smiled at the old, familiar titles, before asking, "What is it about history that draws you to it?"

***

Chrollo sat silently and thought about the question; nobody had ever thought to ask him that before. His Troupe never disturbed him. He would sit in silence and read, and they held him in too high regard to interrupt.

What about history interests me? he thought, and sat back in his chair as he contemplated the answer.

Eventually, he met the Doctor's eyes and said, "The past shapes the future, even though our lives
are focused on the present, the past has an inescapable effect upon us all. For example, if I hadn’t formed the Troupe, would I be here now, in this room with you? Could I have made another choice that would have still led me to this place?” he paused with a thoughtful hum, "Yes I think that might be why I am so captivated by it."

***

"I like to think that our past shapes our present in the same way the teacher shapes their pupil. If we are open to its lessons, then we can learn everything we wish, but if we are not, we are doomed to repeat its mistakes," Hannibal agreed.

He followed Chrollo’s lead and relaxed into his chair. "The entirety of human knowledge and thought is available to all, should we but choose to seek it out."

***

"It has been said that, 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it’," Chrollo said smoothly. "Forgive me if I cannot recall where I heard it." He noticed Hannibal glancing at his small collection of books and took in the minute twitches of what he assumed were smiles that crossed his features.

He remembered the Doctor's own impressive assortment back at his office. "You consider yourself a seeker of knowledge as well, Dr. Lecter? Is that why you choose to display your impressive library in your office rather than at home?” he asked, allowing a hint of inquisitiveness to sneak into his words.

***

"I find both comfort and solace in words of all kinds," Hannibal said, nodding towards the shelf. "I have been known to spend more time in my office than at home, and I made the logical choice to keep the books that I regularly used there a long time ago."

He crinkled his eyes in a quick, self-deferential smile. "It also helps to prevent those who would be so inclined, to feel more,” he paused as if thinking, "reassured when they enter my space."

He looked back at Chrollo and asked, "How about you, Mr. Lucilfer? How do you choose to display your knowledge?"

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Chrollo bowed his head slightly. "You have me at a disadvantage there, Doctor," he said, clapping his hands between his open knees as he shifted his posture to lean slightly forward.

"I do not have the space for such a display. Although, I have taken some enjoyment in handing them out to others to read," he explained, and moved a hand to point to his head. "As for storing my books, the only place I have is inside here."

***

"You display your knowledge through the people around you," Hannibal said with a genuine smile. "You become a teacher, shaping and influencing minds?"

He made sure to keep his tone polite. Chrollo would not be an effective leader if he weren’t capable of reading people; and from everything Hannibal had found through his research, Chrollo’s Troupe were devoted to him.
Chrollo didn't raise his head, but he did lower his hand.

"I'm not a teacher, Dr. Lecter, I wouldn't presume to give myself such a title. The idea of a book sitting somewhere unread just doesn't sit well with me, that's all." He straightened, still looking thoughtful. "Leaders are supposed to encourage those who choose to follow them, are they not? What kind of leader would be I if I did not foster the growth of those who look to me for guidance? Surely it is the same for your patients. They look to you for support; you provide them with the tools they need to help themselves, or am I mistaken?"

Hannibal nodded. "That is very true. My aim is not to force my own ideas upon my patients; it is to allow them the safety to explore their own." He sat up in his chair as a plan began to form in his mind. "I would, however, not be an effective therapist if I allowed my patients to wander aimlessly throughout their mental landscapes," he said softly.

Sensing that he was unlikely to get a better moment, Chrollo decided to try and ask the question that was stuck in his mind. Since the Chairman's letter had arrived, one sentence had stuck out above all others. To his surprise, he had found the words had lingered in his mind, and had proved to be troubling, rather than reassuring:

"You are indeed very fortunate that he has insisted that he be allowed to work with you."

With a respectful expression, he asked, "I hope you won't think me to be impertinent if I ask, but it has been on my mind for a while." He paused to gauge the reaction, before ploughing ahead. He wasn't averse to risk. "The Chairperson wrote to me - as I am sure you are aware - to tell me that I was to remain your patient. What I am curious about, however, is that she said you requested that this be the case. I suppose I am seeking some reassurance that your interest is purely professional, with regards to myself, and not to learn more about my Troupe?"

He leant back as he waited for his answer. After all, how he would proceed from here would be greatly affected by the Doctor's words and his reaction.

Hannibal noted the subtle suggestion behind Chrollo's question, but didn't rise to the bait. The man was probing for weakness, as would be expected from anyone in his position.

"Your concerns are entirely understandable, Mr. Lucilfer," he said in his most reassuring tone. "However, my interest in your colleagues lies only in how they reflect upon you. Who we choose to surround ourselves with, after all, says a lot about who we are as an individual. Would you not agree?" he asked, tilting his head in enquiry.

Chrollo allowed himself to look relieved and leaned back into his chair for full effect.

"That is very reassuring to know, Dr. Lecter. I do hope I have not offended you with my question? I am grateful, after all, that you would want to help me." He took a moment to compose himself, letting his body relax back into its usual calm. "I am also grateful that you appear to want to help my Troupe; as you no doubt know they are very important to me. If as you say my association with
them tells you more about me, then it must also follow that, by learning about me, you will learn about them, would it not? So, I suppose that I have to accept that, in this situation, there is no way to prevent something new being learned."

Chrollo looked at Dr. Lecter thoughtfully, for a moment before continuing, "Would it also not make logical sense that, if we are reflected in the company we keep, I would count as a reflection of you now, Dr. Lecter? I mean you chose me for your patient; you could have refused."

***

Hannibal decided to lean forwards slightly, playing Chrollo's game for now, "What do you think that choice says about me Mr. Lucilfer?" he asked calmly, waiting to see how the man would answer.

***

"You described yourself to me earlier, as a student of humanity. From my opportunity to see your office at our first meeting, it was clear that you are highly qualified; you are well-read, dare I say dedicated to your pursuit of the knowledge you seek," Chrollo said and pretended to think over his next words. "There are those, as I am sure you know, who do believe me not to have any humanity, I have to wonder if you are looking to confirm that view? Or...perhaps to confirm something else?"

***

"Is that how you see yourself?" Hannibal asked. "Lacking humanity?"

***

Chrollo adjusted his posture and fixed the man sitting in the chair opposite with his most stormy gaze, but kept his impassive mask in place. "As I am not sure I even understand myself, Dr.Lecter, I would imagine I am way off the mark. Perhaps I am one of those who are lost in my own mental landscape. Simply looking for someone who can help me find my way?"

***

"Perhaps," Hannibal agreed, meeting Chrollo's glare without flinching. He kept his voice pleasant as he said, "I am here to assist in any way I can. What is it you see when you picture your mind?"

He noted the careful flattery Chrollo was directing towards him, alongside the subtle self-deprecation and wondered if that was how the man had disarmed his opponents in the past; playing at being meek until his pincers struck?

***

Chrollo caught himself staring; the question had taken him aback. Much of his self-image was shaped by his Troupe, by those who he ultimately approved to join. They were all different, in their own way, from the rest, but all looked for that same feeling of belonging. At least, that's what Chrollo had believed.

What did he see inside his own mind? It wasn't something he liked to do often. Books were always a welcome distraction. His words from earlier in their conversation floated back to him; yes, he could work with that idea.

"I suppose you could say that I see a library," he suggested, giving Hannibal a shrug, telegraphing
frustration. "I am sure the answers are in there somewhere, but I don't know where."

***

Hannibal continued his observations. "Could?" he asked curiously. "You are not sure?"

***

Chrollo gave a small shrug and offered Dr. Lecter a meek smile. "I don't suppose there is a way to find a catalogue?" he tried to joke.

***

Hannibal smiled but maintained his posture. "That would depend, what is it that you are looking for?"

***

Seeing the smile returned gave Chrollo the subtle encouragement he needed, and he continued, "The simple solution to your question would be answers. However, that feels too simplistic. If I had to put it another way..."

He looked up at the ceiling, giving the question some actual thought. "It occurs to me that I actually don't talk about myself that often, Dr. Lecter. That might be why I find your questions difficult to respond to. I don't like to talk about my motives; why I do the things I do. Last time I was in this city - before the incident I mean - a young boy asked me about my motives, I found myself unable to fully answer him too."

Chrollo glanced towards his books for a brief moment and then back to his therapist. "I expect that, as I realised back then while we both stood in the rain, that I am still looking for the key to understanding myself."

***

Internally Hannibal rejoiced; they had reached the moment he'd been waiting for. Leaning down, he reached into his bag and drew out a collectors edition of 'Living with Antisocial Personality Disorder'.

"You may find this useful," he said as he handed it over to Chrollo. Patiently, he waited behind his helpful expression to see how his 'patient' would react.

***

Chrollo watched silently as Dr. Lecter reached into his bag and pulled out a book. He tried to look uninterested, but the facade fell when it was handed to him. Gingerly he accepted the gift and looked at the cover, trying to hide his growing curiosity as he read aloud, "Living with Antisocial Personality Disorder?"

He hummed thoughtfully. "I can't help wondering why you would give me this, are you giving me some sort of... what is the word... homework? Yes I believe that's right, are you setting me some reading as homework, Dr. Lecter?"

***

Hannibal smiled, genuinely pleased with the reaction he'd received. "If you wish to see it that way,
Mr. Lucilfer, then I suppose it could be thought of as a workbook of sorts. It was, however, intended as a gift; a resource for you to read at your leisure, as were the rest of the books here. When I found out that you were being denied the basic dignities afforded to any of my clients, I stepped in.”

He sat back in his seat and allowed the annoyance he had felt towards the guard's behaviour to show. "As far as I am concerned respect is a given, disrespect is earned."

***

Chrollo remained still, looking at the book in his hands as he listened to Dr. Lecter's explanation. If he was honest with himself, he hadn't expected a gesture like this from his therapist. Nor had he ever expected that Dr. Lecter would have been the one to step in to get his request for reading material approved. *Is this what gratitude feels like?* he wondered.

For a few moments, he allowed this new feeling to wash over him, and tried to process it; to put a name to it, but he wasn't sure he could. At least not yet. What he did know was that when somebody did something like this for you, you were supposed to say thank you.

"Then you have my thanks, Dr. Lecter. I'm sure the people holding me here do not consider me to be like your other patients, or do you spend a lot of your time in cells like mine?"

***

Hannibal shrugged ever so slightly. "I am a seeker of knowledge. The light can blind if we stare towards it for too long. It is only in darkness that our eyes open wider. Until we can understand both aspects of our nature, we can not move forward."

Relaxing, he looked up at the high window that allowed a small amount of natural light into Chrollo's cell. "I like to think that it is my job to facilitate understanding."

***

"And you facilitate your patients to understand their mental landscape?" Chrollo asked calmly. Internally, he noted that the answer didn't confirm what he had wanted to know the most. Noticing Hannibal's gaze, he smiled a little before adding, "I find that the lighting in here is usually adequate, sitting in dark places isn't anything new. Candlelight can be very soothing."

***

"In my experience, most predators are not averse to darkness," Hannibal mused. "I too prefer the primal light of the fire; it speaks to me in a way the sun never will."

Sighing, he turned back to Chrollo. "What is it about the flame that speaks to you?"

***

"Fire has an intense beauty to it; a small flame is controllable, but even the smallest spark can grow and become a true force to be reckoned with," Chrollo said, pausing slightly; he wasn't sure if he'd said enough or if he should add to his response.

Deciding that he'd said enough, for now, he asked a question of his own. "Do you think that we're both predators, Dr. Lecter?" He was intrigued by the idea. Was there more to his therapist than he had first thought?
"Do you think that we're both predators, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal allowed a spark to shine behind his eyes at the question and focussed on Chrollo's reply. "You see the potential in fire?"

Chrollo chose not to react to Hannibal's lack of verbal answer; instead, he focussed on the thoughts that he would usually have kept to himself. "A single candle flame can give light and a small amount of warmth; if you make a campfire instead, then you would get both more light and more warmth. However, you also risk drawing more attention to yourself."

His Doctor was thought-provoking. Chrollo found it to be a welcome distraction from his earlier worries.

"Indeed, we often find safety in the shadows," Hannibal said thoughtfully. "But even a small flame will eventually draw moths. What happens when the attention does inevitably fall upon you?"

Hannibal knew that his gesture had thrown Chrollo, and that had allowed him to find a crack in the man's armour. Now he had to place a few wedges to ensure it didn't entirely seal over. Establishing a common ground was essential with someone like him. He hadn't reacted to his not so subtle hint that they both shared a passion for the hunt, but that didn't mean that the message hadn't been received.

Chrollo regarded his therapist with a thoughtful expression. Initially, he'd been tempted to respond that moths were prey for some of the larger spiders that existed in the world. However, he was cautious; Hannibal had been nothing but polite and respectful towards him, even when the rest of the people in the facility were not. He was keen not to risk ruining that. "Ah, but you see, Dr. Lecter, what if that is the intention?" he asked instead.

Hannibal maintained his steady gaze. "You wish to be seen? Or, perhaps," he allowed an amused smile to form on his lips at the idea, "I wonder, in this scenario, am I the moth?"

"Do you see yourself as the moth, Dr. Lecter?" Chrollo asked without missing a beat, an enigmatic smile pulling at his lips as he tried to keep his expression neutral.

"That would depend," Hannibal said playfully. "Are you a flame, Mr. Lucilfer?"

Starting to feel amused, Chrollo leant forward and allowed his smile to fully take shape. "Would you like me to be the flame to your moth Dr. Lecter?" he asked, letting his voice drop a few octaves, remembering the way Hisoka had always when he had in the past.
Hannibal chuckled and tilted his head back slightly as he answered, "I have always felt an affinity towards the flame. I must confess a curiosity as to what it would feel like to be consumed." His eyes danced as he continued, "But isn't that the beauty of nature, Mr. Lucilfer? One can never truly tell what awaits us in the dark unless they are willing to light a fire."

Chrollo's usually cold gaze, warmed with amusement as he continued to observe his Doctor's reactions. "Perhaps we are both moths Dr. Lecter?" Chrollo mused. "But I would have to wonder if knowledge could be our flame, what do you think?"

The sparkle remained in Hannibal's eyes as he calmed slightly. Returning Chrollo's smile, he said, "And what deadly moths we are, Mr. Lucilfer. I would suspect that between us we have enough knowledge to burn a city, should we so choose."

Pausing for a moment, he tilted his head and asked, "I wonder, if we turned the light of the fire inwards, what would we find?"

Chuckling slightly as he imagined the mental image that was being painted for him, Chrollo thought back to earlier; to his failed attempt at humour.

"Perhaps it would make it easier to find a card catalogue for that library," he replied with an amused grin.

Hannibal nodded and looked to the book, still resting in Chrollo's hands. "Hopefully that can provide you with a place to start piecing together your own Temple of Alexandria."

"That sounds like the kind of place I would rob," Chrollo replied thoughtfully, lifting the book in his hands to examine it. He didn't want to appear too interested in it, not in front of the Doctor at least, but he knew how to be polite.

"Then perhaps I can help you learn the layout of your mental landscape and find out which scrolls pique your interest?" Hannibal said with a smile. "I am at your disposal."

Chrollo looked back up in surprise, studying Hannibal carefully for a few moments, before he sighed, and shook his head. "I'm afraid I normally wouldn't take an outsider with me on a heist. Something I am sure you would understand Dr. Lecter," he said regretfully.

"And I would refrain from breaking the law, Mr. Lucilfer," Hannibal replied simply. He leaned back and relaxed into his seat before adding, "I am not offering to help you steal what you seek; I am offering you a guided tour."
"That is what I had expected you to say," Chrollo said, and offered his Doctor a small, but mostly sincere smile. "I am your patient, after all, you have guidelines to follow when interacting with me, do you not?"

"Of course," Hannibal said, bowing his head to acknowledge the man's point. He paused to think for a moment before adding, "I did, after all, consult on their creation. I am known for my unorthodox methods, it is true, but I can assure you I have a comprehensive knowledge of the rules of my profession."

Chrollo's posture stiffened ever so slightly, and his grip on the book in his hands tightened. "I would like to think that I'm known for my unorthodox method of appreciating art, Dr. Lecter," he retorted. "So I can certainly appreciate any unusual methods, as long as I am not being used as a guinea pig."

Hannibal's smile reached his eyes as he replied, "Transmutation is not a specialty of mine, Mr. Lucilfer. The idea of turning a Spider into a Guinea Pig never crossed my mind. I simply wish to help you understand your own mind, nothing more."

The lie fell from his lips smoothly as he watched the man in front of him, grasp his gift as if it could be withdrawn at any moment. Chrollo was so close to accepting Hannibal's help, he could almost taste it, but he had to hear the words.

"That would be a Nen ability I would very much like to see," Chrollo said, turning the book over; it felt fairly old.

"These methods you would want to use...am I allowed to ask about them? How successful have they been?" _Surely a man like you would be proud of his success rates._

Hannibal remained relaxed as he answered Chrollo's next question. "I would hope that the fact that I was chosen to consult on the formation of the Code of Conduct for the Hunter's Psychiatric Association would speak to my success rate. I specialise in treating patients that others would deem incurable, or whom they would not see as deserving of a second chance."

He thought about how to phrase the next part of what he had to say and nodded when he found the words. "I take a Person-Centred approach to my therapy, Mr. Lucilfer. I adapt as needed and offer myself, as I have said, as a guide, to help you see yourself with fresh eyes. I am happy to answer any other questions you may have, either now or in the future. I am, I assure you, here to help."

Bowing his head slowly, Chrollo made sure to keep his tone respectful as he said, "I see, my apologies for my earlier bluntness. It isn't a common occurrence to meet somebody who would consider assisting somebody from Meteor City..."
Letting the words hang he considered the conversation so far. The Doctor had been reasonably consistent with his statements of assurance that he was here for him and no one else. Right now, he knew that he had to find some way to establish contact with Shalnark, and via him, with Kortopi. The sooner, the better, he didn't want to leave them defenceless. Not with Hisoka roaming around.

The mention of the Hunter's Psychiatric Association had caught his attention though. It wouldn't be too much of a stretch to assume that the man before him might have valuable contacts. The bigger issue would be persuading him to bend the rules; but surely, as their creator, he'd know the grey areas? He just needed to find an opportunity.

"I am flattered that a respected man such as yourself would consider me worth a second chance. Perhaps it is time I gave the world outside my city a second chance as well..." He held the book aloft. "Does your method require me to have to read this book before you can help me, Dr. Lecter?"

***

Hannibal sat and listened as Chrollo talked. He was either an extremely good actor, or he was actually shocked that Hannibal found him worthy of his interest. He smiled as he realised that it was likely a bit of both. He was starting to find his footing, but he was fully aware that a man like Chrollo could pull the rug out from under them at any moment. He had to be careful.

"No, Mr. Lucilfer, it does not," he assured. "However, it will likely help. I'm hoping that it will give you food for thought, if nothing else. Maybe even answer a few questions you may have about yourself." He thought for a few moments and then added, "Hopefully, it will help to facilitate a dialogue that will prove beneficial for your recovery and eventual release."

***

"You make it sound like I have a real chance of being let out of this place," Chrollo said, and gestured to the cell he was sitting in. "I'm not that optimistic, I'm afraid. Although I would very much like to get out of this cell just for one day at least."

He paused, leant back in his seat and looked at the ceiling. Taking great care to keep his expression as neutral as possible until he was no longer looking at the Doctor. Only then did he allow himself a sigh.

"From what the other's told me...they buried one of our lost in an abandoned building in this city...do you think they'd let me visit the grave? Perhaps if you were to accompany me?" he allowed a hint of hope to creep into his words.

***

Hannibal took note of the sudden display of emotion from Chrollo as he watched the man try to appeal to his emotions. The message was clear: How unorthodox are you willing to be? How powerful are you? How many rules are you willing to bend for a man like me?

He had to hide the excitement he felt as he answered, "That would entirely depend upon the progress we make. However, I am well aware of the need to grieve for those we have lost. Without the ability to properly mourn, our emotions can become stuck, and we end up acting out." Hannibal remained calm as he said, "I will certainly see what I can do for you, when I believe that we have made sufficient progress in your treatment."

***
Keeping his eyes fixed on the ceiling, Chrollo moved a hand up to his face trying to maintain his act of sadness. He allowed a single tear to fall as he remained silent for a little longer.

"I don't even know what flowers she liked," he mumbled. "She always wore purple though...do you know anyone who could suggest suitable flowers? Botany isn't a strong point of mine" he paused, and allowed himself to look at Hannibal again. He shook his head and wiped away the tear. "My apologies, please tell me what you would have me do, Dr. Lecter?"

***

"I can have arrangements made by the end of the day," Hannibal said gently. "If you wish to have a delivery sent to her resting place. Anything in person, I am sorry to say, will have to be done at a later date." He leaned forward and offered Chrollo the handkerchief from his breast pocket.

"Right now, I would suggest that we leave things here for the day." He allowed himself to mirror Chrollo's show of grief ever so slightly. "My sincere apologies for your loss," he said and knew that he sounded as if he meant every word. Readyng himself to stand, he added, "You may keep the book."

***

Sensing an opportunity to test the sincerity of the offer of help, Chrollo carefully took the handkerchief and wiped at his eyes as would be expected. He also smiled for effect.

"Thank you, Dr. Lecter. I'm sure Pakunoda would appreciate you looking out for me like this. Let me write down the address, but I would request that you don't put my name on the card if possible?" He gave Hannibal his best hopeful look. "She always called me Danchou...I would like them to say they were from Danchou, rather than Chrollo, please."

***

Hannibal nodded, waiting as Chrollo quickly wrote down the address of an abandoned building in a deserted part of town. Taking the paper from him, he carefully schooled his features to keep his excitement from showing.

"I will see that the delivery is made tonight," he said and paused as a thought struck him. "From everything, you have said, would sunset be an appropriate time to make your offering?"

***

"Yes, that sounds like a wonderful idea, thank you, Dr. Lecter," Chrollo replied and gave a small bow of gratitude.

"Please do tell the delivery person to be careful; it's not the safest part of the city." He sat back up and looked at his therapist once more, reaching out to return the handkerchief, he said, "I shall be sure to take a look through the book, when should I expect to see you again?"

***

"I will pass on the message and make sure they have adequate security," Hannibal said, taking back his handkerchief and neatly tucking it into his pocket.

Picking up his bag, he added, "I will be back at the same time next week. Feel free to make notes if you have any questions. If anything urgent arises, please speak with Ayato, and he will pass on your message to me."
"Ayato?" Chrollo asked, uncertain for a moment until the name clicked in his mind. "Oh, I see, he's one of the guards. Of course, I will let him know if I have any questions, or if I need anything further. My thanks again for the book; I am sure it will be a fascinating read."

He knew he was not allowed to get too close to the door when a visitor was due to enter or to leave. But it still felt strange to remain seated as Hannibal made his way out of the room. He nevertheless bowed slightly when the man turned to look at him. "I shall await our next meeting, Dr. Lecter," he said and tried to sound as respectful as possible. He saw his Doctor's small smile flash across his face before the door to his cell closed again.

***

Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:

Hannibal

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Chrollo
Hannibal had spared no expense. He'd ensured the florist had produced the most stunning bouquet they were capable of, and he grinned as he looked at the Yellow Roses, Lilacs, White Roses and Lilies that were enclosed in black tissue paper and plastic wrap in his hand. All the fuss had been worth it; the arrangement was breathtaking.

As he climbed over rubble and the remnants of old abandoned buildings, he kept the protective cover in place to protect his delivery from the dust that was being thrown at him by the wind. The walk hadn't taken that much time, and it felt nice to be back on the hunt. It had been too long since his last assignment, and his most recent outings had been disappointingly predictable. This, however, promised to be anything but that.

He'd personally written the card, using his best calligraphy brush, and he checked that it was still in place, nestled amongst the flowers, as he rounded the corner and approached his destination.

"For my dear Pakunoda, you shall forever be a part of me, Danchou."

The address he'd been given turned out to be an old, semi-ruined Church. There was an irony to the choice of 'headquarters' that wasn't lost on Hannibal, and he was smiling to himself as he pushed open the large double doors.

He'd been prepared for the possibility of company when he'd made the choice to deliver the flowers himself, and he smiled when he realised that he wasn't alone. He made a quick assessment of the two blond men who were stood, talking quietly, by two neatly dug graves, and dismissed them as nothing to be concerned about.

*Let the fun begin,* he thought and adjusted his posture subtly, making sure to keep a tight hold on his Nen, and walked forwards.

***

The sound of the church doors opening caused Phinks to pause briefly. He looked at Shalnark and discreetly moved his hand to point towards the door to wordlessly ask if he had also heard the noise.

"It's hard to believe it's been another year since we lost Paku to the chain user," he said as if nothing had happened. "Do you think Danchou will visit her this year, Shalnark?" he asked, trying to sound casual. He was itching to go and investigate the noise.

His loyalty to their leader, however, kept him where he was, for now. He had been entrusted to look out for his Nenless colleague until Dancho returned.

***
Shalnark saw the hand signal and had been tempted to look in the direction his colleague was pointing, but instead, decided to take a more direct approach.

"Phinks," he sighed. "I think if they were worried about being caught, they would have made a quieter entrance. How about we go and say hi? It could be the others."

***

Hannibal listened to the discussion and had to work hard to keep the amusement off of his face.

"Gentlemen," he said, acknowledging them both with a nod of his head. "You appear to have me at a disadvantage." He spread the hand not holding the covered bouquet wide and waited to see how the two young men reacted. He assumed that they were both members of Chrollo's Troupe. They would have Nen and wouldn't be afraid to use it. The night was turning out better than he'd imagined.

***

Hearing the newcomer address them Shalnark looked in the man's direction and gave him a friendly wave.

"Hi, there!" he began to say. "We weren't expecting any other visitors; this is sort of a private meeting? If you're lost, we'd be happy to help you find your way back. I'm Shalnark, and the guy in the tracksuit is Phinks. Don't let his appearance fool you; he's nice once you get to know him."

***

Hannibal grinned widely, matching the cheer Shalnark had shown him.

"That is wonderful to hear, but don't worry, I'm not lost," he said and held up the flowers in his hand by way of an explanation. "I am here on business." This was going to be a lot more fun than he'd expected.

***

When Shalnark casually introduced them both to the stranger, Phinks groaned and slapped his hand over his face in annoyance. They had no idea who this person was, and now he knew their names!

"Great idea, Shalnark, why don't we just show him our tattoos too?" he snapped.

***

Hannibal couldn't quite contain the bark of laughter that erupted at the mention of the tattoos. That was all the confirmation he needed that these were both members of Chrollo's Troupe. Apparently, these two weren't all that bright.

"As happy as I would be to admire what I'm sure are impressive works of art, I have a delivery to make." He pointed to the bouquet in his hand. "I was given this address and told to wait for sunset before carrying out my task."

***

"A delivery?" That caught Shalnark's attention, and he moved closer to the stranger to get a better look at what he was holding. "Is that for Paku?"
Hannibal watched the small blonde walked towards him, apparently entirely unafraid and cocked his head to the side.

"It is," he said simply, curious as to why the young man was approaching him so freely.

***

Before Shalnark could get too close, Phinks moved and put a hand on the man's shoulder in warning.

"Shalnark, I don't think we should be getting too friendly just yet, I mean we don't even know who he is." He paused to turn his attention to the stranger, "In fact, there's a few things bugging me about you. Not just who sent you, but how you got the information about our friend's grave over there." He pointed behind him. Their tributes from earlier were clear to see. "So why don't you start talking?"

***

Hannibal let his grin turn feral. "Why don't you give me a reason why I should talk to you, my boy?"

***

Phinks grinned back at the stranger; he had always enjoyed a good fight. "Just the one?" he asked as he let go of Shalnark's shoulder and slowly approached the old man.

"Oh, I can give you an excellent reason." He started to rotate his shoulder in a manner Shalnark could clearly see indicated his intention to use his ability. Ripper Cyclotron would tear through his body in one hit. "You seem to know enough about us to know that Shalnark and I are from the Phantom Troupe. So you are either very stupid or very brave to come here alone."

Phinks paused and rotated his shoulder once more, it had only been a few repetitions, but he didn't think he would need more, and he let his Nen flare to life in his clenched fist.

"So I'll ask you one more time, pal, just to prove that I am, as Shal said, a nice guy. Why don't you start explaining why you are here? The real reason."

Phinks started to slowly pull his arm back, readying himself to deliver the blow he was sure would deal with their intruder. Just who does this guy think he is, coming in here with that attitude. This is Paku and Uvo's resting place; I'll teach this city slicker to disrespect us.

***

Even without his Nen, as a master manipulator, Shalark could tell that letting Phinks knock the man into next week would be a bad idea. He'd been in enough fights and on enough missions with him to know that he respected their leader's rules to a fault, including the ones about infighting.

The moment he noticed that Phinks was about to use his ability, he calculated his best course of action.

As Phinks allowed his Nen to pool in his hand and readied his strike, Shalnark jumped between both men, pushing Phinks backwards, just enough to create distance, and to cause him to stumble back a few steps. He knew he'd taken a huge risk; he was now standing only a few steps in front of the stranger, and he hoped his instincts about the man were correct. He didn't have his Nen, and there was no way he could defend himself properly, but the newcomer's calm was bugging him,
and he wanted to know more about him before they attacked.

"Phinks, come on now, that's no way to talk to a guest. You can't just start throwing demands around. You have to be polite," he scolded, hoping to calm the situation.

***

Hannibal watched, bemused, as the boy jumped in front of his friend and pushed him to prevent a fight from breaking out. It was rather like watching a kitten trying to stop a German Shepherd from guarding it's home. The gesture was amusing, but, ultimately, Hannibal knew, would prove pointless.

The larger of the two blondes, Phinks, was hot-headed and far too impulsive to be allowed to take the lead; something that the smaller blonde has apparently figured out.

"Thank you," Hannibal said nodding at Shalnark and pointedly continuing forwards to make his delivery.

***

"Phinks, please just trust me on this, OK?" Shalnark said, trying to appeal to his colleague. He only relaxed when the other blond nodded and appeared to deactivate his Nen.

"Please accept my apologies for my friend's rash behaviour, Sir," Shalnark said, turning his attention to the strange man. He watched with interest as he appeared to make a beeline for Pakunoda's grave and started to unwrap the flowers so that he would be able to lay them down upon it. "That's a really nice gesture, Sir, she loved flowers," he added gesturing to the bouquet.

***

Hannibal finished unwrapping the flowers and reverently laid them onto the grave. Pausing for a few moments to pay his respect, only then did he straighten and turn to the two men.

"Well, gentlemen, it has been...enlightening. Now, if you will excuse me, I have to be on my way," he said as courteously as he could manage.

***

Ignoring the disapproving stare Shalnark was giving him, Phinks moved to try and block the man's exit from the church. Staring at him definitely with an arrogant grin on his face, he crossed his arms over his chest and dared him to move.

"Well I'm glad you got what you came here for, but I'm afraid that you're not excused," he barked, taking a step closer and trying to appear as intimidating as possible. "Not until you tell us why you really came here."

***

Hannibal hardened his stare. The kids had been fun for a while, but now that they were blocking his path, he wasn't so amused.

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to politely refuse your request. I can not give you any details about my employer as I am under contract, and have to maintain their privacy. So you are either going to have to step aside or, and I say this with regret, I will have to take matters into my own hands."
Not seeing any way to stop Phinks from confronting the stranger, Shalnark decided to take a closer look at the flowers. Usually, if they were being delivered on behalf of someone else, a card would be included. He hoped, if he could find it, that it would answer some of their questions.

As quietly as he could, he carefully made his way to look at them. Taking care to examine them thoroughly, he winced when he heard Phink's words, and grew more concerned by the second when he listened to the thinly veiled threat the stranger gave in reply.

Fortunately, it didn't take long for him to spot the card. Taking a closer look at the calligraphic script, he thought he could make out the word 'Danchou'. "Danchou?" he said out loud before turning to face his friend.

"Phinks, the flowers were sent by Danchou for Paku's grave." He looked at the man who had delivered them; he seemed a little too well dressed to be a simple delivery guy. Has Danchou hired somebody from the mafia? he wondered.

With a small bow, Hannibal said, "I would congratulate you on your investigative skills, but I do not wish to appear impolite." Straightening to his full height, he stared directly at Phinks. "Please, move aside."

The revelation that their leader had sent the flowers didn't deter Phinks one bit. There was something off about the guy, and he was going to find out what it was. He took another step forward.

"Are you trying to be funny seeing as you're just a delivery boy? " he sneered. "I told you; you're not going anywhere until we get some answers. You're too well dressed for a simple errand boy. Who really sent you?"

Hannibal's mood changed from amused to irritated in a flash. The easy humour vanished, and he stilled as he repeated, very deliberately, "I can not tell you. I will not repeat myself. Stand aside."

Seeing the subtle change in the stranger's body language, Shalnark became even more concerned than he had been before. Phinks wasn't known for keeping a cool head, and they had no idea what this man could do. If he'd been sent by Danchou, then he wasn't going to be helpless.

"Phinks, maybe you should...do as he's asking?" he suggested, trying to keep his worry out of his voice.

"Fuck no!" Phinks said with a snarl. He changed to a battle-ready stance once again and activated his Nen.

"I'm not asking you to repeat yourself, pal," he snapped as he powered up his attack. "I'd rather not have to knock you into next week, but I will if I have to. Last time, who sent you?"
A subtle cloud of red arose from Hannibal's body as, with a lightning-fast twist he turned and conjured a massive cauldron from thin air. The black cast iron pot entirely engulfed Phinks's teammate, and he grinned to himself as he heard it slowly beginning to fill with liquid.

Turning back to face Phinks, he clicked his fingers and flames burst into life underneath it.

"Your little friend has less than an hour to live," he said. In the silence that stretched between them, fists could be heard banging against the metal. "He cannot escape and any Nen he may have had access to, has been sealed. Allow me to pass, and he will be released the moment I am clear of the building." Hannibal flashed Phinks a feral grin. "Or, you can fight me, and I'll have two for supper."

"You're a Nen user?" Phinks exclaimed. Seeing the skilful way the man had effortlessly trapped Shalnark had entirely deflated his plan. Usually, he could tell as soon as he met someone if they had Nen, even though Zetsu. However, seeing the cauldron surrounding Shalnark explained a few things, and he now knew what had put him on edge. From the moment the man had stepped foot into the church, there had been no Aura leaking from him at all; it was as if the man had no presence whatsoever.

"How do I know..." he started to say, but stopped mid-sentence. He didn't trust the man standing in front of him, not one bit, but it was clear that Shalnark was in real danger. He also knew that he had been personally tasked, by their leader, to ensure his safety until Chrollo could return his abilities. He placed his hand on his face and groaned in frustration. There was only one thing he could do, but he didn't have to be happy about it.

"Fine, just leave..." he grumbled, "But you better let him out of that thing!" He pointed at the cauldron. "Let's make one thing clear, whoever you are, the Troupe will avenge our own, you got that?"

Allowing the black desire he was feeling to flare in his Nen and seep out into the room as he moved forwards, Hannibal nodded.

"Of course, I wouldn't expect anything less," Hannibal said and headed for the door. He didn't turn around to check if Phinks was going to attack, his aura was strong enough to detect any movement. Stopping at the door, he added, "Until next time," and left, dismissing the cauldron with a disappointed sigh when he cleared the rubble.

"Shalnark!" Phinks yelled as he saw the strangers Nen dissipate, and his colleague fell to the ground. No longer thinking about the strange man, he rushed to Shalnark's side. "Shit" he swore loudly. "Are you OK?"

"I'm fine," Shalnark said, getting to his feet and shivering slightly. He sniffed and said in a mildly stunned tone, "I think he had me in a Chicken broth."
"WHAT?" Phinks yelled as he tried to comprehend what he had just heard. "You're kidding, right?"

***

Shalnark licked his arm. "It's good." He looked over to the doors. "I think the guy was gonna eat me."

He looked down at the piece of card still in his hand. The ink had run, but the words were still visible. "Do you think Danchou knows his messenger is a cannibal?"

***

"Or, you can fight me, and I'll have two for supper."

Phinks thought about what the stranger had said before he'd given in and agreed to stand aside. He shuddered at the idea that he'd meant it quite literally.

"I don't know, Shalnark, but do you think the boss might be in danger?"

***

Shalnark thought about the question for a few moments. He tapped the soggy paper against his chin before he answered. "I'm not sure. If he was the one who employed him, then probably not. He seems loyal."

He flipped the card in his fingers and wished that he had access to his phone. "But if he didn't, and the man was from the Mafia, we have a problem." Looking up at Phinks, he said, "I think you're going to have to call Feitan, we need to warn the others."

***

20 Minutes Later

***

Feitan stood in the abandoned church that had become their official headquarters in Yorknew City. Currently, he was eyeing the floral arrangement that had been recently laid on Pakunoda's grave. When he had received the call from a disturbed sounding Phinks, he had been irritated but curious enough to investigate. With a dispassionate expression, he turned to his fellow Troupe members. With the arrest of Chrollo, he had once again been asked to take up the mantle of leadership in his stead.

"Shalnark," he said succinctly. "Explain. Why do you need me here?"

***

"Danchou's employed a cannibal as a messenger, and I thought you should know," Shalnark said, sniffing at his top. It was going to take a lot of cleaning to get the smell of chicken stock out of his clothes. "He has an ability that, I think, will eventually cook you."
"I shall be sure to inform him when I speak to him next," Feitan said flatly.

***

Phinks was finding it hard to wrap his head around Feitan's lack of concern. "Did you not understand what Shalnark just told you?" he exclaimed. "The guy tried to cook him! He's a conjurer, and he can just click his fingers and WHAM! You're in this huge fucking cooking pot..."

***

"Climb out then," Feitan replied coolly, turning to look back at the graves. "Was this from Danchou?" He pointed to the flowers. He had to admit; it was a tasteful arrangement.

***

"I tried," Shalnark said amiably. "His Nen keeps you in there. He said that he was going to see us again sometime." He thought for a moment and then said. "He also said that he would happily have more than one for dinner."

***

Feitan listened, but still couldn't understand why they hadn't killed the man instead of letting him leave; if they had, there would be no need to worry about him returning. Turning around, he pointed at Phinks.

"You should have killed him," he said simply.

***

"You're kidding, right? He was going to kill Shalnark, and Danchou explicitly told me to take care of him!" Phinks could feel his anger bubbling back to the surface. "Danchou's orders are absolute, Feitan you know that the same as the rest of us," he pointed out, crossing his arms over his chest with a huff.

***

"But his life is not," Feitan responded without missing a beat. "Danchou said that the Spider has to survive. It is more important than any of us."

Unperturbed by Phinks reaction, he continued to inspect the graves. Once he was satisfied that there had been nothing hidden in them, he repeated, "You should have killed him."

***

"What am I supposed to say to the boss when he asks me what happened, huh?" Phinks asked petulantly. "That I just let some random guy turn Shal into a happy meal?" His voice rose, along with his anger. "Maybe we should call the others here to Yorknew and take a new vote on who should lead in Danchou's absence. You don't seem to care much about your responsibility, Feitan."

***

"The vote would turn out the same, Phinks," Shalnark said breezily. "While I agree that we probably should have killed him, the man's Nen was incredibly strong, and we couldn't risk allowing him full access to Danchou without the rest of you being informed."

He picked a bit of seasoning from his hair as he added, "We don't know if Danchou actually is his
client or if he is trying to infiltrate the group. It would have been foolish to risk us both dying and allow him to pick us off one by one."

***

Feitan narrowed his eyes in annoyance. "Shalnark, are you still nen-less?"

***

"Yes, Danchou hasn't had a chance to return it yet," Shalnark answered, sniffing at the seasoning. It was Basil.

***

"Then we can assume Danchou is not dead." Feitan walked away from the graves and headed towards Phinks. "Killing the stranger would have removed the danger to Shalnark."

***

Watching Feitan stride towards him, Phinks tensed for a fight. "But what if he really was sent by Danchou?" he pointed out. "I mean, how else could he have found this place? It's not like we're in the middle of a tourist attraction, you know?"

***

"Perhaps Danchou expected you to kill him?" Feitan countered. "How will you justify to him that you went against the rule of protecting the spider to protect an individual?"

***

"By the fact that we did protect the spider by allowing him to leave," Shalnark said reasonably. "If Danchou did not send him, then we can track him to find out who is trying to harm us. If it was Danchou, then we have no proof that he is aware of what happened or that his messenger is a Nen user."

***

"EXACTLY!" Phinks chorused, "We don't know enough to make that call Feitan. Why is it always kill them with you?"

***

"Dead men tell no tales." Feitan fired back.

***

"Dead messengers can't report back to the one who sent them either!" Phinks snapped.

***

"Nor can they lead us to our enemies," Shalnark agreed and smiled as a thought occurred to him. "I can't wait to play with him once we free Danchou."

***

Feitan turned to look at Shalnark. He hated to admit that the hunter had a point, but he
"You think he wasn't working alone?" he asked.

"He would either be powerful or foolish if he was; either way, he didn't look like he was local," Shalnark said and bounced on his heels as he recalled everything he could about the stranger. "He looked like he was from the mafia."

"How powerful did his Nen feel?" Feitan asked, his curiosity finally piqued.

Shalnark thought for a few moments. "He kept himself cloaked until the last second. He didn't show any of his abilities until he had to, and he read the room well. I would say he is most likely very powerful."

"The guy's Zetsu is insane Feitan. It's like he has no presence at all," Phinks interjected.

That caught Feitan's attention, and he once more looked over at Phinks. "You couldn't track the stranger?" he asked.

"That's exactly what we are trying to tell you. The guy just walked in here as if it was an everyday thing for him. Of course, I tried to stop them from leaving, but he just reacted by trying to kill Shalnark." Phinks said, starting to pace.

"He said he'd been told to wait until sunset to make his delivery, and then he left those flowers on Paku's grave. I don't see who else but the boss could have sent him here."

"He wasn't scared of fighting Phinks," Shalnark pointed out. "But he used me as a hostage. He's smart." He looked over at Phinks. "Do you think Danchou would want his ability?"

Phinks stared at Shalnark in shock. "Why would he want that? Are you suggesting we all become cannibals?"

"Interrogation," Feitan suggested.

Shalnark brightened. "He did say that it would block my Nen while I was in there. It could be extremely useful."

He looked over at Feitan and said, "If Danchou knew about his ability, he wouldn't have wanted us
to kill him. But we could capture him as a present!"

***

"Perhaps" Feitan agreed. He wouldn't admit it out loud, but he would have liked to be able to get the strangers ability himself. It would be incredibly useful for getting information out of prisoners. "We do not know where Danchou is though," he pointed out to the others.

***

"What if he has Danchou?" Shalnark said, stunned that they hadn't thought of it before now. "His ability would completely stop anything Danchou could do."

***

"Trailing the stranger is going to be hard, his skill with Zetsu is amazing," Phinks added. "Maybe we should call in the rest of the Troupe and finally find out who the fuck this stranger is?"

***

"Agreed," Feitan said and pulled out his phone. "You call Machi, I'll call Franklin," he ordered and glanced curiously down at the grave as he hit speed-dial three.

***

Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:

Hannibal, Shalnark, Phinks

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Feitan, Shalnark, Phinks
Chapter Summary

The Letter Hisoka has been dreading arrives.

It had been a couple of days since Hisoka had attended his assessment with Dr. Lecter. He was still in the hotel the Hunter Association had put him up in while he awaited their decision as to how his ‘trial’ was going to proceed. He knew the result was going to heavily depend upon the impression he’d left Dr. Lecter with, and, if he was being honest with himself, he couldn't see himself getting away without further ‘therapy’. He just hoped that it would be with another therapist. There was something about Dr. Lecter that felt off, and after giving it some thought Hisoka had decided that the man reminded him of his mentor.

Not that he really wanted to entertain such thoughts about either of them. Luckily for him, Illumi had decided to stay to ‘keep him out of further trouble’. They were currently lying under the blankets together, Hisoka shuffling his cards. Keeping his hands busy helped when he felt restless, and it helped to control other...urges too. It kept the caged feeling at bay; three miles, although seen as generous by the Association, felt awfully constrictive to him.

Hisoka glanced over at the bedside phone when it began to ring unexpectedly. Frowning slightly, he stopped his card play and reached over to pick up the call.

"Hello?... Yes, I am the guest staying in room 444...A letter?...From the Association? Of course, I'll ask my friend to collect it for me, if that would be satisfactory?...No, no it's fine I just need to keep off my leg for a little while, that's all. I assure you I'm fine...of course, I hope you have a pleasant day as well," he said to the receptionist.

Butterflies had sprung to life at the mention of the Association; had the Doctor made his recommendations already? Would they be letting him go? He hoped that would be the case...they'd responded so quickly. There was a slim chance, at least.

Staring at the phone as he replaced the receiver, he said, "Illu-chan?" He didn’t need to look at him, and he was confident that his lover would have been listening intently. "You know how you want me to stay off my feet? Could you be a dear for your Master and collect his mail? They're holding it at reception for me."

***

Illumi nodded and got out of bed. He put on his trousers and newly acquired top, readjusting the beaded possession band Hisoka had bought for him the day before.

"This marks you as mine Illu-chan."

He had felt...honoured. No one had ever thought of him as valuable before, and he felt a smile tugging at his lips as he twisted the long cord into place and let it hang around his wrist. It was easily removable, but he knew that he would never take it off. He belonged now. He was marked. It was an odd feeling, but one that he very much enjoyed.
Being around Hisoka-san had always made him feel special, but this time it was different. There was an intensity to it that he hadn’t anticipated and his stomach filled with an alien sense of dread when he thought about the letter.

He’d been trying not to think about it as much as he could, but the back of his mind had been formulating plans for every eventuality, nonetheless. He had already decided that, should the Association have declared that his Master was too dangerous to be set free, he would pull his many and varied strings, to call in every favour he was owed. If he asked enough people, he knew that he would be able to find an exorcist to rid him of the Nen that was tying him to his radius. Fortunately, if looked at from the right point of view, Dr. Lecter would likely prove to be reliably predictable. He couldn’t see any way that the man wouldn’t wish to keep Hisoka-san around. His reputation proceeded him, and from everything he’d managed to learn about him, Hisoka-san was someone that he’d want to keep close to him for as long as possible.

Straightening out his clothes, he gave Hisoka-san a reassuring smile and pointedly clamped down on any display of the unfamiliar nervous feelings that were churning inside him, in front of his already worried Master. It was his job to take care of Hisoka-san, and he would do so to his dying breath. He felt the beads shifting on his wrist and let their reassuring weight bring him back to the present.

“Is there anything else I can get you whilst I’m out, Master?” he asked as he strode confidently to the door.

***

Looking up from his spot in the bed, Hisoka couldn't help but smile when he spotted the bracelet he’d picked up for his pet resting perfectly around his wrist. Yes, it suited him perfectly; he was glad he had decided to buy it.

Watching the way the dark beads seemed to absorb the light that fell upon them, he thought about his lover’s question: Was there anything else he wanted? He wasn't sure. Glancing at the time on his phone, he noted that it was still, just about, morning, and neither of them had eaten yet. He pondered sending his lover to see if there were any shops that would still be serving breakfast and chuckled to himself when he thought about what he might end up bringing back. The Zoldyck family had a reputation for poisoning their food to build up resistances. He gave a thoughtful hum; if Illumi were to buy something, rather than make it from scratch, then he should be safe.

"Well, I don't know about you, but I would appreciate some breakfast," he said with a smile.

***

Illumi brightened at the thought of food. He nodded his understanding and left the room, carefully closing the door behind him.

As he made his way to the lobby, he forced the worry from his mind and turned his attention to what he could buy that his Master would like. The meal would end up being either comfort food, or a small part of him dared to hope, a celebration feast; either way, he had to select something that Hisoka-san would want to eat. There was a small concession stand opposite the main desk, and Illumi’s lip twitched into a slight smile as he spotted the brightly coloured treat hidden amongst the candies, nuts and novelty joke-gifts.

It took ten minutes in total to find everything that he wanted. He'd had to time his trip carefully to make sure that everything stayed warm, but as he balanced the drinks containers in one hand, and held the food in the other, he was content with his haul.
No matter what the contents of the letter turned out to be, he would make sure that Hsioka-san opened the food first.

He had sought out the speciality sandwich shop down the road to find the fresh salmon salad and tuna mayonnaise sandwiches that he knew they both liked. He’d stopped off at the bagel and doughnut store next door to buy a large selection of what they had left, and on his way back, after collecting the post, he had stopped off at the cafe and bought them some steaming hot tea to-go.

The last gift he had kept in his pocket. He wanted to give that to him after he had opened the letter.

Managing to open the door to the hotel room with his elbow, Illumi braced himself for what he might find when he entered his Master’s room. Nothing shocked him anymore, but the first time he’d seen a naked woman sitting on Hisoka-san’s face and screaming for more, had, he would admit, come as a mild surprise.

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While he had waited for his companion to return, Hisoka had decided to start building card towers on the bed to occupy himself. He only cheated a bit. Using his bungee gum to keep the cards together didn’t really count when the surface was so uneven. Besides, it was good to keep up with his practice; his control over his Nen was a vital part of what had kept him alive for so many years.

As he constructed the tower, his thoughts idly turned towards imagining what he would do once he was free. Perhaps he could persuade Illu-chan to run off somewhere for a while, lay low and just enjoy being alone together? The thought was a pleasant one.

However, the more realistic side of him argued that he knew it wasn't going to be that simple. It was clear that his Illu-chan was deeply worried about him. Which was sweet, but it wasn’t something that he was used to. For most of his life, the only person who had cared about what happened to him, had been Hisoka himself.

The act of placing one card atop another had become a form of meditation for him, but even that wasn’t enough to brush aside the nagging doubts and worries that were plaguing him. He didn’t want to see the Doctor again, and Illu-chan’s warnings played back in his mind as he steadied the tower, and kept on building.

***

“Hisoka-san,” Illumi said as he walked through the door and didn’t immediately hear any form of greeting...or scream. He had been gone a while, and he knew what his Master was capable of achieving in a short amount of time. Mentally calculating the odds of what was most likely to have happened, Illumi walked through into the bedroom and braced himself for the sight of a new naked body.

When, instead, he was greeted by a huge card tower, he smiled. “Impressive,” he said, staring at the giant creation. “I have food, drink and your letter. I recommend we open the food first as it is rapidly cooling.” He didn’t add that he wanted Hisoka-san to have something in his stomach before he faced the report.

***

Hearing his lover's voice, Hisoka looked up from his cards with a proud smile; it was a larger tower than he usually would make, and he had to admit that he was pleased with himself for managing to
put it together. He brightened more at the mention of food and ignored all talk of the letter for now. With a wave of his hand, he dissolved the bungee gum holding the cards in place, and revelled in the destruction as his project collapsed onto the bed. Seeing the cards fall was half the fun of it for him.

Gathering the cards back into a large pile, he put them on the bedside table. His precious Illu-chan had returned to him.

"What did you bring my dear?" he asked curiously as he eyed the number of bags in his Illu-chan’s hands. He hadn't expected him to be gone so long, but it made more sense now that he counted the carriers. "It looks like you had a nice shopping trip."

***

Illumi held out his haul for Hisoka-san to inspect. "I hope you find my choices agreeable. I can replace anything you wish, of course." He bowed politely and waited for Hisoka-san to accept his gifts.

***

He had been about to reach out and take the offered bags from Illumi when he saw Illumi bow to him. He arched an elegant brow in response, he knew it was something ingrained in Illumi from birth, but he still didn't understand the need for it. Dr. Lecter bowed to me as well. Until now I'd always thought it was a Zoldyck thing.

"Illu-chan?" he asked the question evident in his voice, "Why do you always do that?"

***

Illumi looked up towards his Master but did not break the bow. Confused, he said, “Do what, Master?”

***

"Bending over?" he asked, grabbing the food and tilting his head in enquiry.

***

Illumi frowned, thinking about his Master’s question. “You mean bowing to you, Master?” he asked. “It’s a mark of respect, why would you ask that? I thought everyone knew...didn’t anyone ever teach you? I know that etiquette wasn’t a big thing for you, but surely you know...” Seeing Hisoka-san’s frown, he straightened up. “Master, tell me it’s not just me who bows to you?”

***

Etiquette? Hisoka's eyes widened slightly with his new understanding.

"To be honest, a bow was something I was taught a performer gave to their audience. Before you, nobody ever really bowed to me," he said indifferently, inspecting the contents of the bag he'd been handed. "Until Dr.Lecter..."

***

“It is a basic form of respect, Master. I do not understand how you have gone through your entire life without anyone ever...” Illumi trailed off as he tried to imagine a world in which, what to him
were the basics of a polite civilisation, were not performed. “That makes no sense.”

***

Hisoka hummed to himself but didn’t look up at Illumi. *It’s really not that big of a deal, is it? What even is basic respect? Surely you give respect, or you don’t?*

The idea of ‘basic respect’ was somewhat lost on him. He knew that in their respective childhoods they had walked in very different worlds, on top of that he was the senior of them both by quite a few years. Not that he’d actually revealed his age to Illumi.

"Illu-chan, it's fine really, it's just not... something that was done where I came from..." he added when he felt he’d found the safest explanation for his blase attitude. "I guess my upbringing was rather uncivilised compared to most; I am rather instinctual, I’m sure you’d agree." Closing his eyes for a moment, he pushed aside the memories of his childhood; the other children surrounding him, shoving him to the ground whenever he tried to get up.

Reaching into the bag, he pulled out the food and grinned. *So he remembered that I prefer simpler things.* Despite his inner turmoil, Hisoka couldn't help being all smiles as he said, “Everything smells wonderful. Sit with me, we both need to eat.”

***

“Illu-chan it’s fine really, it’s just not... something that was done where I came from”

There was only one place that Illumi knew of where people did not bow to each other. His heartfelt strange; there was an odd ache, but he kept his face calm. His Master clearly did not wish for it to be important so that it wouldn’t be. His mother was from a place of outsiders too, and she had achieved great things; Hisoka-san would too. Background meant nothing; it was what you chose to do with your time that mattered.

Sitting down opposite Hisoka-san, he did his best to process his feelings privately. His Master needed him; there were more important things than how he felt about Hisoka-san’s childhood to deal with.

***

Continuing to dig through the grocery bags, Hisoka barely registered Illumi as he sat on the bed. His hungry eyes took in each item in turn, and decided to look at the sandwiches, setting the tuna ones in front of him. The choice had surprised him at first; he was used to his lover preferring more fancy foods. But, the gesture made him feel warm inside.

In a show of affection, Hisoka reached over to his lover and patted his leg gently and said, “Thank you, Illu-chan. If the food tastes as good as it looks, then I might have to send you out more often.” He then turned his attention to the other bag; it contained doughnuts, and he chuckled happily; so he’d remembered his sweet tooth as well? It seemed that he was being spoilt today.

***

The touch helped to centre Illumi, and the smile on Hisoka-sans face was enough to reassure him that he’d made the right choice. “Eat as much as you like, Master,” he said evenly. “You know that I will be more than happy to fetch anything you need.”

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Hisoka picked up one of the salmon sandwiches and held it out for his lover. "You need to eat too, sweetheart," he said warmly.

***

Illumi took the proffered sandwich and smiled. He’d hoped that his Master would have taken both for himself; he hadn’t eaten much since Illumi had been with him, but he appreciated the gesture nonetheless.

“My thanks, Master,” Illumi said and caught himself before he could bow his head. “I hope it is to your satisfaction.”

He waited until his Master had taken a bite of his breakfast before he tore off a piece of his sandwich and placed it neatly into his own mouth.

***

"Illu-chan did you remember to pick up my letter?" Hisoka eventually asked between bites of food.

***

_The letter?_ he thought. _How could I have forgotten?_

He looked over to the table he’d left it on, “Do you wish to open it now, Master?” he asked as he leaned over and retrieved it. Hisoka-san had eaten enough; his body should be able to handle any sudden shocks; although, if he was being honest with himself, he didn’t believe anything much could truly surprise his Master.

***

Hisoka looked at the envelope being held out to him; he didn't want to open it. But he knew he had to. The piece of paper the envelope contained would shape his future. He swallowed the last piece of his bagel and gently took the envelope, staring at it for a while. It was addressed to him in elegant handwriting that he recognized as the chairman. The food settled like a lead weight in his stomach.

"I need to get this over with, no point in putting it off..." he said quietly. "I need to know if they’re sending me back to therapy, or..." he couldn't bring himself to say it. He knew that there were a few alternatives to his freedom apart from therapy.

Steeling himself, he tore open the letter. His golden eyes widened, and his lips fell open in shock, his mouth felt dry. _I have to go back to him? They can’t be serious; this has to be a joke._

***

Illumi went from pleasantly optimistic that his Master was going to be OK, to wondering where the nearest bottle of Sake was hiding.

There was no way they had chosen execution; Hisoka-san looked more baffled than darkly amused. Besides, from what Hisoka-san had told him, it was Chrollo who had caused the deaths of the innocents in the crowd, not him.

“Master?” Illumi asked quietly. He realised that he wanted to reach out, to touch him and to offer some form of comfort, but he didn’t understand why. He remained motionless and passive as he watched his lover’s expression, trying to work out what was happening inside him that was causing
him to feel such strange things.

***

Focusing intently on the letter, Hisoka ignored his lover for now. *What does the Doctor think he can achieve by keeping here? How is sitting in a fancy room in leather chairs supposed to help?* He tried to understand but grew frustrated when he couldn’t see any clear answer. *Maybe I could appeal the decision, or ask for another therapist? It’s not like I can leave. He blinked, and his lips twisted into a sneer as he crushed the letter in his hand. So the Association thinks they have me trapped in a cage, do they? Well, I’ll show them; I’m going to wipe that smug smile off Dr. Lecter’s face.*

"Nobody keeps me trapped in a cage," Hisoka said in a harsh whisper. "Nobody." He allowed the crumpled paper to fall onto the bed and reached for his cards.

***

Illumi grabbed the paper and read, keeping one eye on his Master. He was a volatile man, and he had to be ready if cards started to fly.

But he had to know what their decision was. At least he knew for sure that execution was off the table.

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*Mr. Hisoka Morow,*

*I am writing to inform you that a decision has been made with regards to the recent incident involving yourself and Mr. Chrollo Lucilfer at the Heavens Arena Stadium.*

*It is the opinion of our Chief Psychologist, Dr. Hannibal Lecter, that you should remain under observation and continue under his therapeutic care for a minimum of 12 further sessions. After which, your progress will be assessed, and the Hunter Association will review your case.*

*Should you fail to attend a therapy session then this will be considered an act of gross insubordination and your Hunters Licence could be revoked. If this occurs, then you will be viewed as a civilian and any and all acts carried out while you were acting as a Hunter will be placed up for review.*

*Should your acts be deemed criminal in nature then you will be remanded in custody and be subject to the rule of civilian law. Any unjustified homicides committed will be prosecuted with a view to seeking the execution of the individual(s) involved.*

*Yours Sincerely,*

*Cheadle Yorkshire,*

*Head of the Hunter Association.*

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Illumi frowned. It wasn’t the best news his Master could have been given, but it was far from the worst. He didn’t understand why he was reacting so strongly to the situation.

If he had to, Illumi knew that he could coach Hisoka-san; he could tell him exactly what he needed
to know to pass any interview.

“Hisoka-san?” he asked. “Why are you so upset?”

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"Illumi," Hisoka replied softly as he paused his shuffling and looked at the cards in his hands. "I have to go back to him."

He let the words hang between them before licking his lips to alleviate the dryness in his mouth, and asked, "What am I going to do? You already told me to be careful around him. Is he really that dangerous?"

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"I have to go back to him."

Dr. Lecter. His mother had threatened Milluki with him when he was little and still hadn’t quite understood how to handle his temper tantrums. Illumi had researched him, wanting to know why his mother would use a Doctor to terrify his brother into behaving.

What he had found had impressed his younger self. The Doctor had a perfect record and had almost as many kills to his name as he had patients. He was clearly skilled with the blade and had saved many very important lives, whether through surgeries or in the field.

He had also been said to be a fearless therapist; one who would either eliminate or tame the wildest amongst the Association’s Hunters. The man had walked into the lion’s den so many times that the lion’s now feared his presence.

He could find no record of his Nen abilities though; something that, as a young man, he had found frustrating, but that now he understood and admired. Dr. Lecter didn’t want his patients to have the upper hand.

He was a skilled man, but so was Illumi. The Doctor would not take his Master from him.

“What am I going to do? You already told me to be careful around him. Is he really that dangerous?”

He looked at his Master, certainty and purpose forming to replace his unwanted confusion of the past few minutes. “You fight,” he said bluntly. “Dr. Lecter is a strong and worthy opponent for a man of your skill. You are my Master. You are the strongest person I have ever met; I would not serve anyone unworthy of my time. You are worthy, Hisoka-san, so you will fight, and you will bring him to his knees.”

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Fight? The word reverberated inside Hisoka's mind and he smiled. Fighting he understood, he could do that.

“You are the strongest person I’ve ever met."

His lover's words thrilled him. What could the Doctor do apart from asking him more questions?

He’d already rebuffed his advances; he’d seen through his first attempt to get his licence revoked, but could he possibly manage that another way? The letter said he couldn't fail to attend the
sessions, but what if Dr. Lecter was no longer allowed to work as his therapist?

"Lulu, my dear. Do you think I would be able to get him to actually fight with me?" he asked thoughtfully, starting to think through his options.

He thought about how it would feel to destroy the man's office in the process of destroying him. Yes...that will teach him to ignore me when I tell him to leave something be. The idea of fighting the Doctor was starting to send familiar tingles throughout his body.

"Do you think I should try and annoy him?" he asked in a mock-innocent tone, "Or should I seduce him? Oooh, I can't decide Lulu, I'm getting too excited." He licked his lips as he began to imagine the scene in more detail.

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Illumi smiled softly at the idea. Yes, the Doctor would not have his Master, but his Master would need to adopt a more unconventional approach if he was going to come out of his battle alive.

"I would recommend seduction, Master. From everything I have found in previous research, the Doctor has an alarming habit of finding a reason to eliminate those that irk him."

Illumi gave the thought due consideration. "I would suggest that you remain subtle. Allow him to understand that you have a lover; that will increase the thrill when he finally claims you. I would ask that you refrain from giving him my identity. I believe he and my mother are acquainted, and so that will not end well for either of us, should our relationship be revealed. You are a charming man. That is your greatest weapon in this situation." Illumi allowed the pleasure he felt to show on his face. "Use it, Master."

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Hisoka pushed away the remaining food as he listened to his Illu-chan's suggestion before stretching out along the bed with a groan. Looking up at him, he purred "You know Illu-chan..." He trailed off and stretched like a cat. "If I'm going to have to let the Doctor claim me...maybe I should get some practice in?"

He tilted his head slightly. He wanted to see how his lover would react to this new roleplay and to check that he was on the same wavelength as him at this moment.

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Looking down at his Master Illumi felt the same beast that had arisen when he had found his Master sleeping off the effects of Dr. Lecter’s ‘treatment’, stir within him.

He studied his face, the lines of his back, the tilt of his head and the burning arousal behind his eyes all pointed to one conclusion.

"If I'm going to have to let him claim me...maybe I should get some practice in?"

There was more than one way to take control, Illumi knew. He would always serve his Master; he would do whatever was necessary, and right now, he wanted to practice and build up the skills he would need to handle Dr. Lecter. He could do that; he knew how to teach.

Mimicking Hisoka-san's knife-sharp smile, he allowed the beast to take over. As slowly and gently as he knew how, he cradled Hisoka-san's head in his hand, and threaded his hair through his fingers, watching his golden eyes blow wide with lust.
Deliberately, telegraphing every move, he allowed the hand in Hisoka-sans hair to twist, gripping and yanking his head back to expose his neck.

“That depends, Master. What kind of plan did you have in mind for the good Doctor?”

He let his legs fall open and roughly pulled Hisoka-san’s right hand forwards, deliberately rubbing it against his crotch.

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Feeling the gentle caress of his lover's hand, Hisoka gave him a come-hither look and smiled, leaning into the touch. When the hand running through his red hair twisted and whipped back his head, he moaned with delight.

He didn't resist as his hand was tugged towards the Illumi's crotch, he could feel the hardness forming beneath the fabric. Hisoka licked his lips in anticipation, and he chuckled. Even when I play at bottoming, my Lulu still dances to my strings.

"Well, I figured it would be more thrilling if I let him think he has me on my knees, Lulu...” He let the words hang, gently rubbing the bulge beneath his elegant fingers. Moving his other hand to stroke one of Illumi's thighs gently, he teased, "I can do more with my mouth than just make witty remarks, as you well know."

Arching a brow and flashing a suggestive look, he let his gaze drop. Feigning submissiveness, he trailed his free hand from his lover's smiling face to his hard cock, still in its cloth prison. It had been a while since he'd played the submission game, but if this was how he had to fight, then his pride wasn't above such things.

"Why don't I show my darling Illu-chan how much of a good boy I can be?"

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Internally Illumi groaned with desire; outwardly, he looked down at his Master and channelled his beast, moulding it into what his Master needed from him.

"Well, I figured it would be more thrilling if I let him think he has me on my knees, Lulu...”

He allowed a hint of a growl to enter his voice. “Such a good boy.” He pulled Hisoka towards him. “Using me for practice, I’m so proud.”

And he was. Hisoka-san had to be bulletproof when he faced Dr. Lecter. Illumi would have to do more research; he’d have to understand the man his Master was going into battle against in order to prepare him for what was to come.

He yanked Hisoka-san’s head further back so that he was looking directly up at him. “Show me. Put your hands behind your back, Hisoka-san, and keep them there. Show me what those wicked lips can do.”

For now, mimicry would have to suffice. He would research what his Master needed him to become later. Looking down into Hisoka-san’s lust blown eyes, he let himself live in the moment. Giving in to the beast a little more, he allowed the predator in him to shine as he tightened his grip on his Master’s hair.

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The way his own phrases came from Illumi’s lips made Hisoka shiver; was this how he made others feel when he spoke like that? The idea excited him. An audible gasp of pleasure escaped him as he was forced to look up, once again, into his lover's eyes. He heard the instruction and grinned.

This would work; he didn't intend to truly surrender.

Allowing his lips to become a wicked and seductive smile, he made sure to keep their shared eye contact as he did what he was told. He moved his hands behind his back and moved as Illumi pushed him into his body. With practised precision, he used his teeth to pull down the zipper and licked his lips with anticipation.

"The button may be a bit tricky, it's been a while..." he said, keeping his voice soft and a little breathy. Illumi was doing things to him that he hadn’t quite expected, but it was certainly working.

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Illumi’s gaze turned cold, steel entering his tone as he said, “Then learn Hisoka-san; you wouldn’t want to disappoint me so soon, would you?”

He produced a needle from seemingly nowhere and ran it down the side of his lover’s cheek, allowing enough pressure for it to slightly graze the surface of the man’s skin. “Don’t disappoint me, Master.”

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Hisoka had been about to speak, to say that he wasn’t trying to disappoint him when he felt the slight press of the needle against his cheek and stilled, closing his eyes. He swallowed; he hadn't expected that. How wonderful, you managed to surprise me Illu-chan.

"I'm not saying I can't, just that I haven't done this for a while," he said quietly. "That's why practise makes perfect, isn't it?"

Returning to his task, he tried not to react to the sting of the needle on his face. His makeup would cover any marks.

He used his teeth and tongue in tandem, as he experimentally adjusted the button until he was able to push it through the hole. Despite himself, he couldn’t help the proud smirk that formed when he managed to complete his task. Eager to continue, he nuzzled the hard length in front of him, taking in his lover's scent and moaned.

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At the moan that left his Master’s lips, Illumi let out a hiss of need. In this moment, he knew, he couldn’t be Illu-chan; he would have to find a different face to wear. He couldn’t simply be Illumi. Illumi was dispassionate and detached; he would not understand what the man rubbing against him would need. He heard the call of the beast again and shuddered. The monster that lived within him would destroy them both. He would rip them apart and revel in the carnage. He wanted to see Hisoka-san blood-soaked and begging; tears streaming from his eyes as he took him apart inch by inch.

He gasped. The combination of the images that had filled his mind and his Master’s skilful attentions were drawing responses from him that he was not entirely sure he understood.

“Use your mouth Hisoka-san,” he ordered, and to his ears, it sounded almost like a snarl.
Curiosity made Hisoka contemplate disobeying; would his Illu-chan have it in him to seriously punish him? His heart sped up at the thought, but, he reminded himself, it wasn't Illumi's punishment he had to worry about. It would be Dr. Lecter's.

Fighting back the urge, he reached inside himself, looking for his very much hidden submissive aspect; the one he had buried years ago. With a soft sigh, he let the mindset flow over him. He knew how to please, to bow, even to yield if it was necessary.

Using his nose, he manoeuvred Illumi’s cock out of his pants, and stuck his tongue out to lick the head as if it were a lollipop. With the shameless confidence of an adult performer, he arched and tugged at the hand holding his hair. He could do this. He tightened his hand's grip on his wrists behind his back. It felt oddly familiar.

Deciding to focus on breathing through his nose, he opened his mouth and relaxed his throat as he moved with the hand controlling him. The actions took mere moments, and Hisoka had taken in as much of his lover's length as he could, deep throating him and humming to send pleasure shooting up his Illu-chan’s spine.

When Hisoka-san began to lick at the head of his dick as if it were the most delicious candy in the world, Illumi moved his needle to rest atop his Master’s shoulder. He couldn’t cause him lasting damage, but he had to be willing to cause significant pain if it were required.

He watched his Master relax into his task and moaned as Hisoka-san ran his tongue around the head of his cock. He would have to teach his Master...the thought made his mouth go dry.

He closed his eyes, picturing everything that would need to be done, how they would have to prepare and-

Hisoka-san’s mouth almost entirely engulfed the length of his cock. He had pushed him down, but he hadn’t expected him to be able to take it all. He cried out in pleasure, gripping tighter and twisting his hair in his fingers in an effort to process everything he was feeling. This was a new kind of thrill and he, he realised belatedly, had not been prepared. “Master,” he groaned, savouring every part of the word as it left his lips. “Master, so good.”

The moan of ‘Master’ that fell from Illumi's lips was music to Hisoka's ears, spurring him on to greater heights. In response to the feeling of his hair being twisted, he pulled his head back, ensuring that he kept his lips firmly on the hard shaft in his mouth. Experimentally he moved his head up and down, trying to see how far he could push his lover. This, he could handle, this was nothing new to him. Pleasing a man with just his mouth was a skill he had honed early on, and it was one he’d known was worth keeping sharp. Not being allowed to use his hands just added to the challenge, and his own neglected cock twitched at the thought.

Still moving his head up and down as much as Ill-chan would allow, he kept his tongue against the underside of his dick and varied the pitch of his hum.

The power...the control...Illumi tried to understand how it was even possible to process these feelings without giving in to the need to cause pain. He had to remain detached. He had to be able
to observe, to analyse to-

He growled as Hisoka-san varied his pitch yet again. The man was trying to take him apart.

He knew Illu-chan would submit, and give in to the mind-bending sensations, but in this moment, he could not be Illu-chan.

His beast roared for more. He had to mark him, to claim his body, to dominate him completely.

Coming back to himself, Illumi used the hand in his Master’s hair to pull him back, off his cock, and rose to his knees in one fluid movement.

“Such a good boy,” he purred. He pulled Hisoka-san up until his head was level with his leaking cock. His lips were ever so slightly flushed, and the sight was fascinating. “Open,” he ordered and waited for his Master’s compliance.

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Feeling the hand in his hair tighten, Hisoka closed his eyes and braced himself for what he expected to happen. He wasn't disappointed. Letting himself go limp in his lover's hold, he felt himself being pulled back.

Once more, he heard his own praise turned upon him, and he fought the urge to smirk, schooling his features into a demure glance up at his Illu-chan. Opening his mouth obediently when he heard the instruction, he patiently waited to see what his lover would do with his body next. You know me so well, don’t you, Illu-chan? Praise and instructions. Yes, this is what I need, but will it be like this with Dr. Lecter?

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The spike of triumph as he saw his Master’s flushed lips open for him was a heady sensation. His cock twitched as Hisoka-san’s gaze turned upwards and his hooded eyes looked up at him. He wanted more. He wanted everything he could get. The urge to grab hold of him, to crush him beneath his fingers and hear him scream was so tempting.

He wanted to watch the blood pour from Hisoka-san, wanted to wrap him in his arms and feel the life drain from him. His hold in his Master’s hair tightened, and he tugged, painfully.

The hand holding the needle twitched ever so slightly. It would be so easy to slice the man’s skin...

He pushed his cock roughly into the open and pliant mouth, pulling his Master’s head forward as he did so. He had to claim him as his own.

“Mine,” he growled as he began to move.

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He was atypically taken by surprise at the unexpected way his lover plunged into his body and pushed his cock down his throat. Hisoka gagged momentarily as he tried to get his throat to relax once more, eyes watering slightly at the sensation.

It's just Illu-chan, he reminded himself. This is practise for what I’m going to have to do.

He allowed the thoughts to calm him, and he sank back into his acquiescence, smiling inside at his lover's vocal claim.
Illumi felt Hisoka-san choke, felt the tight squeeze around the head of his dick and he moaned; more he had to have more.

The slight resistance soon died, and his Master gave into being used. Illumi saw the involuntary tears that always came with being used like this run down his cheek as his before he adjusted and he forced himself not to keep on pushing. He could break him. It would be so easy; one slip of his needle would be all it would take. The thought of his Master’s dead eyes looking up at him splintered his mind. He felt his dick pulse as the beast’s bloodlust reached a new high; at the same time, the part of him that belonged to his Master baulked at the desire.

Illumi closed his eyes. Focus, feel, relax. His master’s instructions came back to him. He had not understood how to handle the feelings the man had brought up when they had first met. He had learned how to submit to authority at an early age, but Hisoka-san had taught him how to feel.

He concentrated. Hisoka-san’s mouth was exquisite; warm and wet. It felt as if it were made for this specific purpose. He fucked it roughly, taking what he needed but never pushing as far as the beast wanted.

His hand never relaxed its grip, but now that his eyes were closed, Illumi could feel the small beads around his wrist.

“Master,” he gasped. “My Master, my Hisoka-san, I,” he squeezed his eyes tighter as the pleasure he was feeling began to overwhelm. “I will never...I belong...I want...” It was too much. If he gave in, he would do terrible things.

“Master!”

He didn’t know what he was asking for, but he trusted his Master to give it to him.

Hearing the desperation in his partner's voice, Hisoka opened his eyes and sought out his lover's gaze. He allowed himself to yield further, attempting to convey wordlessly, that he was okay with what was happening. It wasn't a new experience.

Relax, my Illu-chan, he thought to himself, fighting the urge to move his hands to reassure through touch. Each time he'd pushed his Illu-chan’s limits, he had been careful to be consistent in a few things. Touch, he knew, was the Assassins weakness. Illumi could be considered to be touch starved, and it was something Hisoka related to, and understood in much the same way he understood pain.

Gripping his wrist tighter, he felt his nails graze the top layer of his skin and moaned as he felt his pulse quicken in response.

As he cried out, his Master relaxed. He felt the man become even more pliant in his hands, and he shuddered. He would destroy him if he gave in. The feelings were too much. He would not harm his Master.

He felt something cold run down his cheek and let his hand fall from Hisoka-san’s hair. He would remove the temptation. He was so close.
He must not cum before his Master.

He would hold on. He would endure.

***

Hisoka froze when he caught a glimpse of what looked like a tear on his lover's face, followed by the grip on his hair falling away. A whimper tried to escape his throat; the two halves of his nature were both competing for control.

He was Illumi’s Master; he knew he was supposed to reassure and comfort his submissive if things ever got out of hand. They were supposed to have a signal to indicate when it got that far. Hisoka gulped around the throbbing dick still in his mouth; he'd been too caught up in his desire. They hadn't agreed on one to use this time around, and he was growing concerned. In all the times they’d played, he'd never seen him react like this.

Closer to the surface, his submissive side was calling to him to remain as he was; to stay still and wait for instruction. He was supposed to do as he was told, not as he wanted. Hisoka tensed, unsure which of the two sides to listen to as they continued to fight within him. All the while, he continued to stare up at his disoriented lover, confusion and concern flickering in his golden stare.

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“Talk to me, Lulu. Tell me how it feels.”

His Master’s commands came back to him as he worked to control his warring desires.

“Master, it feels...I can’t...Master, I must not cum. I will not come before my Master...I will obey...it’s too...” Illumi let his head fall back and gripped his leg; not tight enough to cause pain - he knew that would tip him over the edge - but enough to focus. He had to vocalise. His Master had instructed him how to cope when things became too overwhelming.

“I want to hurt you, Master. I want to tear...I will not harm...I can’t...so close, Master!” He cried out as he fought against what he was feeling.

***

Hisoka listened to the words and closed his eyes as things started to click into place inside his mind. Even when I allow you to be in charge, you stick to the rules. You’re still mine. Humming in understanding, he tried to think about how he could reconcile what his lover was trying to achieve, with his responsibility as the dominant partner. How do I guide you without breaking role? I need to start thinking before I act, too late to worry about that now.

Despite his hesitation, Illumi hadn't withdrawn from his mouth, so he was effectively gagged. He'd been told to keep his hands behind his back; he knew he technically could break the rule, but that would defeat the purpose of the lesson. Should he make his pet break his rule? Would he risk breaking his precious toy beyond repair if he short-circuited him too badly?

Looking up once again, Hisoka tried to assess his lover's mental state as best he could. There had been a keening desperation to his voice; he wanted to help Hisoka prepare, but he was clearly also compelled to obey his previous training. It was quite a dilemma. You released my hair so that I can move despite your instruction. I could reach out and touch you, would that help you, Illu-chan? You know I don't talk when I get like this. But if this is going to work as training, then I need you to let me make you cum. The rule’s going to need to be broken, but I can frame it as a reward perhaps? Hisoka couldn't think of a way forward that both the warring factions of his mind would
be content with. He just hoped his Illu-chan was as resilient mentally as he had believed.

His course of action settled upon, Hisoka deep throated Illumi once again; humming gently, lips pursed around the dick as he pulled back slowly. He ran his tongue around the cock, tasting as much of his lover as he could as he moved. He half-closed his eyes in a look of unbridled pleasure, maintaining his submissive act, he only hoped Illumi would understand his silent permission.

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Illumi’s eyes shot open as his Master took him back into his mouth. No!

He watched as his golden gaze looked up at him, begging to be taken. I can’t. I’ll destroy you.

He took the man’s face in his hand and stroked away the streak of residual makeup Hisoka-san’s earlier tears had left.

“I need...” Illumi breathed, throat tight and vision beginning to blur. He wiped at his eyes with his free hand and blinked. His Master wanted this. He moaned as the man hummed, lips now red, and flushed with blood. The desire to take was so strong. “May I?” he rasped, throat tight as he fought his own body.

***

Yes, Hisoka thought. That's a good boy, now you've asked I can tell you.

Doing his best not to stop what he was doing, Hisoka nodded slightly; he hoped it was enough. He already had a plan forming in his mind for how to explain away the breaking of their rules. He would tell his Illu-chan it had been a reward, for trying so diligently to help him through this difficult time.

First, he needed to make him cum. Then, once he had a chance to come back down, he knew he would need to go through his aftercare routine. It would be jarring, and he knew how important it was to walk his pet through this experience.

Heeding his lover’s warning, he bobbed his head faster, allowing himself to moan as he did so. He needed to show that he was enjoying this. If Illu-chan saw that, he’d find it easier to let go and accept the pleasure being offered.

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With a simple nod, Illumi was released from his internal prison. Walls came crashing down, and the beast surged forwards. Almost blindly, he snatched at Hisoka-san’s hair shoving himself into his Master’s mouth as far as he could go; fucking, taking and choking.

It didn’t take long. He saw white as his entire body went rigid, dick pulsing as he came inside the tight heat of his Master’s throat. Blind with lust, he continued to fuck him, trying to wring out every last drop of pleasure he could from his Master. “So good,” he gasped. “Hisoka-san...so good.”

***

The sudden change in demeanour caught Hisoka by surprise, and he felt the dick in his mouth being forced down his throat again. Gagging, he tried to breathe through his nose; he hadn't anticipated that his pet would want to be this rough with him. Illumi’s hand had found its way back into his hair, tugging harshly and sending comforting tingles of pain through his scalp, helping him
keep his composure.

Remembering why they were doing this, he allowed his lover to use him. His eyes were watering again as he continued to choke and gag, and instinct caused him to close them.

His submissive side won the internal struggle for dominance, and he let himself rag doll in his lover's hands. Illumi was doing this to help him; he trusted his lover wouldn't permanently damage him; it was just training, he reassured himself as he felt Illu-chan climax and he resisted the instinct that told him to struggle as he came down his throat. It took almost all of his self-restraint to simply take it and swallow. It's just Illu-chan, it's not him why am I acting like this? I've gone mute before, but I've never wanted to fight back. What's happening to me?

***

Illumi fucked Hisoka-san's mouth until he felt himself going soft against his tongue. The high had been immense, and he was reluctant to let go. He twitched as the overly sensitive skin of his cock protested being kept in Hisoka-san's mouth. Groaning he finally pulled out and blinked down at the man he'd used entirely for his own pleasure.

The thought caused his stomach to clench.

His Master, he had used his Master.

***

Feeling the cock in his mouth soften, Hisoka relaxed and began to breathe more normally. As Illumi pulled himself out of Hisoka's mouth, he fought against his desire to fall forwards as he caught his breath. That was intense. It's never been like this before not with Illu-chan.

It had certainly been an experience to let his pet loose.

Still, his hands had remained behind his back; he hadn't broken the rule he had been set. A smirk formed on his lips as he looked up at his lover defiantly. If his pretence at submission was going to be like that with the Doctor, he was confident he could survive it without breaking.

"Can I..." he panted, "Move my hands now, Illu-chan?"

***

Illumi heard the question and blinked through his confusion. Things felt wrong, but he knew that his Master needed him.

“Yes, Hisoka-san,” he said softly. “You may move."

He tossed his needle aside and gripped his leg, using pain to centre himself and felt something hard inside his pocket. Fishing it out, he looked down as he opened his hand to reveal the innocent, brightly coloured gum in his palm.

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Hisoka wriggled the fingers of his hands as he worked the blood back into them; apparently, he'd gripped them a bit too tightly. As he felt the blood flow return, and the stiffness fade, he gave a pleased sigh. Was that why you were gone so long earlier? You were looking for bungee gum? he wondered as he spotted the small treat in his lover’s hand.
Reaching out a hand to stroke his lover's side and said, "It's okay Illu-chan, it really is, sweetheart. Is that for me?"

***

Illumi continued to stare at the small sweet in his hand and did his best to swallow around the lump in his throat. Things were wrong; everything was so intense...it had never been like this before. He’d never actually desired to cause his Master harm before, not like that. He’d imagined fighting him many times and knew that he would likely one day end his life, but that was an honour he had earned. It wasn’t the bestial bloodlust that had somehow been unlocked by Hisoka-san’s actions. He couldn’t understand why he felt...strange.

Clearing his throat, he gazed into his Master’s golden eyes. “Yes,” he said quietly. “I saw it and thought of you. I...I wanted to give you a gift. I thought it would...help.”

***

Remembering the small amount of bloodlust he’d sensed coming from his lover Hisoka paused in his ministrations. Did I let things go too far? He hoped not. There weren't many people in this world he would ever allow to see him vulnerable. Frowning slightly, he reached out to grasp his lover's hands in his own, ignoring the small sweet pushing into his palm.

How do I fix this? Was he worried about me? But he only worries about his family? “Illu-chan,” he said gently. “I’m not sure what to say, but I do appreciate the gesture. Thank you.”

As he looked into his lover's eyes, he felt his heart skip. But if you were worried about me does that mean...no, it can't be that. I'm his Master; it's his job to take care of me. I shouldn't read too much into it. Although did I misread things earlier? Was he not suggesting that I play submissive? Trying to distract from the thought whirling through his head, Hisoka lifted Illumi's hand to his lips and kissed it gently. "You're so wonderful Illu-chan, you're always so good to me."

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“And you,” Illumi said, trying not to frown. “You were always so good to me too. I mean, you are, you are good to me. My apologies. I, I just feel...confused,” he tried to explain. “Something is...wrong. You are...I need you to be happy. I felt...different. Things are somehow different, and I don’t understand why.”

He reached out and cupped his Master’s face in his hand, running his thumb over the slight graze that had been left by his needle. “Things are intense. I became overwhelmed. I.” He swallowed. “I wanted to crush you. It felt so good and the way you reacted.” He closed his eyes in shame. “It caused me to feel things that I have only ever felt while...killing. I am overwhelmed, but I am glad that you appreciate the gift.”

***

Oh! his eyes widened for a moment as the realisation hit him, You usually associate control of a situation with your assignments. I’ve played at submitting to you before, but I went deeper into that side of me than usual. His mouth felt dry once more. Are you wondering where your Master went? I’m still here, how do I show you?

“Lulu,” Hisoka purred as he gently squeezed Illumi’s hand. “You’re OK, Master is fine. I love the gift, but right now I need to help you through this, so that’s what I am going to do. Focus on my voice. You can do that for me, can’t you?”
I know you’ve always felt more comfortable with clear instructions. I need to be your guiding light; I can do that for you. If you’re still willing to let me.

He saw Illumi’s small nod of agreement and smiled warmly. “Good,” said. “Now come here and let me hold you. I need to feel you in my arms; we don’t have to go anywhere. We’ll stay here, just the two of us.” Letting go of his lover’s hand, he pocketed the small piece of gum and held his arms out in an open offer of comfort.

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Illumi blinked and took a deep, soothing breath. “Yes, Master,” he said, moving so that he was in Hisoka-san’s lap. He could feel the warmth of his chest through his back, and he let out a relieved sigh as the world started to fall back into some semblance of order once again.

“That was...different,” he admitted. “It was so intense. I fear that I may have been unprepared to be your teacher. I hadn’t anticipated the way I would react; something has changed, and I can’t quite put my finger on what it is.”

He felt Hisoka-san’s breath against his neck and let his eyes fall closed, relaxing into his tight hold. “I will find out though,” he assured. “You don’t need to worry.”

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“It was,” Hisoka agreed as he rested his chin on Illumi’s shoulder, enjoying the feeling of his lover relaxing into his embrace. “I’m not worried; I have faith in you. After all, you’re my most prized possession, and I’m never going to let you go.” He squeezed him to reinforce his point. “We’ll work it out together,” he assured. “It’s just been a very long time since I’ve been truly submissive. I don’t know if I could be that way with you...but I’d like to think that I could trust you, but right now that’s not important to me. Taking care of you is. Would you like me to brush your hair? I’m staying with you today.” He paused to kiss his Illu-chan’s cheek. “I think I may have pushed things a little too far too soon, but you’re strong. We’ll get past this together; overcome Dr. Lecter together.”

***

Illumi allowed a twitch of a smile to pass over his face at the suggestion that his Master brush his hair. It was sweet, but not what he wanted. He hadn’t missed the slight bulge in Hisoka-san’s boxers when he’d moved into his embrace, and his beast reared its head again, but this time with an entirely different kind of desire running through it.

“We will,” he said, and his voice sounded mildly dazed to his ears. “Together. It’s the only way; he’s...a worthy opponent.” He hummed contentedly when his Master started to run his fingers through his hair.

“Maybe you could braid it?” he asked, feeling the familiar spike of excitement that always came along with the suggestion. There was nothing quite like his Master taking him from behind as he held his hair in his hands. “I like it when you do.”

***

Hisoka chuckled and gave a playful tug on the hair in his hand. "I can do that; you look so adorable with your hair in braids. It's been a while since I got to play with your hair. You always take such good care of it for me," he added playfully as he reached over to pick up the brush from the nightstand. "Now be a good boy and stay still for Master," he instructed as he used the brush to
start preparing to braid his Illu-chan's hair with a happy hum.

*Yes, Dr. Lecter will be a worthy opponent, but together we're unstoppable. I still remember the thrill when I helped you during the Chairman election; getting to spill all that blood.* He moaned softly as he began working on the first braid. *Oh Illu-chan, I'm going to make you look so cute. Then I'm going to ravish you.*

***


He reached behind him and ran his hands over his Master’s legs. “For you, Master. It’s all for you. Always.”

For a brief moment, his heart fluttered. The truth behind his words had never felt quite so clear before, but there was no ignoring it now. Hisoka-san was like a magnet; if he were ever to try to pull away, he knew, he would be sucked back in doubly hard. Was that what this was? Had he been away too long? Was this strange intensity his body’s reaction to his master’s absence?

*Don’t think,* his mind told him. *Just feel. You know you want this. Just relax; let him show you. There’s nothing to worry about; you belong to him.*

“All for you. Forever,” he gasped and let himself sink into his Master’s touch.

***

Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:

Illumi

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Hisoka
Hisoka has a plan and his chance to implement it has finally arrived. Now, all he has to hope for is that Hannibal will give in and start to cooperate. What he wasn't expecting was for Hannibal to have one of his own, and for him to fight back.

With a small sigh of satisfaction, Hisoka made the last fold needed to complete the latest origami sculpture he had made. Holding it carefully, he admired his craft before gingerly placing it on the coffee table next to the others. The stack of origami paper had been a gift from Illumi, a helpful suggestion as to how he could calm himself before entering the office once again.

Together they had been working on a strategy, in preparation for the upcoming battle that they were sure was coming. Hisoka knew he had to learn to let go of his natural need for control; his need to dominate. Understanding didn’t make it easy. Sparing a glance at the door to Dr. Lecter’s office, he picked up another square of paper, and robotically went through the folds required for his chosen design. This time he channelled his frustration at being caged into a yellow butterfly.

As much as he had understood his lover's insistence that he arrive early, rather than just on time, he wished Illumi had waited with him. Sitting alone in the waiting room, he felt more isolated than he had for quite some time. Hisoka wished he could put a finger on just what it was about Dr. Lecter that was able to unsettle him so easily. Another piece of coloured paper slid into his fingers, more hand movements, another sculpture. This time it was a small origami cat, he smiled at it before placing it next to the butterfly. It seemed almost hungry as it stared, unseeing, at the insect.

Hannibal had been watching Hisoka for a few minutes, using Zetsu and a few techniques of his own that he’d developed over the years, to conceal his presence.

Hisoka was skilled, precise and obviously nervous. Still, his creations were beautiful, and Hannibal always valued such things.

“You are a skilled artist Mr. Morow,” he said, walking into the view of the man’s peripheral vision. “Have you ever considered offering your creations for sale? I have no doubt that you would find an appreciative audience.”

Hisoka startled at the sound of the Doctor's voice, but disguised his surprise as best he could. Instead of looking towards him, he looked over at the table. Sitting silently for a brief moment, as if he were seeing his work for the first time.

"I wouldn't know about such things, I mean I do recall you saying those that enjoy destruction don't usually find pleasure in creation, yes?" He looked back at the unfinished piece in his hands. Hisoka contemplated crushing it to emphasise his point, but remembering his lover's guidance just in time; he had to play the submissive. Remember what Illu-chan told you, Hisoka. Keep a lid on your temper; you’ll get him when the time is right.
After a few brief moments, he gave in and made the last movements needed to complete the work.

Holding up the small paper frog for his Doctor to see, he asked, "Do you have a favourite?" and forced himself to smile.

***

Hannibal smiled down at the origami animals on his coffee table. In truth, he saw beauty in each and every piece. No one was of more value to him than the other. Beauty was a reward in and of itself, but that was not what Hisoka Morow wanted to hear.

Hannibal assumed he had asked in order to draw a conclusion about his Doctor.

“It is true that often those who relish destruction do not enjoy the prospect of creation. However, there are always exceptions to every rule. For example, in the ancient religion of Hindu, the God Shiva is simultaneous destroyer and creator. Each day we are born anew.” Hannibal leaned down and picked up a tiny rabbit that had been nestled in and amongst a larger collection of cranes, frogs, butterflies and cats. “I believe this is my favourite. It took true skill to make something so fragile and small seem so at peace amidst the chaos around it.”

***

Hisoka forced himself to keep up the smiling facade as he watched Dr. Lecter pick up the rabbit. Are you trying to make fun of me? You know how uncomfortable being here makes me don’t you Dr. Lecter, but I can’t let you provoke me.

"Feel free to keep it then; I don't have much use for them once I've made them." He put the remaining paper away before rising from his seat. He had deliberately decided to wear his shorter heels today. His ankle may have healed, but he was wary of taking another fall, especially in front of the Doctor.

***

Hannibal looked down at the fragile creature in his palm. The urge to crush it rose within him, but he tempered it quickly.

“Thank you,” he said and meant every word. He made a mental note to have his secretary collect all the animals. He would find a display for them after his session had concluded. “Please,” he said to Hisoka, gesturing with his hand and inclining his head slightly. “Come on through.”

***

Hiding his surprise at the simple thanks, Hisoka bent to place the small paper ornament still in his hand on the table with the others.

"Of course," he mumbled quietly, as he moved. Giving his artwork one last look, he made his way into the office, trying to stamp down on the growing apprehension that was spreading in his chest. He reminded himself that he had faced far worse in his life, and steeled himself for what he had to do.

Upon crossing the threshold, he paused and looked at the chairs; he remembered that the last time he was here, he’d sat in the one furthest from the door. It had been meant as a display of confidence; a show of his own power. During our last meeting, you ignored my flirtation, but I need to seduce you. Can I command your attention as I simply cross the floor to my chair? Well, there’s only way to find out. Smirking to himself, he walked slowly and gracefully, turning to look
back at Hannibal through his lashes as he sat down with the poise of a dancer and leant back in the chair. Crossing his legs, he tried to get comfortable and did his best to appear as relaxed as possible.

***

Hannibal had been wondering what approach Hisoka was going to take when confronted with the prospect of enforced therapy. He was mildly amused to see that he appeared to have embraced the more flirtatious side of his nature.

It was a dance Hannibal enjoyed playing, and the man had a natural elegance about him that Hannibal could most certainly appreciate.

He watched as Hisoka all but sashayed across the floor, heading to the chair that he had chosen for himself in their previous session. He made a show of posing as he sat down for Hannibal - and it was for him; he’d left no room for doubt about that. Hannibal could almost see the unspoken words floating above the man: ‘I’m ready for you now, Doctor’.

Chuckling internally he gave him what he clearly wanted and took him in from head to toe as he closed the door behind him.

Walking calmly to the chair that was usually reserved for his patients, he placed the origami rabbit on the table beside him.

“May I ask, where did you learn origami? It’s an art form that has always fascinated me.”

***

Seeing the way his Doctor looked him up and down, Hisoka shifted slightly, preening for his audience. He wanted to appear inviting to find out how easily he could hold Hannibal’s attention. The query about his origami skills shouldn’t have surprised him nearly as much as it did.

Memories of playing dodgeball during his time on Greed Island flashed before his eyes; the way he’d readied to intercept Razor’s. Recalling the pain that had flowed through him as he’d struggled to keep the ball from breaking his wall of Bungee-Gum caused a small sigh of contentment to leave his lips. I think I managed to dislocate all of my fingers doing that, still getting to surprise Gon made it worth it.

"I watched a friend." He chose to keep his response simple and to the point. I needed to regain full use of my fingers; it seemed like a good idea at the time. Illu-chan would make me do origami as meditation, and I did find that it was relaxing. Plus you seem to like it, so that’s a bonus.

***

“You keep skilled company,” Hannibal observed. “Did your friend mind you observing them?” He kept his stare interested, and his body relaxed. He had noted the way Hisoka had shifted in his seat, subtly re-arranging his carefully constructed display.

Idly he wondered how long he should wait before confronting the man about his obvious unease and the clear attempt he was making to control the situation with his sexuality. He’d been attractive whilst he had slept, but now that he was alive and well, he was dangerously alluring. Maybe he could let it wait; see how the situation played out? If nothing else, Hisoka was going to be a highly entertaining client, but he was open to the possibility of it becoming more than that. He’d have to play his cards just right for that to happen though and he knew he shouldn’t get his hopes up.
"Should a student not observe their teacher when they are demonstrating something?" Hisoka countered.

His neck had twinged slightly when he’d cocked his head earlier, and Hisoka closed his eyes for a moment to enjoy the oddly comforting sting. I hope you’re right about making him jealous Illu-chan, although I did enjoy the feeling of your teeth when you bit me.

“I find that when a person is aware that they are being observed, they tend to act rather differently than when they are ignorant of the eyes upon them,” Hannibal said conversationally. “So, I suppose it would depend upon whether your friend was aware that you were their pupil.”

Hisoka flashed a small smile at his therapist. He was tempted to point out that the same could be said for anyone attending his office. However, he held the snarky remark back. Now was not the time.

"Well you see..." he paused, "They wanted to assist me, with regaining the functionality of my fingers. I managed to injure my hands severely, so I think they knew. I mean it would be kind of strange if they didn’t. Wouldn’t you agree?"

“They care for you then,” Habbibal said, ignoring the sarcasm. “To do something so time-consuming and intricate for your benefit.” He cocked his head slightly. “You must trust them a lot to allow them to care for you when you were in such a vulnerable state.”

"I surprised myself with that little revelation," Hisoka said lightly, but there was weight to the words. When did I start to feel so safe with my Illu-chan? he wondered.

Hisoka had considered Illumi to be his only friend, which had, in turn, evolved into an urgent need to control and to own. Luckily for him, his friend had been craving somebody willing to do just that. And, Hisoka did so cherish his favourite toy.

Hannibal kept his tone gentle as he asked, “What about my observation surprised you?”

Hisoka chuckled a little, "Now I never said it was your observation that surprised me. I had already come to that realisation long before my little incident at the arena."

He straightened his posture in an attempt to get more comfortable, still trying to keep up the more demure act as he did so. "I mean, that is the reason why you requested for me to come back, isn’t it? To talk about my fight with Danchou?"

“It is?" Hannibal asked. “I am certainly happy to discuss that if you’d prefer a less personal topic.”
He paused for effect before asking, “How do you feel about the deaths in the arena?”

***

Well, that was easier than I expected, even if he did question it. Hisoka thought with a small bit of curiosity. You're a hard man to read, aren't you? Were you gifted with a natural talent or did you learn it?

"I haven't given them much thought; the only person I’d intended to harm in any way was Danchou. The audience wasn't my opponent." He fixed his golden eyes on the floor, trying to appear less challenging. "Forgive me for saying so, but strangers die every day, I don't exactly get upset about that. Why should this be any different?"

***

Hannibal looked thoughtful. “Well,” he said. “Chrollo was there to fight you. It could be considered that you bare, however small, a proportion of the guilt for their deaths?”

He leant forward in his seat. “Would you have answered any differently if your friend had been in the audience?”

***

How do you know that I didn’t lose anyone? Hisoka wondered idly as he started to plan. Then again I said I hadn’t thought about the audience because they were strangers. I could still try to catch you off guard by claiming I did, though. He doubted it would work, but he had to try. For effect, he gave an anguished sigh.

"Nice of you to assume they weren't, Dr. Lecter." He kept his gaze facing the floor. "There was a large turnout for that fight."

***

“So, if, as you have suggested, your friend was present,” Hannibal said, allowing a mild note of concern to enter his voice. “The prospect that they could have been harmed did not concern you? Did you not check to confirm that they were not amongst the injured?”

***

Hisoka felt the urge to smile; it sounded like Hannibal was buying into his story. Still, caution would be needed.

"Well, I did want them to be there...but, well they are kept busy by their work. Business trips and the like." He raised his head to look at the man sitting across from him. "I did try to get them a ticket to the fight, for a front-row seat but they told me they might not be able to make it. As I couldn't see them, I had simply assumed they hadn't made it."

Shaking his head slightly, he continued, "I don't quite recall what happened immediately after the explosion...my memory hasn’t fully returned, but I know the seat I had reserved was empty." He paused to consider his next words. "They aren't sentimental enough to try and surprise me."

***

“I see,” Hannibal said, sitting back in his chair and allowing his gaze to turn cold. “I do not appreciate being lied to Hisoka. I consider it extremely rude.”
There had been no record of Hisoka purchasing any tickets, nor had there been any empty front row seats. Hannibal had made a point of learning everything he could about the events of that day.

“I am curious, however, why you felt the need to lie to me?”

***

Hisoka felt his blood run cold when he heard those words, “I consider it extremely rude.”

He narrowed his eyes as he looked into the cold stare with defiance, but only for a moment before he looked away, in an attempt at feigning submission.

"You said yourself that people behave differently when they are being observed...I'm a born performer." He looked back at the Doctor once more, again keeping his eyes lowered. "Some would say that lies and deception are my craft. Sometimes lies are easier to accept than the truth."

***

Hannibal softened his tone, inviting the self-professed performer in. “Are you afraid that I will not accept you, Hisoka?”

***

Despite himself, Hisoka relaxed at the change in Hannibal’s tone. Did he fear not being accepted? He remained silent as he decided how to answer; he knew he was walking a fine line when it came to deceiving his Therapist.

"I've learnt to be prepared for such things,” he said quietly, refusing to meet his Doctor's eye.

***

Hannibal saw the change in Hisoka’s demeanour and smiled. In the same tone, he said, “Each of us craves to be seen. The prospect is simultaneously alluring and terrifying. Please,” he added a note of earnest interest to his voice as he leaned forward, steepling his hands below his chin. “Tell me more.”

***

He could hear the intent in Hannibal’s voice; it was clearly an invitation to open up. There was only one problem with that: Hisoka didn't yet trust the therapist, and didn't want to. At least, not until there was no alternative.

Turning his head slightly, he gave Hannibal a sideways glance. Not bothering to hide the suspicion he felt. "Why? So you can put me into all your neat little boxes?” His distaste for the idea of being categorised was clear to see, but he didn't care.

***

“Of course not,” Hannibal sounded genuinely shocked at the idea. “I simply can’t accept what I do not know. All I wish for is to get to know you.”

***

Hisoka tensed a little but otherwise didn't move. "What if I don't want you to get to know me, Doctor?” he asked quietly.
“Then I would very much like to know what I could do to change your mind,” Hannibal said earnestly, noting the man’s defensive posture.

A small amount of relief entered Hisoka’s voice as he replied, "Oh? So you're not going to hold the threat of telling the Association I'm being uncooperative over my head? How kind of you."

Tilting his head to once more look up through his long lashes, he continued, “What would I get in return for giving in to you, Doctor?”

“You would gain unconditional acceptance, insight and knowledge,” Hannibal said patiently. “I am here for you, Hisoka. Not the other way around. I wish to get to know the man you are, not the performance you put on for the world.” He bowed his head in acknowledgement. “Wonderful as it maybe.”

Curious, Hisoka couldn't help but turn to face his Doctor. He thought his performance was wonderful? That was unexpected. He found himself momentarily lost for words; his mouth fell open slightly as he gaped in his surprise.

"Won-wonderful?” he asked eventually, uncertain how to respond.

“Of course,” Hannibal said warmly. “I would hope that you did not disagree. You have a natural gift.”

Hisoka attempted to pull himself back together and swallowed as he tried to process what had been said. "So, it has possibly occurred to you that there is a reason I have this 'natural gift', Doctor?"

“It has,” Hannibal nodded. “Which is why I asked.” He kept his tone soft, non-threatening and differential. “As I said, I would very much like to get to know you.”

Hisoka regarded Hannibal with a hint of wonder in his eyes. "I can give you a list as long as my arm, of people who’d you tell you that you shouldn't."

He tilted his head slightly, ‘accidentally’ allowing a hint of Illumi’s bite mark to show. “Maybe longer, but I wouldn’t want to bore you,” he added as he watched his Doctor to see his reaction.

Hannibal saw the mark on Hisoka’s neck and for a brief moment felt an unexpected surge of jealousy rise within him; someone else had marked that perfect skin before he could. He clamped down on the emotion and refused to let it show.
“I am sure many would tell you the same about me. I have my fair share of kills under my belt. And yet,” he opened his arms wide, “Here we are. There is beauty to be found in the darkest of places, should we be but willing to look.”

***

"Was your first kill also an accident?" Hisoka asked quickly. He remembered their last conversation, and the subtle hint that the man in front of him was also a killer; the way that the Doctor had tried to worm under his skin by inferring that he was a kindred spirit.

***

“No,” Hannibal said calmly. “It was entirely deliberate. I killed the men who had,” he paused for a moment and let the memory return, deliberately placing himself back into that cold cabin. “Violated my little sister,” he finished, returning to the present.

He met Hisoka’s eyes as he said, “I felt both terrified and righteous when I did it.” He waited calmly as he watched Hisoka process the information.

***

The calmly spoken words washed over Hisoka like ice-cold water, the way they were said made it sound entirely plausible; he wasn't lying. Everything in Dr. Lecter’s body language pointed to it being the truth. Although Hisoka would still take the chance that it was a ploy, a clever one, but still a ploy to get him to open up, he had said men though. Just how many, Hisoka wanted to ask. Deciding that it would be rude to press the topic, he chose to return the gesture by letting something small slip.

"I’m an only child; I can't imagine what that must have been like." He closed his eyes, thinking back to his own childhood. The other children had never liked him; they had always been afraid of him. "Were you and her very close? Growing up the only person who ever wanted me around was my mother; she taught me my first magic tricks..." he felt that he should say more to redress the balance, but he couldn't quite make himself. Instinct threatened to take over, and he chewed on his lip for a moment. "The other kids where I grew up, they feared me."

He managed to force the words out at last and waited in nervous anticipation for the reaction he knew would come; the one that always did. The question he couldn't answer: Why?

Not wanting to see it, he averted his gaze as he opened his eyes. Looking out of the window, wishing he was anywhere but here, in this office with this man.

***

Seeing Hisoka slowly open up was oddly captivating. Social isolation, misunderstandings and lack of any proper affection were common enough in his line of work; no, they weren’t that interesting to Hannibal, but there was something there, something that explained Hisoka’s fragile ego and desire to please.

“This was extremely close with Mischa, she was my life,” he said simply. “Your mother sounds like a fascinating woman. I’d love to see what tricks she taught you if you’d be willing to show me?”

***

He tensed at the first sound of the Doctor’s voice, but the dreaded question hadn’t come, and he
surprised himself when he began to relax. Hannibal wanted to see the tricks his mother had taught him? He wasn't sure how to explain that what she'd taught him hadn't been what he would think of as a trick, not at first. Originally he had just watched her practice; it was one of his earliest memories.

"You've seen some of them already; she worked as a card dealer at a casino." He sighed. "Why do you think I can shuffle the way I do?"

***

"I would not wish to assume," Hannibal said with a respectful smile.

He picked up the small rabbit and turned it, admiring Hisoka’s creation. “I can imagine card tricks go down well in such an establishment. Does she still work there?” he asked gently.

He didn’t expect to hear a positive reply to his question, but gaining Hisoka’s trust was vital to his plan to get to know the man better.

***

"I wouldn't know, I've not been back there in a very long time," Hisoka said, continuing to look out of the office window with longing. "I don’t think I’ve ever felt a need to return. There is nothing for me back there; it's the past."

***

“It is true that we can not change our past,” Hannibal conceded. “But without a solid foundation, we build our subsequent houses on quicksand. If we reject the family that we are born with, then it is human nature to seek to create one of our own. Is there anyone in your present that you would consider family, Hisoka?

***

Hisoka chuckled, but there was no humour in it. "I wouldn't know how to answer that. That being said, I am curious how somebody who was..." he floundered for the right words. "Shall we say, spurned by their family and their peers for something they couldn't change? How would you say that would affect a young child?"

***

“I would say that they would become extremely lonely. That isolation would eventually turn to anger as they tried to comprehend what was happening and found no reason for it, and realised that there was nothing they could do to influence the outcome. I would imagine it would be exceedingly frustrating as well as incredibly hurtful. Eventually, they would, probably, grow to reject those that rejected them.”

Hannibal paused to allow Hisoka to think. “How about you? How would you say that young child in your example would be affected?”

***

Hisoka had expected the question to be turned back on him, but it had been interesting to hear the answer regardless.

"I would imagine they would internalise, and think they were at fault. Depending on the way they
were rejected, they might even begin to believe the things being said to them." He moved in his seat, shifting when the conversation began to turn in an unexpectedly uncomfortable direction even if he had caused it.

***

“And what,” Hannibal asked. “would you imagine was said to them?”

***

Hisoka let his mind wander a little, as he tried to get comfortable. Could he really do this? Glancing over at his Therapist, he saw only curiosity coming from him, but still; he felt a lump in his throat. It felt like he was struggling to breathe. No...I can't...

Stamping down on his anxiety, he pushed the memories away with a low growl from deep inside his throat. I am not that person anymore he reminded himself firmly, shaking his head along with the residual feelings he was trying to disentangle himself from. When he came back to the present, he looked at the small paper rabbit in the Doctor's hands. It seemed so tiny and fragile. Of all the ornaments he had made, he had only made a singular rabbit, yet the man had picked that one out of the many.

"Why the rabbit?" he was desperate to know and hoped it wouldn't show in his voice.

***

Hannibal looked down at his hand. “It had a fragile strength about it that drew me in,” Hannibal said honestly, allowing the diversion for now. “It was surrounded by creatures far larger than it, and yet, it stood defiant; beautiful and unafraid.”

He smiled, keeping his eyes focused upon the creation in his hand. “It really is a most magnificent beast.”

***

"I see," Hisoka replied quietly. He didn't really understand the attraction to such a fragile piece of art. After his little misadventure with the ball game, he had felt that he needed to rehabilitate his fingers. Remembering how calm and composed his lover would be when practising origami had made him curious enough to try himself. He smiled at how Illumi had reacted to his request for the speciality paper; he hadn't known he'd taken up his hobby.

"I can make them bigger, but then I'd need larger paper," he added as an afterthought.

***

Hannibal chuckled. Hisoka had entirely missed the metaphor, but that told him just as much about the man as if he'd understood.

“It is perfect just as it is. I wouldn’t wish it to change.” He placed the paper creation back on the table facing Hisoka.

“Tell me about your friend, the one who taught you how to create such masterpieces. How do they feel about what happened at Heavens Arena?”

***
"They wouldn't be too surprised I was involved; they know of my intentions to fight Danchou... they might be surprised to find out I got arrested for it, though." He tilted his head and tried to take a more relaxed posture, wincing slightly as the high collar of his top caught against his healing skin. "I mean it's not like I don't already have a reputation for getting into and out of trouble."

He was itching to get his cards out; he didn't like not having something to keep his hands occupied. Instead, he opted for fiddling with the material of his trousers.

***

“So they aren’t aware that you’re here?” Hannibal asked, watching the man fiddle. Talking about his friend made Hisoka nervous, and that intrigued him.

***

“I wouldn't think that she does, no,” he mumbled. Remembering his pet's advice about letting Hannibal know that he had a lover, he wondered if he could merge the two ideas into him being a 'special friend'. That could work, couldn't it? He smoothed out the crease he had made in his trouser leg, before continuing to mess with the white fabric.

***

“I am surprised,” Hannibal said, noting the sudden change in pronoun. “Someone who cares for you enough to teach you origami after your hands are damaged doesn’t strike me as the kind of person to not at least try to contact you, especially after such a public event. You’re front-page news, after all.”

He allowed a hint of steel back into his tone. “Evasion is part of the game Hisoka, but please refrain from outright lies.”

***

Okay, he seems to be taking an interest, I suppose now is as good a time as any to let slip that I have a lover, he thought to himself. Deliberately ignoring the hardened tone, Hisoka defiantly looked back at his Therapist.

"Her family doesn't know about us,” he snapped back, narrowing his eyes for effect, "It's not like she can suddenly jump on an airship and come looking for me, they would start asking awkward questions."

***

Hannibal noted the petulant tone and inwardly smiled. “So, it wasn’t her that gave you that mark?” he asked, nodding towards the wound that marred Hisoka’s otherwise perfect neck.

***

Hisoka was starting to enjoy the performance now that the Doctor seemed to be taking more of an interest in his recent activities. He put on an air of nervousness as if he'd been caught cheating.

"No...I picked him up at the hotel bar..." he let his words trail off.

***

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. “And your lover, she is OK with you allowing strange men to mark
"I doubt I'll be able to see her anytime soon, it'll heal," Hisoka said, defiantly, but still made sure to pull at his collar to hide the bruise. Dr. Lecter was on the hook now; he just had to reel him in. "I'll just use makeup if not."

***

“I see,” Hannibal said calmly. “So when you propositioned me, was it the thrill of pain that you sought, or the chance to take back control over the situation?”

***

Flashing his most coquettish smile, Hisoka looked at Hannibal and lowered his gaze sheepishly before mumbling his reply. "Sometimes a guy has needs that a woman can't fulfil..."

***

“And you believed that I could do such a thing for you?” Hannibal noted the overly dramatic response and smirked. “I’m flattered you would choose me for such an act.”

***

Trying to maintain his more submissive posture, Hisoka carefully considered the best way to proceed. He wasn't sure that his Doctor wasn’t seeing through his charade, but he was wary of pushing it too far. "Well, it's not every day that I meet somebody who looks like they wouldn't disappoint me. You already know that I'm highly masochistic."

***

“And you believe me to be,” Hannibal cocked his head, “either a sadist or someone who enjoys control?”

Hannibal was surprised at how curious he was to find out the answer. Hisoka was clearly enjoying his little show, and Hannibal couldn’t honestly say that he was disliking watching the man at work; he was a fine actor.

***

Hisoka pouted in response and tried to look and sound disappointed at the prospect of having misjudged Hannibal. "My apologies if I misread the signs, but I get the impression from your aura.” He hesitated. “You're very charismatic, and I could believe that you draw people to you. There's something about your presence that’s rather commanding..." You have a spacious waiting room, yet I've never seen another patient leave your office, or anyone waiting when I leave. You also made that remark about rudeness when I suggested my guard would wish to be present. This is your territory as well as an office, isn’t it?

Pausing in his explanation, he leant forward a little. "Yet you seem to prefer to keep others isolated, which in my experience is useful for when you want to make someone scream. Although you don’t strike me as one to allow your personal life to bleed into your work, hmmm, if I had to guess, I’d say your nen was that of a specialist."
Hannibal allowed a very slight air of authority to enter into his Aura. “Thank you; your analysis was very thorough. I am flattered,” Hannibal said sincerely. “So, if it is power and pain you seek from men, then what is it that you find in your female companion?”

***

Feeling the change in the man's Aura Hisoka couldn't stop the shiver that ran through his body. He closed his eyes in response and tried to keep a lid on his excitement. Hannibal's confirmation of his reading of his Aura bolstered his confidence. Perhaps he hadn't been misreading the situation during their last meeting after all?

"Well, that would be the opposite really..." he paused thinking about how he had retaken dominion over his favourite toy; the memory of carving his initials into the man's skin was especially vivid. "I'm sure an experienced man like yourself has come across those who are both sadist and masochist? Dominant with some and yet submissive to the right people?"

***

“I have. Indeed, one might even say I have intimate knowledge of such individuals,” Hannibal said, taking note of Hisoka’s slight shiver. “But is it not the job of a dominant to care for their submissive? How do you think she would feel, knowing that you were here with me now? Or that you were with a man you barely knew the other night?”

***

"Who says she has to know?" Hisoka countered. He knew that his lover wouldn't mind; it was his suggestion. However, he couldn't let the Doctor know that. "Besides if you're concerned for me, it wouldn't be the first time my...top, shall we say, left me to patch myself up. Rest assured I've gotten fairly adept at it."

***

Hannibal listened to Hisoka’s answer and let him think about his words for a few moments, analysing the underlying meaning behind them, before asking, “Is responsibility something you find hard to accept?” He sat straight-backed in his chair and made sure to keep his tone even - he didn’t want to spook the man too soon, not when things were just starting to get interesting.

***

His Therapist's words made Hisoka tense and sit upright. He stared in clear displeasure through narrowed eyes. "Why does a bit of fun have to be about responsibility?" Inwardly, he snarled at himself; he’d tightened his grip on the arms of his chair without realising it.

"It was never about responsibility when they left me to fix myself up! The one who indoctrinated me into submission didn't care, so why should you?" His voice had become a harsh whisper. He was finding it hard to keep himself in check; the warnings he'd been given that morning by Illumi were lost to his sudden frustration.

***

“Do you expect that I would be so careless with you? Whoever it was that introduced you to such ideas was an extremely incompetent teacher,” Hannibal said, allowing his displeasure to show. He was impressed that Hisoka had given him such intimate details at such an early stage in their sessions. It boded well for the future, but he had to remain consistent.
If the man was looking for him to dominate him, then he could use that to his advantage. He just had to figure out how much of his submission was an act.

Hisoka’s childhood appeared to have been one of abuse and neglect. He had grown into a man that craved control as a result. He would not submit to just anyone, despite what he said. He would play the part, manipulate from the ‘weaker’ position.

The idea of seeing Hisoka _truly_ submit to him was a captivating one though, and he felt a thrill run up his spine at the prospect.

He would have Hisoka Morow, and it would be delicious.

***

Unperturbed by the counter-question, Hisoka merely arched an eyebrow and continued to stare across the room. Turning his head with a 'harrumph', he crossed his arms over his chest protectively.

"I would hardly call him a teacher," he sneered, "He didn't care enough to have such a title bestowed upon him."

He could feel his self-control slipping; he wanted to hurt someone, anyone, even if it was himself. Last time he had been in this room he'd been told plainly that he wasn't allowed to inflict harm upon himself, and he ground his teeth irritatedly. He tried to push the memories away before they managed to overwhelm.

"Your little sister was lucky to have you for her brother," he said eventually, tone clipped, as he ground out the words. He needed to get his anger in check. Was the plan even salvageable at this point? Hisoka didn't know, but he doubted it. His Lulu was going to be disappointed, and that made his displeasure all the stronger.

***

Hannibal noted the change come over Hisoka and internally ticked another box. He would have to find out who the man was that had caused such pain to his new toy. Providing Hisoka with a resolution to such an integral part of his personality should prove more than enough to gain his trust after the initial shock had worn off.

He relaxed his pose but did not allow the slight air of authority to fade.

“I believe that you have my situation backwards Hisoka. I was lucky to have had Mischa in my life. The few short years we had together meant everything to me.”

Hisoka had given him something, and it was time for Hannibal to show a little trust too. “If I am honest, she deserved a better brother.”

***

The use of past tense caught Hisoka by surprise, and as he returned his attention to Dr. Lecter, the shock was clear on his face.

"Deserved?" he asked. "You make it sound like she died, Doctor."

***
Hannibal bowed his head. “She did, Hisoka.” He allowed the pain of his past to come through in his voice. “I was responsible for her. Her death is the greatest regret of my life.”

With a sigh, Hannibal glanced at the rabbit. Seeing an opportunity, he picked it up and held it in his hand. “My Mischa,” he said with a soft whisper.

***

Unsure about what to do, Hisoka sat and watched with morbid curiosity. As he had told Hannibal earlier; he had been an only child.

"My apologies if I can't quite understand," he said quietly.

***

Hannibal’s lip curled in a sad smile. “You have nothing to apologise for, Hisoka. But I do hope that you can now grasp why I take my responsibilities so seriously.” He looked up, staring directly into Hisoka’s eyes. “I have been tasked with your care, and I will do whatever is required to fulfil my duties.”

***

"With all due respect..." Hisoka started to say, without really knowing where he was going to go with his objection. Whatever is required? You shouldn’t make offers you can’t keep. Unless you’re suggesting you’d hurt me to stop me self-harming in your office? I could work with that, but first, you need to understand that I’m not a damsel in distress.

"With all due respect, Dr. Lecter, I do not need to be saved or avenged. I took my vengeance a long time ago. Then I left my home behind, ended up at a circus for a while..." he thought of his mentor, "That didn't quite work out." He chuckled, but it sounded hollow.

***

“Sometimes,” Hannibal said mildly, “The monsters we bury do not always lie quietly. I am here to help make sure they are not only dead but preferably wrapped up in a neat bow in the process.”

He didn’t try to catch Hisoka’s eye again. The man had a lot to process, and their session was due to come to a close shortly.

“Facing our fears is how we grow strong. From everything I have been told of your skills, you are both deadly and exquisite on the battlefield. I hope that, in time, you will allow me to assist in honing your mind to become as resilient as your body.”

***

"If you keep throwing those compliments around, I might actually start to think you do like me, " Hisoka smirked; he couldn't resist the flirtation. His playful mood was resurfacing.

"I'll be honest, Dr. Lecter, as you seem to value it, don't you?" he paused, but not long enough to allow Hannibal to reply. "The man who...used me, was not my first kill. Further, if I am to continue being honest I don't see what you can do with some pretty words. My condolences on your loss, for what it’s worth. I know it won't bring her back."

He ran a hand through his styled hair, careful not to ruin his updo as he did so. "I stand by my earlier words; the past can not be changed, so I have chosen to live in the present. Battle is my first
love; there’s no greater thrill than the feeling when I force those who doubt me to buckle to their knees.” His smile widened. "Seeing their disbelieving faces as their plans fail around them. Do you still think you can fix me, Doctor?” Hisoka asked, raising his arms into a shrug. "I would say it's a bit late for that, but it's sweet that the chairman still thinks it's possible."

***

Hannibal grinned widely at the dramatic display. His plan to bring Hisoka back from the brink of internal collapse had worked well. Now, he just needed to plant a few seeds and allow them to grow, ready for their next session.

“I do not believe you are broken, Hisoka, far from it. I think you are an incredibly strong man; however, you do have weaknesses, and I can help you with those,” he said earnestly.

He waited until the man was looking at him again before he added, “And I do, very much, like you Hisoka. I do not compliment those who do not deserve it.”

***

Hisoka couldn't help it; he could feel the amusement building as he heard his therapist try to tell him that he wasn't broken. If he wasn't broken, then what was he? Why would he need therapy if he was 'normal'?

The questions buzzed around his mind, along with the Doctor’s words as his mouth twisted into a smile. He put a hand over his mouth to try to keep himself contained, but it was of no use.

"Of course I am!" he choked out the words between bouts of laughter. "Strength doesn't mean I haven't been damaged..." he tried desperately to reign himself in. "It just means that I haven't found the right pair of hands to extinguish my flame."

Opening his fingers to peer through them, he observed his Therapist, wondering how he'd react. Had he finally crossed that infamous line? Would Dr. Lecter strike him down for being rude?

"You said my first Master was an incompetent teacher, you also say you do like me, so why not teach me yourself?” The giggle fit having finally passed, he bent forward and held one hand out towards Hannibal. "You could help me with that much-needed catharsis..." he licked his lips, smiling bewitchingly. "Help me cleanse my soul,” he purred.

***

Hannibal chuckled quietly along with Hisoka. There were so many points he could pick up on in what he’d just said; the obvious desire for self-destruction, the crooked self-image and the fear that the words and deeds of his past were going to catch him if he ever stopped running, but instead he chose to focus on what Hisoka obviously wanted. A positive note to end their session on.

As the man held out his hand towards him, he subtly used his Gyo to make sure he was not using any of his abilities; he wasn’t.

“I can teach you many things, Hisoka,” he said, allowing a slight note of seduction to slip into his words. He reached forward and clasped the offered hand. “My question to you is whether you’ll accept my lessons. I have been known to implement, unique and highly individualised methods when I feel they are needed.”

***
Hannibal’s tone caused Hisoka to shiver in anticipation, and he averted his gaze to look at the hand that had taken his. Had he managed to pull off his and Lulu’s idea to seduce? This certainly felt like the important first step; now he just had to conquer that niggling anxiety that crept in whenever he was around the Doctor. Bringing his free hand to lay on top of their joined ones with a quick, graceful movement, Hisoka smirked: hidden on his palm was a piece of origami paper containing a parting message for his Therapist.

"Does that mean you’ll punish me if I misbehave?" he asked, letting a hint of his earlier merriment leak into his words. "I assure you, I am a very fast learner. So I am confident that you’ll be pleasantly surprised by what I can do." As he spoke, he slowly and skillfully removed his Nen, intending to unveil his prank when he withdrew his hand. "How much more time do we have today, may I ask?"

***

Hannibal gave Hisoka a devilish grin. “I find that correction, when properly applied and timed, is a highly effective educational tool.”

Hisoka wasn’t the first patient Hannibal had encountered who had tried to seduce him, nor would he be the last, he was sure. It was an old game of cat and mouse that Hannibal had never lost. He was interested to see how this would play out.

“And, I believe we can end our session here for today.” He shook Hisoka’s hand firmly and let go and looked down, wondering why the man had covered his hand in the way he had. Weighing his options, he decided that whatever his reason was, it was likely not malicious.

***

"Hmmm? I see..." Hisoka pouted. "What a pity, well I guess you'll have time to plan a little lesson for me this way." He said in an attempt to keep the Doctor's attention while he used more of his Nen to stick the paper to the back of Hannibal's hand. Once he was happy that it had been successful, and that his Therapist hadn’t noticed, he slowly removed his hand, allowing his touch to linger a moment longer than needed.

"I guess you need to see me out now?" he asked and tilted his head slightly. "Do I still call you Dr. Lecter when I see you next?" He put on his best coy smile. "Or do I call you something else entirely from now on?"

***

Ahh yes, this was going to be a fun game. Hannibal offered Hisoka a knowing smile and allowed enough power into his Aura to cause the average man to buckle to his knees.

“I find negotiation is best done when minds and bodies are well-rested and fresh. I, like you, do not enjoy my fruit to be spoiled before I taste it.”

***

Hisoka felt the change in Hannibal’s Aura and groaned; if the man kept this up, he’d end up getting far too excited. He had to hold back; he reminded himself. He was meant to be playing the submissive. When he got back to the hotel, to his Lulu, then he could let his dominant side back out to play.

"If you keep that up you’re going to get me excited, Dr. Lecter," he purred in warning. "Don’t worry, I’ll keep myself in check; I can be a good boy when I need to be. When should I come back
to see you so we can continue this little negotiation?"

***

Hannibal gave Hisoka a stern look as he walked towards the door, seeing if the man would comply with the unspoken expectation to follow. "You will be receiving a letter with full details of the times and dates of our upcoming sessions," he said, and reached for the handle of the door, pausing to add, "You will find my views on morality to be rather fluid, Hisoka, however, my views about obedience are not. Please bear that in mind for our next session."

***

As soon as he saw the expectant look, Hisoka realised it was time for him to leave. With his usual dexterity, he rose from his chair and made his way over to the door. He listened intently as the Doctor explained to him what would happen. That was fine by him; he just hoped that his appointment schedule would arrive before Illumi would have to leave.

"Of course, Dr. Lecter" he responded laying on a more reverent tone to his voice, deciding there was no time like the present to get used to how he would need to act within this room.

***

Hannibal nodded, noticing the way Hisoka appeared to have, yet again, modified his behaviour to fit what he believed was required of him. He turned as he opened the door. "You do learn fast when you want to, don’t you?" he noted and stepped to the side to allow his client to move past him.

***

Hearing the praise, Hisoka plastered a shy smile onto his face and walked past the Doctor to leave. Once he was past the threshold, he turned to face Dr. Lecter, remembering his lover's words about showing appropriate respect.

"I hope that my ability to learn fast will be pleasing to you, Dr. Lecter," he said quietly and mimicked the way he had seen his lover bow to him the other day. He hoped it would have the desired effect. "Until next time, I hope the rest of your day is a pleasant one."

***

Hearing his own words and mannerisms, subtly adapted by a performer like Hisoka was oddly flattering. "Your skills, as always, remain impressive, Hisoka,” Hannibal said and offered him a bow in return.

As he lowered his eyes, he noticed the piece of paper that had been stuck to the back of his hand. The words, ‘Made you look again’, were clearly visible. Inwardly, he smiled; the message was received loud and clear. Hisoka wasn’t going to fully submit without a fight. He would have to prove that he was up to the task.

"I believe this belongs to you,” he said, eyes twinkling with a devilish charm.

***

"You flatter me, Dr. Lecter" Hisoka replied, keeping up his act, he reached out to take the card back. "Please, forgive my mischief."
He made the paper vanish and gave a graceful bow as if he had just finished a magic show. "Should I take my leave?" he asked, looking up into Hannibal’s amused gaze.

***

Watching the paper disappear and listening to Hisoka’s explanation for his little trick, Hannibal carefully didn’t react as the man tried to make his escape without being impolite.

“A moment ago you wished me to prolong our session together,” he said and allowed his eyes to flash dangerously for a second. “If you aren’t careful I might suspect your performance is just that.”

He let his Nen settle and relaxed his stance. “But yes, you may leave, Mr. Morow,” he said evenly, this time offering the man a sincere, but slight bow of his head.

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"My apologies," Hisoka replied, sensing the subtle change in the Doctor's mood. "I didn't want to intrude on your time with your next patient." Careful, this is going to be like walking a tightrope. He values politeness, use what you know about him. He's still just a man.

Looking away, he added, "Please be patient with me; I know I have much to learn from you. I hope you have a pleasant evening, Doctor."

***

“You too, mon cher*,” Hannibal said softly, watching Hisoka turn like a ballerina and make his exit with what had become his characteristic nonchalance.

***

That went rather well; it looks like I have his interest, after all. Illu-chan will be pleased, Hisoka mused as he made his way out of the building to meet up with his escort.

"I'm ready to head to head back to the hotel now," he told Kyoya with a smile as he approached his guard. "Although it is a lovely day, perhaps we could take our time on the walk back?"

***

“Fine by me, I have to get my friend a pick-her-up present,” Kyoya said, smiling at Hisoka. “I’ll be glad for the help. I mean, I’m happy if I have a new lock to pick, but she’s...” he trailed off, thinking about Jade’s forlorn face the last time he’d seen her. “I don’t think locks are very good for curing the break-up blues.”

***

"I wouldn't recommend a lock, but I'm sure we can find something on the way. We did pass by plenty of shops and a shopping mall coming here," Hisoka replied thoughtfully. "Tell me about your friend. What does she do for fun? Is there anything, in particular, she’s had her eye on? I'm good at finding things; I am a Hunter," he added playfully as they set off towards the city centre, his head still full of what had just happened with Dr. Lecter and what he needed to do to plan for his next session.
Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:

Hannibal

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Hisoka

*mon cher = my dear
The Empress

Chapter Summary

Hisoka returns after his second session with Dr. Lecter to find a surprised, but happy Illu-chan waiting for him.

The scabs had almost fully healed on his chest, and Illumi stared at himself in the mirror, running his finger along the lines above his heart: H.M.

His Master had known precisely what to do to help him find his feet when he was afraid that he’d gone too far. He’d pinned him down, sliced his initials into his chest and given him no room to ever think that he didn’t belong to his Master; he’d been playing a role and nothing more. He was still Hisoka-san’s toy. The feeling had brought an odd warmth into him, and he’d basked in the pain as his Master sliced him again and again. He hoped that, one day, if he cut him enough, he would have a permanent scar. His Master would always be with him, and no one would ever doubt his claim.

With his Master’s mark slowly healing on his chest, and some firm rules set into place, he’d been able to take his Master to places he hadn’t enjoyed going. Seeing him submit had been...interesting. He’d felt the same rush of power as he had before; the beast’s wide grin had formed across his face, and he’d known that all it would take was a few quick movements to end his life...to forever be the one to have claimed him. But the shutters had come down; the beast had been caged behind his Master’s words of the night before: “Remember that you are my prized possession, my favourite toy. You are still dancing to my tune; I am still your Master.” He was safe.

While they’d rehearsed, they’d agreed that Hisoka-san would call him “Elijah” and Illumi had been grateful for that. He could play the role without ever hearing Hisoka-san call him Master; he hadn’t liked that when they’d tried. Everything had felt wrong, and he’d refused to go any further. That had not been a fun night.

As his mind returned to the present, he looked into the background of the mirror. Hearing the door open, he raised an enquiring eyebrow as his Master walked into the room. He had an assortment of brightly coloured bags with him and a rather pleased grin on his face.

What on earth did you do during your therapy session? he wondered, but aloud, he asked, “Hisoka-san?” in the most neutral tone he could manage.

***

The shopping trip with Kyoya had been enjoyable, Hisoka found that he actually enjoyed the young guard's company. Walking around the shopping district had helped to clear away the mental fatigue from seeing Dr. Lecter again. I have to tread carefully with him, push too far and the plan will fail. But I think that Illumi will like the present I picked up for him. He gave a contented hum as he placed his bags down on the bed, lying down and cuddling with his Illu-chan seemed like a wonderful idea, but he had things to address first.

At the sound of his lover's voice, he turned to see Illumi standing by the bathroom door, the marks
he'd left on his chest were healing nicely. *Yes, you look good wearing my initials. It's a shame that they'll go soon, but that just means that I get to make them again.* Tilting his head, he smiled wider. "Lulu," he purred. "I took the chance for a little retail therapy. The young guard, Kyoya I think? Well, he needed some help finding a present for a friend, and I wanted a walk," he explained as he sat down on the bed, groaning in delight as he kicked off his shoes and wriggled his toes. "I got you a surprise," he added playfully.

***

"You did?" Illumi asked, eyeing the bags suspiciously. "What kind of surprise?" His Master was known to have a very...eccentric sense of humour.

*If it starts ticking; then you can just jump out of the window,* he reminded himself. *If you grab Hisoka-san’s arm, then he can bungee-gum us to safety, but we may need to find a new hotel. I really do need to get in touch with someone to see if I can track down an exorcist, this three-mile radius is getting annoying.*

***

"Something that made me think of you," Hisoka replied smoothly as he held up the bag containing his present. "Don't worry, it's not going to explode," he added with a chuckle when he saw Illumi’s face. "Although the idea of sending an explosive parcel to Dr. Lecter is amusing; I'd need to make it look like it came from Danchou though. I much prefer the seduction plan. He seems open to the idea of dominating me; I think it will work. But right now I want to focus on us, just for a little while."

***

"OK," Illumi said, cautiously accepting the bag Hisoka-san handed him. "But I would like to know what happened at some point. I take it our practice paid off? You managed to make the Doctor jealous?" He remembered biting into Hisoka-san’s neck and internally shuddered with delight.

***

Hisoka didn't move; he simply closed his eyes and hummed. *I want to say that I did, but Dr. Lecter is rather hard to read, I wonder if you’d find it a challenge too, Lulu? Still, he didn’t seem particularly impressed that I’m cheating on my girlfriend.*

"I may have told Dr. Lecter that you are a woman..." he started to say in a quiet voice.

***

Illumi cocked his head to the side. Well, that was unexpected. "Why?" he asked and despite his best efforts, couldn’t quite keep the interest out of his voice.

***

"I am not sure, it just sorta came out?" He opened his eyes to look at the man sitting beside him. "I was using the origami paper to calm my nerves in the waiting room, he got curious about where I learnt it, and I couldn't tell him who you were. He asked about you and if you were in contact with me...I sorta reacted without thinking and said 'she' instead of they."

Despite his apprehension, he managed a small smile, "Besides, I think you'd be a pretty woman, Lulu."
Illumi thought about what his Master had just said. “So you were attempting to remain gender-neutral in your discussions about me with the Doctor, and he forced you to disclose which I was?” That didn’t sound like something a therapist would do. “I believe I have missed an important detail somewhere.”

He looked down at his Master and added, “I believe I would make a believable woman, yes, Master. I have played that role a few times in my life if that is what you are anxious about?”

With a small groan, Hisoka allowed himself to fall backwards onto the bed, looking up at his lover he explained, ”I wouldn't say he forced the information from me...He liked my origami animals; he's even kept one." He paused to stretch languidly before continuing.

"He started asking about how and why I learnt it, and he said he found it hard to believe that the person who taught me...wasn't in contact with me." He shrugged, "I said that 'she' hadn't been in contact because 'her' family didn't know about me. Does that make more sense?"

“Whilst I am flattered that you discussed my skills as a teacher with the Doctor, I thought we had agreed to try to make him jealous of the fact that you had a male lover?” Illumi said, mildly confused by the deviation his Master had chosen to take from their plan.

"Yes, I remember...but, you see, he saw your hickey on my neck. Let's just say he thinks I'm cheating on you, with you." Hisoka chuckled quietly at his own words.

"I led him to think I'm in the habit of picking up random men from the bar to satisfy my masochistic urges - ones that my girlfriend can't help me with. I figured he would find it more believable that I would stray that way. Do you not agree?"

Illumi concentrated. There was a small voice at the back of his mind that was insisting that he could hurt Hisoka-san, in just the way he wanted, and it was proving to be far more distracting than usual. It wasn’t his beast- that voice he knew all too well - this was a softer, far more predatory feeling and he didn’t know where it had come from.

“I can satisfy him,” it purred. “I know exactly what he likes.”

Hisoka shuddered. He didn’t know what was happening, but it didn’t matter right now. Hisoka-san was the priority.

“I think you’re going to have to elaborate, Master,” he said evenly. “I understand that he needs to believe that you are promiscuous by nature, but I’m not sure that I understand why you chose to gender me as a female. Do you want me to be a woman?”

Hisoka opened his mouth to give his reasons but closed it when he realised that he didn't have one. *I didn't plan it; it just came out. I had to think on my feet, lying is rude after all, and I need to*
He stared at the ceiling for a moment as he pieced everything together in his mind. "It wasn't intentional, it was a slip of the tongue, and once he picked up on it...I had to keep going. You warned me about being rude to him; he views lying as rude. Besides, you wanted me to hide your identity. You don't have any sisters, so it should reduce the chance of him figuring out who you really are. Plus, I already call you Lulu," he explained. "As far as I'm aware the only woman in your family is your Mother, and there's no way she'd cheat on Silva with me," he paused and shuddered. "OK, never thinking about that again. Or talking about it, don't let me say that again. Ever."

***

Illumi worked hard not to picture the scene his Master had described and only just managed to suppress his own disgust as the man beside him shuddered.

"Agreed," he said thickly. "I will ensure you never have the opportunity to speak those words again, Master." He forced himself to focus on his Master’s main point:

"You asked me to protect your identity."

He had, and his idea did have a solid logical foundation behind it, but, like his Master had said, it wasn’t intentional...did he really want him to be a woman? He could do that...it had been a while since he’d worn a female body, but he could do that for him if he really wanted.

He’d never thought about it before, but seeing him with the women he’d brought back to the flat had made Illumi realise that Hisoka-san had needs that he hadn’t yet fulfilled. The thought was strangely upsetting, and it was that, more than anything else, that solidified his next move for him. He hadn’t said it in so many words, but there clearly was a part of his Master that did wish that he was a woman.

“I have several female identities,” he said, making sure to sound as confident as he could whilst his heart raced inside his chest. “Which would you like me to be, Master? If they aren’t acceptable, then I can tailor my look for what you would prefer.”

***

Hisoka perked up at the suggestion; he'd never thought to ask if Illumi could make himself look like a woman before. True he was somewhat taller than the person he had in mind.

"Can you make yourself look like Machi?" he asked hopefully.

***

“I could, Master, however...” Illumi trailed off as he thought of the best way to phrase what he had to say next. “Isn’t she rather recognisable?”

You do want me to be a woman, don’t you? Why did you never say? Although...that does explain why you like to buy me things and take care of my hair. I suppose I could buy myself some Yukatas? Kalluto always did like them when Mother bought them for him. Hisoka-san would take pleasure in dressing me up. Yes, I can do this.

The voice rose in the back of his mind again. “Give him what he needs, Illumi...it’s what you’ve always wanted, after all. You know you need to be perfect. Let’s do this for our Master.”

Our? he thought. What’s going on, who are you?
"You know, Illumi. I've always been here; you just never listened to me before."

*Then go away, this is important. Hisoka-san needs me. I have to listen!* He turned to his Master and tried to concentrate on what he was saying, blocking out the dark laughter at the back of his mind.

***

"I know that don't worry; I just want to live out a fantasy," he purred. "She kept turning me down but, well, I would like the chance to get her out of my head."

She would be too easily recognised, but I can’t think of anyone else I really like. Most people seem interesting at first, but end up being so dull. Does not boring count as a type? He wasn't sure. One thing that did feel important was to make them believably different from Illumi's natural appearance. "How much lighter can you go in terms of hair colour? I know that I do prefer unusual hair colours."

***

"I can become anyone you wish, and in turn, take on any hair colour or other physical attributes you may desire, Master," Illumi explained patiently. There was an anticipation creeping in around the edge of his mind, and he tried to work out if it was him or the strange new voice that was becoming excited.

He wondered if it would be possible to create a disguise that would be stable enough for the kind of intercourse his Master would likely desire. He would have to use his pins carefully and would almost certainly have to put the extra effort in to disguise them from view. He had to be believable as a female, even to his Master. If he wanted him to be a woman, then this had to be something that he would need to be able to keep up over the long-term.

***

Rolling onto his side, Hisoka listened tried to listen carefully to Illumi's explanation. His thoughts drifted back to his time at the circus. I was happy there, wasn’t I? It's so long ago now it's hard to remember clearly. Wanting to keep his Illu-chan close, he shifted so that he could lay his head on his lover's lap and sighed contentedly.

"How much detail would you need?" Hisoka asked eventually. "All joking about my crush on Machi aside, I can think of one person that I’d like to see again. She was at the circus; we were both learning Nen together." He paused as he closed his eyes, attempting to picture her in his mind, before continuing, "I remember that she had silvery blonde hair and striking emerald green eyes. She was slim and had an athletic build. She was tall for her age. Do you...could you maybe be somebody like that?"

***

Illumi began to stroke his Master’s hair as he talked, and noted the change in his tone of voice. He watched as, quite visibly, Hisoka-san’s inner eye turned towards his past. He had never heard him talk about that period of his life before, and had never felt the urge to ask; he cared for the man Hisoka-san was now, not who he had been before they’d ever met. Was this something that he’d talked about with Dr Lecter? Had he asked about the type of women he liked?

His throat tightened uneasily, but the voice at the back of his mind purred at the description he’d given.

"Yes," it said. "Yes, let’s be her. We can make her beautiful for our Master. You want to be
beautiful in your new skin, don’t you, Illumi? You know that you want to be the best for Hisoka-san. When he wears you on his arm, you have to make him look good. Look at his face; he looks so happy. Let’s give him everything that he has ever wanted; let’s be perfect.”

“I can, Master,” Illumi said softly, fighting against the urge to reply to the voice instead. “You would need to show me images to work from, but your description would be adequate to form an initial impression.”

***

Hisoka's heart sank a little. I don’t have anything from back then. Just my memories, I left everything else behind. He sighed softly before he said, "I don't have anything like that from my past. Would a drawing be enough? We'd have to age her up; I was a teenager when I saw her last.” I think I can remember her clearly enough to create a drawing, I have plenty of origami paper left.

***

“That would be acceptable. You would have to direct me as to her skin tone and how she carried herself. If you would find that hard to do, then we can go out to a cafe, and you can point out women that remind you of her,” Illumi said, thinking out loud to drown out the voice; it was becoming distracting.

He would have to probe for details, and he wasn’t keen to find out how his Master would react to that after his session with the Doctor. He didn’t know what they’d talked about and he wasn’t sure if he should pry. These sessions were supposed to be private, but he didn’t believe that Dr. Lecter was treating his Master for any legitimate reason. He was also sure that without his help, his Master would leave Dr. Lecter’s ‘care’ a changed man, and that was not an outcome that he found acceptable.

***

Reluctantly, Hisoka sat up, mourning the loss of his lover's touch as he found his remaining sheets of paper and activated his Nen. Focusing on his most vivid memories of the circus girl, he waved his hand over the surface and smiled down at the image that appeared. Abaki, do you even remember me? He shook the thoughts away and held out the paper for Illumi to inspect.

Dr. Lecter's words came back to him, and he stiffened for a brief moment. "You're front-page news." He didn't want to draw more attention to himself, not while he was stuck in therapy at least. "I hope the sketch will be sufficient; it's how I remember her. If you need more maybe we could sit in the bar and watch people without pointing?" he suggested. "In my experience, the general public doesn't appreciate being randomly pointed at. It could be seen as rude.”

***

Hisoka-san’s choice of words caught Illumi’s attention, even as he stared down at the perfectly rendered image of the 12-year-old girl in his hand. He wasn’t unaware of the social implications of pointing at random strangers, but he had assumed that Hisoka-san would manage to do so in a subtle way. He’d never taken into consideration what people had thought about them before. What kind of effect had Dr. Lecter had on him?

“Master, I feel I must ask, what exactly have you and Dr. Lecter been discussing?” Illumi said as evenly as he could.

The girl's face was looking back at him, and the voice at the back of his mind was growing warmer
and more insistent by the moment. It wanted this to happen.

***

Do you need to know for our training? I know you want to help, but there's so much I haven't told anyone before. Should I tell you now? Can I tell you? Hisoka was taken aback by the question; had he done something to make his Illu-chan worry?

"He keeps asking about my childhood, but this time he was more focused on when I began killing. Dr. Lecter wanted to know about my first kill in particular," he said quietly and ran his fingers through his hair. "You know I don't talk about that stuff. I've tried to tell him it's not important, tried to deflect, but all it got me was a telling off for being rude. Although today I did manage to learn something about him."

***

Illumi raised an eyebrow at that, “You did?” He’d expected that the Doctor would want to explore his Master’s past, but he hadn’t expected that his Master would manage to get details from the Doctor about himself. Every little detail that they could piece together would help them engineer his downfall and his Master’s eventual release. Everything was a weapon if used correctly, especially knowledge. “What did he tell you? Do you think you’ll be able to get him to tell you anything else? This is fantastic news, Hisoka-san. Tell me everything.”

He focussed on his Master’s face, trying to ignore the insistent voice reminding him that he still had to create his new skin.

Hisoka-san isn’t pushing it, so I don’t see why you should! he snapped, and smirked when the voice fell silent.

***

"Apparently he blames himself for the death of his sister," Hisoka replied calmly shrugging before picking up another sheet of paper. Pausing, he started to fold the paper into a small origami rabbit with a thoughtful hum. “I suppose you can relate to that more than I ever could, I’m an only child,” he added.

***

“That would depend if the Doctor cared for his sister,” Illumi said, staring down at the picture in his hand again. “I have contemplated the deaths of all of my family members, but only one would cause me disquiet. Do we know how she was killed?” he asked, trying to get as much out of his Master as he could before the man inevitably told him to be silent and to start on the task he’d been set.

***

Staring at his latest creation, Hisoka thought back to the expression on his Therapist's face when he’d held up the rabbit he’d left behind at the office. You hide your emotions well, but I could have sworn there was something when you mentioned her name.

"I think he did care for her; I mean enough to avenge her death. He didn't go into details, but he did tell me her name was Mischa. Do you think I could use that Illu-chan?" he asked.

***
Illumi’s expression darkened. “I will use every resource at my disposal. Do we know the age at which she died and anything about the one who killed her?”

***

"I'm afraid he didn't go into any real details, but it was more than one person that did it; he said people," he put the small rabbit on Illumi’s shoulder with a smile. "He did say my other origami rabbit reminded him of her, and that he wanted to keep it."

***

“Sentimentality?” Illumi asked, lifting the rabbit and inspecting its construction. “Or do you think it was flattery?” He couldn’t quite believe that this wasn’t an act for Hisoka’s benefit.

“Never mind that!” the voice hissed. “Make me my body! Now!”

He twitched slightly, but this time, chose not to respond. He had to work out where the voice was coming from. If he ignored it for long enough, he might get it to reveal why it had suddenly appeared.

***

"When you put it that way, I'm not sure. I'd made a small menagerie while I was waiting and he seemed impressed by my skills. I did mention that he asked who taught me, didn't I?" Hisoka replied easily as he contemplated making something else. Dr. Lecter said he appreciated beauty; maybe he just likes art? "Out of curiosity, I asked him which one he liked the best, and he chose the rabbit. I'd only made the one at the time, I was intrigued, and I asked him about the choice. That's how Mischa came up in the conversation, but he does seem to enjoy complimenting me. Although that could just be his way of provoking a reaction."

***

“He was likely gauging your reactions,” Illumi said, keeping the words he had to say aloud to a minimum. Doing his best to think ahead to the logical next step of the conversation, he asked, “How did he react to your advances?”

***

"Dr. Lecter is cautious, as I expected he would be. Although once we got past the question about me trying to get his license revoked, he seemed to relax. I'm confident I have his attention," Hisoka replied with a smirk. "He let his bloodlust show for a brief moment, and it was simply wonderful Illu-chan. I want to fight him, his Aura was so strong,” he sighed happily. “I got a little excited, but he has agreed to discuss it more during my next session."

***

“And it is..?” Illumi asked. He thought he knew, but his experience of Hisoka-san had taught him always to make sure to seek explicit clarification. “He hasn’t accepted your offer of sex so soon, has he?”

***

"I don't think we’re quite at sex just yet," Hisoka advised. "He managed to get some small things out of me during our session about my childhood. I took a chance, and I think it paid off; I alluded to having a dominant who wasn't particularly interested in aftercare. The idea seemed to bother Dr.
Lecter a great deal; he called him an incompetent teacher. Not really a title I would give the man myself, but I was able to use it to further our plan. It will be worth it in the end.

Feeling oddly hesitant, Hisoka reached over to pull Illumi to him, taking comfort in the warmth of his lover's body. "I asked him to be my teacher; he's proud, and flattery usually works on men like that. He agreed and said that he could teach me many things, then followed it up by giving me a warning not to disobey him. I just need a little more time, but I'm sure I'll get him to fuck me. The harder part will be proving his misconduct."

***

Illumi thought long and hard about what his Master had said. It sounded as if their plan was working, and it seemed as if Hisoka-san believed that it was, and that was what mattered, for now at least.

He didn’t like to do what he knew was going to have to happen next, but duty had always trumped emotion and now was not the time to start making exceptions to that rule.

"He's going to ask you more about your past," he said, ignoring the angry snarling at the back of his mind. "Are you prepared for that?"

***

Am I prepared? Not yet, but I will be. Hisoka sighed and rested his head on his lover's shoulder and gently squeezed him. "I know he will, but I've never told anyone the things he wants to know. I've cornered myself; he's going to make me tell him," he mumbled. "I don't see the value in talking about it, but he clearly disagrees. So I'm going to have to do it, I don't have a choice anymore. Not if I'm going to play submissive to him, the plan has to come first," he added firmly.

Pulling back so that he could look into his Illu-chan's eyes, he plastered on a wide smile. You won't deny me; you never say no to me. There's no way you'd start now, my darling Lulu.

"Illu-chan," he began quietly. "If I have to reveal my past, I want to at least get to choose who I share it with first. I want it to be you; we've shared so many firsts together already. You've been by my side for years now; it should be you. Will you listen?"

***

"Of course, Hisoka-san," Illumi said, taking his Master's hand in his own and rubbing at the pad of his thumb gently. "I will always listen." He hesitated for a moment, then added, "You know that nothing you say will change how I feel about you."

He looked down at the beads around his wrist and smiled softly. The voice in his mind purred. "I belong to you now. You are all I care about, so talk when you are ready, and not before."

***

"Let's get more comfortable," Hisoka replied, not caring to hide how relieved he felt. I knew you wouldn't deny me; you're mine. Pulling Illumi with him, he settled against the pillows and kissed his lover's cheek. Taking a deep breath, he let his mind wander back to the time he had spent so long trying to forget. It's going to be fine, Illu-chan won't care. He just told you that nothing would change how he feels about you. Just pick something to start with, you're not that scared boy anymore.

Hisoka hummed as he sorted through the memories he expected Dr. Lecter to ask about. I would
usually begin with the start, but I never did find out who started the rumours. Father? No, that doesn't feel right. The circus maybe, but that would be skipping over a lot. "I don't quite know where to start," he admitted as he stroked Illumi's hair. "I've never done this before, and there's so much to tell."

***

"You said Dr. Lecter asked about your first kill," Illumi suggested. "Please, Hisoka, start there. I would very much like to know about that," he said, pulling his Master closer to him and whispering in his ear, "You are always so magnificent, I would love to know where it all began."

***

*My first kill?* Hisoka had expected that to come up, but for some reason, Illumi leading with it had surprised him, I suppose it's the best place to start, it was the turning point. Will you be disappointed that it was an accident?

Nodding, Hisoka cast his mind back to his childhood; the memory of his first kill had always been unusually vivid. Ignoring the uneasy feeling in his stomach, he took a deep breath and began his story.

"I had a rather challenging childhood in a way. I wasn't being groomed to be an Assassin, but I didn't really have any friends growing up. The other kids were afraid of me, so I spent most of my free time alone. I was a different person back then, not as confident; I was bullied most days by my peers."

Closing his eyes, Hisoka felt himself falling further into his memories. "If I didn't want to stay at home, there was a small wood nearby; I liked to climb the trees. Eventually, Father agreed to help me make a treehouse; it was my favourite place to go." He smiled, remembering the view from his private hideaway. "I loved to be high up, even back then. It was my own place, just for me. I could be alone, and nobody would bother me because none of the other kids knew about it. At least for a while, but as they say, all good things must come to an end."

*Will this be easier when it's the second time?* Hisoka wondered as he took a moment to centre himself. Illumi was still holding him firmly, but he knew that there would be no comforts when he had to face Dr. Lecter again. "The day I took my first life, Mother had to go to work, and I didn't want to stay in the house. It wasn't," he paused. "I didn't feel it would be wise to stay, but I'll explain that later. I decided to wait for Mother to finish work by sitting in my treehouse, I could practise my card tricks there, and I thought I'd be alone. But, two of the older children had planned to ambush me when I left my house, and they followed me to my sanctuary. I don't know how long they waited before they began throwing stones and hurling insults to get my attention. I asked what they wanted, and I thought I'd be alone. But, two of the older children had planned to ambush me when I left my house, and they followed me to my sanctuary. I don't know how long they waited before they began throwing stones and hurling insults to get my attention. I asked what they wanted, and they claimed they just wanted to talk. I was only young..."

Hisoka stopped to compose himself, searching for Illumi's hand and giving it a squeeze. "I asked them to leave; I had nothing to talk to them about. The boys laughed like it was the funniest thing they'd ever heard," he mumbled, hoping his lover could still hear him. "Like I said, I was a lot younger than them; I didn't understand why they wouldn't leave. All I wanted was to be left alone."

He closed his eyes and whispered, "Why wouldn't they leave me alone? I asked them to, but they just laughed again, and then decided they'd come up and get me, if I wouldn't come to them. I had no other way out; he had me trapped. When he lunged for me, I acted on instinct, and I shoved him back as hard as I could. He stumbled...and he fell." He shuddered as he remembered the way the boy had screamed as he'd toppled out of the treehouse and the sudden silence that had followed. "It was an accident; that's all. I didn't even know he'd die; I'd fallen out of that tree myself, and well, I'm still here. That was the only time I killed without intending to," he added, falling silent and
opening his eyes.

***

“How did it feel when you pushed him?” Illumi asked curiously. He’d been six when he’d made his first kill. His father had taken him to a strange playground. There had been hardly anyone there; just a woman and her child. He’d been told what he had to do and then his father had left. Either he would complete his task, or he would not return home; that was the deal.

At sunset, he saw his father returning, and Illumi stepped out of the bushes he’d hidden in. There was blood in the sand and on his clothes.

“You missed a shoe,” the man had said sternly and nodded towards a tiny shape sticking out of the sand.

“I’m sorry Father,” Illumi said, hanging his head in shame.

“Did anyone see you?” He’d asked.

“No, Sir,” Illumi had replied.

“And the bodies?” His father had sounded so distant.

“In the bushes, Sir.” Illumi had worked hard to make sure that they wouldn’t be visible from the street.

“You served the family well, Illumi. Now, it’s time to return home.”

It had been the only praise he’d ever received from the man, and those words had solidified and become his life’s purpose.

Killing had thrilled him; it had become his passion and his life’s mission. Hearing Hisoka sound...apologetic, didn’t match up to what Illumi knew of death and the art of the kill, but his kills had always been deliberate. Maybe when the kill wasn’t intentional, it felt different?

***

"How did it feel?" Hisoka repeated. Right now, he felt numb. He'd finally lifted a burden off his shoulders that he’d never thought he could share with another.

He allowed himself to think back to the moment he had shoved the older boy away from him and out of the treehouse, and the tree it was perched in. It as the first time he could remember standing up for himself; he'd been afraid, but he'd also felt powerful, seeing the fear on his attacker's face.

"Powerful," he said simply.

***

Illumi looked down at his Master. He watched as the realisation formed in his eyes: powerful. It was an excellent way to describe the sensation.

“When I sank my blade into the ladies side, I remember how warm her blood felt as it ran over my fingers. I can recall the look of shock in her eyes and the terror as she realised that her child would be without her protection.” He smiled. “Powerful is an excellent way of describing the thrill.”

He rubbed his thumb over the back of his Master’s hand. “I killed her child next, who was your
second, Master?"

***

Hisoka continued to stare at the ceiling; he didn't respond to the comforting touch. He took a deep breath, in a lot of ways he dreaded talking about his second more than his first.

"That would be the man I was raised to call 'father'," came the emotionless reply.

***

“I see,” Illumi said, overriding Yokai-san’s desire to let his bloodlust show. “And what made you choose him as your next target?”

***

Why? Hisoka asked himself that question; he never did work out what has been the turning point that had made him snap. Why him? He asked himself again; he tightened his grip on his lover's hand.

"I wanted him to stop." The answer was vague, but it had been what had been going through his mind the day he'd done it; that he wanted everything just to stop. In his young mind, he couldn't see any other way to make it stop than to make the man, himself, come to a stop.

"I just wanted all the things he was doing to me to stop..." he screwed his eyes closed. He was determined not to allow himself to cry. Even if he had to relive it, he was Hisoka Morow. People feared him. "I didn't know how else to make it just stop."

***

Illumi felt his own bloodlust growing, and it was an entirely separate thing from Yokai-san’s desire to dominate and control.

He didn’t hold back when he asked, “And how did you do it.” His voice was slightly breathless, and he tightened his fingers around his Master’s hand, digging his nails into his flesh ever so slightly.

***

Hisoka gave a quiet gasp when he felt nails digging into his skin; it felt nice, he wanted more. Perhaps his lover was rewarding him for getting this far?

"I..." he started, but closed his mouth and bit his lip, he wasn't sure how to put it into words. He floundered a little as he tried to make sense of the vents in his head. "Father," he hissed the word, "blamed me for my mother leaving, he used to take it out on me. Said I had to take her place..."

The fluttering sensation in his stomach was coming back full force; he could feel his heart speeding up. He fought against it, to keep himself calm. It was just Illu-chan, he was here in Yorknew City, in a hotel with his lover, he tried to tell himself, repeating the affirmation inside his head until he felt the panic start to ease off.

"If I didn't let him do what he wanted he would...punish me..." he trailed off, he knew he was avoiding the crux of the matter, but he wanted to put it off as long as he could. "At first, I just tried to run away, but he caught me and locked me in the cellar...I got used to it eventually..." a tear made it's way down his left cheek. It felt like an odd mimicry of his usual makeup.
"Then he started complaining I was boring to him. That he wanted me to 'join in more'," he sneered, "I couldn't take it anymore, I just wanted it to stop! I hid a knife under the pillow..." he took a deep breath. "I knew what he wanted from me, I pretended to go along with it... reached under the pillow while he had me on top..." he chuckled darkly without humour, "I slit his throat...I sat there and watched as he drowned in his own blood, as his eyes went dark and I knew I'd finally won."

***

“Brilliant,” Illumi whispered in an awed tone. “I wish I could have been there to watch as he realised what a mistake it was to underestimate you.”

He had turned to fully face Hisoka-san now, and he didn’t hide the desire he felt rising within him.

“What third as...poetic?”

***

“My third?” Hisoka asked, looking up at Illumi, "Have you heard of 'Hundred-Face John Doe'?” he asked in a thoughtful tone.

***

Illumi raised an eyebrow, suspecting where this was going but waiting for absolute confirmation.

“He operated in Glam Gas for several years. He was an amateur, but nonetheless effective in his own way.”

***

"Harsh Illu-chan," Hisoka replied weakly, trying once more to smile. "That man was my Nen teacher. I met him as Moritonio; he was the ringmaster of the circus that took me in when I fled my home. Like me, he was also a Transmutation Nen user; his Hatsu was magnets." Hisoka hummed at the memory.

"If you ever saw a circus where a man walked upside down then you've seen him." He smiled, "The look on his face when I asked him was he the killer was priceless. He thought I was going to turn him in; I just wanted a fight. I wanted to know who would win."

***

Illumi let out a dark laugh. “People always underestimate youth. Tell me how you did it Hisoka-san,” he asked, eagerly leaning towards his Master. His mask was slipping, but he didn’t care. The man below him was wonderous and learning these precious secrets - being the first ever to hear the words flow out of him - was intoxicating.

***

The more he talked, the easier it seemed to get, as the words began flowing. Illumi was an eager audience, and Hisoka was glad for it, it made this so much easier.

"Moritonio was impressed by how fast I learned the basics; he said I was a worthy opponent, so he would show me his Nen." He took a moment to think how to describe it, "When he started using it I wasn't sure what was happening. There was this pressure that felt like it was going to crush me to die. I remembered how, when he would do his signature trick, I could see things the audience were wearing float upwards. So I tried to focus on where the sensation was coming from."
He shifted slightly to get a better look at his lover's face; he hoped that he would be impressed by what he had to say next. "I didn't know it then, but I'd used Gyo. My mentor hadn't taught me that yet, I'd just created my Hatsu not long before this. What I saw were large magnets...he was using the magnetism to crush me. He had decided I was worth killing. Once I knew what he was doing to me everything after that was disappointingly easy. All it took was attaching my bungee gum to his magnets...and," Hisoka smiled at the memory, "I bludgeoned him to death with his own Hatsu."

***

"Poetic indeed," Illumi breathed, leaning closer and licking his suddenly dry lips. "Tell me more, Hisoka san. Tell me everything."

***

Seeing his lover lean closer caused Hisoka's golden eyes to widen in response.

"There isn't much more to tell...I left him there for the authorities to find. I used my texture surprise for the first time to change his face to one they would have on record; so they'd know it was him..." he trailed off. *So Abaki would know she was safe,* he thought to himself.

***


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"The next?" he asked, uncertainty in his voice. After the first few he hadn't really remembered the ones that came next. He could remember how, after getting away with the other deaths he had started to crave the powerful feeling he had felt.

Racking his memory, he tried to think of something that would satisfy the curious man looking down at him.

"I... I..." he tried to calm himself, for some reason the way his lover was leaning over him was making him uneasy. "They... stopped being important after that..."

***

Illum stared down at Hisoka-san, “Master,” he begged, tightening his grip on their joined hands. “Master, please tell me how you killed them, how it felt...tell me how much you enjoyed it...”

***

The way Illumi was squeezing his hand was starting to hurt; he couldn't help the quiet moan which worked its way out of his mouth. If his lover kept this up, he was going to get too excited to hold back. He licked his lips and tried his best to meet the other's eyes.

"When I killed who Illu-chan?" he searched the other's face for clarification, "That boy? That man who called himself father? My mentor? Or the ones who came next?"

***

"Everyone," Illumi sighed as he heard his Master moan underneath him. He let his bloodlust flood the room. His Master had to understand, had to give him what he wanted, had to *tell him.*
"Everyone?" he repeatedly dumbly, he hadn't seen this side of Illumi before, it was equally fascinating as it was unnerving. Would Dr. Lecter react like this? He doubted it, but then his Doctor had also confessed to being a serial killer. He hummed and reached out with his free hand to stroke his lover's face gently.

"Illu-chan, it makes me feel strong, powerful." He lowered his voice to a purr, "My sadistic side sings when I hear them scream and beg, the smell of the blood..." he groaned, "the way the life flickers before it goes out in their eyes..." Hisoka licked his lips.

"After a while, I started wanting to taste it...it seemed such a waste just to wash it off..."

"Yes," Illumi whispered and let his weight lean into the touch.

"Sweetheart," he said in a firm but gentle tone, "I think you're getting a bit excited there. Do you expect Dr. Lecter to react like this? Is this part of your coaching?"

Illumi frowned, “Dr. Lecter? Why would he...?” Illumi’s voice trailed off after he remembered what they were supposed to have been doing.

He immediately pulled back from Hisoka’s hand and sat up straight. “My apologies, Master. I allowed myself to be...overcome. I...please, punish me. I have failed you when you needed me.”

Hisoka arched his eyebrow and gave his lover a quizzical look, "Illu-chan there isn't much I can do to punish you that you wouldn't enjoy. We both know that."

Illumi hung his head. “I understand, Master. It is...” he tried to think of the least insulting way of telling his Master how he felt. That had, after all, been a part of their agreement. “Unfortunate,” he swallowed down his guilt, “but true. Given the circumstances, I feel I should probably leave. I can speak with some associates about the child, Misha.”

He picked up the textured origami paper that had lain forgotten whilst they had talked. “I will also endeavour to perfect this new identity. With your permission, I will change her to be socially appropriate for a man of your age.”

The idea of being left alone to face Dr. Lecter made Hisoka feel slightly nervous; he wasn't sure he was ready to deal with him by himself. "I didn't say you had to leave..."

He eyed his drawing from earlier, "Yes that would be what I had in mind, I don't need Dr. Lecter thinking I'm... one of those types of people."
Reaching out for Illumi he tried to think of the right words, he really didn't want the man to leave. Not if he didn't have to.

"Do you have to leave Illu-chan? Is this your way of trying to punish yourself?"

***

Illumi froze mid-rise as he felt his Master’s hand make contact with his fingers.

"Do you have to leave Illu-chan? Is this your way of trying to punish yourself?"

“I,” he paused, trying to think. “I feel...shame. I allowed my emotions to cloud my judgement. You-”

“Is this your way of trying to punish yourself?”

“I believe your assessment may be accurate. However, I am not capable of thinking rationally at this moment in time. The ultimate decision should lie with you, of course, Master.” He hung his head and dropped back down onto the bed, unable to meet Hisoka-san’s gaze.

***

Shifting to sit behind his lover, Hisoka positioned his legs so that they were either side of Illumi. Once he was comfortable, he put his arms around the other man and pulled him back against his chest.

"Lulu," he said softly, "Master would very much appreciate it if you could stay with him a little longer. If you have to leave though, then that's ok too. It's been a while since we've had such an opportunity, and I know you feel like you might have screwed up..." he paused, realising the word choice may not have been the best but continued, "I feel a bit...vulnerable right now. You know things about me that no other living person knows. Please stay?"

***

Illumi felt something inside him shatter at his Master’s last words. After Hisoka-san had wrapped himself around his waist the way he had, he wouldn’t have left, but as the man explained precisely how vulnerable he was...

Illumi wished he could carve the black pit that had formed inside his heart from his chest.

His head fell further forward as he said, “Master, tell me how I can atone.”

***

Hisoka tightened his hold on Illumi, resting his head on the other's shoulder with a sad smile.

"Please stay? I need you with me right now...for the first time in as long as I can remember, I don't want to be alone," he whispered.

***

Illumi’s throat felt tight. He shook as he listened to his Master, beg him to stay once again.

"I need you with me right now”

“I will stay.” He wanted to say more, but that was all he could manage. He heard a ripping sound
and re-focussed his gaze to find that he’d torn a hole in the sheet.

***

"Thank you" Hisoka replied, still resting his head on his lover's shoulder, feeling happier about the fact that he had agreed so easily. In an attempt at affection, he nuzzled Illumi’s cheek.

"Talking to you really did help you know, it's just, I feel strange," he said, letting his voice return to normal. "You have been helpful, very helpful."

***

The tears fell, and there was nothing Illumi could do to prevent it. He shook as his Master told him how helpful he'd been, and he knew he couldn’t do this. He couldn’t hear his Master’s praise after he’d done everything wrong.

“Master, please, I need you to punish me,” he begged as he tried to stop the need to draw blood from overtaking him.

***

Feeling the way his lover had started to shake brought a small smile to Hisoka's face. His theory had been proven correct, understanding and compassion were not things his Illu-chan could properly process. Perhaps he could use that to devise a more effective way to punish his lover in the future when it was needed. For now, he was wary of pushing too far; he really didn't feel that punishment was needed.

He'd needed the catharsis and as difficult as it had been, he was grateful. However, his experience with this type of game told him sometimes necessary punishment to be handed out for the sake of the submissive partner. Hisoka was starting to become convinced this would be one of those occasions, and by pushing his toy this way, it would make the relief all the sweeter for him.

"How do you think you need to be punished, Lulu? If it's what you need, then Master will give it to you," he said quietly.

***

Illumi couldn’t talk. As respectfully as he could, he pushed Hisoka-san’s arms from his shoulders and pulled his top over his head. Materialising a needle, he held it up for his Master to take. The relief of knowing what was about to happen was causing him to shake almost as much as the tears still falling from his eyes.

***

When he felt his arms being pushed away, he allowed his embrace to be broken, he understood perfectly. He didn't feel that he could ask or tell him verbally. He watched carefully as he removed his shirt and produced a needle that he held up to him.

For a moment, Hisoka simply stared until he realised what he was being asked to do. Gently he reached out to take the offered weapon; it felt strange in his hand.

"I hope that I'm understanding this correctly. Master thinks that you're asking him to cut you with your needle." He paused to see if he would give him a signal that he was correct. The nod of confirmation told him he wasn't mistaken and he placed his empty hand on Illumi’s back. "Ok Lulu, Master will give you what you need, but you are expected to stay still." He hardened his tone
to show that it was an instruction, not a request.

Illumi nodded once, and Hisoka felt him still beneath him.

Next Hisoka moved the long black hair so that it fell over the topless man's shoulders and gave him easier access to the unblemished skin.

*What should I do?* he pondered momentarily, *Should I just make random marks? No...scratch a word perhaps?*

Eventually, he settled on what he wanted to do and pressed the needle against the exposed back and applied pressure so that it would break the skin. He tied to keep himself calm when he saw the small amount of blood welling up when he dragged the needle through Illumi’s skin. The man didn’t flinch, not once. When he had finished carving his chosen design, he leaned back and admired his handy work. In large letters he had written the words 'Master's slut', he smiled. He would like seeing that on his lover's back until it healed.

***

As the needle entered him, Illumi felt peace return. The confusion of emotions he couldn’t understand quieted and focussed into the burning pain of the slow movements on his back. It was a small thing, nothing close to the punishments of his past, but as Hisoka wrote what felt like words into his skin, Illumi felt an odd warmth forming in his stomach.

*Is this gratitude?* he wondered as he breathed evenly. The tears had stopped as the blood had begun to flow, and as the coppery scent drifted into his nostrils, he felt his whole body relax.

“Thank you,” he whispered as his Master leant back to admire his work, and the warm sensation blossomed inside him once again. *Thank you, Master.* The words came from his very core.

***

Unable to resist Hisoka leant forward to lick at some of the blood running down his lover's back. He hummed in enjoyment at the rich coppery taste.

"Are you feeling any better for that Lulu?" he asked in a gentle tone. The sight, smell and now taste of the spilt blood were intoxicating. "Or do you need more?"

***

Illumi shivered as Hisoka-san licked at the blood dripping down his back, and let out a groan at his Master’s words.

"Do you need more?"

"Always Master," he gasped. “Whatever you desire. I belong to you.”

He ran his fingers across the initials carved above his heart. *I belong to you Hisoka-san.*

***

Hisoka chuckled. "As you were good and stayed perfectly still I'll give you some more..." he trailed off as he thought about what he could add to the words he'd carved. "Ah, I know!" he exclaimed and eagerly set about drawing on his lover's skin once more.

When he had finished, he had added a few heart shapes and his signature star and teardrop as
decoration on the already carved words. Feeling lightheaded from the scent of the blood, he couldn't help his chuckle.

"I think I've made you look pretty enough, for now, Lulu," he purred, "But this was fun, I want to draw on you again when it heals, but next time I'll use my cards."

***

Illumi gasped as he felt the needle carving into his skin again. His Master’s enthusiasm was intoxicating, and he tried to focus on picturing what the scratches in his back could be forming; moaning and doing his best to stay still as pleasure and the perfect amount of pain filled his mind.

"I think I've made you look pretty enough, for now, Lulu,"

His heart sank a little at the announcement.

"But this was fun, I want to draw on you again when it heals, but next time I'll use my cards."

There was going to be a next time?

“Next time, Master?” Illumi said, hopefully.

***

"Yes, Lulu" Hisoka purred, "You can be my canvas!" his voice rose a bit with giddy excitement.

"I'm not sure if I should keep it as a punishment only thing though. You're normally very well behaved, and I'd never get to create my masterpieces," he pouted a little.

***

Illumi risked turning to face Hisoka-san. The man’s golden eyes were blown wide. He looked incredible.

Leaning in, he licked his own blood from his Master’s lips. “I am yours,” he said and leant in to claim the man’s lips.

***

Feeling his own excitement building, Hisoka eagerly returned the kiss, frantically pulling his own shirt off. Once the clothing had been discarded, he allowed his hands to come up and around his lover's body once more.

Yes, you are mine, Lulu, he thought as he pulled him down onto the bed. Not caring that they would be getting blood all over his chest or the covers - they could take a shower together later - he ran a hand through Illumi’s thick hair and, with a wicked grin, he licked his lip and said, “Show me, Lulu. Prove to me that you are mine.”

***

Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:
Illumi

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Hisoka
Hisoka's third session with Hannibal takes an interesting turn when he accepts his Therapist's offer.

Hannibal opened the door and saw Hisoka waiting in the same seat as he always did, one leg crossed over the other and foot-tapping in the air. He had his arms crossed, and his head tipped back, staring at the ceiling. He wasn’t dressed in his usual eccentric circus attire; instead, he had long black trousers, a green turtle neck and what appeared to be a belt with the four suit symbols printed on it. He still had his high heeled boots on though, which Hannibal appreciated.

Today promised to be another interesting session.

“Hisoka,” Hannibal said sternly and waited for the man’s reaction.

***

Lost in his own thoughts as he stared at the ceiling Hisoka jolted at the sound of his name. Looking across the room, he saw Dr. Lecter standing in the doorway to his office. Realising that he was expecting him to join him, he stood and made his way to where the other man stood. If he was being honest, he felt a little strange in such normal clothing, but when he had discussed it with Illumi, he’d suggested that it would be less distracting if he wore a more simple ensemble.

"Dr. Lecter," he said once he was standing in front of the office door, and gave a polite bow. Thankful that he had asked Illumi to instruct him on how to make it look more natural.

***

Staring at the strange civilian getup, Hannibal cocked his head slightly but said nothing. Gesturing for Hisoka to make his way to his usual chair, he wondered who had dressed the man and where they’d found the clothes - They were made from expensive fabrics.

***

Trying his best to appear relaxed Hisoka walked over to his preferred chair and sat down, crossing his legs once again and leaning back to get comfortable. He remained quiet as he waited for the session to begin.

***

“Who bought you your clothes?” Hannibal asked curiously as he closed the door and made his way to his seat.

***

"These? Well, they were a gift," Hisoka explained, shifting in his seat. "From Lulu."
“And is Lulu your girlfriend, or is she another partner?” Hannibal asked, noting how uncomfortable Hisoka appeared.

***

Hisoka brightened, this was a topic that he was actually comfortable with. "Lulu is my girlfriend, Dr. Lecter, I may have lovers on the side, but she is my only partner."

***

“So you decided to get in touch with her after all?” Hannibal asked, eyeing the outfit from boot to neckline.

***

“Well, as you pointed out, I am front-page news currently, Lulu's job keeps her very busy. But, she found the time to track me down during the week...and she sent these." He gestured to the outfit. "She was worried that I wouldn’t have any clean clothes," he lied smoothly. “We're hoping that she can try and make it to Yorknew City soon, depending on her work and family circumstances, of course."

***

“A kind gesture indeed, but tell me, who’s idea was it that you wear these clothes today? You seem rather uncomfortable in them,” Hannibal asked, his curiosity rising.

***

Hisoka sighed a little. "Hers,” he said. “She insisted that I should make more of an effort. If I look uncomfortable, it's because I don't usually wear such expensive things, Dr. Lecter."

***

Hannibal watched closely as he asked, “So she is aware of the deal you intend to make with me today?”

***

"I didn't mention it, no,” Hisoka said, shrugging. "To be honest, she was more concerned that I might be in a prison cell, and if I was eating enough, things like that."

***

“So you do intend to follow through with your proposal?” Hannibal asked, allowing a little more power to bleed into his Aura so that he could observe how the man reacted. There was something ever so slightly off about Hisoka today, and he wasn’t sure that a simple change in outfit could account for all of it.

Nerves about the coming deal could undoubtedly be the reason behind most of the strangeness, but there was still something he was missing. "I have allowed you a week to change your mind. If you wish, we will return to our usual conversations; I will hold nothing against you.”

***

Feeling the change in Dr. Lecter's Aura, Hisoka closed his eyes for a moment and let the sensation
wash over him. He'd already chosen to follow this path when he started flirting with his therapist, if
he backed out, then it would mean starting from scratch on a new and entirely unknown plan. No,
there was no stepping down now.

"I haven't changed my mind, Dr. Lecter, unless you're having second thoughts?" He tilted his head
as he regarded the man sitting across from him. "Oh, before I forget..." he reached into his pocket
and pulled out a red origami rabbit. It was nearly identical to the one he had made last week, except
it was much larger. Delicately he unflattened it and held it out in his hand. "I thought Mischa might
like a friend, or a brother if you prefer."

Hisoka tried his best to give a warm smile as he waited for Dr. Lecter's reaction to the gift.

***

Hannibal smiled slightly as his challenge was thrown back at him, both deflection and provocation
in one. Before he had a chance to answer, however, he watched as the man drew a pre-folded piece
of paper from his pocket and unfolded it to reveal a large, red rabbit then offered it to him as a
“friend or brother” to the small rabbit he’d used as an aid, when he’d told his tale of Mischa.

His face split into a wide grin, and he accepted the gift eagerly. “So thoughtful,” he said, holding it
in his hand as if it were a precious jewel.

He stood and walked to a cabinet beside his chair. The entire surface had been arranged with the
origami figures from Hisoka’s last session. “I think he would fit well beside her, don’t you?” he
asked, looking back at the Hunter.

***

Curious, Hisoka watched as his gift was accepted, and kept up his smile at the praise. He was
confused when his Doctor stood up, and he tracked the man’s movements, over to the cabinet. His
eyes widened when he properly looked at it for the first time. Unsure if he was imagining things,
he blinked. All of his origami work from the week before was arranged on display. So you are the
sentimental type? Is that because you saw something that made you think of your sister or
something else?

"You kept them all?" he asked in surprise. "I'm...flattered."

***

“You expected that I wouldn’t?” Hannibal asked as he carefully placed the bright red beast beside
the snow-white bunny. He very much appreciated the symbolism.

***

Hisoka gave a slight shrug as he answered, "I didn't see any reason why you would have...except
for the rabbit."

***

“As I said before, Hisoka, I see value in beauty and skill. It is one of the reasons I chose to step in
and take you on as a client,” Hannibal explained as he made his way back to his chair and sat down
gracefully.

***
"I’m flattered, Dr. Lecter, honestly I am...but it's just a way to keep my hands busy for me," Hisoka said, trying to sound sincere rather than dismissive. "There are people who can make far more intricate things, I'm sure."

***

“And yet, they did not offer their creations to me as a gift. Nor have they offered themselves to me as a ‘student’,” Hannibal said, allowing the air quotes to hang between them, deciding that now was the right time to test the man’s resolve. He upped his challenge and stared directly at him, not once allowing his gaze to falter.

Let’s see what you do now, mon cher, shall we? It’s time to sink or swim; I do so hope that you won’t back down.

***

Hisoka instinctively met the Doctor's gaze but managed to quickly flick his eyes away quickly enough, landing them on the animals once again. "You seemed to like them," he explained. "So I thought it would only be polite to make the offer, at least. Did I think wrong?"

***

Hannibal watched as Hisoka hesitated a moment before dropping his gaze, and another piece of the puzzle fell into place.

“You did not misjudge me, no Hisoka,” he assured and watched as the usually flirtatious and confrontational man morphed into a quiet and submissive creature. Now he understood what had been bothering him since Hisoka had entered his office. The sudden change in clothing and demeanour could only mean one thing.

“May I ask, who has been coaching you?”

***

Did I take it too far? Think, there has to be a way to explain it away. He's not the first person to dominate me, that would be the best excuse.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking and reflecting between this meeting and our last one, Dr. Lecter," Hisoka replied calmly, still staring at the animals. "You wouldn't be my first, you know, not in any real sense of the word. I do remember my original training..."

He chose to let the words hang briefly, and looked down at his feet before continuing in a soft tone, "I guess Father wasn't such a bad teacher, after all."

***

“I would advise you not to assume what I want from you, Hisoka,” Hannibal said sternly. “I doubt very much it will be in line with your Father’s ideas.” He allowed his tone to soften ever so slightly but maintained the strength of his Aura as he continued, “For example, I hold consent to be an absolute necessity, did he?”

***

"He..." Hisoka swallowed. "I wouldn't say he did no."
“Then I would suggest that your Father and I do not have that much in common.” Hannibal allowed the note of command to return to his voice as he said, “I do not wish for you to refrain from being yourself Hisoka, so look at me when I talk to you.”

Without hesitation, Hisoka looked back towards Dr. Lecter and gave him a faint smile. "My apologies...I shouldn't have assumed."

*Maybe playing submissive to you won't be as bad as I expected, I just need to learn what you require from me. I find that oddly reassuring.*

Without missing a beat, Hannibal continued, “If we are to do this, Hisoka then you will be fully aware of, and participate in, the creation of the terms of this deal. Do you understand?”

"Yes, I understand, Dr. Lecter," Hisoka agreed, and relaxed a little more. "Does that mean you haven't changed your mind either?"

"I would not offer something to a client that I did not think would help them, Hisoka," Hannibal said smoothly, adding a slight frown to his features to see what effect it would have.

Hisoka chose to ignore Hannibal’s frown and tried to stick to the plan that his lover had rehearsed with him for the last week. "So you do believe this will help me then? You have no other motive for going along with my proposal?"

Hannibal smiled warmly, rewarding the return of Hisoka’s usual wit. “And what other motives would I have, Hisoka?” Hannibal said, raising his brow in challenge.

"I mean no disrespect, Dr. Lecter, but I find it hard to believe that you wouldn't get anything out of it," Hisoka challenged, tilting his head to give the Doctor a quizzical look, "There is no such thing as a selfless act. Humans are selfish by nature."

“I entirely agree, but I am curious Hisoka,” Hannibal said, leaning forward in his chair. “Do you not think that my goal to successfully treat you, and enable you to return to your loved ones, as well as give you back your freedom, would be something that I’d desire? Would that not be my selfish motive?”

Hisoka gave a thoughtful hum, "So you really are willing to do whatever it takes to get your patient back on their feet?” He chuckled. "My apologies, I’m simply curious. Especially if that would be your only motive, you seem confident this will help me. Does this mean you have a diagnosis in
mind for me already? I’m sure you understand that a man with my history doesn’t trust easily in the goodwill of others.”

***

“Nor does a man with mine,” Hannibal nodded to acknowledge Hisoka’s point. “Which is why I maintain a flexible approach with my clients.”

He paused and met Hisoka’s golden stare with his own. “It is also why I maintain a policy of keeping any deals I make with them both private and explicitly between the both of us.”

***

"I would have expected that Doctor-patient confidentiality would have applied to our little agreement,” Hisoka replied coolly. "At the end of our last session, you made it clear that you don’t tolerate disobedience, and that we would discuss the terms today."

***

“Good,” Hannibal said, “Then we are both on the same page.” He paused to observe the man across from him.

After a few moments, he decided that the time was right to make a start on the negotiations. “I do not tolerate disobedience, that is true. If you agree to my deal, I expect you to obey any and all orders I give you.” He paused again momentarily and then added, “For my part, I will promise never to order you to do anything that would risk your chance at freedom or cause you any permanent harm, either psychological or physical.”

***

"I see,” Hisoka said, leaning back and tilting his head to look at the ceiling. "Will there be a clear way to tell an order from a request? Would you have me address you any differently? Dress a certain way?"

***

Hannibal smiled. “I’m glad to see you’ve been giving my offer some thought. To answer your questions in order, yes, if I request something from you, I will make it explicitly obvious that you have a choice in the matter. I would prefer that you call me Doctor, should you agree to be my submissive within our sessions. I would also like for you to dress in your usual clothing; whilst I do appreciate variety, you seem rather uncomfortable, and that is not conducive to successful therapy.”

Hannibal maintained his posture as he asked, “Do you have any more questions for me, Hisoka?”

***

Still staring at the ceiling, he remained silent as he let what he had been told sink in. Did he have any more questions? He wasn't sure if he would get another chance to ask if he continued down this path.

"There are a few more things I would appreciate being able to ask, Doctor." He decided to adhere to that request immediately, granting the man a show of good faith, and hopefully winning himself some brownie points in return. "Would you feel the need to make me wear a collar while I’m your 'submissive'? Just as a clear symbol, of course. Am I allowed to inquire as to what the penalty
would be for disobedience?"

Shifting to once again to look at his Doctor, Hisoka smiled a little wider and asked, "On the subject of my clothes, may I have your permission to tell my girlfriend you do not mind my usual outfits?"

***

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. “For someone who is not sharing a living space with their submissive girlfriend, she does seem to have quite an influence over you, Hisoka,” he said smoothly, letting the implication behind his words sink in. He wanted to see the man’s reaction first; he would answer his questions later.

***

"Wouldn't you think it rude if after she went to the trouble and expense of buying me such a thoughtful gift, not to wear it?" Hisoka asked, giving his Doctor a confused look.

"She may be submissive to me, but that doesn't mean that I should reject her present. I'm not sure if you're familiar with the idea...but I was taught that rejecting the gift would be like rejecting the person offering it."

***

Hannibal looked curiously at Hisoka. “I was also taught that cheating on my partner was exceedingly rude. When I asked the other day if she was aware of your other partners, you said no.”

Hannibal thought for a few moments and said, “I am curious as to why you would choose to wear clothes that make you uncomfortable, when, as you say, she is not with you, and would not know if you had or had not put them on. Yet you have no issue with having sexual encounters with men you just met in a bar, that result in semi-permanent marks on your skin?”

***

"You have heard of video calling, have you not, Dr. Lecter?" Hisoka replied without thought. "If she had just asked for a photo I'd have changed them again after taking one. Lulu can be quite persistent...she's only submissive in the bedroom...and I believe I already explained that last point," he sighed. "I have needs that she can not help me with...she's fond of me that is true...but she won't hurt me."

***

Hannibal listened patiently to Hisoka’s answer. He hadn’t truly believed that Hisoka’s girlfriend, Lulu, would not have contacted him and now, he was reasonably sure that she was staying with him. It was a small detail, that didn’t much matter, for now, so he decided to make a mental note of it and chose to focus on the next point instead.

“I see, and would that be something you would require from me, Hisoka? You asked earlier what kind of punishments you could expect from me, my answer to that would be what kind of punishments would you require? And please bear in mind, I refuse to permanently harm you, unless, for whatever reason, you force me to do so; at which point, of course, our sessions would stop.”

***

"That's probably going to be a tricky one then, isn't it?" Hisoka smiled a little, trying to keep a lid
on his desire to laugh at the absurdity of the situation. "I mean I actively enjoy pain Doctor, so it's not really an effective deterrent...I don't have many phobias that you can use against me..." he paused and looked thoughtful. "I don't like being trapped," he said eventually, folding his arms over his chest. "Because of him."

***

"I understand," Hannibal said. "I believe I will have an effective method of punishment at my disposal, that will not violate any of our boundaries."

Hannibal sat back and smiled. "Now, I believe you asked about a collar. Would you like one?" He allowed a sparkle to enter his eyes and waited to see if Hisoka would notice.

***

"I'm not averse to the idea, Doctor," Hisoka said, trying to look disinterested. "It wouldn't be the first time I've worn such a thing. Would it be to your liking for me to wear one for you, Doctor?"

***

Hannibal grinned at the idea that was forming in his mind. "Good to know, thank you Hisoka. I will have something for you that I'm sure you will appreciate, if you choose to go ahead with the agreement."

Hannibal crossed his legs. "Now, I believe that's all of your questions so far answered, do you have any more for me?"

***

"I have to admit I'm curious as to why you're allowing me to ask so many questions. Last time I tried to lead the conversation like this you were quite firm in taking the reins back from me," Hisoka noted, arching an eyebrow.

"Not that I don't appreciate the opportunity, it's just..." he paused, trying to find the right words. "I am not used to it being like this." He frowned. He still felt the words weren't quite right but couldn't think of any other way to voice his confusion.

***

"It is my duty as both your therapist and potential dominant to care for you to the best of my abilities, mon cher. As your therapist, letting you lead the conversation about your mental health would be foolish. As your potential dominant it would be equally as foolish of me not to establish your needs before I entered into an arrangement with you," Hannibal explained, smiling reassuringly. "After we have established your needs and agreed our terms, things will return to a more normal structure, I assure you."

***

"Do you want to choose a safeword and discuss my limits next, Doctor?" Hisoka asked, flashing a flirtatious smile.

***

Hannibal chuckled. "If you like, but maybe after I tell you the terms I operate under when carrying out this kind of agreement?"
"That does sound like a good idea," Hisoka agreed. "Please, continue."

Hannibal allowed an amused little grin to form on his face at Hisoka’s discomfort. The change of routine had clearly thrown the man more than Hannibal had expected. Hopefully, flipping things back would settle him.

“My rules are simple,” he said. “I expect obedience from you and, as I said earlier, I will make it very explicit when I am making a request or presenting you with options. I would also require you to refrain from outright rudeness.” Hannibal paused and pointedly added, “That does not mean that you are to change who you are; I do appreciate your humour. I will, however, not tolerate blatant rudeness from anyone. I do not make exceptions.”

Hannibal waited for a beat before adding, “My third and final requirement is that my submissives actively seek to improve themselves. I do not find passivity interesting and so, whilst under my care, I require anyone who wishes to submit to me to be proactive in their personal development.”

Hisoka listened patiently, taking in what was being said. It was becoming apparent that his Doctor had played this game before, possibly with other patients. He made a mental note to mention it to Illumi when he got back to the hotel, in case they needed to tweak their plans. The rules seemed simple enough, on the surface, but Hisoka was naturally a cautious man. "That all seems reasonable to me, Doctor, but if I may be so bold, the concept of personal development can be a bit vague." He hummed in thought. "When you refer to it, in this case, is that your idea of what my needs are, or my own?"

Hannibal was pleased Hisoka had asked for clarification. A few of his more impressionable clients in the past had not, and the game had quickly become tedious.

“Hopefully, in time, it will become both,” Hannibal said patiently. “At the start, I will give you direction, but you will find that you quickly learn what I deem appropriate and what I do not, don’t worry.”

Hannibal leaned forward and asked, “Do you have any other clarifications you wish me to make?”

"I see, so you expect me to disagree, at least at first?" Hisoka asked, feeling more curious than he had expected.

Hannibal gave the question due consideration. It was true that, in the past, his patients had resisted at first; Hisoka, however, was far from average.

“I expect that, in the beginning at least, you may not find the prospect as stimulating as you may be used to. But,” Hannibal nodded his head in a polite bow. “I am open to the idea that you will likely surprise me.” He smiled as he added, “In fact, I rather look forward to it.”
"Oh, I do live to surprise, Doctor," Hisoka said with a teasing smile. "I wouldn't be much of a magician if I couldn't."

Hannibal’s grin widened, and his eyes sparkled as he said, “So, mon cher, do we have a deal? Do you agree to my terms?”

"If you are taking the caring dominant thing seriously, Doctor, then surely you need to know more?” Hisoka said, shifting slightly and giving Hannibal a playful look.

"I may not be used to my dominant caring about my needs, but that doesn't mean that I am not aware of how to take care of my own submissive." He straightened out a crease in his trousers as he spoke. "Isn't it customary to confirm limits? Or do you not think that is necessary with me? I mean I doubt you'd be able to push me past them, but do you think the safeword is important?"

“Do you expect that I would cross the boundaries of my professional Code of Conduct, Hisoka?” Hannibal asked, smirking ever so slightly and looking Hisoka straight in the eye. “Or maybe, that is what you are hoping for?”

"I am not presuming anything, Doctor," he said, still smiling. He was rather enjoying the back and forth of the ‘discussion’.

“Am glad,” Hannibal said. “If it would make you more comfortable, then we can operate on the traffic light system: Green for good, Amber for no further and Red for stop. That would only apply to acts that are physical in nature, though; I am here to help you therapeutically after all. We will touch on subjects that make you uncomfortable, and I am contractually bound to push at your limits in order to help you grow.”

Hannibal rested his hands on his knee as he asked, “So, tell me, Hisoka, what are your limits?”

"As you no doubt remember, I don't really like to talk about my past...and to be honest being here makes me uncomfortable,” Hisoka said, shrugging. "Also you once told me off for hurting myself when I needed the pain to ground myself...then you hinted that you could help me in other ways, but you never said you couldn't hurt me, Doctor. So it's simple really, I need to be able to hide any marks. Either with my clothes, makeup, or my other methods."

He paused to think of anything else that could be relevant. If things were to turn physical, the nature of their Doctor-patient relationship limited things. "I am curious as to what those other ways to ground myself would have been. The traffic light idea is reasonable; I’m familiar with that.”
Hannibal nodded as he listened to Hisoka speak; he had been wondering when he would ask that particular question.

“I am well versed in many methods of corporal punishment Hisoka, none of which would leave lasting marks.” He allowed his lip to twitch up into a flash of a smile as he explained, “You will easily be able to cover them when you call Lulu...and when she comes to visit. I believe I am more than capable of providing you with the pain you seek if that is what is necessary to ground you during our sessions.”

Hannibal tempered down the desire that threatened to rise at the idea of finally getting his hands on Hisoka’s beautiful skin. The bite mark on the man’s neck was still irking him, and he clamped down hard on the urge to find whoever had put it there and take them to pieces one limb at a time.

***

Hisoka schooled his expression into one of relief and widened his smile as he continued to watch his therapist closely.

"I believe it will probably become necessary, depending on the topics you feel need to be discussed. It gives me something to focus on. You have my gratitude for your understanding about Lulu...I am an unconventional man...I know I don't exactly deserve her."

***

Hannibal allowed a thoughtful expression to cross his face. “What we deserve and what we get do not always align. However, I am here for you, not her. Whilst you are under my care, I will take care of your needs to the best of my abilities and within our agreed limits.”

Sitting back once again, he relaxed as he asked, “Do you have any more questions for me before we move forwards, Hisoka?”

***

Hisoka nodded, "Of course, Doctor, I am happy to hear you say that." He paused, closing his eyes and mentally calming himself. Now he was here, and things seemed to be moving along as he’d planned, he was unusually nervous. Once he felt that he was as calm as he could be, he returned his gaze to the Doctor.

"I understand that you need me to explicitly consent, Doctor, don't worry. As it stands, I think I have the answers I need. The terms seem reasonable; I am happy to proceed. When should we start?"

***

Hannibal uncrossed his legs and smiled languidly; this was always a moment he enjoyed. Hisoka had asked more questions than most, but had caved under the pressure of being repeatedly asked if he was ready. He hadn’t asked nearly enough to truly understand what he was letting himself in for. He was looking forward to seeing the surprise on his face when he realised his mistake.

“We can start now,” he said and gestured to the floor in front of him. “Kneel and hold out your dominant wrist towards me.”

***

Hisoka hadn't expected that Dr. Lecter would have jumped straight into it and he hesitated for a
very brief moment. Nodding to show that he understood, he moved to the indicated spot in front of the Doctor's chair. Once he was kneeling, he held out his right arm, watching with curiosity to see what he would do next.

***

As he took Hisoka’s outstretched hand in his own, Hannibal employed a technique he had perfected during his days working as a surgeon. He pooled a small amount of Nen into his palm and channelled his certainty and assurance into it, allowing it to be felt by the man below him.

“Earlier you spoke of the possibility of my presenting you with a collar. Whilst I am not averse to the idea, you also seem to be rather concerned about what your girlfriend will think of visible signs of you submitting to another.”

He moved his hand to wrap around Hisoka’s wrist, holding it in a firm but careful grip. “How would you feel if, instead, I gave you a bracelet to remind you of your submission whilst you are in my care?”

***

Hisoka shivered at the touch, and his eyes widened as he looked up at his Doctor. He was being presented with a choice; a bracelet or a collar. Both would work in his eyes; surely, he could just take the item off once he left the session.

The thought was chased away when another occurred to him, and a tiny flicker of unease ran through him. Dr. Lecter might be able to use his Nen to prevent him from removing it.

"A bracelet might be more discreet...it's the symbolism that’s the most important, after all; I’m happy for it to be your decision, Doctor. I'll accept either." He tried to keep his voice as even and calm as he could while he spoke.

***

Hannibal was impressed by Hisoka’s answer; he’d managed to flip the question and turned the choice back upon him.

“A bracelet it is then,” he said warmly.

Concentrating, he summoned a continuous solid gold band that sat comfortably against Hisoka’s skin. The words *Obedience, Civility* and *Growth* could be seen wrapping around its face. The words were written in his handwriting - an ornate calligraphic script - and was clearly meant to be read by the wearer rather than anyone looking from the outside.

***

The sensation of the Doctor's Nen against his skin was strange at first but soon morphed into the feeling of a cool metal band. He dropped his gaze to his wrist and watched with fascination, as the piece of jewellery took shape. *Was I wrong about his Nen type?* he wondered.

"You're a conjurer?" he stated, confusion evident in his voice. The fact that he could see the band was all the evidence he needed.

***

Hannibal looked down at the surprise on Hisoka’s face. “I am,” he said simply.
Turning back to the bracelet, he ran his finger over the words, rotating Hisoka’s wrist as needed. For a brief moment, each glowed with the deep red of his Nen. “This will help you to abide by the rules we have agreed upon. You are free to resist as much as you wish,” he said mildly. “But I want you to understand that you will grow increasingly uncomfortable if you do. You will, of course, also be rewarded for obedience.”

***

Hisoka blinked a few times as he processed the new information; what else had he misjudged? He allowed himself to read the words, watching with interest as they glowed. One thing caught his attention; Hannibal had mentioned a reward.

"Rewarded?" he asked. "So this is a carrot and stick approach then?"

***

Hannibal smiled happily. “It is. The bracelet is infused with my Nen, and as long as you fulfil the requirements of the contract, you will be rewarded.”

He withdrew his hand to allow Hisoka to inspect his new adornment. The thick golden band did look beautiful against his skin.

***

Remaining on the floor, Hisoka held his wrist up to get a closer look at the new trinket he had been gifted. He had to admit, it was very impressive work, and he wondered if his own conjuration ability, texture surprise could cover it.

"It's..." he wanted to say something nice, but wasn't sure it would sound sincere, "You're very skilled with your Nen, Doctor."

***

“Thank you,” Hannibal said. “You may return to your seat.”

***

Upon being told that he was allowed to move, Hisoka nodded and gave the Doctor a small smile. He contemplated hinting that he was fine on the floor, but decided against it. As funny as it would have been to try and rile the man up, it was early days, and he did not yet know the extent of the Nen that had been used upon him.

"Thank you, Doctor,” he said politely before rising from the ground and quickly settling back down in his chair, continuing to admire his dominant's handiwork along the way. It was much more elegant than a simple collar would have been, and he couldn't help but feel like he was being complimented.

***

“Tell me, mon cher, earlier you brought up your Father, and you suggested that he abused you. Was he your first kill?” Hannibal asked, knowing the answer. He wanted to see if Hisoka’s story would remain consistent.

***
Hisoka arched his eyebrow questioningly. Hannibal had used the pet name before, but he still didn't know what it meant. Listening to the question, he internally sighed. He had expected this to come up again, and he was grateful that he had been able to talk to Illumi about it first.

"No, he was not," he replied quickly. "And may ask why 'mon cher'?"

***

“It means my dear,” Hannibal said easily. “So, who was your first? Walk me through how it happened.”

***

At the repeated line of questioning, Hisoka couldn't help stiffening slightly. He thought back to the day in the treehouse; he expected to feel much more anxious about it than he did. Perhaps telling somebody else for the first time had been a better idea than he'd imagined.

"It may come as a surprise, Doctor but I wasn't always as confident as you know me to be." He sighed, but continued, "I was very young, 5 or 6 at the most...the other kids didn't really want me around; they would bully me. One day two of the older kids followed me...they tried to ambush me, and I panicked." He paused, closing his eyes as he started to talk again. "We were in my treehouse, and I pushed him out of it...he fell to the ground..."

He opened his eyes and looked at the bracelet once again; he found it strangely comforting to stare at it. "I didn't know I'd killed him."

***

Hannibal remained calm as he listened to Hisoka's story. The man was far more relaxed than he had been during the previous sessions and he wondered if he had talked about it with anyone in the week since their last appointment. Maybe that was why his girlfriend had showed renewed concern in his well-being?

“It’s an understandable impulse to want to defend yourself from an ambush.” Hannibal relaxed into his chair. “What brought about the bullying?”

***

With his usual grace, Hisoka moved to gesture to his face and in particular his golden eyes.

"Kids can be cruel, Doctor; they were afraid of me...because I looked different."

***

The man had clearly turned being different into an art form, and Hannibal was curious to find out if he was aware of where that desire may have come from. “Do you think that is what drives you to stand apart as an adult?” he asked, tilting his head ever so slightly.

***

"Moritonio encouraged me to stand out during my time at the circus,” Hisoka replied thoughtfully. "That was the first place where I felt like I didn't have to be ashamed of my appearance. I took part in a lot of different acts while I was there, juggling, some magic, even trapeze.” He shrugged nonchalantly. "It's a pity it didn't work out, or I might still be with them."
“And why did it not work out with the circus?” Hannibal asked. The name sounded familiar, but he couldn’t quite place it yet.

He waited for Hisoka’s response. If he didn’t deflect or avoid the next few questions, then he would have his reward soon enough.

"Somebody murdered the ringmaster," Hisoka replied with a peacefull expression, doing his best to hide his confusion; this was much easier than when Illumi had talked to him about his past. "I left after that, travelled a bit and continued honing my Nen. During my travels, I learnt about the Hunter exam and Heaven’s arena...amongst other things."

Hannibal allowed his gaze to intensify, “And who killed the ringmaster?”

Despite himself, Hisoka chuckled at the question. "I did, Doctor."

He had to bite down a groan when a pleasant jolt of pain went up his right arm from his wrist. He looked down at the metal band in wonder.

Hannibal allowed his amusement to show as he took in the amazed look on Hisoka’s face. “I reward my pets when they behave, mon cher,” he explained.

Allowing Hisoka’s admittance to sit in the air between them as the man contemplated the potential of his bracelet, he finally asked, “So, why did you kill him? Talk me through the tale.”

"That was your Nen?” Hisoka gasped in surprise. He could feel a small amount of excitement building at the idea; this could even become fun after a while. *Clever Doctor, very clever.*

"I didn't plan on killing him at first, I just wanted a fight," he explained, groaning as the pleasant pain began to subside. "He taught me Nen; said that I was a prodigy and that he wanted me to take the Hunter exam. I figured out he was the John Doe killer, and I wanted to see if I was stronger than him. He confessed everything to me, and made it clear that he intended to kill me to keep his secret safe."

He shrugged as a small smirk played around his lips, "I killed him in self-defence."

“It was,” Hannibal said after Hisoka asked about his ability. “It sounds to me like you chose to take a large risk,” Hannibal said calmly. “You must have been confident in your abilities to take on a serial killer?"

The John Doe killer, that was where he remembered the name. Hannibal had been mildly curious at the time but had been distracted by a target East of Zaban City, and there had been no way of investigating further. By the time he’d returned, John Doe had been killed...and apparently, the
man that had taken him down was now sat across from him.

***

"It was disappointing, actually. Once I figured out that he was using his Nen to try to crush me, I used what I now know as Gyo, instinctively. He was a Transmuter, like me." Hisoka paused to think about how best to describe the fight.

"Moritonio...he used magnets. I used his own Nen to kill him, attaching my Bungee Gum to them and throwing them at him." He sighed. "I had hoped for something more exciting..."

A second jolt of pain ran through him, and this time Hisoka couldn't completely hold in the pleasured moan that escaped his lips.

***

Hearing Hisoka’s moan when his bracelet rewarded his honesty was wonderful. He must be revealing quite large truths to elicit such a strong response from the bracelet. The other option, he supposed, was that the man was highly sensitive to sensations of any kind. If that was the case, then Hannibal was very interested to see how he would react when he inevitably disobeyed him.

“When those we look up to deny us the satisfaction of living up to our mental image of them, it often is disenchanting. How did you deal with that feeling?”

***

"I left the circus," he admitted, frowning a little. "Before I left, I did use his own trick to disguise his face, I wanted..."

He thought back to Abaki; how he'd jumped to her defence in that alleyway, slicing John Doe's eye with his cards. "I wanted the one person I cared for there to know that she was safe."

***

“Tell me about her,” Hannibal said gently. “She must have made an impression for you to do such a thoughtful thing.”

***

"Well I don't think she liked me all that much..." he chuckled as he remembered how upset she’d been when he’d surpassed her with such ease.

"My mentor was also teaching her Nen, but she wasn't as...” Hisoka tried to think of a suitable word that wouldn't be too insulting. "Adept at it as I was. In fact, I surpassed her in a few weeks even though she’d been learning for over a year. That's why Moritonio wanted to coach me for the exam."

Hisoka moaned again when the pain shot up his arm, and closed his eyes, trying to force himself to focus.

***

Hannibal smiled, delighting in his new toy’s reactions to his present. “What was she like as a person?” he asked, wondering if there were any similarities between this woman and Hisoka’s current girlfriend.
Hisoka blinked and took a deep breath. The pain had subsided, but his body's reaction to it hadn't. "Oh, you meant her personality?" he clarified, "Well...she was actually quite serious for her age; I remember she always told me that I didn't take things seriously enough. She was quite worried about the serial killer...he did actually try to kill her at one point. I can't imagine me, appearing out of nowhere, and overshadowing her so quickly won me any points though. Even if I did consider her a friend of sorts."

Hannibal delighted in the hiss of pleasure that left Hisoka’s lips but kept his face as even as he could manage. "And how many people would you consider your friend now?" he asked curiously.

"I don't really stick in one place long enough to make friends, Doctor," Hisoka shrugged, bracing for the small bite of pain that he knew would come. He wasn’t disappointed.

"So you do not consider your girlfriend, Lulu, a friend?" Hannibal asked, tilting his head, watching Hisoka's reaction.

"She's my lover, that's different." Hisoka gasped as the latest wave of pain washed over him. My darling Lulu always insisted he didn't need, have or want friends; still, he submitted when I claimed him as my own. Friends and lovers are different things surely? He sighed as the tingling in his arm died down. Perhaps I need to discuss this with him when I get back to the hotel?

"It is?" Hannibal asked, noting that Hisoka showed no outward signs of anxiety - he wasn’t deliberately being evasive or deceptive then. "So, mon cher, what are your criteria for friendships?"

"My criteria for friendship?" Hisoka echoed. The line of enquiry took him by surprise. Growing up as he had, being shunned by nearly everyone, he had become incredibly self-sufficient and content in his own company. The only person he could recall seeing as anything remotely like a friend was Abaki, but what had made her different?

Memories of other circus performers remarking that Abaki and himself seemed to be becoming close flitted through his slightly fogged mind. Had he only considered her a friend because of those comments? He couldn't be sure and the more he thought about it, the less certain he became.

Had he ever considered Illumi, a friend or was he always just a toy? At what point had his views changed, and he'd begun seeking the Assassin out for more than just a fight? During the election...I realised how strong he was, but did I see him as a friend?

"I don't know," he said quietly, shocked by the truth of his words.
Hannibal watched the man genuinely consider the question and understood all too well the look on his face.

“Hisoka, mon cher, look at me,” he instructed.

***

Feeling uneasy, Hisoka raised his head to look his Doctor in the eyes. He hoped his discomfort wouldn’t be readable on his face. Another small spark of pain nipped at his wrist. *Is it always going to be like this?* he wondered but pushed the thought aside when Hannibal started to talk.

***

“What do you think your Lulu would say if you asked her that question?” Hannibal asked, deliberately keeping his voice even and his manner calm.

***

"Lulu..." he began and stopped almost immediately. What would Illumi say? His family never valued him having friends; it was why he couldn't stand Gon claiming to be his brother's. Could he get away with that? It wouldn't be lying; it was what his Lulu's family believed after all. He cleared his throat and tried again.

"Her family are very inwardly focused, it’s the family business, you see. She was homeschooled and didn't really have much chance to make friends. We met by chance. I imagine, like myself, she would struggle to answer that question."

***

“Is that what drew you to her?” Hannibal asked, noting that Hisoka still appeared to be telling the truth, but not enough of one to elicit a response from the bracelet.

***

"She's strong, Doctor." Hisoka sat up a little straighter as he spoke. "I am drawn to the strong and the powerful."

He closed his eyes and tilted his head back when he felt another small jolt. *Dammit*, he thought, he was beginning to feel quite sensitive. It wouldn’t take much more to have him writhing in his chair at this rate.

***

Hannibal smiled in satisfaction; that response was very clearly true. “Tell me about her. I do not need to know about her family or profession; I want to know how you see her, mon cher.”

***

*How I see Lulu?* he tried to think through the fog his new Master's bracelet had caused.

"She’s my prized possession..." he groaned, - still coming down from his high. "My favourite toy..."

***

“Go on,” Hannibal said as he watched the man moan. He must be sensitive to be reacting so
strongly to such simple truths.

***

"She's..." he tried to find the words he wanted, but it was difficult. "Lulu is...she's mine." He shifted in his seat, he was anticipating another jolt, and he was already becoming excited by the idea.

"My beautiful doll," he purred. "I do so enjoy turning her into a work of art when I mark her flawless skin."

When he was rewarded for his continual honesty, the spark sent out flooded his senses. He tried to keep quiet but - this new sensation was stronger than the others. As much as he tried to fight it, he couldn't stop himself crying out. "...fuck...that was...intense..." he leant forward gasping and trying to catch his breath.

***

Hannibal chuckled. “It rewards in proportion to your obedience,” he explained, watching the flush that had spread up Hisoka’s neck. Exquisitely sensitive. “You were being honest, mon cher. Although,” Hannibal frowned slightly. “A word of caution with regards to the vulgar language. Use it outside of a sexual context, and you will find that you will regret it.”

***

Still trying to calm his breathing, Hisoka closed his eyes and let the sensations wash over him.

"My apologies, Doctor..." he gasped. "I don't suppose you can dial it back a tiny bit? I'm feeling very sensitive right now..." he whined a little.

***

Hannibal allowed an apologetic expression to fall over his features, “I am sorry, mon cher. I can not. You are, however, making your Master very happy; I am impressed by your level of honesty. You weren’t lying when you said you were a fast learner.”

He paused and traced the edge of his seat with his finger thoughtfully before saying, “Tell me, what do you like to do for fun?” The change of topic was deliberate; he couldn’t be seen to be too interested in those close to Hisoka, and the opportunity to talk about a positive topic should present the man with more chances to stimulate himself. He was finding his reactions extremely entertaining.

***

"I would have thought that was pretty obvious Doctor, I like to fight," Hisoka said, straightening once he’d finally managed to get his breathing under control. "Heaven's Arena may as well be a temple for a man like me."

He winced a little when he felt another zap. This is going to get overwhelming at this rate.

***

“And what about it, do you find enjoyable, Hisoka?” Hannibal asked, watching the man squirm.

***

"When I face a strong opponent...it's arousing..." he bit his lip. "I enjoy seeing the look of disbelief
when they thought they could win...but they lose..." He looked at Dr. Lecter. The man would be truly capable of becoming his real Master if he wasn't careful.

***

“And how do you think you would feel if you faced me, mon cher.” The setup had been deliberate, and Hannibal was looking forward to hearing the answer as well as seeing the fallout, whatever it may be.

***

The unexpected question made him freeze; he had wanted to fight the Doctor at first, and part of him still did, but he'd pegged him for a specialist and had been mistaken. He didn't quite trust his other earlier estimations. Judging by how easily he was being taken apart, he had no doubt the man's Nen was strong; he would be a formidable opponent. The thought alone went straight to his groin, and he moaned.

"Surely you know the answer to that..." he crossed his legs in a vain attempt to hide his excitement, the new trousers were becoming far too tight. "I bet your full of surprises though...it's not often I get it wrong when guessing which Nen type a person has." He let out a pleasant hum. His eyes were a little unfocused from the sensory overload; the residual feeling of his Doctor's Nen was feeding into his own growing arousal.

"I don't think you could disappoint me if you tried, Doctor," he purred.

***

Hannibal heard the last few words of Hisoka’s reply and thrilled. He watched as the man visibly arched his back at the apparent bliss he was feeling and wondered if he was reacting to a sensation of pain or, as was more usual, pleasure. He suspected the Masochistic side of Hisoka was at play and he longed to find out...but no, it was too soon for that.

The man was starting to lose focus, though, and he would need time to fully adjust to what had happened. Hannibal thought about everything that had transpired today and decided that Hisoka would definitely need guidance in his studies for the week.

He let the pleasure he was feeling show, and in a low tone brought Hisoka’s attention back to the here and now.

“Mon cher, come back to me,” he said, loud enough to be heard over the moaning.

***

Hearing a commanding voice calling to him, Hisoka instinctively looked up and smirked.

"Yes, Doctor?" he asked, voice still thick with arousal.

***

Hannibal smiled indulgently as he said, “It is nearly time to draw today to a close. You have done extremely well, and I want to make sure your progress continues. Do you remember what the third clause of your contract is?”
Hisoka stilled as he tried to think. His head was swimming, and it was difficult to focus. Looking for something to jog his memory, he glanced to the words on his wrist.

"You wish for me to work on my personal growth, Doctor." He smiled, hoping that he'd gotten it right.

***

Hannibal nodded indulgently. Hisoka was so very expressive. “I do, mon cher. Do you remember our earlier conversation about friendships?”

***

Hisoka nodded a little dumbly; he wasn't really interested in that right now, he wanted to see Lulu. He felt the need to claim him as his own; to remind his toy of his place.

"You... asked me about my friends... even though I don't have any..." he tried to keep the disinterest from his voice.

***

Chuckling, Hannibal made a strategic choice. He stood up and walked over to stand beside Hisoka, forcing the man to either look up at him or risk being rude.

He wasn’t disappointed. The young man stared up at him with wide, blown out, golden eyes. Placing his hand under Hisoka’s chin, Hannibal ran his fingers along his jaw.

“There is a bookshop, mon cher, two streets from here. It has a well-stocked psychology section. It will be your task to research and learn about friendship and the role it plays in people’s lives.” As an afterthought, he added, “Do not fear, there will be no test.”

***

Hisoka tensed and watched as Dr. Lecter approached him and came to a stop by his side. When he felt the touch of his hand, he couldn't stop himself from leaning in; he almost purred. It felt strangely nice to be held like this, even when he let his Lulu be on top, he'd never touched him the way the Doctor was now.

"How will you know that I actually buy and read one of them, Doctor?” he asked quietly, still trying to maintain the physical contact.

***

Tightening his grip slightly, Hannibal looked down at the band around Hisoka’s wrist.

Running his thumb over the young Hunter’s bottom lip, he said, “I, like you, have faith in my abilities.”

***

Hisoka couldn't keep in the small whimper that escaped him. Closing his eyes and leaning into the Doctor's hand, he nodded to let him know that he understood.

***

There it was; that was what he wanted. True submission.
“So good, mon cher,” Hannibal praised. “Now stand up,” he instructed as he pulled gently on Hisoka’s chin. He left no room for disobedience or the possibility that the man would not comply. He was a world-class Hunter after all, not a fragile doll.

***

Staying quiet Hisoka moved with the pull of the Doctor's hand; in his current state of mind, it didn't even occur to him to resist. Graceful as a dancer, he rose to his full height and kept his eyes locked onto his Therapist as he moved.

***

“It is time for you to return to your Lulu, mon cher,” Hannibal said as he stroked the side of Hisoka’s face.

Standing like this Hisoka, with his heels, had the slight height advantage, but Hannibal paid that no mind. “You will come back to me at the same time next week.” It wasn’t a question, but Hannibal waited for Hisoka’s response.

***

The mention of his lover made Hisoka smile a little wider, yes he couldn't wait to claim him once again. He heard the instruction; He was to return next week, at the same time as today. He had no objections. "Of course, Doctor," he said, and his voice sounded dreamy to his ears.

***

Hannibal let his hand fall and walked to the door, opening it, he stood aside to let Hisoka pass. The man’s endorphin high was impressive, and he knew that he was in for a fun trip home. He only wished that he could watch what happened after he left his office.

***

Staying still, Hisoka watched as his Doctor walked away from him. When he realised that he was heading for the door, he sashayed forwards. If anyone wasn't aware of what had transpired in the room they were in, they could have been forgiven for thinking that he was sober. As he passed the cabinet with his artwork, he gave the two rabbits a playful little wave.

Once he made it to the door, he stepped through into the waiting room, and turned to face Dr. Lecter. He gave him a polite bow.

"I hope you have a pleasant evening, Doctor," he said as he straightened. "Do I have your permission to leave?"

***

Hannibal smirked when he saw Hisoka wave at his rabbits and walk seductively towards him; his gait didn’t falter and, thankfully, the bulge in the man's trousers had begun to subside.

When he bowed, far more expertly than any of his previous attempts, Hannibal was sure that he’d been coached by someone. His guess was Lulu, but he would have to wait to confirm if it was correct. As responsive as someone like Hisoka was, he was still a predator, and if he moved too fast, or pushed too far, he would come out fighting.

He didn’t want that just yet.
When his new submissive asked if he had permission to leave, Hannibal’s smile softened. “You do, mon cher,” he said. “Oh, and Hisoka, as interesting as it was to see you in civilian clothing, I do prefer to deal with the real you, and,” he added as the thought occurred. “Do remember to take care of Lulu.” He was interested to see what impact that instruction would have. He realised that he was looking forward to their next session already. Apparently, Hisoka wasn’t the only one who was becoming intoxicated. He would have to keep a close eye on himself for their next session.

“Enjoy your evening, mon cher. Until next we meet.” He gave Hisoka a slight bow and watched as the man turned on his heel and sashayed away. His eyes focused on the round rump of his ass, and he licked his lips.

Next week could not come soon enough.

***

Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:

Hannibal

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Hisoka
The Empress

Chapter Summary

Hisoka decides to treat his new toy and Illumi begins to listen to the voice in his head, but what neither of them counted on, was Hannibal's ability to enforce his rules outside of his sessions.

Illumi blinked twice as he stared at the ceiling.

His Master hadn’t spoken a word as he’d entered the small hotel room, but one look at the man had been enough to know what he’d wanted. Without warning, Hisoka had tackled him to the bed and ripped Illumi’s clothing from his body. The next three hours had been a blur of skin, sex and pain. Nothing they’d ever done together had come close to inducing the complete and satisfying lethargy Illumi was feeling right now.

“That was...” he started to say, but there were no words that he knew of to describe what had happened.

***

Sitting next to him on the large bed, Hisoka eagerly gulped at his water. With a playful grin, he looked at his still naked lover as he blinked up at the ceiling.

"I guess this means Master owes you another new outfit, Lulu...maybe you should start wearing easier access clothing?" he teased.

***

At the suggestion, Illumi nodded. “I shall endeavour to find some, Hisoka-san,” he said, still too stunned to move.

***

Oh Illumi, you're so adorable like this. You really are my favourite toy, Hisoka thought with a chuckle, glancing around the room for one of his jester outfits. Sighing, he finished his drink and turned to his boyfriend.

"Lulu I don't suppose you remember where I put my normal clothing? As nice as the outfit you got for me was...I felt so out of place," he pouted, "Dr. Lecter got suspicious. I don't think it's a good idea for me to dress like a civilian again."

***

Illumi did his best to sit up. The scratches Hisoka-san had left across his chest were starting to scab over, but he would need to clean them properly. He moaned as his muscles protested but managed to prop himself up on his elbows and watched his Master as he turned, pouting at the fact that he couldn’t find his clothes.

Illumi wanted to say that he didn’t mind his Master as he was, but bit back the response. He’d been
spending too much time around Hisoka-san and was developing bad habits. He didn’t particularly care one way or the other about the fact that the Doctor hadn’t liked Hisoka-san’s new outfit. It had been an experiment.

“I put them away in the draws behind you, Hisoka-san,” Illumi said nodding in their direction.

When a flash of gold caught his eye, he quickly re-focussed. “Master, what’s that on your wrist?” he asked curiously.

***

Inwardly, Hisoka cursed. In his daze, he’d completely forgotten to try covering the gold band with his own Nen. He froze as he opened the drawer. Lowering his gaze to his wrist, he sighed.

"Dr. Lecter's Nen; it seems I was wrong about him being a specialist. He's a conjuration Nen user." He tried to sound unbothered by it, but if he was honest with himself, it did bother him a little. He turned his attention to his lover's naked body, eyeing the healing wounds with interest.

"We should get those cleaned up, you know," he said thoughtfully, hoping he could distract him from further questions about the band. *Do we have to talk about him right now? I refuse to let the Doctor ruin the moment.*

***

Illumi stilled at Hisoka-san’s casual words **“Dr. Lecter’s Nen”**.

“He conjured that?” Illumi said, entirely ignoring his Master’s suggestion. Crossing the bed in one fast movement, he took the bracelet in his hand and started to inspect it for himself. “What did he say it did?”

***

When Illumi took his hand, Hisoka sighed impatiently. *Of course you'd rather talk about the band than let me take care of you. I'm your Master. I need to tend to your wounds.*

"It's a way of forcing my obedience Lulu," he said matter of factly. "Let me get you cleaned up, and you can look at it once we're done, OK?"

The appointment had been rather intense; he wasn't in a hurry to revisit it just yet.

***

Illumi felt his blood run cold at the casual summary of the bracelet's function but nodded at his Master’s instruction.

“Of course, Master,” he said, biting down the urge to ask more questions.

***

"Good boy," Hisoka said, smiling affectionately. He gently pulled his wrist out of his lover's grip. "I'll get the first aid kit from the bathroom. You may ask your questions while I'm cleaning you up...think of it as my way of making it up to you for destroying more of your clothes..." he trailed off as he stood up from the bed.

"I understand your concern for your Master, Illu-chan, but I have to take care of you too, you know," he called as he strode, still naked, into the small en-suite.
Illumi watched as his Master sashayed into the bathroom and despite everything, found himself appreciating the view.

He didn’t quite understand what was happening to him, but as Hisoka-san emerged with the newly re-stocked first aid kit, he forced his eyes upwards and asked, “Did he explain how it works?”

Gesturing for Illumi to sit up against the pillows, Hisoka thought about the question. How it works? Not really, no.

"Not exactly how it works, sweetheart, more what it does." He positioned himself next to Illumi as he got out the items he would need. "It's purpose is to apply reward and punishment."

Once he was happy he’d identified the worst cuts, he set about cleaning them as gently as he could.

Illumi hissed as he felt the alcohol wipes being pressed against his skin, and maintained his focus as he listened.

“...reward and punishment.”

“And how does it do that?” he asked as evenly as he could.

Hisoka looked up from his cleaning in response to the question - the hissing, he knew, he could ignore. Illumi was resilient, but he'd still felt the need to make proper wound care a priority when laying down the rules of their playtime.

"Well, when I was obedient and answered his questions, it did give me some absolutely delightful jolts..." His heart sped up a little as he remembered how good it had felt. "I am not sure about the punishment yet..."

Humming thoughtfully, Hisoka resumed his earlier cleaning of Illumi’s cuts.

Watching his Master’s body as he spoke, and listening to his words, caused Illumi’s stomach to sink.

“And how did you react when the jolts happened, Master?” He was determined not to jump to any conclusions without gathering all the information he could first.

"Lulu," Hisoka said, sighing a little. "You know your Master is a masochist. I think you can probably guess with a fair amount of accuracy how my body reacted." He finished cleaning the worst of the scratches and turned his attention to the more minor ones.

"I did try to stop myself reacting, but it was hard to process once the high kicked in..." He stopped for a moment. "I think I might have sworn...I can remember him warning me about that.” He
shrugged it off and continued checking for anywhere else that needed his attention.

***

*You’re being trained!* Illumi thought, feeling rage building inside him but managing to push it down as only a born Zoldyck could. True, it had been his idea for his Master to pretend to submit to Lecter, but allowing the man to attach his Nen to him...

“How did he force it on you, Master?” Illumi asked as emotionlessly as he could.

***

"He talked to me about the conditions for him accepting me as his submissive...then he asked me if I consented to those terms." Hisoka frowned slightly as he tried to recall the conversation. Specifically, where he had been asked to consent to Hannibal's Nen being used. "When I accepted, he instructed me to kneel in front of him and hold out my hand."

He finished attending to his lover's chest and moved to put a hand on his shoulder before asking, "Do you have any other areas that I need to check, Lulu?"

***

“I believe the top of my back may be marked too, Master,” Illumi said blankly. As he leaned forward to allow Hisoka-san to look, he asked, “So you did not consent to him attaching anything to you?”

If Lecter had used his Nen without Hisoka-san’s permission, they may have something they could use against him.

***

Hisoka gestured with his hand for his lover to move so that he could get to his back. He listened patiently to the next line of questioning. He’d been doing this a lot lately, he mused; answering other people's questions. It was an odd turn of events. He usually answered to no-one, but ever since his former Danchou's little stunt, he was answering to everyone, it seemed.

"I honestly can't recall him mentioning that Nen was to be involved in the agreement, but I'm still a little hazy from the endorphins, my dear,” he said absently, as he appraised his handy work. "Your back heals so nicely, Illu-chan, if you keep being good I might draw another pretty picture on you,” he teased reaching once more for the first aid kit and resuming his humming as he worked.

***

Illumi shuddered as his Master’s words washed over him. The promise of more pain, even after such recent ecstasy, was so tempting.

“You are not the only one who is still woozy, Master,” Illumi breathed. “My apologies for asking so many questions. It is not my place...” He hung his head and leaned forward to give Hisoka-san better access to his back.

***

Hisoka smiled at Illumi’s words; discovering the different ways he could affect his lover never seemed to get old. He really had become his most prized possession.
"Perhaps not, my sweet Lulu, but you’re only acting out of concern for your Master. I would say that is allowed in this circumstance.” He placed a gentle kiss to the nape of his neck.

"I did give you permission to ask your questions while I tended to you as well, don't forget,” he reminded him, continuing to apply dressings and cleaning up the dried blood where needed. "Do you have any more questions for me?"

***

“Just the one, Master,” Illumi said, shuddering at the feeling of Hisoka-san’s breath on his neck. “Do we know if it will work when you are not with him, and how...strong, will it be?”

***

The question bounced around Hisoka's mind as he finished his task. He couldn't recall Dr. Lecter mentioning anything about the band needing proximity to work, or it's strength. *I really should have asked more questions, the band is on my wrist now. I suppose that there’s nothing else I can do but learn to work around it and figure out how it works by trying to set it off.*

Silently he started to pack away the rest of the first aid kit, carefully assessing everything he did remember; he'd been so surprised the first time he’d felt the pain in his arm. It had been so nice, and he'd found it hard to resist the compulsion, to tell the truth.

"No, I'm afraid I don't...I only know that it's supposed to bind me to the terms of our agreement. That, and it won't come off."

***

“May I ask what those terms are?” Illumi said, looking up at Hisoka-san.

***

"As it says on the engraving, obedience...civility and growth." Hisoka recited. "Basically, I have to do as I'm ordered, I’m not allowed to be rude, and he expects me to work on improving myself."

***

Illumi couldn’t quite picture Hisoka-san ever truly being obedient, or civil, but the last clause... "What is there to improve about you Hisoka-san?” He was genuinely confused; he couldn’t imagine his Master needing to change in any way. He frowned at the idea that Lecter might actually think that he could shape his Master into becoming a different person.

“He’s training you, Master?” Illumi said. It was meant as a statement, but as he listened to his words, he realised it had come out as another question.

***

"I think he's going to try to, I don't know how successful that will be,” he said, trying to sound reassuring.

"He wants me to read a book about friendship...he found out I don't really make friends.” He sighed. "I'm going to put this in the drawer, so it's closer to the bed.”

***
Illumi nodded at the suggestion, still frowning at the idea of both Hisoka-san reading a book and that anyone would suggest such a topic.

Turning to face his Master, he asked, “Why would anyone want to read about that?”

***

Hisoka chuckled; he’d expected that reaction from Illumi. He found it reassuring that he hadn’t been mistaken.

"Apparently, Dr. Lecter thinks that I need to learn the value of friendship; he didn't say why. Although, he was asking more questions about you than he did before. He thinks your coaching me, and he guessed that you picked out my clothes."

***

Illumi’s eyes darkened. “When we find a way to free you, I will kill that man,” he said simply, meaning every word.

***

The stern expression accompanying the sudden declaration made Hisoka's heart skip a beat. For him, Illumi was at his most beautiful when he was fueled by bloodlust. He felt his own desire to maim and kill flicker in response.

"Oh, Illu-chan, you're so sweet, perhaps you could make him into a tribute to your Master?” He reached out and pulled Illumi to rest against his bare chest. "I think I would enjoy seeing you make a wonderful tableau, just for me, with his blood."

***

Illumi rested his head over his Master's heart and listened as it sped up at the idea.

“I swear it, Master,” he whispered.

He pushed his Master to lie down on the bed and curled over him.

“How would you have me do it, Hisoka-san?”

***

"Hmmm?” Hisoka pondered the question as he idly stroked his fingers through his lover's long dark hair.

"Well, I think you should make it last a while, draw it out. I want him to suffer...You can do that, can't you?"

***

Illumi hummed happily at the idea as he let himself drift in a contented haze once again. His Master’s hand felt so good in his hair. It had come as a shock to him the first time he’d touched him like this, but he’d grown to like it over the years.

“Yes, I can make him suffer for years if you wish, Master,” he said dreamily.

***
Hisoka chuckled at the idea of keeping his therapist locked up for years and giving him to his Lulu as his own 'toy'. He had to admit that it had a certain appeal to it. The more practical side of him warned that the longer they kept the man alive, the more dangerous it would be. It was less than a full day since he'd learnt first hand just how powerful the conjurer's Nen was.

"As much as I adore your skill and I would relish the chance to watch you work him over..." he paused and looked at his wrist with a thoughtful expression, "The longer you keep him alive, the more risk you're taking; he could use his Nen on you. Unless you were to cut his hands off early on?" He kissed the top of Illumi's head.

"Just make him suffer, Lulu, and make damn sure he knows who he shouldn't have messed with. Maybe toy with him for a month and then let me see you finish him? I want him to know he's your gift to me."

***

One Day Later

***

Illumi looked over as they walked down the street, ignoring the guard beside them, and saw the grin on Hisoka-san’s face. He felt a warm curl of pleasure swirl in his stomach, and he smiled in return; it made a nice contrast to the experiments of the morning.

He’d insisted that Hisoka-san found out what happened when he broke one of Lecter’s arbitrary rules, and the results...had not been fun.

He’d watched his Master’s face crumple after he’d instructed the man to call him as many vulgar names as he could think of. Hisoka-san had stopped after the third slur and had said that he’d felt like his arms were on fire. Illumi had begun to refine his plans for exactly how slowly Lecter was going to die in his head.

Now though, Hisoka-san was practically bouncing. Illumi had run down to the concessions stand and bought him every Bungee Gum they had in stock after they’d finished, but he was beginning to wonder if allowing his Master so much sugar had been a mistake.

***

Hisoka looked around at all the people on the street as he walked with his Lulu on one side, and Kyoya slightly behind him on the other. There was a giddy feeling building within him as he took in the various shops, sights and sounds of the outside world. When he’d been told about his limited area of freedom, he'd taken to sulking in his hotel room. However, with his lover by his side, it didn't feel quite so bad anymore.

After a morning of unpleasant experiences at the hands of Dr. Lecter's Nen, he was now happily chewing on his favourite treat and delighting in trying to annoy his lover by making and popping the most massive bubbles he could. He smirked cheerfully at any annoyed looks they got.

Looking over at his lover, and taking in the beautiful outfit they’d found before they’d left, he grinned and asked, "So, Lulu, I think we should work on getting you some easier to remove clothes...as fun as it is to tear them off." He ran his fingernail up Illumi's back and teased, "Maybe
we could even give them a test run tonight, hmm?"

He thought back to his research about the area surrounding the hotel, and the clothes shops within his range. It would just be a matter of finding one that would cater to both of their tastes.

***

Illumi blushed and tucked his head down in the demure way he’d seen other women do in this situation. Seeing breasts jutting out from his chest was always slightly jarring, but he’d worn the disguise of Lulu enough over the past few days that it didn’t feel too surreal any more.

The feeling of his Master’s nail running over his back made him close his eyes for a brief moment and sent shivers down his spine. He wondered if Hisoka-san was going to want to buy him female clothing to match his new disguise? If that were the case, Illumi realised, then his Master was likely going to want to take his time and play dress up with his new doll.

“If you wish, Master,” he said in a high, bashful voice. “I am here to please you.”

***

Kyoya raised an eyebrow. “You know that slavery is illegal, right?” he asked Hisoka cautiously, eyeing the small woman and trying to work out if she was with them of her own free will or not.

***

“Of course it is,” Hisoka agreed as he put his arm around Lulu. “But last I checked BDSM wasn’t.”

His lover’s words had thrilled Hisoka, and he’d smiled when he saw the shy blush on her cheeks. It had been odd, at first, to see Illumi looking like an adult version of the young girl he’d known back in his circus days. However, the strangeness of it had quickly subsided and had been replaced with a hunger to claim the new body.

Humming happily, he looked down at his new toy and said, "I’m very pleased to hear it, sweetheart, and that's all the more reason for us to find some more suitable clothing for you. I think we need to get something to compliment your lovely peridot eyes."

He chuckled when he saw her blush deepen and looked around, trying to decide where he should take them first. Spotting a popular women’s clothing store further down the street, he grabbed Lulu's hand in his own. "This way, I think I know just the place."

***

“This is a sex thing?” Kyoya asked, wincing when he heard how high his voice had become, and doubled his pace to keep up with Hisoka’s sudden increase in speed. “Please tell me we aren’t going to- Oh, crap,” he groaned, spotting where they were heading. “Hisoka, I am not playing third wheel again.”

***

"I'm just buying some nice things for my girlfriend, if you prefer you can wait outside the shop?” Hisoka replied cheerfully, scratching his wrist. "Unless you have to keep me in sight in which case, I'll try to be quick."

***
“You know I can’t leave you,” Kyoya groaned. “You really weren’t paying attention to Miriam when she was explaining things this morning, were you?”

***

“I was,” Illumi said, pretending that he was a little breathless from the exertion of keeping up with his Master. “Master was...paying attention to parts of her, but it’s OK. I understand the rules and respect them. I will not ask you to leave him; in fact, it’s a comfort to know he is being looked after by such skilled guards. There are a lot of bad people in the world. Thank you.”

He could see the sign on the shop and felt an odd mixture of dread and alien excitement as they headed towards the doors.

***

“You’re welcome?” Kyoya said, slowing and checking who was around as they approached the department store. Who the hell are you? I thought Hisoka had a boyfriend? That’s what Zeller was saying? What’s going on? “I’m sure he’s capable of looking after himself. I’m here to make sure he...doesn’t break any rules.”

***

Hisoka chuckled as he confidently strode into the lingerie store. Ever since he had found out his lover could take on a female form, he’d wanted to bring him to a place like this. Grinning widely, he continued to lead Lulu through the shop until they reached a display of corsets. Looking at the various options with a practised eye, he finally selected a dark purple overbust corset with black lace trimmings. Turning, he held it up against his Lulu’s new top half, before nodding his approval.

"I think I would enjoy seeing you in this one, Lulu," he purred, then looked back at the selection for other ideas. "Do you see any that you like?"

***

Illumi did his best to hide his shock as Hisoka pulled him straight towards the corset section, but after he’d allowed himself a few moments thought, and ignored the groans from their guard, he realised that his choice made sense. Hisoka had apparently spent his formative years in a circus, and the woman Illumi was now pretending to be would likely have worn costumes. These were no different.

"Do you see any that you like?"

Illumi tried to look at the clothing through his Master’s eyes, and asked himself what would suit the body he was in right now the most?

“That one,” the new voice inside his mind said. “I’d look spectacular in that one, and you know it.

He kept his posture submissive and shy as he tried to look like someone wasn’t talking to him inside his mind, and pointed towards a black corset with a bright red bust and gauze that would cross around his neck. It would shape his curves, he knew, and draw attention to his breasts, whilst still leaving something to the imagination. “I think that’s pretty Hisoka-san,” he said, not needing to put much effort into sounding slightly flustered.

***
Hisoka's eyes widened as he looked to where Lulu pointed, taking in the black and red design. The addition of material to go around his lover's neck was an interesting idea; he liked it. Without saying a word, he picked the garment up for closer inspection; he wanted to test if the material was as soft as it appeared.

"I think you would look wonderful in this Lulu," he agreed. "I really can't decide between them; maybe I should just buy them both? What do you think, Kyoya?"

***

Kyoya glared at Hisoka. “I said I’m not playing third wheel. You might be into this kinky stuff, but you are not dragging me into it. I’m not going to dress up your girlfriend. That’s not why I’m here.” And I’m not looking at your girlfriend’s boobs. I thought Zeller was joking about the threesome stuff. Hell if I’m getting fired over this!

***

"Alright, I won't make that mistake again," Hisoka said, holding up his hands as he tried to work out why the man was reacting so strongly to a simple question. "My apologies. Hmm, we'll still need some things to go with these." He scratched at his wrist and looked back at his lover. "Come on, Lulu. We have a lot to look at."

***

Illumi allowed himself to be led around the shop, pretending to be embarrassed as he watched and observed, cataloguing the potential threats - all but one of which, Kyoya appeared to have missed - as well as the designs his Master seemed to take a shine to.

There wasn’t really much for him to do in this situation. His role appeared to be that of a life-sized doll, and he was more than happy to play it.

“Of course you are, it’s what he wants,” the voice said. “We want whatever makes him happy, and I’m going to make sure he’s never sad again. That’s what I’m for; let me show you how to make him smile. I know you like it; you want to see that grin on his face whenever he looks at you, don’t you? You’ve made him the perfect body; let me help you perfect your mind.”

***

Hisoka turned his attention to the more traditional lingerie options; bras and panties, stockings and garter belts. He’d never been one to pass up an opportunity, and he enjoyed as he selected a handful of styles in various colours that he felt would compliment Illumi’s new paler complexion. His thoughts idly drifted to the real Abaki one or twice...he had never said goodbye.

***

Keeping up his innocent and embarrassed act had taken all the skills he’d acquired through his years of training.

After Hisoka-san had pulled him around various sections of the shop, and pointedly avoided asking his guards opinions, he’d headed for the tills. Illumi had to admit, his Master had chosen well; all the outfits would look good on his body. He didn’t know why he was feeling so strange. There was an excited buzz at the back of his mind, but he didn’t quite know how to bring it up while they had company, and when his Master was in the bedroom with him, he tended not to talk that much. He was more interested in finding out what noises he could get him to make.
“Stop over-thinking this, and just be happy,” the voice told him. “It’s called enjoying yourself. Get used to it.”

***

Once he was happy he’d found everything he wanted, he quickly made his way to the checkout.

“I can’t wait to get you to try these on back at the hotel, Lulu dear,” he purred, holding up the bags for Illumi to see.

***

“Of course, Master,” Illumi said quietly, dipping his head experimentally, feeling a foreign amusement when he saw the wide-eyed look Kyoya was giving him. “Please, lead the way, I am yours to dress however you see fit,” he added, and felt the voice chuckle in the back of his mind.

***

“Oh, come on, we’re in *public,*” Kyoya moaned. “People don’t talk like that. Please, people will start looking, and you’ll draw even *more* attention to-”

***

“I thought you didn’t want to play third wheel, Agent,” Illumi said, sharpening his tone and looking the man sternly in the eye. “If you have an issue with how I talk to my lover, then I would suggest that you either hold your tongue and respect my right to free speech, or you take it up with him. You can not have it both ways. I will happily include you in our conversations, but if you disrespect us again, I will request another officer be assigned while I am present. Hisoka-san may be under guard, but I am *not.* You *will* respect me, do you understand?”

***

“What the...I thought you were supposed to be-” Kyoya began.

***

“Submissive?” Illumi said, raising his brow. “I submit to one man, and one man only. Do not assume that you know me, Kyoya. There is a reason I chose a man as strong as Hisoka-san as my partner. You would not last two minutes. Now, if you will excuse us, we have some shopping to complete.”

Where the hell did that come from? he thought, masking his confusion as he turned to his Master. *Please don’t be angry with me. I don’t know why I acted like that. What’s happening to me?*

***

“Well you heard the lady,” Hisoka said playfully to his guard. *You even managed to sound like her too, how? I don’t remember talking about her temper with you, Illu-chan.* "How would you feel about more skirts and dresses? Lingerie and corsets are nice, but we need clothing suitable for day to day wear too.”

Transferring the bags into one hand, he took Lulu’s hand once again and continued leading the way through the shopping district; disposing of his now flavourless gum and replacing it with a new piece.
It feels so good to be out and about, even if I am limited to a three-mile radius. Maybe I should look for that book store soon?

***

“As I said, Master,” Illumi said, having to take twice the number of steps he usually would in order to keep up with Hisoka-san’s excited pace. “I will wear whatever you wish; I am yours.”

Besides, Illumi thought, It’s not like I haven’t worn them before. Why does this feel so different? Why is this body making me react like this? Who’s talking to me? Psychoactive drugs don’t work on me, what’s happening?

It was sweet that his Master seemed to genuinely think that he cared what he looked like. Illumi couldn’t tell. But sometimes the man confused him. He was pretty sure that the question had been rhetorical...but there was always a small part of him that wondered if Hisoka-san cared a little more than he let on...at least about some things. But, he was a reflection of his owner, maybe that was why he was taking his time to dress him up? He’d thought that the clothes he’d purchased the other day were adequate, but it would appear that his Master preferred garments with a bit more drama to them.

***

Hisoka smiled and led the way down a couple of side streets, away from the fancier women's clothing stores; opting instead for a larger department store.

Turning his attention back to his partner, he said, "I know this is probably not as...high end as what you're used to, my dear, but it's a bit more subtle and,” he looked over at Kyoya who appeared to be sulking. “Will draw less attention to us.” He entered the store, making a beeline for the women’s section. I’m sure we’ll find plenty of suitable clothing here, the window displays look like Abaki’s style. Illu-chan will wear what I tell him to, so I may as well make the most of this opportunity to get out. I should probably go to that book store while I’m at it.

***

Frowning, Illumi followed and looked up at Hisoka-san. “You know that I will be happy with whatever you chose for me, Master. I’m flattered that you want to do this for me. I don’t mind what the clothes cost, only that you like them.”

He squeezed his arm and pressed himself against Hisoka-san, imitating the affectionate couple he’d seen in the street earlier. “You know that I’m here for you,” he whispered, making his high voice sound dreamy. “Just being here is enough, everything else is a bonus.”

***

"Now now Lulu," Hisoka replied, ignoring Kyoya's scoff from behind him. "I know you've come a long way to see me, and we still need to be discreet about our relationship. I want to spoil you while I have the chance, and I think I’ve spotted something ideal.” Putting his arm around Illumi’s waist, he guided him over to rack filled with dresses. So it appears you don’t like Kyoya much; you’re not usually this clingy. Was it for his benefit or mine?

***

“Dresses, Master?” Illumi asked, looking up into Hisoka-san’s golden eyes adoringly. “I suppose they are the most ‘accessible’ items here.” He felt a wicked smile forming on his face, and the voice prompted his lips to start speaking. “I can’t wait to see what you choose for me,” he purred.
What on earth is going on?

***

Checking that Kyoya was still keeping up with them, Hisoka nodded. "I see no reason not to show off those lovely legs of yours," he teased before kissing Lulu's cheek. "But yes, they would be very accessible. I am rather fond of the classic little black dress, but I think I would like something a little more colourful. Don't be afraid to suggest things; you're the one who has to be comfortable in it. If it were up to me you'd only need to wear lingerie, or you'd be naked, but sadly there's laws against public nudity."

***

"And since when have you cared about those?" Illumi purred, allowing the voice to direct his words. His Master seemed to be reacting positively, and he couldn't suddenly switch his mode of speech halfway through a conversation. Kyoya might not be a great guard, but he would notice that.

***

Hisoka chuckled. "It's a new idea I'm trying out," he teased. "I want to show off just enough for people to be jealous that you're mine, while not drawing too much attention to us."

***

Standing on his tiptoes, Illumi nuzzled up to Hisoka-san. “Then let me see what I can do for you,” he whispered, nipping at his Master’s ear playfully. It felt strange to be this affectionate, but if this was what Hisoka-san wanted, then this is what he would learn to do.

Looking around, he spotted a deep burgundy floor-length, wrap-around dress. Smiling wickedly, he tugged on his Master's arm and directed him towards it.

“How about this one, Master?” he asked. “It’s both classically respectable and,” he licked his lips. “Breathable.”

***

That one? Hisoka glanced over at the rack Illumi was pointing to curious to see what his lover had found. *Did you pick it for the colour or do you like the style as well? Blood red would be wonderful on you.* He wondered as he idly trailed his hand down Lulu's side.

“I think you would like ravishing in that,” he said, quickly looking around the rails nearby. "Although I do think we should get some less eye-catching colours too." His excitement rose as he added, “You’re going to need some shoes as well.”

***

“Well, I suppose that rules out the nude selection,” Illumi teased, wondering where the voice got its inspiration, and watched as his Master excitedly searched through the various racks of clothing that surrounded them. “I do love watching you work, Master,” he added, needing to speak for himself. “You are magnificent.”

***

"Don't sell yourself short, my darling. You know I only accept the best," Hisoka said, kissing Lulu's
cheek and scooping up a skirt that would look lovely on Illumi’s new body. *This will leave plenty to the imagination as well as showing off those delightful curves. Still, I feel like I’m forgetting something important.*

Shrugging the thought away, he grinned as he added a few more tops and finally a little black dress to his basket. “This should be enough to be going along with. You’ll look fantastic in the white off the shoulder crop top paired with the green skirt, and it can be dressed up with the purple shirt. I can’t wait; you’re going to be stunning,” he declared as he led them over to the tills, idly scratching at his wrist as he joined the queue.

***

“I’ll be your perfect work of art,” Illumi said, listening to the voices prompts as he spoke. He knew that different disguises brought their own distinct personalities with them and that they could sometimes hide various quirks that he had not anticipated, but he’d heard the voice *before* he’d gained the new body shape.

Hisoka-san’s description of Abaki had excited the voice; it couldn’t have created it.

Who are you? he wondered.

“I’m Lulu,” the voice answered. “Don’t worry, sweetie, you’re going to be safe in my hands. Together, we’re going to be perfect for Master.”

You aren’t; you can’t be. Don’t lie.

There was no response. Illumi took that as his queue to focus on his Master again.

Standing beside him as he piled the clothes onto the checkout, he watched Hisoka-san closely. Something wasn’t quite right. He wasn’t as excited as before, and he appeared to be ever so slightly twitchy. He tried to think what might have happened to have caused the subtle shift in his Master’s demeanour, but couldn’t think of anything significant that had happened.

Kyoya was still following them at a respectable distance, but he got the distinct impression that the man amused Hisoka-san, rather than irritated him.

He saw him scratch at his wrist and narrowed his eyes. *Lector, what have you done?* “Master,” he asked as evenly as he could, “Are you OK? Where would you like to take me next?” He waited to see what he would suggest and hoped that it would give him enough information to narrow down what the Doctor had done.

***

Watching the shop assistant ring up his purchases Hisoka reached out to pull Illumi to him. *What have I forgotten? We picked up tops, skirts, a few dresses and some shoes. Lingerie we got from the other store, but something still feels wrong.* He looked down at Lulu, pausing at the sight of the blond hair and smiled. *That’s it; he’s being my girlfriend Lulu, but I still keep thinking of him as a man. Yes, that must be it. I’ll adjust, I always do.*

"Are you hungry, my dear?" he asked. "We can grab some lunch once I’ve paid for your new outfits."

***

“I could eat if you wish, Hisoka-san,” Illumi said. Something was definitely wrong, he never
usually touched him like this, and he didn’t avoid his questions. Was it all part of the act? Maybe he wanted to talk to him somewhere a little less conspicuous?

***

"I am a little hungry actually, and there was a nice quiet cafe that we passed on the way here. Perhaps we should let Kyoya have a well-earned sit-down?” Hisoka suggested after paying for the clothes and collecting the additional bags. "It's just around the corner,” he added as he headed for the exit.

***

“Very well,” Illumi said and made sure to look like the idea pleased him. “I could change into something we’ve just bought if you would like me to model something for you, Master?” he offered. “I’m sure that we can buy Kyoya something as a thank you for putting up with degenerates like us,” the voice added and Illumi felt his lips curl into an amused smirk.

***

“I never said-” Kyoya began, but cut himself off. “Look, I’m just here to make sure Hisoka doesn’t start any trouble, and to be back up if someone decides to start it with him. I’m not... I don’t think that you’re... you know what, never mind. I’ll get myself a sandwich and leave you two to it. Think of me as a silent shadow. Have fun.”

***

"Well, you're still welcome to sit with us, or at a separate table. I understand you're working but, I'm just trying to be friendly," Hisoka told the guard as they left the store and made their way towards the cafe entrance. "To be honest, Lulu, you look delightful in what you're already wearing. Although you could change in the women's, or you could give me a private show later with the lingerie," he teased. "Your current handbag should work with any of the new outfits.” He clicked his fingers. “That's why I feel like I'm forgetting something, I meant to buy you a new one. I know, you should model one of the dresses, and I’ll go get you that new bag.”

***

“"It would be my pleasure,” Illumi said, stepping aside as a child tried to poke at his leg from a pram. “I’m sure I could have a small meal waiting for you when you both return if you like?”

***

Hisoka brightened at the suggestion, "That sounds ideal, my dear." He smiled down at his Lulu. "I'll leave the bags with you."

Flashing an apologetic smile at his guard, he added, "I guess this means lunch will have to wait a little longer."

***

“It’s fine,” Kyoya said, offering Hisoka a weak smile. “As long as you don’t start to offer to buy me one as well, then we’re all good.

***

"Wouldn't dream of it," Hisoka replied. "I'm sure we'll find a shop that sells handbags and be back
in no time."

***

“That sounds delightful, Master,” Illumi said and handed him his purse. “Hide this,” he whispered. Once his Master had slipped the bag under his top, Illumi walked them all into the cafe. It looked pretty plain and had enough people in to ensure that they wouldn’t stand out too much. Hisoka-san would always attract attention wherever he went, but the beauty of that was, that anyone with him was hardly noticed at all.

Making his way to a quiet table by the wall, he started to sit down.

“Oh, darling,” he said, just loud enough for him to be overheard by the people sitting at the next table. “Oh no! I think I left my purse in the shop we just left!” He plastered a stricken look across his features. “It had everything in it!”

***

Realizing what Illumi had planned, Hisoka moved to comfort his seemingly distraught girlfriend, feigning shock as required. "Don't worry, Lulu," he said soothingly. "We haven't come far, wait here, I'll go back and ask if it's been handed in."

As he passed the counter, he stopped to ask the waitress to help his girlfriend while he tried to find her missing purse. Once he was satisfied their ruse had been successful, he gave his lover a small wave and blew him a kiss before leaving the cafe with Kyoya trailing close behind.

***

Illumi waited at the table, making sure to fiddle and look nervous, until, finally putting on the act of ‘giving up’ and grabbing the bag that he knew contained the burgundy dress from earlier. He picked up a second bag that held a pair of black stiletto heels and got up to go to the toilet. He smiled at the waitress, knowing that she’d been suitably charmed by his Master, and gestured for her to ensure that no one touched the other bags. When he received a polite nod in return, he headed for the bathroom.

Once he was in the stall, he made quick work of entirely stripping out of his clothes and slipping into the new dress. He hadn’t time to try to figure out how to put any of the lacy bras Hisoka-san had picked out for him on, and so, deciding that his Master wouldn’t mind, decided to go commando.

He’d had to learn how to walk in high heels for a previous alias and so, as he strode out of the bathroom in his new floor-length dress, his step didn’t falter. He practised adding a little sway to his hips, the way he’d seen his Master do when he was feeling particularly predatory, and noted several men turn briefly to watch.

Satisfied that his updated appearance would please his Master, he went over to the assistant Hisoka-san had talked to and negotiated two coffees along with a simple tuna-mayonnaise sandwich for him to eat upon his return. The lady insisted that it was fine that they could both pay before they left, and he gushed over her generosity until she was blushing, and insisting that it wasn’t a problem at all. She even showed her back to her table and brought over a menu in case he changed his mind about the food.

***

Hisoka grinned as he left the shop with a new handbag for Illumi’s disguise, he felt rather pleased
that he'd been able to stash the purse inside without Kyoya noticing. *You’re not the most observant guard I’ve ever met, is this your first time guarding somebody in the field?*

Walking in silence side by side they made it back to the cafe where he found his lover waiting for him, exactly where he’d left him. Quickly making his way over to Illumi’s table, he stopped for a moment as he cast his eyes over his new outfit. *You really like that dress, don’t you, Illu-chan? I have to admit it looks even better on you than it did in the store.* Smirking as he got close enough to whisper to his lover, and he lowered his voice to ask teasingly, "Why is such a beautiful lady sitting all alone in a place like this?"

***

Illumi feigned shock at his Master’s arrival, but couldn’t hold back the genuine blush that filled his cheeks at his words; he wasn’t used to compliments and being treated in this way was both flattering and slightly disorienting. He was used to his Master treating him as a prized possession - because that was what he was - but he wasn’t used to being taken out and, for all intents and purposes being treated as if he were his girlfriend.

He turned and looked up into Hisoka-san’s smirking face and ignored the confused look the guard was giving them. Innocently he said, “I’m waiting for my Master to return, have you seen him? He’s exceptionally handsome.” He lowered his voice conspiratorially before adding, “And wickedly creative.”

***

*Oh, Illu-chan, you always know exactly what I want to hear.* Hisoka thought, pleased by his lover’s reaction, and with a predatory smile, sat down at the table. "Oh? Well, I don't see him around, maybe I’ll do instead?"

***

Looking demurely over at Hisoka-san through half-lidded eyes, Illumi ignored the voice in his mind and said, “Well, I hope you are ready to fight for me when he turns up, he’s a world-class Hunter, and I’m not supposed to be talking to anyone but him.” It was a risk, but not much of one. Hisoka-san lived for fighting.

***

Hisoka leant back in his chair with an amused grin and said, "Is that so? Well, I was once a Floor Master. I'm sure I could hold my own if he challenged me."

***

Illumi smiled and fiddled with his napkin. “I’d like to see that,” he said. “It always makes me excited to see my Master fight. I hope you really were a Floor Master...You’ll need to be strong to beat him. I’ve never known him to lose to anyone, and he would be so angry to know that I’m sitting here with a strange man.”

Illumi wasn’t quite sure if it was him talking or the voice, but either way, he was enjoying himself. The voice, it seemed, could match Hisoka in her ability to flirt.

***

Reaching across the table to take Illumi’s hand, Hisoka smiled wider as he caught Kyoya’s confused expression. "Forgive my manners; I haven't introduced myself yet. I'm Hisoka Morow, no
doubt you've heard of me? Until recently, I was a popular fighter at heaven's Arena. Your boyfriend won't punish you for talking to me, will he?” he asked and brought his lover's hand up to his lips for a gentle kiss. “I would hate to be the cause of anything bad to happen to such a delicate flower as yourself.”

***

Illumi felt the flush return and looked down as his Master reached over to take his hand.

“I-” the words got trapped in his throat, and he coughed to clear it. “My name is Lulu,” he said quietly. “It’s nice to meet you, Hisoka-san.” He couldn’t meet his Master’s eyes. “I lied before, I remember you; I’ve seen you fight many times.” His mouth felt dry. “I’ve thought about what it would be like to meet you, to be with you, but I never thought it would happen.”

He turned his own small hand in his Masters and marvelled at the difference in their size. “And don’t worry, Mr. Morow.” He looked up and smiled wickedly. “The smallest of flowers often prove to be the deadliest in the end. Size really doesn’t matter.”

***

Unable to resist any longer Hisoka chuckled. "Indeed I couldn't agree more, my sweet Lulu. I got your handbag, and I have to say you look simply divine in that dress,” he paused and gave Illumi's hand a gentle squeeze before letting go. "I might actually have to fight to keep you,” he teased as he held up the handbag for his lover to take. You're still standing there staring at us? Just how inexperienced are you, Kyoya?

***

Illumi smiled, pleased that his Master seemed to like Lulu and that the voice had been entertaining enough to him to make him laugh.

“Thank you, Master,” he said in Lulu’s soft tones. “I’m sure you’ll win, every time.”

He looked up as a waitress approached with his order and politely moved his hand. When she asked who the tuna sandwich was for, he gestured towards Hisoka-san, and noticed Kyoya’s stunned lack of movement.

“Would you like to join us?” he asked politely. “I’m sure the waitress would be happy to get you whatever you liked.”

***


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“Are you OK?” Illumi asked evenly.

***

“I think so?” Kyoya answered, not quite believing his own words. Watching Hisoka flirting with his own girlfriend had made him feel...strange. He didn’t know if sitting at the same table as the two of them was a good idea, but if Jack found out that he’d left Hisoka alone, on his first assignment in the outside world, then he might as well kiss his future goodbye.
He coughed and accepted the chair the waitress offered him. “Thanks.” He nodded to her and sat down. “Yeah, I’ll have a coffee. Black, three sugars.”

***

Hisoka thanked the waitress before she left to fetch Kyoya’s order and smiled at Illumi. “Did you not want anything for yourself, darling?” he asked before taking a bite of his sandwich. *You're so good at looking after your Master my Illu-chan.*

***

“I have my coffee, Hisoka-san,” Illumi said as he stirred his drink. He really wasn’t hungry; the turmoil of the last few days had played havoc with his appetite, but he didn’t want to disturb his Master, not when he was so cheerful.

Instead, he decided to smile cheekily and slide his leg forwards under the table. “I’m sure you don’t want me to get fat,” he said, echoing his mother’s words whenever anyone would comment on her small portion sizes.

Sliding his stiletto clad foot up the back of Hisoka-san’s calf, he sipped at his drink and wondered how to change the topic. For a moment, he contemplated asking Kyoya a question, but the voice piped up at the back of his mind and, he had to agree, it’s idea was far better than his. It wasn’t exactly a direct change of topic, but it was good enough. “You seem to be enjoying yourself, Master,” he said, licking the foam off his lips. “It is nice to see you so happy.”

***

No, I just can’t see you ever getting fat Illu-chan. Hisoka arched an eyebrow at his lover’s comment but chose to ignore it. "I feel happy," he agreed. "Getting out for a shopping trip, forgetting about my therapy for a little while, it's been a nice change of pace," he sighed and scratched at his wrist again as he smiled over at Kyoya. "You know I do actually like your company; I didn't mean to irritate you earlier. I know you're my guard, not my friend, but I don't mind having you around."

***

Kyoya ducked his head and felt a flush filling his cheeks. *Oh, please tell me I’m not actually blushing. What the fuck is wrong with me?*

“Yeah, I’m sorry too,” he said. “I’m just a bit sensitive about that stuff I suppose. Miriam and Jade really screwed me over. I told them I wasn’t going to get involved, but Jade can’t take no for an answer, and,” he added, realising what he’d just said. “If you tell either of them I said that I’ll...probably be found in a forensically clean box at the bottom of a ravine. So please don’t.”

***

"Don't worry, I'm very good at keeping secrets," Hisoka replied kindly before sipping at his coffee. *Wasn't Jade the one we went shopping for? *"It's really none of my business anyway, and I did promise I'd behave for you. Besides, Miriam clearly doesn't like me, and I don't actually know who Jade is."

***

“She’s the one we overheard Zeller and Miriam talking about the other day,” Illumi said absently, noting his Master scratching at the skin by the golden band. “She was dating Miriam and was supposed to be guarding you. Jack has taken her off duty.” Hisoka-san’s usually pale and smooth
skin appeared a little inflamed. “Master,” he said cautiously. “May I see your wrist?”

***

"Oh, right," Hisoka shrugged and held out his arm with the band for Illumi's inspection. "Is this about my scratching? It's just been rather itchy today for some reason." I can't be allergic, can I? It's made from Nen.

***

“Your skin,” Illumi said, leaning in to have a closer look, “It’s irritated. How long have you been scratching for?”

***

“And what the hell is that?” Kyoya said, staring at Hisoka’s arm. With his Gyo active, he could see red tendrils seeping out of the band. “Shit, who’s done that?” Please, tell me you're not under attack. Not on my watch. Jack’s gonna kill me if you die!

***

"Dr. Lecter," Hisoka replied simply. "It's Nen. I'm not the most cooperative patient, so he took precautions to make sure I behave. As for the itching, since this morning I think? Plus, I keep feeling like I've forgotten something important, did I mention anything when I got back from therapy yesterday, sweetheart?"

***

“Dr. Lect- Hisoka, look at your arm with your Gyo. What kind of therapy are you undergoing!” he asked, utterly aghast by what he was seeing. “What did he tell you to do?”

***

"If you ask me, the pointless kind. I don't really believe in this therapy thing," Hisoka replied as he ate the last bite of his sandwich. "How bad can it be?" he asked rhetorically before activating his Gyo and staring at the wisps of red Nen that were starting to crawl along his forearm.

***

Illumi looked down at his Master’s arm, and activated his Gyo. “It’s...beautiful. I remember you telling me how it worked,” he said as he gingerly touched the metal; it felt warm. “You said that Dr. Lecter had told you that you had to obey him, that you couldn’t be rude and that you had to work on,” he paused, holding back a sneer. “Improving yourself.”

He turned his Master’s hand in his and saw that the word Growth was glowing. As much as he was growing to detest the man, he had to admit, the Doctor’s Nen was impressive.

***

"The bookshop," Hisoka groaned. "It's near his office, and he assured me it was within my allowed radius. "I didn't think he could actually use this band to force me to do anything if I wasn't actually in the room with him. Guess I underestimated him." He looked at the reddened skin around the bracelet thoughtfully. "I'm actually impressed, if a little annoyed."

***
“He’s forcing you to comply?” Kyoya said at the same time as he saw Lulu lifting up his wrist.

***

“It is impressive” Illumi admitted. “But the fact that the Doctor has done this, with the full knowledge that Hisoka-san is under the...protection, of the Hunter Association and the BAU, would lead me to believe that it is legal. We should go to the shop soon. After this morning’s experiments, I do not wish to see what would happen if you delay this any longer.”

*Did you really believe that, after everything we learned this morning, or are you just saying that for Kyoya’s benefit? Please tell me you weren’t curious. I know you like to experiment, but please don’t do it on yourself.*

***

"Yeah the book shop, he wanted me to get a book on friendship. I’d like to get it over with,” Hisoka agreed and glanced over at Kyoya. *Please, tell me Dr. Lecter hasn't gone as far as to ask the shop staff to tell him when I've been. Just how far is he going to take this? "Do you want me to see if we can change your order to a take-away coffee?"

***

“Yeah, I’ll...go do that,” Kyoya said, pulling his phone out of his pocket. “I just have to make a call,” he added, staring at the band and really wishing that it didn’t have to be him that informed Jack his best friend was a madman who was experimenting on his patients.

***

Hisoka smiled at Kyoya and held up his hand to signal for him to wait. "Kyoya, if it's about the band it's fine, really. I consented to it, but it's my nature to push boundaries. I don't enjoy being confined. Dr. Lecter told me that he uses a patient-focused approach, and he wouldn't do anything he didn't think would benefit me. He wants me to read a book," he explained. "Surely you'd agree without the influence of his Nen, that I wouldn't have even bothered to go to the bookstore? Please, don't cause trouble for Dr. Lecter on my account;" he added as he thought. *He's mine to cause trouble for. Don't get involved, I like you, but I will kill you if I have to.*

***

“Oh, I’m not going to cause trouble, but I do have to report this. After that, it’s out of my hands. I just hate playing messenger,” he grumbled and walked off to find the shop assistant. At least she seemed like a sane person.

***

“He won’t stand between you, Master,” Illumi said; his words sounded soft in Lulu’s voice. “He clearly doesn’t like conflict. It makes me wonder why he went into law enforcement. Maybe it was a family career?”

He handed Hisoka-san his bags and accepted his new purse, noting the careful gold embroidery appreciatively. “Very good needlework; this was made by a craftsman. Thank you.”

He rose to his feet and held out his arm for his Master to take. “Shall we, my darling? The day is still young, and we have,” he flashed his eyes up at Hisoka-san eagerly. “Experiments to carry out. I am interested in finding out what will happen when we find your book. I wonder if you will be rewarded?”
"Maybe I will," Hisoka agreed thoughtfully as he accepted the bags and looked around for his guard. "I'm glad you like the bag. I hoped you'd enjoy the embroidery. It seemed like something that would suit you," he said softly, accepting Illumi’s arm.

Kyoya accepted the piping hot to-go cup of coffee and ended the call to Jack. He couldn’t believe that what Dr. Lecter appeared to be doing was actually acceptable, but his superior officer had said it was fine, so it was out of his hands now.

Striding back over to the most bizarre couple he’d ever met, he plastered on a polite smile and said, “Well, that’s my duty fulfilled, let’s go sort out yours.”

Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:

Illumi (Illu-chan/Lulu), Kyoya

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Hisoka
The Knight of Swords

Chapter Summary

A chance encounter leads to an unexpected opportunity for Hisoka to learn more about his therapist.

Warnings for discussions of murder, torture and violent acts.

***

"Did Jack have any objections?" Hisoka asked with a smirk once Kyoya joined them outside the cafe. "I'd hate to cause Dr. Lecter any trouble when he's been so keen to help me." Maybe I can get out of this enforced therapy sooner than expected? Or will they just hand me over to somebody else? Reaching for Lulu's hand, he set off towards Dr. Lecter's office with his guard close behind.

***

"He said that he was aware of what Dr. Lecter can do and that I should get back to guarding you, not trying to bad-mouth your therapist," Kyoya admitted. "He's the boss," he shrugged. "Don't argue with the boss. So, where exactly are we going?"

***

"Well I've been told to go to a specific book shop, one that's near to Dr. Lecter's office," Hisoka explained. "He said it was only two streets away and would be within my range of movement, but I'm not familiar with that part of the city. I don't suppose you know where the shop is?"

***

"Oh, Minerva's," Kyoya said happily. "Yeah, we used to get our textbooks there. Come on; I'll show you."

***

Illumi was never more grateful to have learned to walk in heels than he was now. He had to take two steps for every one of the men's, and it reminded him of when he was a child and having to keep up with his Father.

They wove their way through streets lined with vendors and managed to dodge the more entrepreneurial ones who tried to dash out to surprise them into stopping.

When they walked down yet another side street, he was about to object and ask that they look at a map, when a truly monstrous sight befell him.

"Oodles of...Poodles?" he said quietly. "Who would call their store- Why? "

***
Hisoka looked up at the sign when he heard Illumi muttering to him and shrugged. "It's most likely a pet grooming salon, or a pet shop or some kind. Besides, it rhymes and people like that."

***

"Hey, my Aunt shops there," Kyoya said defensively. "Her dogs win prizes."

He turned them around and pointed to a shop halfway down the street. "Minerva's is there. If you insult that place, I will have to get Miriam to slap you," he deadpanned. "Some memories should not be ruined."

***

"Promises, promises," the voice said before Illumi could stop it. He felt the flush run up his neck almost immediately.

Why did you say that? Master must know that I want him. I don't want her!

"No, but I do," came the amused reply from the back of his mind. "And he'd love to watch."

No, he wouldn't! Stop lying!

***

"Now now, darling, we can have plenty of fun when we get back to the hotel. I just need to get this book on friendship and then we're done for the official shopping of the day." Hisoka replied before he looked at his band. Now that he was able to see the store, the itching had begun to die back, and the redness was fading from his skin. Huh, it's almost like it's reacting to my intent to do as I was told? he thought.

Pushing the disturbing idea aside, Hisoka smiled at Kyoya before he said, "Thank you, I would have ended up walking all the way to Dr. Lecters and then gone exploring the area if you weren't here to save us. I really don't understand why he insisted that I had to come here, though. Surely I could have gone to any bookshop? Anyway, we're here, so we should head inside."

Heading down the street, he walked up to the door and held it open for Illumi to enter the store he added, "Ladies first," and grinned happily at her.

***

Illumi offered his Master an apologetic smile as he passed him and walked inside. Looking around the teaming shelves, he took in the heady smell of all the books and the quiet, almost padded silence of the building.

Feeling Hisoka-san approaching him from behind, he said, "It would make sense if he often sends his patients to buy books for themselves that he would pick a store close to where he works, would it not?" Illumi asked.

***

Hugging Illumi from behind, he kissed his boyfriend's cheek and hummed thoughtfully, considering his lover's words. Maybe I'm just reading too much into everything? It's not like I actually trust Dr. Lecter; I really don't see how talking to him about stuff that happened in my childhood will prove I'm sane.
"Perhaps," he sighed, letting go when he spotted a sign pointing to the psychology section. "I've never been in therapy before, or known any therapists, so I don't know how they usually operate. Why don't you have a look around while I go finish my 'homework'"

***

Illumi felt a little lost. He had no desire to go anywhere without his Master, but it appeared that that was exactly what Hisoka-san wanted him to do.

"Very well, Master," he said dutifully and headed for the psychology section. He didn't like leaving his Master alone with Kyoya, but if that was what he wanted, then that was what he would do. There had to be a reason that he ordered him away.

Not wanting to risk the possibility that the Doctor had laid a trap for them here, he activated his Gyo and began to look around the shelves.

***

Making his way through the store, Hisoka felt the anxiety from earlier slipping away a quick peek at his bangle showed that obey and growth were glowing faintly. Rolling his eyes, he switched his focus to a nearby display, hoping to find something of interest.

*Dr. Lecter wanted me to read about friendship, but he didn't give me a specific book to look for just that I had to come here. I don't suppose they have an idiot's guide that I can quickly flick through; it's been a while since I actually read a book myself.*

He was jolted out of his thoughts when his gaze settled on a display that was laid out on a table. Prominently displayed in the centre was a small paperback titled - The Psychology of Friendship.

With a small audible groan of irritation, he rolled his eyes. *Of course they fucking do,* he thought to himself as he picked up a copy to read the summary. Catching a glimpse of Illumi, he frowned slightly. *Are you actually interested in this stuff? You don't look like you're taking in any of the titles, have you sensed something that's got you worried? Or did I upset you?* he wondered as he approached his boyfriend. "Lulu, are you OK? You've seemed a little...not yourself?"

***

Turning, Illumi found himself looking at Hisoka-san with his Gyo activated, and it made him more determined than ever to end Dr. Lecter's life. He could see Nen travelling up his Master's arm and watched it intensify as he held the book aloft.

"I am fine," he lied. "Master, tell me what you are feeling right now," he asked quietly.

***

"How the hell is this legal?" Kyoya said, following Lulu's line of sight and staring at Hisoka's arm. "You're lit up like a creepy tentacle Christmas tree."

***

"A what-now?" Hisoka asked, arching his eyebrow and staring at Kyoya for a moment before shaking his head. *Nevermind that, Illu-chan asked me a question, didn't he? Yes, he asked how I was feeling?*

"I'm feeling fine at the moment; all the anxiety has gone. Although now I'm curious as to what a
creepy tentacle Christmas tree would look like," Hisoka tried to joke as he stared at his arm with his Gyo.

***

"I would suspect, something like that, Master," Illumi said as evenly as he could manage. "Are you sure you are feeling, OK?"

***

"I think so? I'm not so sure now though," Hisoka admitted as he trailed his eyes down his arm. Following the thin red tendrils of Nen that stemmed from his bracelet with his gaze, he gasped. "Is this what you saw in the cafe, Kyoya?" he asked, unable to tear his eyes away from his arm. They look similar to Machi's Nen stitches, just more delicate and they're a different colour. "I mean, the nagging sensation that I'd forgotten something important went away when we came in here. The itching stopped when we were by the dog salon, and my skin's nearly healed."

***

"No, no it's not," Kyoya said, unable to look away. "It's..." he shuddered. "How is this legal?"

***

"Hisoka-san," Illumi asked, more forcefully than he would usually, trying to get his Master's attention. "You see it, don't you? You know what he's doing." His lip curled. "He's trying to train you. He's punishing you when you don't comply and rewarding you when you do."

He watched as the tendrils thickened. "Are you sure you are feeling alright?"

***

Of course he's training me, I offered myself to him as a submissive, he's hard to read, but he's almost certainly a dominant. "Well, it makes a weird sort of sense that he would," Hisoka mused. "I'm not exactly a willing patient; I need persuading to cooperate. Although, I have to say it is rather beautiful," he sighed as he took one last look and deactivated his Gyo. Turning his gaze back to the book in his hand, he said, "I felt drawn to this book, but there's no Nen on it. I'd have felt it."

***

Hannibal almost missed the soft, angry tones of a woman saying Hisoka's name. He'd been looking for more books to keep Mr Lucilfer entertained, but he couldn't resist investigating the sounds coming from the other side of the shop. Am I going to get to meet Lulu, mon cher? How are you going to explain her presence to me, I wonder? Looking down at 'The Mythology of the Greeks through a Modern Eye', he neatly tucked it under his arm and headed over to the psychology section.

He heard a man saying, "Beautiful? You think the tentacle band is beautiful?" and he raised a brow. Whoever was speaking certainly didn't sound female, or bright, but it was clear that they were talking to Hisoka.

You think my Nen is beautiful? Truly, mon cher?

Plastering a polite facade onto his face, he rounded the corner, took in the three people standing by The Psychology of Friendship display, and felt his lips tilt up into a grin. "You flatter me, Mr. Morrow," he said. "Coming from someone with such prestigious talent, that means a lot."
Is that Lulu with you? I know the guard, Jack's still labouring under the delusion that he's a competent officer. Do you really think my Nen is beautiful?

***

"I didn't expect to see you here," Hisoka said, looking up from the book in his hand and noting the one under his therapist's arm. "Surely you already have all the books you need in your library already, Dr. Lecter? I'd hate to think that you were checking up on me." Without thinking, he moved closer to Lulu. Was I right about you spying on me? Or are you just here because it's close to your work?

***

"I was here collecting a book for a patient," Hannibal said easily. "There's a reason I recommended the store, they have a wide collection of works and are happy to order in if you have anything specific you would like to look into."

Turning his gaze down to take in the petite woman beside Hisoka, he bowed slightly and offered his hand in greeting, "I apologise, you must think me frightfully rude. My name is Hannibal Lecter."

***

Illumi moved to stand closer, but ever so slightly behind his Master and, going against every instinct in his body, took Lecter's hand.

"Lulu Nikolaev," he lied easily, offering Hannibal a small courtesy as he shook his hand. "Pleased to make your acquaintance," he added, making sure to keep any eye contact he had with the Doctor brief; he was his Master's submissive after all and it was vital that he fulfilled his duty. This meeting would make or break their plan.

Why had neither of them accounted for the fact that they might run into the man outside of Hisoka-san's therapy sessions? What had Hisoka-san told him about him being there? Think, Master, what can we tell him that isn't a lie?

***

"Oh, where are my manners? Lulu, you remember me telling you about my therapist, don't you? The one you wanted me to dress nicely for," Hisoka said kindly as he put down his bags so that he could wrap his arm around his lover, and looked back at Dr. Lecter with a small smile.

"I hope you'll forgive my darling Lulu if she's not herself today. She travelled a long way to surprise me and is still tired from her journey," he advised. "I'd already planned to pick up a book to study, and she wanted to come with me, so we've been picking up some things for her along the way too. While we're all here though, could I be so bold as to ask if you would approve of this one? I understand you want me to take my studies seriously, so I would be grateful for a nudge in the right direction." It's not really a lie, but will you believe it? The band isn't punishing me, so you have no reason not to trust me.

***

She did? Kyoya thought. You could have fooled me. I thought she'd been in your room for the last week. What timeframe for the 'surprise' are we talking about here?
Hannibal smiled softly, making sure to maintain tight control over his Zetsu. The guard was frowning and staring at Lulu, but he wasn't going to jump to conclusions just yet. He needed more information, and he'd found that it always paid to make sure that he was under, rather than overestimated by his audience.

Giving Miss Nicolaev another polite bow, he wondered if she weren't of the same school of thought. Her dress was startlingly beautiful, but she carried herself as if she were an actress. **What role are you playing now I wonder, ma chere? What does Hisoka want to show the world? You feel like a coiled snake; are you his secret weapon? Charming her was going to be important. You're his key. I wonder if you'll help me unlock his marvellous mind? I'd hate to have to break you.**

"I hope your journey was a pleasant one," Hannibal said kindly before turning back to Hisoka. "Yes, that was the book I hoped you would choose. It explains the important concepts well, whilst, thankfully, not condescending the reader by assuming that they can't grasp the basics by themselves. It is quite an enjoyable read."

***

"I see, well I'll definitely get this one then. How could I ignore such a glowing review?" Hisoka replied playfully. Smirking, he gestured towards the book Dr. Lecter had tucked under his arm. "Are you looking at further topics for me to study or do you have other extremely interesting patients? Don't worry; I understand if you can't answer."

*How convenient that the same book you wanted just happened to be in front and centre of the display. Did you arrange this for me, Doctor? Why would you go to all that trouble?*

***

"I am afraid to say that I am a non-monogamous therapist," Hannibal said in mock solemnity. "I do see other patients, but everything is consensual, I promise."

*You know I can't answer you, but how will you react if I turn it into a joke, I wonder?*

***

*Oh, God, not you too, Kyoya thought, inwardly groaning. Can't someone just be normal for once?*

***

Seeing the utterly bewildered look on his Master's face, Illumi decided that now was the right time to take a chance. The topic needed to be changed, and there was one thing he wanted to know above all else, the only difficulty he was facing was how to ask about it without being rude.

"I am sorry if I am speaking out of turn, Doctor," he said demurely. "And I realise that you may not be able to answer my question, but what, exactly is the device you have put onto Hisoka-san's wrist? He has told me that it is a therapeutic tool, but I fail to see how placing my Master in bondage will enable any form of personal growth?"

***

Hannibal looked down at the woman beside Hisoka and refined his initial analysis. **You aren't just a snake are you, my dear; you're a Viper.** He had to admit, he was impressed.

"It is a simple tool, nothing more. I find that it helps to focus the mind of those who would otherwise find the process hard. I assure you, your Hisoka-san is in no danger."
"Darling it's fine honestly, it looks worse than it is. You know what I'm like; I hate talking about my past, it's not a pleasant experience. Dr. Lecter is just trying to make things easier for me. He's not averse to unorthodox methods if he sees value in them," Hisoka soothed trailing his hand down Illumi's arm gently.

Turning back to Dr. Lecter he added, "Isn't that right, Doctor?"

Smiling to himself, Hannibal watched the subtle domestic argument unfolding in front of him. Lulu looked gloriously murderous. If she was his submissive partner, then Hisoka had somehow managed to tame a beast of a woman. You really are full of surprises, aren't you, mon cher?

"Yes," he said, throwing the full authority of his position behind his words and inwardly smirking when the guard straightened his back. "It is why I am the only therapist who has had a consistent level of success when it comes to treating Hunters. We are a unique kind of people when it comes to our psychological makeup; competition comes naturally to us, and we do not fear death. The examination process is a brutal one, and, I have found, it tends to leave people believing that anything provided to them by the Hunter Association will be equally challenging."

He saw the flicker of some kind of emotion behind Miss Nicolaev's eyes as she shifted position, but couldn't read what it was. Hisoka merely tilted his head. "I like to think that my therapy sessions are more enjoyable than the exam, but some patients require a little more assistance than others. My bands are safe and have helped many people. I mean Hisoka no harm."

He was surprised to find that he meant it. He felt drawn to Hisoka, but not in the same way he did towards Chrollo. He wanted to take Mr. Lucifer apart and watch how he reacted to having to piece himself back together, but Hisoka... What do I want from you? Why do I find myself thinking about you? What makes you special? "I assure you, I am a professional. I will do everything I can to keep Hisoka from coming to any harm."

Hisoka chuckled. "Yes, I actually got disqualified the first time I attempted the exam, but I was able to pass it on my second attempt," he agreed happily. "Brutal is certainly one way to describe it, and I am confident I will learn to work with the band in time. Lulu is naturally protective of me; we don't get much time together. Our relationship is still a secret from her family, so we aren't used to being seen together as a couple. It is nice to be so far away from prying eyes."

Pulling Illumi against him, he kissed his boyfriend's cheek. "I'm a lucky man, I know. I still wonder to this day what I did to deserve her." he smiled at Dr. Lecter before he said, "He's an expert in his field, he knows what he's doing. You don't get a Double-Star ranking without considerable hard work." You're clearly proud of your achievements, Dr. Lecter, how will you react to some careful flattery I wonder?

Illumi allowed his eyes to close when Hisoka-san kissed his head and tried to see if he could get a better read on Lecter's Aura. He was shocked to find that, without his sense of sight to aid him, it was as if he wasn't there at all. His Zetsu was as strong as his Grandfathers. You really are as powerful as Mother claimed. How can I get Hisoka-san away from you? Why isn't he more worried? Have you gotten to him already?
Dropping his head as his Master withdrew from the kiss, he opened his eyes and stared at the band again. It's that, it has to be. What kind of Nen are you using on him? You've deflected every time I've asked a question; why is Master letting you? Is he really just pretending?

Looking up at Hisoka-san, Illumi saw the smile on his face and tried to keep the worry from showing. "I am sure you don't," he said quietly. "I didn't mean to question his credentials. It's just hard for me to see..." He lifted his Master's arm and ran a finger over the now slightly warm band. "You aren't a man who should be bound."

***

"And I am a man who wants to set him free, ma chere," Hannibal said gently. "I do not believe that he is guilty of the crimes he has been accused of, but he has also been through a great trauma. I intend to help him, and if binding him temporarily is what is required, then that is what I will do. Think of it as a cast for a broken leg; temporary discomfort for long term gain."

***

"My Master is not broken," Illumi hissed.

***

"He is not entirely unwounded either, Miss Nikolaev," Hannibal said, noting the fire in the woman's eyes. Just how strong are you? "I am merely here to assist in his recovery."

***

"Now there's no need to fight over me," Hisoka gently chided with a grin. "By some people's standards, I would be seen as broken, but by others, I'm not. It's all perspective, and I'm not bothered, so you don't need to be upset on my behalf. Why don't I go and get this book paid for then I'll take you anywhere you like within my range of movement. I want to see that pretty smile of yours again," he added. You're upset; I need to get you away from prying eyes and ears to ask. Play along; you've always been good at improvising in the past.

***

"Yeah, that...that seems like a great idea," Kyoya said. "This situation is not tense at all. We're all happy campers here." He glanced at Lulu. Please don't make me have to break up a fight. The Doctor's Jack's friend and you're way more scary than I first thought. Why did I let Dad talk me into becoming a cop? I'd have been so happy as a locksmith.

***

Grinning at the guard's clear unease, Hannibal said, "Please, I didn't mean to interrupt your day. It was lovely to meet you, Miss Nikolaev. It is wonderful to see someone with so much passion."

He stepped aside to let them pass and smiled at Hisoka. "I hope you enjoy the book, mon cher."

***

You wouldn't risk my ire by going for my lover, would you, Doctor? He's become more upset since you've been here. I can only assume he's picking up something that I've missed. Can your band cause me to overlook things? Hisoka wondered.

Outwardly, he turned to Illumi and asked, "Lulu, sweetheart would you be a dear and take the book
to the till and pay for it for me? Take Kyoya with you, I'd like to ask my Doctor about something we discussed in therapy, and it's rather private. There's only us here; I promise I won't get up to any mischief." He pointedly didn't look at the guard as he waited for his lover's reaction.

***

Cocking his head to the side, Illumi took in the scene before accepting the book. "Of course," he said in Lulu's gentle tones, ignoring the voice inside his head that was screaming for him to stay. "Come, Kyoya, we have a book to buy. The Doctor has already proven that he can keep Hisoka-san under control." He did his best to hide his sneer and managed to keep all but the slightest twinge off his face.

***

"What?" Kyoya said, staring around the shop. "But I can't-" He saw the look on Dr. Lecter's face and backed away. "After you," he said to Lulu and inwardly winced at the pitch of his voice. *I am so not cut out to be a cop. What the hell are these people smoking?*

***

Hannibal raised an eyebrow as he watched the retreating forms of Lulu and the guard, but turned to Hisoka when they were out of earshot.

"You wanted to talk to me, mon cher?" he said, resisting the urge to move closer. It wouldn't pay to assume what Hisoka wanted, and so he kept his tone neutral as he asked, "How can I help?"

***

Hisoka smiled sweetly at his therapist before stepping closer and lowering his voice. "For the record *Doctor*, Lulu is mine. As such, she is not part of our little arrangement; she cares for me deeply and I for her. She's already rather upset with me, but I made my choice, and I consented to this," he said in hushed tones as he held up the band for Hannibal to see. "She did not consent to be part of the game, so I am respectfully asking that you leave her alone."

***

Hannibal smiled knowingly at his patient. "I assure you, I have no interest in moving in on your territory. If I gave you that impression, I do apologise. She is a beautiful woman, but," he looked Hisoka up and down. "She is not my type. I do not intend to include her in any of our, as you put it, 'games'."

***

Not your type? Am I your type after all? Hisoka blinked with the realisation that Dr. Lecter had agreed. "I see, well, I guess that's alright then. I was just concerned that you might feel she was under your dominance too, via virtue of submitting to me. Seeing as I'm well, in a way, your submissive."

***

"That you are, mon cher," Hannibal said, softening his tone and allowing a little of his hunger to enter his voice. "But she consented to be yours, not mine. Boundaries are important, and I'm glad that we," he flashed a knowing smirk at Hisoka. "Understand each other a little more." He looked over to the counter and watched Lulu accept the bag from the shop's owner with a polite 'Thank you'.
"You make wise choices, Hisoka," he said as Lulu stalked towards them. "Keep up the good work."

***

"Yes, well, you did tell me to take care of her. If I didn't act to protect her..." Hisoka paused. He wanted to say against a threat, but felt it would be unwise. "If I didn't look out for her interests, and make sure that the boundaries were established I'd be a rather poor Master. He looked over and smiled warmly at the sight of his lover coming back, with a confused Kyoya in tow. "I'm sure you understand, I would fight anyone to the death who dared to try to take her from me. She's in many ways, the light of my life. The day I saw her in Jappon for the first time, I knew." He looked back at Dr. Lecter. "That I wanted her to be mine, whatever it took."

***

Without turning his head, Hannibal replied, "I know the feeling well, mon cher."

***

Are you trying to flirt with me? Hisoka chuckled before leaning closer to whisper, "Careful now; you wouldn't want me to get the wrong idea now, would you?"

Pulling back, he turned to Illumi and opened his arms wide to welcome his lover back." Lulu," he purred. "I missed you. I know you were only gone for a few minutes, but to me, it felt so much longer."

***

Hannibal smirked at Hisoka's obvious display of territoriality and offered Lulu a polite bow. "My apologies for monopolising your partner's time," he said. "I hope that you did not get the," he paused as if thinking. "Wrong idea about me."

***

"Not at all, Doctor, it is I who should apologise," Illumi said, doing his best to sound humble now that the alien anger he had been feeling had died back. Accepting the hug from his Master, he went on, "I'm afraid it's been a while since I last ate and Hisoka-san has promised to take me to his hotel's restaurant when it opens tonight," he lied smoothly. He knew he had to maintain their cover, but he didn't want to be around the Doctor for longer than necessary.

***

Hisoka allowed himself to relax now Illumi was in his arms again. You belong here, with me. My Illu-chan, he's not going to take you from me." "The restaurant?" he mumbled before brightening. "Oh yes, I wanted to take you out to dinner. You know I'd prefer to take you somewhere a little nicer, but well, I'm on a short leash these days. Still, I'm sure we'll be able to make the best of it. Maybe I should get you a new dress to wear? Although I do rather like you in this one."

***

Seeing Hisoka relax so visibly when his girlfriend returned to him, Hannibal stood back and thought through his options. He could leave and allow Hisoka the satisfaction of having successfully defended his territory or...

Turning to face Lulu he softened his gaze and said, "As an apology for the circumstances, may I offer an olive branch; I have a dinner party coming up, and it would be a delight to add you to the
guest list, Ms. Nikolaev. It's happening in a week and a half; and if you can attend, I would be
honoured to cook for you."

Looking back up at Hisoka and meeting the man's direct stare, he said, "I am sure I would be able
to work out a few additional arrangements so that you could accompany her. I live within your
radius, and you have proven to be an exemplary patient. Let me put some work in for you, mon
cher. The paperwork would be no trouble."

Pointedly looking Hisoka over from head to toe, he said, "I should add that it is a black-tie event. I
could recommend a few local tailors if you do not have a suit with you."

***

Illumi's eyes widened at the unexpected development, and he instinctively looked up at his Master
to see how he was going to handle the situation. He hoped desperately that he wouldn't turn the
man down; he knew it was a test. It would be incredibly rude to refuse such an offer, but he also
knew that Hisoka-san would avoid black-tie events like the plague.

"What do you think?" he asked in Lulu's high voice. "It could be nice to meet new people?" He
hoped that his Master would take the hint.

***

"We would be delighted," Hisoka agreed easily. "It's so rare we get to be a proper couple, and I'd
like to be able to do something nice for my wonderful Lulu. If you're sure, you don't mind the
inconvenience? Perhaps you could even frame it as part of my rehabilitation; a chance for me to
prove that I can behave in a civilised manner would help my case, wouldn't it?" I don't have a suit,
but I'm reluctant to let you send me to any more places. I'm already suspecting you're spying on me
somehow if I end up at a tailor and you just happen to be there then I won't be able to hold my
tongue.

***

"It would, yes," Hannibal said, impressed.

He smiled down at Lulu. "Ma chere," he said. "I am ever so pleased you came to see Hisoka. You
are already proving to be a boon to his progress."

***

Illumi lowered his gaze as if embarrassed by the praise and said, "Thank you, Doctor." Squeezing
his Master's hand, he went on, "I will look to see if I can be assigned an investigation close by, it
would be lovely to stay with you for a little longer." He leaned in closer and whispered, just loud
enough to be overheard, "Thank you."

***

"Do you think you could? I don't want to cause any issues for you with your family. But I'm
loathed to let you go now I have you here," Hisoka growled playfully. "I've got so many
wonderfully wicked things planned for when we're alone at the hotel."

***

Hannibal felt a snarl brewing in his chest and fought to keep his face calm. The sudden jealousy
had taken him by surprise, and he made a note to examine it later.
Smiling stiffly at Hisoka, he said, "In that case, mon cher, I shall leave you to your shopping." He was surprised that he sounded so calm. "Sayonara."

Bowing politely, he stepped back to leave.

***

Hisoka returned the smile and nodded, still holding Illumi to him. "Thank you for the book recommendation; I'm sure I'll learn a lot from it. I hope you have a pleasant evening, Doctor; I'll be looking forward to our next session." Did I strike a nerve? You seemed a bit more wooden than usual.

***

"Did that just happen?" Kyoya asked as he watched Hisoka's therapist sweep out of the store. "Did I just hear your therapist invite you out for lunch? How is that not a violation of the Doctor-Patient relationship? What is going on here? Why do I feel like I should be arresting my bosses best friend?"

***

"Well he's a well-respected therapist and Hunter, it's like he said. The exam attracts a certain type of person," Hisoka replied, holding in his chuckles. "If he's making the offer, then there must be a way for him to get authorisation." Letting go of Illumi, he picked up the bags at his feet. "Shall we find you a nice dress for our upcoming dinner date, Lulu?"

***

"No, you can't... that's not how the world works, Hisoka," Kyoya said, running in front of his charge to bar his exit. "You can't just say something is a fact and then make it so."

He stared at two sets of bewildered eyes and gave them an equally mystified frown in return. "Unorthodox methods don't include dinner parties!"

***

"Apparently they do," Illumi said sweetly. "I don't know what world you are living in, but in this one, I am about to be bought a new dress, and will be arranging a job procuring rare flowers in the area for my family's firm."

***

Hisoka smiled at Kyoya. "Well, maybe you should look up what a Hunter license gets you. If you think the benefits are worth it, then you can train hard and try to pass it yourself. Just a friendly warning though, when I got mine I was one of only a handful to pass. Over four hundred started the test, and a lot of them died in the attempt," he explained patiently. "Even then, that's no guarantee of success. Dr. Lecter has not only passed the exam but has earned two stars as well. There's only one rank higher than that, and that's the triple star. Only ten people are currently alive with that status. Please, don't try to arrest him, definitely not alone. You're a good person, don't throw your life away."

***

"People died?" Kyoya squeaked as he allowed Lulu to push him aside. "Miriam said that when she did it...and Zeller too. They saw people die? For a licence?" His eyes widened as his mind whirled.
"I am so not paid enough for this." He shook his head. "Don't worry. There is no way in hell that I'd ever go after Dr. Lecter alone. No, scratch that; ever go after him. That would be like arresting The Guru."

He stared at a small blue book that claimed to explain why people dream, and shuddered. "No way. I am not paid enough for this. Let's go try on dresses."

***

"I think we could find something that would suit you," Hisoka joked, trying to lighten the mood. "Come on, don't worry about it too much. Things are going to change under Chairman Yorkshire; she's more sensible than Chairman Netero from what I have heard. I made a promise to behave for you, and I will keep it."

***

Illumi felt his stomach growl and froze in embarrassment. He knew it's what a lady like Lulu 'should' do, and now, more than ever, he had to preserve his mask. "Master," he said, as if mortified. "I am sorry to interrupt, but I think I may need to eat before I find my dress."

***

_Food might be an idea, I may have had that sandwich, but Illu-chan and Kyoya haven't eaten._ "Maybe we should head back to the hotel for a bit? We have a lot of shopping already, and we can always leave these bags in my room before heading back out. Or dress shopping can wait for tomorrow if you want to catch up on your sleep?" Hisoka suggested.

***

"I...could try to figure out how to write up a report," Kyoya agreed, before realising he didn't have to. "Any ideas about how I should phrase what just happened?"

***

Illumi straightened and felt his stomach rumble again. The store assistant was starting to give them strange looks. "Let's walk and talk," he said in a confident tone. "Words are easier when you are on the move."

***

"I don't know why, but I believe you," Kyoya agreed. "Let's go."

***

Taking Illumi's hand Hisoka lead the way out of the door and into the open air of the street. _I like you Kyoya_, he thought. _But I don't understand why you became a cop? You're far too skittish and overly sensitive for this line of work._ "Let's go to the Hotel."

***

"I don’t like him," Illumi said as they entered the hotel lobby. “He’s a predator...and he wants you. I don’t like it.”

He ignored the confectionary stall owner that was giving him an odd look, along with Kyoya’s stunned silence, and made his way over to the lift. They’d talked practically the whole way back
and Kyoya, it appeared, was now trying to condense their advice into one cohesive report. *You would be so easily corruptible,* he thought to himself. *It’s a pity Hisoka-san has to behave. Without that band on his wrist, he’d have such a good time with you.*

Pressing the button, he turned to his Master and said, “I want to,” he glanced at the black-haired man beside them. “To have a word with you in private. I’m sure food can come to us.”

***

"I’m so happy that my darling Lulu cares so strongly about me. I’m getting all warm and fuzzy inside," Hisoka said, not being able to resist teasing his boyfriend, as he followed him into the lift.

"Does it explain a few things now that you’ve met the man in person?" he asked in a more neutral tone. *Like why he makes me feel on edge? Predator is a good word for him, actually.* Glancing at Kyoya, who was still deep in thought, he leant against the wall of the elevator and waited for it to set off.

***

“Yes,” Illumi said darkly. “It does.” He noted Kyoya’s continued musing and shook his head. The man really was utterly useless as a guard.

“Dr. Lecter is...strong,” he said to his Master. “He lives up to his reputation, and he is extremely intelligent.”

*And dangerous. That’s why you like him, isn’t it? That’s why you’re not more angry about the bracelet. He’s presented you with the perfect challenge.*

“We have to kill him before Hisoka-san does then, don’t we?” the voice said. “If we can set Master free, then he’s going to stay with us forever.”

The door dinged for the fourth floor, and Illumi took a deep breath. He knew the voice was at least partially right. They did have to kill Lecter.

***

*You look and sound so much like her, like my friend. Should I try and find Abaki once this has all blown over?* Hisoka smiled and nodded when he realised he’d been staring. “Yes, he is. That’s why I have to be careful,” he sighed and leant forward to whisper to Illumi. “I think we made him jealous in the book shop, but I find him so hard to read.”

Once the doors opened for their floor, Hisoka plastered on a smile and made his way down the corridor. “Do you have any idea what you’d like to eat?” he asked, pointedly changing the subject.

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“What?” Kyoya asked, realising that he’d just taken an entire elevator ride without noticing what was happening around him. “Food? I thought I was going to write up a report?”

***

“Sweetie,” Illumi said, letting the voice talk for him - Kyoya was far too simple, and he didn’t have the patience to be kind right now. “He was talking to me. You go find your partner and give them all the gossip. I’ll make sure that something is sent up for you as a thank you for your company.”
Jealous? Really? Illumi thought. Has the plan progressed that far already? Why am I not more pleased about this?

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“Oh, right, yeah, sorry,” Kyoya muttered. “Wait, what did you say? You don’t have to do that.”

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“No, I don’t,” the voice agreed. “But I want to. I like you and so does Master,” he smiled up at Hisoka-san. “And I’m sure he’ll be more than willing to chip in for something for whoever’s on duty with you.”

Am I jealous too? Is this what it feels like? Illumi wondered. I don’t ever want that man to touch you. And the way he was looking at you...the way you smiled at him...I didn’t like it.

***

"Sure, I don't mind. Although if it's Miriam, then she'll probably refuse it on principle," Hisoka said thoughtfully. "Please tell me you're not on duty with her? She's such a battleaxe at times," he complained. I mean she's pretty, but she'd be much cuter if she actually smiled once in a while.

***

“No, it’s Leroy,” Kyoya said. “He definitely won’t turn down free food. But, if you don’t mind, I’m going to tell him it’s from Lulu. He’s a bit...he doesn’t have the same political views as we do; which is fine,” he added quickly. “People are entitled to think what they like. I mean, I don’t get into politics or anything. Live and let live; I say...” he trailed off when Lulu patted him on the head. “I’m really not paid enough for this.”

***

"Leroy? I don't think I've formally met him yet, sure tell him it was Lulu's treat. It was her idea. She knows I won't say no to her when I'm in such a good mood," Hisoka replied and gave Illumi an adoring smile. "You've said that you're not paid enough a few times now, are you OK? I understand being around me must be a little weird, and you're here to keep me out of trouble...but you can talk to me if you need to. It's not like I can rat you out to your boss."

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“Erm, thanks, I think,” Kyoya said. Miriam would kill me. Oh God don’t say that to her. “I’ll bear that in mind. But you have met Leroy. He was the one that...oh, well,” he looked up and saw his teammate waiting for them outside of the hotel door. “He’s the one that put the wall around you in the hospital,” he finished quietly. “And is waiting over there.”

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Hisoka looked down the hallway and saw the guard waiting outside and grinned. "Oh, that's Leroy? I remember the wall," he chuckled. "I wasn't very happy about waking up in the hospital. Considering the last thing that I saw before waking up there, was rubble collapsing on me, I think my reaction was understandable."

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Illumi stared at a short, balding man who was looking at him with undisguised hunger in his eyes,
and knew without a doubt that he wasn’t going to get on with him.

“He built a wall around you?” he asked innocently. “That seems a little unnecessary.”

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“Believe me, Ma’m,” Leroy said, standing to attention. “I can assure you that it was entirely necessary for his own protection. I’m Special Agent Leroy Jones,” he held out his hand. “Pleased to meet you.”

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Illumi looked down at the outstretched hand and inwardly sneered as he took it. “Lulu, it’s a pleasure,” he said curtly.

***

“Oh, no, believe me, the pleasure is all mine,” Leroy assured her. “I am here to make sure that you are safe and that your time here is as happy as can be. If there is anything you need, do not hesitate to call.” He patted his breast pocket. “I have my card-”

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“I’m sure she’s fine,” Kyoya cut in. “There’s no need to-” he groaned when Leroy offered his homemade business card to Lulu and stared at her with what, for him, amounted to googly eyes.

***

"You do know who she's dating right?" Hisoka asked glaring at Leroy. "I've heard that her boyfriend is rather dangerous, and can punch through concrete. I do hope you're just being friendly and nothing more."

***

Leroy looked up at Hisoka and raised a brow, entirely unphased. “Well, he couldn’t punch through my wall, and I hear that he tends to be rather indiscriminate about who he brings back to his room. So I would recommend that he doesn’t throw stones while living inside a glass house.”

***

"Trust me, if you put me in a box, it won't be me that you’ll have to worry about," Hisoka replied sweetly. "Now, my darling Lulu and I will be spending some quality time together. We'll try to keep the noise down. We wouldn't want to disturb those glass houses now, would we?"

Not waiting for either guard to reply Hisoka opened the door to his room and pulled Illumi inside with him. What is it with the guards here? Miriam acts like she's getting ready to go to war, Kyoya is nice but a little naive. I can't help wondering if that Leroy has a death wish; Illu-chan would kill him.

Sighing, he leant against the door and smiled sheepishly at his boyfriend. "I'm sorry, Illu-chan. I don't know what came over me, just that I didn't like the way he was looking at you," he explained.

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Illumi burned with rage. “Nor I for you. That man is going to die,” he snarled. “If I hear him say
one more rude thing about you...” he felt all the rage he couldn’t let loose in front of Dr. Lecter pouring from him. “Guards are replaceable; especially ones who do not deserve their position.”

***

"Illu-chan it's fine, really. I'm used to it," Hisoka said sadly as he stood up straight and made his way to the bed. "I've heard much worse things, men like that do irritate me though. It wouldn't surprise me if he got his job because of family connections, Kyoya is just a bit naive for this assignment. Even if he is a nice kid, I'm sure he's going to get himself killed."

Placing the shopping bags by the foot of the bed, he kicked off his shoes and flopped down onto the mattress. "Come here?" he asked, opening his arms in invitation. "I want to hold you; everything has been so strange lately. It's almost like I'm drowning."

***

“You are not,” Illumi said, stating a fact, rather than trying to offer comfort. “Because I am here with you, and am never going to leave your side. You can not drown; I will not let you.” He settled into his Master’s arms and was pleased to find that his smaller frame fit perfectly against him. “If Leroy dies with a business card lodged in his throat, it wasn’t me,” the voice added and, despite everything, Illumi found a smile crossing his lips.

***

Hisoka couldn't help the laugh that escaped him. "Oh, Illu-chan, you always seem to know the right thing to say. Cards are more my style, rather than yours anyway," he said, feeling more cheerful. "I like having you here with me."

***

“I like being here with you too,” Illumi agreed, shifting back and pressing himself against his Master’s body. “And don’t worry, I’ll make sure to find that his smaller frame fit perfectly against him. “If Leroy dies with a business card lodged in his throat, it wasn’t me,” the voice added and, despite everything, Illumi found a smile crossing his lips.

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"You're always so good to me," Hisoka purred, kissing Illumi's neck gently. "I hope I made the right choice agreeing to that dinner invitation; it's going to be so awkward though. The man's a sadist. I'm sure he's doing it just to make me uncomfortable."

***

“He wants to show you his house, Master,” Illumi said, and his voice sounded bitter to his own ears. “He’s trying to show off for you. If he can make you feel uncomfortable and then swoop in and rescue you, then it’s an almost sure-fire way to get you to like him. It’s a classic technique for building a bond with someone.”

He sighed and fiddled with the duvet. “It’s already working. I saw the way you smiled at him. You don’t hate him anymore.”

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Hisoka rolled them both so that he was looking down at Illumi. "Sweetheart, I don't want him that way. I'm smiling because I'm thinking about what he'll look like covered in his own blood. He's put me on a leash! I'm not his property," he said firmly. "He wants to show me off; I'm his pet
psychopath and no doubt he'll make me the 'guest of honour'. He's probably laughing with his 'high society' friends now, telling them how he's got a special guest. Plus he reminds me of somebody, I just can't place who, but it makes me uncomfortable."

***

*You are no one's pet,* Illumi snarled inside his mind but bit back the words.

“I’ll be right beside you when you take him to pieces,” he said instead, looking determinedly up at his Master. *The Doctor doesn’t have friends. He has enemies he hasn’t killed yet.* “Let them laugh...right up until they choke on their own blood. He’s going to watch his world crumble around him, and it’s going to be glorious.”

***

"Wouldn't you be joining in?" Hisoka asked with a wicked smile. "You know, you've never let me watch you torture somebody, maybe you could give me a show? Make him scream until he's horse, push him to the brink of death over and over again. I want him to suffer; he knows what happened to the last man who tried to make me into a doll. He needs to learn the price of putting me on display. I'll play his little game; he's offered us valuable information, we're going to get his address. Plus, we'll get an idea of just how powerful he, based on who he invites. Maybe we can add some of the guests to our hit list? Give the good Doctor a preview of his own fate?”

***

“*Yes,*” Illumi breathed, feeling his heart speed up and the voice in his mind purring its approval. “I’ll do it all for you. Every guest at the party; they’ll all die before him. He’s going to suffer.”

***

He reached up and pulled his Master down into a heated kiss and moaned wantonly. He needed this; he needed his Master back. Everything was shifting, and he had no ground to stand on, but Hisoka-san was firm, solid and knew exactly how to quiet his mind.

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“He’s going to scream,” he whispered into his ear. “I’ll show him exactly what it’s like to be on display.”

***

Hisoka groaned in delight before lowering his head to plant a trail of kisses down Illumi's jawline and neck, grinding his growing erection into his lover's crotch. *Fuck, Illu-chan. You're perfect.* "We can use all the guests for practice," he agreed huskily. "I want to watch you take somebody apart, naked, so that you get covered in their blood." He paused to nip at his boyfriend's ear. "I want to lick it off your skin before I suck you off and fuck you through the nearest bed. Or maybe up against the wall if I can't hold on."

***

“Make him watch,” Illumi gasped. “I’ll cut off his legs so that he can’t move.”

The dampness between his legs that he’d learned to associate with this body was growing by the second, and he felt as if he were being consumed with need. The idea of finally getting to hurt the man that was trying to take his Master from him was fantastic.
“Master, want you. Please, touch me,” he moaned. “My pins...touch me there. I need it. Need you, only you, always yooouu.” He let the last word stretch as he bucked up against Hisoka-san. *Forever.*

***

Continuing to kiss and nibble on his boyfriend's neck, Hisoka hummed happily as he ran his hands down the curves of his female body. *I wasn't sure you liked it when I took you like this, but maybe I was wrong?* Pushing the hem of the dress up his lover's legs, he paused as his fingers brushed against the bare skin of Illumi's ass. "Illu-chan," he murmured breathlessly. "Did you not put anything on under your dress?"

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“You wanted easy access,” Illumi said breathlessly. “Master, this body...it’s so...sensitive. Your touch...” He let his head fall back onto the pillow and lifted his hips to allow his Master to put his hands wherever he wanted. “*Please...*” he begged.

*I’m falling. I need you. Take me, Master.*


***

"Yes, yes I did," Hisoka growled possessively as he nudged Illumi's legs open with his knee. "I'm going to fuck you with the dress on," he added. Gazing at his lover's body, hungrily and licking his lips before pulling down his trousers and underwear. *You're mine, and you're always going to be mine.* "Let Master hear you; I want to hear my name on your lips. You're going to cum over and over before I'm done. Let's show Mr. Leroy Jones how much you love being mine," he said as he positioned himself at his lover's entrance and slid inside with an animalistic groan.

***

“HISOKA-SAN!” Illumi yelled, raising his voice as high as it would go and desperately wrapping his short legs around his hips. Lulu’s voice was high, and he knew it would carry.

“*Master wants to put on a show, let’s make sure Agent Jones has the bluest balls in the city,*” the voice purred. He could feel how happy it was. “*We’re going to let Master use us until he can’t think. Come on, Illumi, show him how much you want him.*”

“Yes! Yes! I need you!” Illumi screamed. *I really do.* “*Use me, Master! I’m yours! Forever!*”

He felt his body clenching around Hisoka-san’s cock and bucked again, trying to get him as deep as he could go. He felt frantic. *My pins,* he thought. *Touch me there again. Make me cum for you. I’m your doll. Play with me...I don’t want to think. All I want is you.* He ran his hands down his Master’s strong, muscular back. *Make me forget the world.*

***

"Illu-chan," Hisoka moaned as he felt his lover's body enveloping him and squeezing him tightly. *Fuck, you feel so good.* Running his hand down Illumi's side again, he stopped to cup his boyfriend's ass before pulling out and slamming into the willing body beneath him. "Mine," he snarled as set a harsh and frantic pace. "Always, never letting go."
“YES!” Illumi cried. “Please! I need it! Show me where I belong! YES!”

He clung to his Master and finally allowed himself to get lost in the feeling of being fucked. What happened to his body was no longer up to him, and the relief was palpable. Yes, I belong to you. Show me. Prove why you’re my Master. He would cum when Hisoka-san wanted him to. For now, the feeling of being filled over and over again was all he needed. His body could wait; Hisoka-san was setting his mind free.

"With me," Hisoka growled in reply continuing to use his boyfriend for his own pleasure. "Never forget you are mine," he added in a harsh whisper before lowering his head to nibble at Illumi's neck, following it up with gentle kisses. Nipping at the exposed skin, he sunk his teeth into his lover's shoulder, marking him as his.

Illumi groaned and tried to rub his pins against his Master as he felt his flesh break. “Yeeeesssss,” he hissed, shuddering with desire and pain. “Master... yours!”

He tightened his grip on Hisoka-san’s top and felt as if he were flying. “I’m yours! So good!” he gasped. “Need this. Need you. I belong to you.” He didn’t know what he was saying, but the voice was approving, and his Master was still slamming into him. “Every part of me,” he gasped. “Is yours.”

Hisoka groaned as he sucked at the wound he'd made with his teeth; Illumi's blood had always tasted particularly good. That's it Illu-chan, surrender to me. You know where you belong, such a wonderful toy. I don't want to ever let you go. Seeking more physical contact, he lowered his body until he was lying on top of Illumi, and allowed the hand on his boyfriend's ass to wander under the dress. With his free hand, he moved to grab Illumi's wrists and pin them to the bed as he pulled back with a playful growl, then leaned back in, claiming his boyfriend's lips with his own bloodstained mouth.

Yes, Illumi thought. Yes, this is perfect. Take me, Hisoka-san. Take me. However, you want me. I belong to you.

He lapped at his Master’s mouth and chased his tongue with his own when he opened up for him. He was shuddering with need, and the constant, pounding pressure of Hisoka-san’s body against him was starting to make him lose his mind. His bodies need was growing, and it felt fantastic. Don’t ever stop. He moaned loudly and bucked, doing everything he could to encourage his Master. He wanted to make him happy, to put on the perfect show for him.

“Stop thinking; feel,” the voice told him, and he did.

Hisoka-san’s cock was filling him; his hand was exploring the rest of his body and, he moaned, he was helpless to deny him. He looked up into the golden eyes above him and tried to clasp the hand that was pinning him down. You’re perfect. Don’t stop.
"You feel so good Illu-chan," Hisoka told his lover as he pulled his hand back out from under Illumi's dress and rested it over his chest, squeezing his breast roughly. "This colour suits you; it's like blood," he gasped as his lover lifted their hips to meet his thrusts again and again. "I bet you'd look beautiful covered in blood, ooh, I want to lick Dr. Lecter's blood off your skin," he purred feeling his dick pulse as he continued to fuck roughly into Illumi's pliant body. *I want to see you lose control, Doctor, you're going to regret toying with the Grim Reaper.*

Continuing to moan loudly, Hisoka angled his hips seeking his lover's g-spot, grinning wildly when he managed to elicit a particularly loud groan from Illumi. *Yes, let me hear you. I want that pathetic man outside to hear how much you enjoy my cock filling you.*

***

"Oh, Master, YES!" Illumi screamed as the voice encouraged him to keep talking. "More, tell me more! Give me more! I want to know everything you're going to do!" *Let me hear everything you'll do to him.* "I'm so," his voice hitched. "Close! USE ME!"

***

"We're going to cut him into little pieces. Maybe we can even feed him to Mike? That way they'll never find his body," Hisoka replied with a smug grin. "I want to hang one of his guests by their ankles, slit their throat, and shower in their blood. I want him to watch as we skin somebody alive," he growled as he felt his climax starting to build in his core. "We should kill every guest differently and make him choose how we're going to end his miserable existence. Oh, Illu-chan it's going to be so much fun."

***

"Master!" Illumi cried. "Yes! Oh, please! So close! Want it all! DO IT! WE’LL DO IT ALL!" he yelled, clinging onto the edge of orgasm by the skin of his teeth. His Master’s words were echoing in his mind, and he dug his nails into Hisoka-san’s hand as he forced himself not to cum. "I WANT IT ALL!" He felt like he was losing his mind to the pleasure. "HISOKA-SAN!"

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*Then we'll do it all; we'll even find a way to do as many of our ideas to Dr. Lecter as we can. Just wait, my precious Illu-chan. He'll be a masterpiece when we're done.* The tightening in his belly was increasing, and Hisoka didn't know if he could hold on, his lover's encouragement was pushing him over the edge. "We'll make him wish for death," he groaned as he began slamming himself into his lover's body more erratically chasing his climax. "It'll be magnificent," he panted and closed his eyes and allowed the combination of pain and pleasure to wash over him. "Lulu," he gasped. "I'm gonna cum...can't hold on." Moving his hand between Illumi's legs, he sought out his lover's clit. "Cum with me, let me feel you. Together, my Illu-chan."

***

"HISOKA-SAN!" Illumi yelled as he crashed over into oblivion. Feeling his Master finally touching his pins was all he needed to send him tumbling into one of the most powerful orgasms of his life. He shook violently as his body did everything it could to keep his Master inside of it. He saw stars as he arched and screamed Hisoka-san’s name again and again.

This was all he ever wanted, and his Master was all he would ever need.

***
"Illu-chan," Hisoka moaned softly as he gave one last push into his lover’s body and felt his orgasm crash through him.

Collapsing down onto Illumi, he moved to wrap his arms around him and rolled them so that they were lying side by side. "My Illu-chan," he whispered, nuzzling his lover's cheek happily, still coming down from his high. Never leave me, I don't know if I could take it if you did. I need you.

***

“Master,” Illumi breathed, clinging onto him as aftershocks rocketed through his body. “That was...incredible.”

He buried his face into Hisoka-san’s neck, ignoring the pain of the movement and glorying in the feel of being so close to his Master. The world was right again, and he was exactly where he belonged. “Forever,” he whispered, drinking in the earthy smell of Hisoka-san’s skin. “I’m yours. This is...perfect.”

***

"Always," Hisoka agreed as he stroked Illumi's back. "You'll always be mine. I feel like I can do anything with you by my side, together, we'll beat him. We'll teach Dr. Lecter his place, and he'll regret trying to change me. He's made a huge mistake already; he's given me a challenge, and you know how much I adore those."

***

“He’s made one more,” Illumi said and felt his voice purr as the voice added its own touch to his words. “He’s tried to take you from me.”

He slid the dress from his shoulders and opened the front in two easy movements, laying himself naked for Hisoka-san to admire. “I’m a deadly doll, and I’ll do anything for my Owner.”

***

"Well, your Owner will have to make sure you get the chance to teach him the error of his ways, won't he?" Hisoka asked playfully, pulling back slightly to admire his lover's female form You look beautiful like this, but I love your real body too. How long can you stay like this before you need to go change back? "I think I'd enjoy getting to see that," he added with a cheeky smile.

***

“Then you shall,” Illumi purred again and felt his arm come up and stroke his fingers delicately across Hisoka-san’s cheek.

“I live to please you,” he said. “You’re the reason I exist,” the voice added. “I’ll always make sure you’re happy. That’s what I’m for.” Illumi wasn’t entirely sure he knew which of them was speaking, but he agreed with every word.

He allowed himself to relax into the mattress and grinned dreamily up at his Master. “I don’t think I’ve ever been more...content. I could stay with you like this for the rest of the day. We wouldn’t even need to move. I have everything I desire, right here.” He slid his hand under Hisoka-san's top and hummed happily. “You're all I’ll ever need.”

***
Chuckling warmly, Hisoka pulled off his top to give Illumi better access to his skin before kicking off his pants. "Then let's stay here for the rest of the day," he suggested. "We can go find you the perfect dress tomorrow, right now, I want you all to myself. I'm afraid your Master can be rather selfish at times. I hope you'll forgive me?"

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Illumi grinned and pulled his Master against him. "There is nothing to forgive," he said. "I belong to you," he whispered, kissing his jaw. "This," he bucked his hips playfully. "Is yours to keep. Slice off the hand of anyone who dares to touch it."

***

"Oh I will," Hisoka growled and nipped at his lover's ear. "I'll mount their hand on a stick and find a way to make it into a back scratcher. You might end up with a nice collection by the time I'm through," he whispered as he tightened his hold. "I'll happily start with Mr. Jones. Maybe I should pluck out his eyes though? He hasn't actually touched you yet."

***

"One for every day of the month," Illumi agreed happily. Never let go. "I'll make you a set too if you want? You take the right hands, and I'll take the left?"

***

"Why don't you have Dr. Lecter's left hand and I'll have his right one? We can carve our initials into them. They'd make a nice souvenir of our time together in Yorknew," Hisoka suggested as he tried to pull the blanket out from under them. "Although if there's somebody who's hands you would like, I'll add them to the list."

***

"The guard," Illumi said mildly. "I didn’t like the way he spoke about you."

He shifted to let Hisoka-san manoeuvre them under the cover and watched his dress as it rolled off the bed. "We could practice on him first. See how long we can keep him alive."

He pressed himself against his Master’s bare skin and sighed contentedly as the duvet settled over them. "I think I’d like that very much."

***

"He is rather arrogant, too; his wall is not that impressive. Back in the hospital when I woke up, I thought that I was still under attack. He thought it was a good idea to summon walls to cage me," Hisoka explained as he idly stroked his lover's bare skin. "Apparently I was in a coma for a while, I scared the nurse when I woke up," he laughed at the memory. "They tried to sedate me. There was this random guy that charged into my room with a needle, and then everyone wondered why I attacked him? I think that I was entitled to defend myself," he sighed contentedly. "Still, I'm glad you're here. I...missed you, it's been a while since we had a chance to be together like this."

***

“We should kill him, just for that,” Illumi murmured, pressing himself closer to his master. “I like this,” he admitted. "Being here with you, like this. I’m...I feel things. I don’t when I’m away, but with you...” he trailed off and sighed contentedly. “I can feel.”
"I shall add him to the hit list, along with Dr. Lecter, and his dinner guests," Hisoka said happily, enjoying the feeling of Illumi's skin against his own. "I like this too. Let's just spend the rest of the day naked. The bed is comfy, and you're snuggly and warm," he teased.

“Snuggly?” Illumi asked and heard the high tone of his voice. “Oh, yes, Master. I suppose I am.” He laughed quietly and heard his belly rumble again. “Perhaps some food? Maybe we could arm wrestle to see who gets the door this time?” He kissed his Master’s cheek, running his hand down his back until it cupped his ass and whispered. “I promise to cheat as much as I can.”

"Food sounds good, and I meant that...in this form, you feel softer than in your real body. As yourself you're solid, but as my Lulu, you're just a bit more padded?" Hisoka tried to explain and gave his lover's breast a playful squeeze. "You know I love it when you challenge me, and I'm curious as to how you'll cheat this time."

Illumi moaned happily as he felt the pins inside him move. It had seemed like a logical idea at the time, to put them in the more private parts of the body - that no one but his Master would see - but he hadn’t counted on how this body would respond to the stimulation. “That would,” he gasped. “Be telling.”

30 mins later

Miriam pushed the food trolley up to the door of room 444 and found Kyoya leaning up against the wall. His arms were folded across his chest, and he had a look on his face that she knew all too well.

She’d passed Agent Jones on the way up in the service elevator. “I take it the reason Leroy looked like he wants to both punch someone in the face and vomit at the same time is—” She stopped when Kyoya pointed a thumb towards the door. “Ah, yeah, thought so. Can’t they stop fucking for five minutes?”

Kyoya scoffed and pushed off the wall. “They managed it while we were out today, but then Dr. Lecter turned up in the book shop, and they both went all...weird. Does Hisoka seem normal to you?”

“He’s never been normal,” Miriam scoffed and knocked on the door. “That man’s a public
He makes me feel strange, Kyoya thought but smiled politely at his colleague. “Yeah, you can say that again,” he joked. “I’m expecting a stern note from the people downstairs. I think their ceiling tiles will have fallen out, the way they were going at it earlier. Leroy nearly puked. He actually gave the girlfriend his card!”

“That man’s delusional,” Miriam muttered and straightened as she heard footsteps from the other side of the door. Please don’t be naked, please don’t be naked. I really can’t blush in front of Kyoya. He can’t know that I like you.

Readjusting his robe slightly Hisoka plastered on his most friendly smile as he opened the door. “Ah I thought I heard room service,” he teased as glanced over at Miriam appraisingly. You really need to smile more, he thought.

“Classy,” Miriam said, raising her eyebrow as she took in the lurid pink silk robe Hisoka was wearing.

Kyoya blinked. Hisoka’s chest was almost entirely exposed and, he noted with growing horror, it didn’t appear that he was wearing anything under the robe.

He felt his stomach flip, and he swallowed. He’s not actually naked, he reminded himself. He said he’d behave... he is... I think... oh, God, what’s happening to me? He turned to face the opposite wall and stared at a spider that was building a hopeful web in the plasterwork. You don’t like men. It’s been a day, Kyoya. You can’t do this. Think about locks; think about locks. Ignore the naked man; he’s not there. And he’s not naked.

“Your food, me’Lord,” Miriam said sarcastically, covering for the way her stomach flipped at the sight of his chest. “I hope you both enjoy it. Let me know if there’s anything else you need.”

“I’m sure we will,” Hisoka purred as he leant in the doorway before grinning at the annoyed expression on Miriam’s face. "Well don’t let me keep you, I'll put the trolley back outside when we're done. Oh, and I'll try to keep the noise down but, well, she's a screamer," he added nonchalantly as he moved to take the cart and bring it inside his room.

“I know,” Miriam deadpanned.
“The whole block does,” Kyoya muttered. “She could have just said no to Leroy, by the way. I know the dudes a-” he stopped himself from saying ‘dick’ and went for, “controversial man, but he’s good at his job. He didn’t mean anything by what he said; he just isn’t- What?” he asked when they both stared at him.

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"Lulu isn't the sort to just say no," Hisoka replied with a patient smile, remembering Illumi’s reaction once the door was closed. **Leroy is lucky he didn't die on the spot for what he said about me. You guys have no idea who is really sharing my bed. **"I'm not questioning his ability to do his job, but he'd do well to admire my girlfriend from afar. You know who I am, and what I'm capable of. So think, what sort of woman would attract me for more than a one night stand?"

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“The kind we would need to investigate?” Miriam said sweetly, pointedly looking up at Hisoka’s face. It wasn’t helping calm her heartbeat.

***

“The kind of person that would stand up to Dr. Lecter without blinking,” Kyoya said absently. “Don’t worry. I’m not suicidal.”

***

“What the hell are you going on about?” Miriam said, glad to have an excuse to look away from Hisoka.

***

“It’s all in the report,” Kyoya muttered. “Enjoy the food,” he added, smiling weakly at Hisoka.

***

“He ordered the Lobster Platter for you too,” Miriam told him. “But the chef said that he’d only cook it when you’re ready for your break. He, in his own words, ‘Refuses to let good Lobster go cold.’ Do I want to know why he’s ordering you Lobster?”

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"Lulu," Hisoka interjected. "She wanted me to get you something, and she was most insistent. If you don't eat shellfish for any reason let me know, I'll cancel it and change it for something else?" he offered.

***

“You bought me the **Lobster?** I mean, she did? What? I’ve never even eaten a crab.” Kyoya stared at Hisoka in awe. “That stuff costs more than my entire weeks budget. I...what... really? ”

***

“He says thank you, and he’s fine with shellfish,” Miriam cut in. “Don’t let us keep you.” She stared at her friends face. “We’re booking him in for treatment soon, have no fear. Kyoya, blink, it’s OK. I’m sure Zeller will happily help you work through the shock and help you with the leftovers.”
“Hey,” Kyoya said, snapping out of the daydream. “That’s my Lobster!”

Hisoka chuckled at his guards. "Well, Lulu seems to have taken a shine to you, so she wanted to treat you. I hope that you enjoy it," he lied happily. Why did you become a cop? Miriam, I can understand, she's got the bluntness I'd expect, but you? You’re far too gentle and kind, but for some reason I still like you. "Just give the kitchen staff Lulu's name and explain that she reserved it earlier for you. We didn't know your last name, so we put it in hers, and they can call my room to confirm. Now, I'll leave you both, to your duties, I have a hungry girlfriend waiting for me." He gave a polite bow before closing the door.

Illumi sniffed and looked up hopefully from where he was lying on the bed. His legs were tied to each corner, and his Master had spent an enjoyable ten minutes toying with him for cheating during the arm wrestling competition. He was curious to see what he would do now. This body seemed to be able to cope with a lot more teasing than his own and, apparently, the voice - who kept on insisting that she was Lulu - appeared to enjoy it as much, if not more than he did. It was proving to be an extremely interesting day.

“That smells wonderful, Master,” he purred, licking his lips as he watched Hisoka-san pushing the cart back into the room. “Let’s hope it tastes as good as you look.”

Stop taking over, I can’t just say things like that to him, Illumi thought.

“No, but I can,” Lulu laughed. “He’ll love it.”

"And just how good do I look, sweetheart?” Hisoka asked as he pushed the trolley closer to the bed and looked down at his bound lover. "Do I look good enough to eat?” he challenged, moving to sit beside Illumi and running his hand down his stomach lightly. You've been rather forward today; I can’t help wondering what's changed. Is this what you're like on your missions? "Because I'm not food, but we do have some wonderful lobster to try."

"Delicious,” Illumi heard his mouth say and gasped when his Master trailed his fingers along the inside of his thigh. “I mean,” he moaned. “You look handsome. I find you very attractive. I’ve never,” his breath hitched when Hisoka-san's fingers continued to explore his skin. “Been attracted to anyone before, but, oh, I like you. I, I want you.” He laid his head back on the bed and moaned with pleasure. His Master’s touch was all he ever needed. “You’re perfect.”

Hisoka chuckled as he continued trailing his fingers down his lover's leg before asking, "How do you want me? You might not get it until after we've eaten, but you won't know unless you ask.” Do you really think I'm perfect?

How do I want you? Illumi thought, totally thrown by the question. Shouldn’t I be the one asking? I
want you to tell me what to do, not the other way around. I don’t want to tell you what to do.

“Tease me,” the voice gasped. “Have me begging for hours. Make me blind with need and mad with desire, Master. I want you to take me over and over again. Use me in every way you can think of and then,” he felt a wicked smile stretching over his lips. “Do it all again. I live to please you. I’m your doll; play with me, please.”

He couldn’t find fault with what the voice, Lulu, had said. He wanted it all, but, he felt his cheeks flush with embarrassment. It was so forward. Would Hisoka-san really do that for him?

“I’ll be happy to eat whatever you put in my mouth,” the voice added cheekily.

Oh, Lord, Illumi thought. Did I really just say that?

***

"Really now? Well it just so happens we've got some wonderful seafood, and I was lamenting having to untie you," Hisoka said playfully. "Maybe I should hand feed you and keep you like this?” he added admiring the sudden colour that had risen to his lover's face. How adorable, are you saying these things because you think it's what I want to hear, I wonder?

***

“That would be,” Illumi managed to say. "I’d like that.” Are you really going to tease me like that? All-day? Are you going to keep me like this, and use me? Oh, Master, please say you are. "I’d like that a lot.”

“You’re so good at dirty talk, Illumi,” Lulu said sarcastically.

He needs to know! Illumi retorted.

“He already does, you idiot. Look at his face.”

“Lobster’s best eaten with the hands, after all,” Illumi said, ignoring the voice. “I’ll lick yours clean each time if you want, Master.”

***

Hisoka looked over at the cart and grinned wickedly. "Yes, so I've heard. So I guess you'll have to show your Master just how skilled you are with that pretty mouth of yours. I'm going to hand feed you, and you're going to clean my fingers, and then if you're very good maybe I'll let you suck my cock and cum down your through for dessert," he taunted as he pinched his lover's nipple harshly. "You look delectable like this; maybe I should use you as my dinner plate?"

***

“Master!” Illumi gasped, arching from the bed. “Yes! Please! All of it, do, ohhh, that feels so good. Do everything.” He closed his eyes and silently thanked Lulu. “I’m your good doll,” he whispered, remembering how Lulu had spoken. “I’ll earn your cum, I promise.” He felt his cheeks flush again, but this time he didn’t care. Hisoka-san was happy, and he was going to...he daren’t even imagine it. “I’m yours, please, don’t stop. I consent.”

***

"I know you will, darling. You've always been good for me. Although I have to admit, I'm enjoying
this new side of you that you're allowing me to see,” Hisoka replied happily as he stood to retrieve
their meal. "Now I don't know about you, but I'm feeling particularly ravenous. So let's eat, I'm
eager to feel your soft lips around my dick."

***

“Yes, Master,” Illumi moaned happily, opening his eyes and staring at Hisoka-san with amazed
adoration.

“See, he likes me. I told you I’d help you become perfect for him,” Lulu said smugly.

Thank you, Illumi thought as he watched his Master reach for something on the tray. Never stop.
The bed between his legs was soaking wet, and he was already desperate with desire, but he didn’t
care. He was happier than he could remember.

“Let me show you what I can do. I’ll be the best doll,” Illumi said. “So good that you’ll want to use
me over and over again. You’ll never want to throw me out,” Lulu added, and Illumi felt his ears
burn.

***

"Sweetheart, I'd miss you too much if I did that. Now I hope you're hungry,” Hisoka said with a
seductive smirk as he picked up one of the platters and climbed back onto the bed beside his lover.
"You need to keep your strength up; Master wants to play with you, all night long. " And in the
morning when we eventually wake up too, then we'll get you the perfect dress. You're going to be
the talk of Dr. Lecter's party. I want to see just how jealous I can make him. Picking up a piece of
lobster he held it out just above Illumi's mouth and said, "Open wide, my precious doll."

***

3 Hours Later

***

“Seriously,” Zeller groaned. “Lobster. He turned me away from getting free Lobster! ”

***

“You told him he’d get fat,” Miriam pointed out, shifting her weight to her other foot and looking
down the corridor, examining the elderly couple that were walking by with her Gyo.

***

“Well,” Zeller huffed. “The man’s as skinny as a model. I thought he’d want to watch his weight.
And really? How can those two still be going at it? Have they even stopped to eat?”

***

Illumi was lost. He was floating somewhere in a haze of need, want and overwhelming, all-
consuming pleasure. Hisoka-san had been as good as his word and had done everything the voice
had asked, and more.
“Master,” he begged weakly, no longer caring if he got what he was asking for. “My pins, please,” he arched off the bed. His Master’s touch was so light, but it felt like fire to his sensitive skin. “Touch my pins.”

***

You’re so sensitive, is it because of the pins? Or something else? Hisoka wondered as he hummed thoughtfully, pretending to think about fulfilling his lover's request. We've never played while you were in disguise, so I have nothing to compare with. Chuckling, he allowed his hands to wander down between Illumi's legs, ghosting around the pins before brushing over them. He grinned as he watched Illumi shift to press his crotch into his hand, trying to increase the pressure. "So responsive," he murmured in awe. "What am I going to do with you?" he asked rhetorically as he snuck a glance at the ropes holding his boyfriend's wrists. "Should I keep you like this all night? Ravish you over and over until your body is dripping with sweat and you can barely move?" he asked as he slipped a finger inside, revelling in the breathless gasp that came from Illumi's lips. "Once I've finished with you, I'll carry you to the bathroom and clean you up, so that we can fall asleep in each other's arms. You'd like that, wouldn't you? Being used by Master until you can barely stay awake?" Hisoka let out a contented sigh as he inserted another finger to join the first. "I like having you like this; at my mercy," he teased as he slowly started to finger fuck him, hungrily watching the rush of desire on his lover's face.

***

“Yes,” Illumi whimpered, not knowing which of them was talking anymore, and not caring. “Please, keep going. I need it. I have, oh, Master, YES! Don’t stop! I have to be used by you. I have to- Oh, Master! YES! YEEES!”

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“I don’t know which is worse,” Miriam muttered. “Hearing her screaming like that, or him.”

***

“Which him?” Zeller asked curiously. “There’s been about five.”

***

“Fair point,” Miriam admitted. “We’re running out of people he hasn’t fucked. I suppose we should be grateful that this one isn’t complaining to the manager.”

***

"Illu-chan," Hisoka growled hungrily as he withdrew his fingers and licked them clean, enjoying the taste of his lover's arousal. "Master's going to fuck you, until you're too tired to move. You'll still be able to feel me inside you when we wake up in the morning," he purred as he climbed his way up his boyfriend's body and claimed his mouth with his own once again. Taste yourself on my tongue, darling. See how sweet you are. Reaching between them, he guided his throbbing dick back inside, moving slowly and gradually speeding up with each thrust, revelling in the sounds of Illumi’s moans.

***

Yes! Illumi thought, grabbing hold of the ropes to ground himself and moaning into his Master’s mouth. He was so full and so close. If his Master kept this up, he wouldn’t be able to hold on for much longer. He knew Hisoka-san wouldn’t stop. When it had happened before, he’d just kept on
going, counting each orgasm he’d given him and then matching the number with strikes from his belt to his breasts. Illumi had almost cum again from the pain.

He tried again to wrap his legs around his Master and felt the ropes biting into his ankles. He licked at Hisoka-san’s tongue, tasting the strange musk of his new body and moaned again. Hisoka-san wasn’t holding back; he really would still feel him tomorrow. *Use me all night,* he thought blissfully. *After this, fuck my mouth and then my ass. Do it all. I’m in heaven. Never stop, Master. Never stop. I belong to you.*

***

“OK, so, how long are we calling it this time?” Zeller asked once there was a lull in the noise from inside the room. “I’m saying half an hour.”

***

“No way, the man’s got stamina,” Miriam pointed out. “He’s got at least forty-five minutes in him.”

She looked up when she heard the elevator doors ding and was amazed to see Leroy slouching his way towards them. “I didn’t expect to see you here,” she said. “Did the boss have something he wanted you to tell us?” Like, maybe, you’re here to do your job, not sulk that a pretty girl doesn’t want to suck your cock. You do know that you look like a gremlin, right? Please tell me that you aren’t that delusional.

***

Leroy glowered at Miriam before he said, "Why wouldn't I be here? Somebody has to set a good example in this place. We don't all stand around making bets about the criminals we're paid to watch over." Like hell, I'm gonna tell you that I'm avoiding that Kyoya kid. What the hell does that woman see in that faggot anyway? I'm gonna make damn sure I'm there when they cart him off to a prison cell where he belongs.

***

“So glad you could join us, nice to see you too,” Miriam deadpanned.

***

“So what should we be betting on?” Zeller challenged, straightening to his full height and looking down at Leroy. “How long you’ll stay at your post? You know Kyoya’s new to this. Why the hell did you leave him for Miriam to babysit? You know she wasn’t due to start shift until five.”

***

Unfazed, Leroy shrugged and leant against the wall. "That’s what you two do though, isn't it? You make bets about how long the Duracell bunny in there will last," he groused and pointed a thumb at the door. He shook his head when another scream of "Yes! Master!" was heard from inside. "As for Kyoya, maybe you should try explaining to him what counts as a bribe. I'm pretty sure accepting a lobster dinner from Hisoka 'Grim Reaper' Morow is against the rules. Stupid kid is going to get himself fired, and if he doesn't want to accept the advice of a more experienced agent, then that's his problem."

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“Maybe that more experienced agent should read the receipt,” Miriam sneered. *Why the hell am I defending him? He can stand up for himself.* “The woman paid for the meal, not Hisoka.”

***

“He’s just annoyed that Kyoya wouldn’t give him any,” Zeller said and reached forward to poke Leroy in his paunch. “It’s Kyoya that needs fattening up, not you.”

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"I don't eat seafood," Leroy sneered as he batted Zeller's hand away. "Are you sure you're not projecting?"

***

“Says you,” Zeller snapped. “I’ll have you know I’m pure muscle under here. How many doughnuts have you gone through today, or don’t you eat gluten either?”

***

"I really don't care what you have under your shirt; I'm not a fag. So keep your hands off me," Leroy retorted.

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“Handbags away, ladies,” Miriam warned. “Don’t make me have to ground you both.”

***

“For the last time,” Zeller exclaimed. “I’m not gay! Price is just a friend. I know it’s a hard concept to grasp, but I can like a man’s company without wanting his co-”

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“We know, sweetie,” Miriam said as patronisingly as she could. “We’ve all been there. I’m here for you when you want to talk.”

***

"Yeah maybe you can, but we all know Price is gay," Leroy replied smugly. "Aren't you worried he's trying to convert you?" He gestured to door to room 444 again and added, "How many so-called straight people has our 'honoured guest' had in his bed since he's been here? If he tries to threaten me again and I'm gonna wall him in that room. He's a criminal; he should be in a cell not enjoying gourmet lobster dinners.”

***

Miriam felt her fists tighten and had to stop herself from punching Leroy out cold. “People don’t work like that,” she hissed. “And it’s not for us to judge who is guilty and who isn’t. Keep talking like that, and you’ll be up for a disciplinary. Keep your opinions to yourself, along with your business cards.”

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Holding in a laugh, Leroy mimed zipping his mouth shut and smirked at Miriam. *Yeah, you talk big princess, but we all know without your Nen, you wouldn't have this job.*
“And, darling,” Zeller said, making his voice as camp as it could go. “You should know by now that Price really isn’t my type.” He gave Leroy the once over and stepped into his personal space. “Now, you on the other hand...”

“DON’T STOP!” Illumi screamed, holding onto the ropes for dear life. “Fuck me harder! I’m so close! MASTER! GIVE ME EVERYTHING! HARDER! FUCK ME HARDER! MAKE ME FEEL YOU INSIDE ME FOREVER! HURT ME! HISOKA-SAAAAAANN!”

“That's it, let me hear you scream,” Hisoka purred as he continued to slam into Illumi. "I'm going to leave you limping by the time I'm done with you," he promised before gripping his boyfriend's hips tightly enough to bruise. "You're mine, don't you ever forget who you belong too," he snarled.

“Yeah, the dulcet sounds of faggots in the,” Miriam looked at her watch. “Afternoon,” she said, sarcasm dripping off every word. “She sure sounds like she’s regretting dating a gay man.”

“I could write my number for you on a business card if you have one,” Zeller offered Leroy. “Then you could call me, no pressure. I know a lovely little Italian...”

Leroy glared at Zeller. "Fuck off," he growled. "If you want to take it up the arse then ask your friend. Or do you want me to make a formal complaint?"

“Be careful what you threaten there, Agent Jones,” Miriam warned. “I’ve got enough dirt on you to bury you alive.” She straightened and looked the man straight in the eye. “And, for the record, you’re lucky I’m not lodging a complaint about your language. Zeller was defending me and his friend. He’s as straight as an arrow, but I’m not. Now, if you want to make yourself useful, go and check to see if Freddie Lounds has made another appearance. If you dare to threaten your colleagues again, I will personally see to it that Jack has a record of every time you’ve dumped your work on Kyoya, every time you snuck off for a smoke break and every patronising and insulting word that’s ever come out of your mouth!”

You as well? What the hell is the world coming to? "Fine," Leroy said stiffly. "I'm sure Miss Lounds will be more interesting than listening to those two go at it." Fighting the urge to sneer at his colleagues again, he pushed off from the wall and trudged towards the elevator before Miriam could reply. You'll see, both of you. I'm going places, and you two? I'll make damn sure you never amount to more than babysitting scum.
Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:

Illumi (Illu-chan/Lulu), Kyoya, Miriam, Zeller, Hannibal

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Hisoka, Leroy
The Page of Wands

Chapter Summary

Hisoka continues to work towards his goal and learns something interesting about Illumi along the way.

Hisoka stirred as the light fell across his face and he rolled onto his side with a sleepy grumble. *It's too early to get up.* Feeling another person lying beside him, he reached out to pull them closer, humming contently when he smelled the heady mix of his shampoo and his lover's scent. *Illu-chan's here,* his half-asleep brain reminded him, and he opened an eye to confirm, smiling happily and tightening his hold on his lover when he saw the happy smile on his face.

"Don't wanna get up," he complained as the alarm he'd set the night before chimed. Hiding his face in the crook of his boyfriend's neck, he said, "You're so cuddly; can't we stay here?"

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Illumi groaned. Every muscle in his body was stiff, and the place between his legs was more than pleasantly sore.

“Yes, Master,” he attempted to say and winced at the raw pain of his throat. “We can definitely stay here.”

Hisoka-san had kept his word. He had dragged the pleasure out until well into the night, and as he curled himself against his Master, Illumi sighed with the satisfaction of the memories. “Right here,” he rasped dreamily. “Staying here.”

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"I like this plan," Hisoka purred kissing Illumi's neck gently. "There's plenty of time to go shopping. Right now, I want you all to myself." Always. *While we're in bed, I can pretend that you're always going to be here.*

Reluctantly, he reached out to turn off the alarm before eagerly wrapping his lover back up in his arms. *You're my favourite toy; I'd be lost without you.* "Do you think we taught Agent Jones his lesson?" he asked, playfully nipping at Illumi's ear. "Or do you think we should give him another one when he's next on duty? Although, it'll have to wait a little longer; I'm not finished enjoying how soft you are like this."

***

Illumi tried to resist the groan that wanted to escape as his Master squeezed his breasts. He pushed against the needles and sent a stab of aching desire straight to that spot between his legs. *How can I still want this?* he thought as the Nen-laced needles moved and caused him to gasp with a fresh wave of longing.

The body was starting to react entirely without his permission, and it seemed that Lulu was more than happy with this development.
“Thank you, Master,” he said a little breathily. The ache between his legs wasn’t entirely unpleasant, and he wondered how long it would last this time. He found that a small part of him didn’t want it to go away.

He stifled a yawn and craned his neck to look at Hisoka-san’s happily smiling face. “Good morning,” he rasped, but his voice sounded serene to his ears. “Thank you for last night. It was the happiest of my life. I will always remember it.”

***

It was? Hisoka thought as he nuzzled his boyfriend’s cheek and licked his ear with a quiet chuckle. "Morning lover," he whispered playfully. "I guess I have a new standard to live up to then? How are you feeling? I gave you quite the workout last night, so we can take our time today." He stroked Illumi’s stomach and gently squeezed a nipple with his other hand.

***

“Hisoka-san,” Illumi gasped and felt the pressure between his legs building once more. His voice caught, and goosebumps travelled down his side. “I, I am fine. Sore, but,” he pressed himself into his Master, loving the way his skin felt against him. “I like it. We will do whatever you like. I...enjoy this.”

***

"Illu-chan," Hisoka groaned in delight, grinding his morning erection against his lover's ass. "I love it when you tease," he murmured before kissing and nipping at the skin of Illumi's neck.

***

Tease? Illumi thought. I was?

He closed his eyes contentedly when his Master began kissing him, and all form of thought flew from his mind. The feeling of his dick against his ass was causing his heart to race. It was almost reassuring.

You still want me.

He pushed his hips back, allowing Hisoka-san’s cock a better angle of entry. “I am yours, Master,” he said. The voice might have been Lulu’s, but the words were his. “You feel so good,” he rasped. “How do you want to use your doll today?”

***

"I have an idea," Hisoka cooed as he ghosted his hand further down his lover's body, until it was firmly between his legs. "Let Master show you how much pleasure you can feel in this body," he teased as he shifted his hold to keep Illumi tightly against his chest. His questing fingers sought out the flat heads of the pins holding his boyfriend’s body into his current female shape. "Moan for me, tell Master how good you feel,” he encouraged as he stroked around his lover's clit.

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“Hisoka-san,” Illumi moaned, tilting his head to give his Master better access to his neck. “Hisoka-san, oh, how...how is this possible? It feels so...so good.”

He surrendered entirely to Hisoka-san’s hold and opened his legs to give him all the access he’d
need. He could hear himself beginning to pant, and he grabbed hold of the hand, holding him in place as he moaned his Master’s name again.

The fingers were driving him wild, and he was still sore from the night before, but, he realised, he didn’t ever want him to stop. “So...good...so...how? Don’t want it to stop. Master, it’s...oh! Yes!”

***

"Don't worry about how, just enjoy it. You were such a good doll last night, this is your reward," Hisoka said gently before kissing Illumi's cheek. Let me hear you cry my name over and over; you're my doll, show me how good you can be, he thought, continuing to toy with his boyfriend's new body, committing every inch to memory.

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“Oh, yes, yes, Master!” Illumi gasped. “I will, I, I will. It feels...fantast-ic. So good! I’m yours! Your doll! Play with me!”

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1 Hour Later

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Hisoka smiled serenely as he carefully washed Illumi's chest, taking his time to avoid disturbing the pins keeping his current shape together. Delighting in the small groans coming from his lover's lips, he fought to hold back his laughter as he remembered carrying his boyfriend into the bath. I must have really tired you out; I can't remember the last time I got to see you like this. Nevermind that; you allowed me to pick you up. Are you becoming more submissive or just acting? Picking up the glass he'd picked up from the sink before, he said softly, "I'm going to rinse you off now; then I'm going to wash your hair. So you stay nice and relaxed, Master is going to take care of you."

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“Master,” Illumi hummed. He felt like he was floating. “That’s...I like that. It feels good. I feel...is this what it’s like to be drunk?” he asked as his head lolled against Hisoka-san’s chest. “I can see why people would,” he rubbed his cheek against his Master’s skin and smiled dreamily. “Do it,” he finished. “It feels...nice.”

***

Feeling Illumi rubbing against him, Hisoka froze in surprise before resuming rinsing the soap from his lover's body. "I think that you're particularly deep into subspace right now," he advised. "We'll take it slow while you come back down, it's important that I keep an eye on you while you're like this. If the floaty feelings change, you need to tell me, OK? You're going to be a little sensitive to touch for a while, from what I remember. I'll give you a nice head massage when I do your hair; you'll love it. You'll feel the most relaxed you've felt in a long time by the time I've finished. I want you to enjoy this for as long as possible. This is what I feel when I get my endorphin rush; it’s a wonderful feeling. "

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Illumi grinned. *Sensitive*, he thought as he felt his Master’s hands moving through his hair. *I am.*

“I will tell you, Hisoka-san, do not worry. This is,” he hummed again and ran his doll-like fingers down his Master’s arm. “Nice.”

He giggled and then giggled again at the sound of his voice. “Lulu is fun. She is strange too, but I like her. She makes me feel things; feel you. You make me feel. Usually, I don’t like it, but with you, I do. Umm, the water is good.”

***

*Adorable, I can’t recall you ever hitting subspace like this before. Is it because of our prolonged-time together?* "Well, if you wanted to be her again in the future, Master won’t complain. Just remember, that I chose you as Illumi," Hisoka said and continued massaging his lover's scalp gently. "Lulu is a bonus and a most welcome one at that, but I still want you as yourself. My Illu-chan."

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Illumi shook his head gently and smiled sleepily. “You say that, but,” he nuzzled his Master again. “You don’t do this with me.”

He let Lulu hum contentedly and kiss Hisoka-san’s arm as it crossed in front of him. “I’m perfect now,” he grinned. “Am both. Am perfect. You’re happy. All good. See, even your bracelet is glowing. It’s beautifully terrifying, isn’t it? I want to kill him so much. I’ll wear this to do it. I’ll let you lick the blood from my breasts and pins. I know how much you will love that. Wait, are you obeying him or are you trying to disobey? You aren’t red, so I say obeying. I wonder what you are doing to make it glow? Did he tell you to give me a bath?”

***

Hisoka hugged Illumi to him and rested his head on his lover's shoulder with a curious hum, frowning a little. *But you've always insisted you didn't need this from me? Until recently you'd have argued you're a Zoldyck and you're fine, what's changed?* "Do you want me to do this with you as yourself? Cause I would," he asked gently. *Will you remember this conversation when you come back down?* "Also I'm not trying to obey or disobey him, he's not my owner. Dr. Lecter can think what he likes, but I do not belong to him. He made a comment and said that I should take care of you. You're my Illu-chan; my fierce, wonderfully strong and deadly boyfriend, or girlfriend right now, I suppose. Things have been intense for both of us, and this is aftercare, the thing you usually resist," he teased and kissed Illumi's cheek. "Now, I need to wash your hair; you seemed to enjoy the head massage. So if you're feeling a little less sensitive, I'd like to continue pampering you while you're allowing me to. Master likes to be gentle sometimes too," he added before reaching for the complimentary shampoo.

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“Yes, Master, but usually I’m not...” he felt his words trail away as his Master began to run his fingers through his hair again. “I’m an idiot. This is...wonderful.”

***

"Well just this once, let yourself enjoy it. I'm having a good time," Hisoka replied soothingly as he picked up the glass to start rinsing out the shampoo from Lulu's short locks. "We've got a lot to do today, especially if we're going to look the part for our upcoming dinner party. You are happy I
agreed to go, right? It felt like a trap, but getting to see his house does have a tactical advantage.”
He smiled as he watched the suds flow down his lover's body to join the rest of the water in the bath. *We'll beat him at his own game, however long it takes.*

***

Illumi turned in his arms and felt Lulu’s curiosity. “He’s made a mistake, underestimating my Master’s cunning,” Lulu purred, and Illumi licked his lips. “We’re going to tear him apart, and he’s giving us exactly what we need to do it. I’m your secret weapon. Should I practice my growl?”

***

"And who are you going to be practising being all growly with?" Hisoka teased with a grin. "If you growl at your Master he may give you a spanking, or were you hoping to growl at Dr. Lecter while you're ripping him limb from limb?"

***

Illumi grinned and bared his teeth at Hisoka-san. “You can try and spank me.” Reaching up, he placed his small hand around his Master’s neck. “But I should warn you; I’m an Assassin. I am no stranger to pain.”

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Hisoka laughed in delight and looked at Illumi through his lashes. "I know, but tolerating and enjoying are different things. So my darling, are you going to choke me?" he challenged.

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“Are you going to stop me?” Illumi dared, tightening his grip until it was painful and watched the result with hungry eyes. “Master.”

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In reaction to the slowly increasing pressure, Hisoka closed his eyes, still smiling at his boyfriend. *Maybe I'll let you have your fun for a little bit; it's not often you try to top me. Surrendering to the sensation, he brought his hands up to stroke Illumi’s back, with a rasp of amusement. Hmm, that feels quite nice actually, I know you won't kill me. Not like this, anyway.*

***

Illumi shuddered and felt his beast beginning to stir. The urge to continue squeezing was almost too much.

“Stop,” Lulu said gently. “You don’t want that, nor does he. I’ve got this.”

She rose to the surface of his mind, and Illumi found himself looking out through his own eyes as his body began to move without his instruction.

He felt himself rise and lean in to whisper in Hisoka-san’s ear. “Let Lulu take care of you, Master,” she said seductively. His hand slipped around to the back of his Master’s neck and tugged on his hair. Illumi shuddered. Hisoka-san wasn’t stopping him. “Let me show you what I can do.”

***

"What you can do?" Hisoka asked, feeling slightly confused by the sudden change. "Master's
intrigued, what did you have in mind?” He ran his hand down his lover’s arm in encouragement. *Show me; I want to know what's been brewing in that wicked mind of yours.*

***

“Shh,” Illumi heard Lulu say as she pulled their Master’s head further back and exposed his neck. “Let go, trust your Lulu; she knows what you like.”

He tried to cry out in warning, but was blocked and watched helplessly as his teeth bit down into the nape Hisoka-san’s neck. He tasted blood and heard Lulu moan with pleasure. *Master,* he thought. *Do you actually want this? Can she really give you what I can’t?*

***

"You're being naughty today,” Hisoka gasped in surprise before moaning quietly and tightening his hold on Illumi. *Oh, I'm going to have to punish you today, aren't I? “What's gotten into you, sweetheart?”* he asked before groaning in delight at the feeling of his lover's tongue lapping at his blood. *“Do I taste good?”*

***

Illumi heard Lulu laugh darkly and whisper, “I would have thought that was obvious, Master. What’s gotten into me, is you.” She reached between them and grasped Hisoka-san’s cock. “Now, why don’t we stop asking all these silly little questions, and have some fun?” She positioned herself over him and felt him hardening in her hand. Leaning forward, she ghosted her lips over their Master’s. “You taste delicious,” she whispered. “See.”

She kissed him and sank down in one smooth movement. Illumi gave in. There was no way he could stop her, and right now, he really didn’t want to.

Lulu pulled back from the kiss and looked knowingly at Hisoka-san.“Let’s get dirty,” she purred and began to move.

***

2 hours later

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Sporting a cheeky grin, Hisoka snuck another glance at his lover’s ass in the skirt they had picked up the day before. Seeing the odd look his guard gave him, he shrugged and sped up so that he could put his arm protectively around Illumi’s shoulders.

"You look great in your new outfit," he purred quietly into his boyfriend's ear. "I wish we didn't have company; I'm getting so many naughty ideas. So why don't we distract me by planning out our little trip? We need to find me a suit, a dress for you...I'd like to get a laptop, can you think of anything else, darling?"

***

“You wanted a new scent selection for me, Hisoka-san,” Illumi said, pulling at his skirt a bit. It felt
odd to have material brushing at the back of his knees. He was fine with the bouse, although the
push-up bra his Master had insisted he wear made his breasts bounce a little as he walked. He
appreciated the flat sandals, though. How his Master wore high heels every day was beyond him.

He glanced again at the female guard accompanying them today and tried to work out why Lulu
insisted upon wanting to look at her. As far as he could tell, she seemed perfectly normal. Her
blonde hair was shoulder-length, she was slim, but in a muscular way and, he sighed and turned
back to his Master, if he were honest, she reminded him of Gon. Over-zealous and totally out of her
depth, but somehow managing to push through anyway. He didn’t know whether to admire or pity
her.

“I know what I want to do with her,” Lulu thought, and Illumi shuddered.

No, we belong to Master. We do not do that, Illumi thought sternly.

“What if Master watched? I’m sure he’d like it.”

“We could pick that up as well if you liked,” Illumi said, pointedly ignoring Lulu. “There are some
shops in town that stock that kind of thing.”

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"Sure, which do you think would be best to pick up first?" Hisoka agreed easily, still in a good
mood from their earlier fun. "I'm feeling generous, so if you're very good, maybe I'll get you a
special treat."

***

Illumi cut Lulu off from suggesting that they visit the adult store that was just on the edge of his
boarder, and instead smiled coyly at his Master, looking up at him through Lulu’s long lashes.

“Well, Hisoka-san, you seemed to like playing dress-up after the bath this morning...” he said,
hoping that it sounded like something a girlfriend would say. When he heard a small huff from
their guard, but nothing more, he allowed Lulu to smile widely. “Why don’t we find me something
pretty for Dr. Lecter to admire?”

***

Good luck with that one, Miriam thought as she scanned the street for possible threats. He’s gayer
than Liberace. Here I was thinking you weren’t just a bimbo. Oh well, it’s not like you’re gonna
stick around anyway. He’s gonna buy you shiny things, fuck you into a coma and throw you out
like all the rest. If you weren’t so stupid, I’d feel sorry for you.

***

"How about a nice necklace?" Hisoka suggested before kissing the top of his boyfriend's head; he
had to admit, he was enjoying being taller than Illumi, even without his heels. "I can't exactly let
you wear a collar, but a nice choker to match the dress would be a good substitute. Hmm, dress
first I think, then accessories," he declared as he took his lover's hand and ignored the eye roll he
earned from his guard.

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“Of course, Master,” Illumi said, trying not to stare at his hand. He felt Lulu flush with pleasure at
the idea of a collar and looked down at his beaded wrist.
I don’t need one; I already have my mark, he thought.

“No, but I don’t. I want one; I’ll look so pretty!” Lulu gushed. “I’ll be his perfect little doll, and he’ll love me forever.”

You’re very strange.

Illumi tried to hide the flush from the guard. It was far too easy for Hisoka-san to affect this body. “I trust you to make your Doll look beautiful,” Lulu said. Illumi was impressed that she’d managed to keep her excitement under check. Her voice sounded both demure and, ever so slightly titillated. It was a perfect act.

***

"Of course, sweetheart," Hisoka said cheerfully as he snuck a glance at Miriam. "We’re going to be the most interesting couple there, so why not aim for best dressed too? I have admittedly never attended a black-tie event. Unless you count my party for becoming a floor master and I dressed in my stage clothes. Hmm, can I get away with a top hat? And a cane? I’ve always wanted to dress up like that."

***

“You really think Dr. Lecter’s going to like you pretending to be the Ringmaster?” Miriam asked before she could stop herself. She’d spotted a group of young men following them, but they were over the other side of the road and looked like they were trying to psych each other up to try and get an autograph, so she wasn’t that worried. “At his party? You are delusional, aren’t you?”

***

"He's the one who wants to put me on display," Hisoka countered. "I may as well be. Wouldn't be my first time playing lion tamer, and yes I do mean with the fuzzy kind," he added, seeing the unspoken question in Miriam's expression.

***

“Did you ever consider that he might be trying to help you?” Miriam countered. “He’s introducing you to his friends and trusting you with people who could actually make a difference in your life.” She shook her head and eyed the boys across the street again. “No, of course, you haven’t. Everythings a grand conspiracy to you, isn’t it?”

***

No fun allowed is it then? Hisoka hummed. "Not really, I just believe life is for living. Nobody knows what's waiting on the other side or when our time will come. I could live my life avoiding all risks and still die at the hands of a criminal, or in an accident and die having lived a half-life," he replied coolly. "Or I can enjoy myself, and accept that we all, in the grand scheme of things, have the same. We all have a life. Before you say it, no, I'm not eagerly rushing towards death, but I'm not going to run from it either. Also, Dr. Lecter seems to appreciate my eccentricities if you must know."

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Miriam raised her brow in challenge. “Yes, but he invited you to a party that he didn’t have to, as a guest. He’s taking a huge risk just to prove to the world that you’re not the man the papers are making you out to be. Are you really going to make a mockery of him, when he’s doing this for
you? I fail to see how personally cooking for you, introducing you to people who have a say, or at least know those who do, in whether you live or die, and getting you out of that hotel for an evening, is a bad thing? Are you that paranoid? Next thing you know, you’ll be telling me those kids over there are Assassins in disguise.”

***

“The children are fans. They were also following us yesterday, although more discreetly,” Illumi said flatly. “And when you know what Dr. Lecter can do with his Nen, then you will be able to answer your own question. Before you judge my Master, take the time to get to know him.”

***

Kyoya didn’t mention anything, Miriam thought. Were they really following him? What reason would you have to-

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"Is it such a risk when at any moment he can order me to stop, and I have to?" Hisoka sighed and looked at the gold band on his wrist. "Fine, I'll leave the hat but can I at least have the cane? My Ringmaster didn't have a cane, so you can't use that objection twice."

***

“He could, yes,” Miriam said, looking over at Lulu smugly. “But would his band actually be able to stop you if you decide to kill someone? You’d at worst, get a bad itch.” When Lulu opened her mouth to object, she explained, “The Doctor helped my ex kick a smoking habit. I do know what the band can do. You could ruin him, but he obviously believes in you enough to show the world that, while you might dress like one, you aren’t actually a clown.”

Why am I saying this? Don’t get involved, Miriam. You aren’t stupid. He’s a criminal. You don’t actually like him, shut up. This isn’t your problem.

***

"Magician," Hisoka corrected with a frown. "If I were a clown then I'd have my make-up in the directory of clown faces and I'd have a clown name. I've hidden many things, but my name is the one I was born with." Why do you care? When we met, you made it clear you'd be happy to see me swing? He sniffed indignantly. "Apparently I'm a talented artist, at least Doc..." he caught himself mid-sentence and sneered. "Why am I defending myself? If you weren't being paid to keep me in one piece, you'd be happy to finish me off yourself. You made it crystal clear how you feel about me, Special Agent."

***

“Look,” Miriam said with a sigh. “I’d had a bad day and...I may have been a bit harsh. I’m not saying you don’t deserve what you get, whatever it might be, but...I was rude. I apologise. You aren’t the worst person in the world. Are you sure those kids are just fans. They’ve followed us for five streets now.”

***

Hisoka chuckled. "As surprising as it may be, I was very popular at the arena. Most of my fights sold out; Danchou’s did as well. Plus, Lulu said she recognised them so, what's the harm in seeing what they want?"
“Erm, they could be armed?” Miriam pointed out.

“So could we,” Illumi countered mildly. “They won’t approach him. They haven’t in all the years I’ve known him. The fact that they didn’t even register on his radar should be all that you need to know about them. They are entirely harmless. I believe the term for them is, voyeur? They derive pleasure through watching him live and fight.”

Miriam blinked twice. “I... suppose that’s technically a correct use of that word...” she hedged. “But please don’t ever say that again. I don’t know why, but it sounds so wrong coming from your mouth.”

“Well let’s carry on then,” Hisoka suggested with a shrug. "They'll get bored when they realise I'm not doing anything interesting. Now I believe our first stop was to get a lovely dress for my wonderful girlfriend?" He teased before pulling Illumi in for a kiss.

Illumi let out a squeak of surprise when he was suddenly jerked towards his Master, and another one when he was equally as suddenly kissed. “Master, he gasped, feeling his heart start to flutter. “I believe that may count as something interesting,” he said, leaning into the hold.

“Yeah,” Miriam said, tapping her foot. “I hope you brought enough for everyone. There’s an old lady over there who looks like she could do with cheering up.”

"Well, we were going to get her outfit first," Hisoka agreed with a thoughtful hum. "Very well, what do you think, Lulu? You'll help me find a suitable outfit so that we complement each other, won't you?"
“Yes,” Illumi, hear his mouth say. “Of course I will, Master. And what will you give me as a reward when I do?” His hand raised to his lips and traced them, feeling where Hisoka-san’s had just been. “If that was my payment for being here with you, then I have high hopes for what a fully tailored suit will get me.” His vision temporarily shifted, and he realised he’d just winked. “What do I need to earn myself a pretty collar?”

“Oh gods, this was going so well,” Miriam groaned. “Why did you have to kiss her? Do you have an aphrodisiac in your lipstick or something?”

"She's very kissable, and she's mine," Hisoka replied proudly. "Shouldn't I show my girlfriend affection? Isn't it a thing so-called normal people do?"

“No,” Miriam said firmly. “She’s hers. People are not property. I don’t care what ‘normal’ people do, but I do care about that distinction. Now, let’s go, we’ve put on enough of a show; you need to buy a dress.” And get indoors.

“Yes, I do. Lulu, darling, do you have any idea what sort of dress you would like? You've got more experience in these matters than I do,” Hisoka asked, wanting to avoid looking at Miriam. "I'm trusting you to be my guide; you know all this black-tie stuff is rather new to me."

Illumi tightened his hand in an attempt at a reassuring grip. He’d seen others do things like this and it was reassuring to be back in control of his body.

He did his best to keep his voice calm as he said, “I have a few ideas, Master, yes, but you must make the final decisions. I...do not wish to be the...authority in our relationship. I think something in black would do though,” he went on, recalling the types of things the women he knew would wear to events. “Maybe some gloves?”

He looked around the street and saw a discreet sign advertising bespoke ladieswear. The lettering was stylish but subtle, and the garments on display would not have been out of place in a country house.

“I would advise that we look in the shop down the street, there; in between the second-hand furniture store and the jewellers.”

“Yes,” Miriam said. “You can.”

“No,” Illumi said, equally firmly. “I will not. I would advise you to not speak about things that you do not understand.”
“Then why don’t you enlighten me?” Miriam challenged. “What am I not understanding? You aren’t a slave, why can’t you decide what dress you’re going to wear?”

"She’s not my actual slave; it’s a kink thing. Kyoya not getting that I understand, but you're a bit older than him, aren't you?" Hisoka quipped. "As for why I’m going to make the final decisions, why don't you ask your friend, Dr. Lecter? He’d be happy to explain the psychology behind submission, I’m sure; the man does seem to enjoy teaching others."

“Dr. Lecter would never insult me by assuming I couldn’t understand. Unlike some, he isn’t rude.” Miriam said vehemently.

“No, but implying that I do not have my own mind and need ‘saving’ is insulting,” Illumi said with finality. “Now, if you are done criticising the way others choose to live, then we should move on. It is not my money that I would be spending.” He felt Lulu rise within him and add teasingly, “It would be rude to buy something without the card holder’s consent, don’t you think?” He couldn’t understand why, but she seemed to like their guard quite a bit.

Miriam looked at the couple and shook her head. “I am never going to understand you two, fine, come on, before we start attracting a crowd. I guess investigating human trafficking does something to the humour muscles in your brain. There are some things I just don’t like any more. But that’s my problem. Let’s get you into a little black dress.”

You’re not here to understand or to judge me, why couldn’t we have Kyoya? I like him; he’s actually friendly. "My apologies, I didn't mean to be quite so insensitive. Let's try and get through this shopping trip without further fighting, shall we? Truce?" Hisoka asked with a small smile.

“Yeah,” Miriam said, running a hand through her hair. “Truce. Look, I really am sorry. I don’t know why I’m like this. Leroy rubbed me the wrong way this morning.” She caught a sneer flash across Lulu’s face. “Yeah, he’s worse than you think,” she said conspiratorially and slapped a hand over her mouth. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t be saying things like that. Oh, fuck, I don’t know what’s gotten into me today. I really do want to get you a good dress. I promise. You’d look great in something floor length. Don’t tell Zeller I said that. Oh, God, someone shut me up.”

"It's fine, take a deep breath," Hisoka instructed firmly. "Now count back from ten, you'll be alright. We're going to get Lulu the most wonderful dress from the store she suggested, and we're all going to get along. Now, are we all ready?"
Illumi felt Lulu walk over to Miriam and put an arm around her shoulder. “Come on, sweetie,” she said. “I’m sure we could find something for you too.”

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Miriam stiffened and as politely as she could, extracted herself from the woman’s grip. Lulu was a lot stronger than she looked and she made a mental note to warn Zeller.

“Thanks, but dresses really aren’t my thing. I promise to give you an honest opinion if you need one, though,” she offered.

***

“I think we have a deal,” Illumi felt lulu say. “Now, let’s go make me look fabulous.”

***

Hisoka watched the interaction with interest before clearing his throat to get Illumi’s attention. "Now, I believe we were heading to the shop down the street?"

***

“Yes, we were,” Lulu purred, and Illumi watched as she took his hand and happily walked beside him to the shop.

*I need to do this,* he thought. *Hisoka-san won’t know how to act in there. Let me take charge. You were better with the woman than I was, but I need to do this.*

“*Spoilsport,*” Lulu thought.

Blinking, Illumi experimentally squeezed his Master’s hand and smiled when he realised that he was back in control. Standing up on his tip-toes, he made like he was going to kiss Hisoka-san’s cheek, but whispered in his ear. “Follow my lead. We can do this.”

With a little prompting from Lulu, he placed the kiss gently against his jaw and took a deep breath before turning and striding into the store as if he already owned it. With a straight back and an air that screamed ‘old money’, he made his way to the shop assistant and said, “Show me a selection of black dresses you have in my size. They must be suitable for an important dinner party and allow for gloves to be worn. Spare no expense.”

Job done, he turned and sat demurely on an expensive-looking chair, waiting for the dresses to be brought out for inspection. He had seen his Mother do this enough times to know the drill.

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“OK,” Miriam said quietly. “Now I get why you like her. Shit, I just said that out loud. I really should cut back on the caffeine.”

***

Hisoka glanced at Miriam and smirked proudly, before joining Illumi and standing by his chair. *You’re so wonderful like this, part of me wants you to stay like this forever. That would be cruel though, wouldn’t it?* Unsure of what to do, he remained silent and glanced at some of the dresses hanging on a nearby rack. *I’m so out of place here; we should have got me something less eye-catching to wear for this. Did you do this to make me uncomfortable, Dr. Lecter? Just you wait, I’ll*
get my own back at your party. You were jealous in the book store; I wonder how much more jealous I can make you over dinner?

***

Seeing the way the shop assistant glanced at his Master and then started to move towards the shop's security, rather than the dress selection, Illumi coughed loud enough to draw her attention.

“If you wish to keep your job, my dear, and earn a significant bonus, then I suggest you go and bring me those dresses.” He grasped his Master’s hand possessively. “I assure you, Hisoka will be on his best behaviour.”

***

Hisoka? Miriam thought, noting the dropping of the honorific. So you do stand up for yourself when you need to. Oh, thank God. OK, I can work with this.

“And I’m here to keep an eye on her,” Miriam teased. “It’s a whole chain of command thing. Trust me; it gets complicated. You wouldn’t believe the level of detail we go into when sorting out shifts. Your merchandise is safe. Trust me.”

***

Hisoka held in his sigh of frustration. He’d expected the assistant’s reaction. "I understand you're probably uncomfortable around me, but, I am only here to pay for a dress for my girlfriend. She has a rough idea of what she wants," he said calmly and put his free hand on Illumi's shoulder. "The price is of no concern. I'll pay it. I'll even leave you some glowing customer feedback, so please, show us what you have on offer?"

***

Illumi watched the assistant hesitate, nod and move to find him the dresses he’d requested. The security officer hadn’t moved from his post, something that Illumi appreciated. The shop, thankfully, didn’t employ stupid people.

Feeling Lulu wanting to have fun whilst they waited, he allowed her to gently squeeze his Master’s hand and rub gentle circles into his palm. He was going to have to play dress-up again soon, and Lulu was getting excited at the prospect. It was almost a relief to know that she would be able to take over.

***

The squeeze on his hand surprised Hisoka out of his thoughts, and he looked down. Chuckling quietly, he squeezed back and bent to whisper in his lover’s ear. “You’re beautiful when you get commanding,” he said, wanting to say more, but deciding against it, he settled instead for a quick kiss on the cheek. “I can’t wait to see you modelling for me again,” he added playfully.

***

Rubbing slow circles into Hisoka-san’s palm, Illumi felt Lulu smile dreamily. “Modeling them or you, my dear, this is all for you; you deserve a treat,” she said, and he agreed.

It felt strange not to say Master, but he agreed with Lulu’s assessment that he could not appear to have anything less than full control over the situation in front of the staff.
Allowing a mildly bored look to cross his features, he inspected his fingernails before turning to watch the assistant gathering his clothes. Lulu didn’t like her, but she was growing on him. He liked people who could think on their feet, and this one certainly could.

***

_You know I'm uneasy here, don't you Illu-chan? _Hisoka thought as he focused on the gentle massaging of his palm and commanded his body to relax. _I can feel the security guard watching me, does he really think he could stop me? If I wanted to kill everyone here, I'd have done it in the blink of an eye and taken the dresses I liked._

"Well, you know how much I enjoy spoiling you," Hisoka said softly, doing his best to ignore the shop staff. "Getting to see your happy smiling face is a treat all on its own."

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Illumi looked up at his Master and flashed him a small smile. “As is pleasing you,” he said gently. “I am looking forward to finding a dress for the party. I’ve never been shopping in Yorknew before. My family would always call in people when they wanted new clothes.” It wasn’t a lie...exactly. Lulu was extremely excited about the dresses, and his family did have a tailor. It just felt strange to be talking to Hisoka-san like this. He wasn’t used to the company and acting on the spur of the moment like this, without being paid to do so was entirely new.

***

“I’d say get a room, but we all know what happens when you do,” Miriam said, settling down on a padded stool next to Lulu. She saw the flash of a smile fly across Lulu’s face and chuckled. “You know it’s true.”

***

“And you know that it isn’t a bad thing,” Illumi countered. “We wouldn’t want Hisoka to become bored now, would we?” Dropping his Master’s title made his teeth ache.

_These dresses better be worth it_, he thought and felt Lulu’s answering assurance that they would be.

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Hisoka chuckled. _I do tend to act out when I get bored, don't I? _ "Well, I don't think the shop staff need to hear about my mischief. I'm sure you'll be stunning in whatever dress we choose."

***

“Well, I trust that you won’t let me leave looking like a Peacock,” Illumi heard Lulu say and felt his body titter at its own joke. He heard Miriam groan and slump in her chair.

Lulu turned his body to look at her, and he noted, with genuine surprise, that whilst the woman had slumped, she had not let up her vigilance. She was nothing like Kyoya. Her ears were angled so that she could hear what was happening, her gaze was not covered, and she was sitting so that she would be able to spring into action at a moments notice.

“I like her,” Lulu thought. “We should keep her around. She makes Master think too. Kyoya didn’t. I got the impression he wanted to pat him on his head. This one actually challenges him. Maybe we could see if she wanted to join us in-“
No! Illumi thought in horror. *I do not want to see any part of her naked.*

“You really are no fun,” Lulu groused and turned when she heard the wheels of a caddy approaching.

The assistant was wheeling in a rack of dresses for Illumi to choose from. Some were gaudy, full of sequins and cut-out side sections that made them look like they’d be more suitable for the circus than a party, and he wondered if she was testing him.

Getting to his feet, he maintained a rigid and upright posture that his mother would have been proud of. Walking over to the rack, he rearranged the selection, placing the three that would suit the party to the left and the five that he had rejected to the right.

“I’d like to try these on for size,” he said, politely gesturing to the dresses. “What do you think, Ma-y darling?”

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"Definitely, I'd like to see them on before we make our final choice. I'm sure at least one of them will look great," Hisoka agreed, pointedly avoiding looking at the shop assistant. *Sequins? For a dinner party?* he wondered, and looked down at his clothes, resisting the urge to sigh indignantly. *I was trying to be nice earlier, but clearly, such things are wasted on some people.*

***

“Very well,” Illumi said, smiling politely at the shop assistant, and assured her that he wouldn’t need her help. Making his way over to the changing rooms he politely asked her to wait and was pleasantly surprised when she did.

He hadn’t been looking forward to explaining why he was only wearing a push-up bra, but, thankfully, that wasn’t going to be a problem. Stepping inside the booth, he stripped out of his clothes and slid easily into the first dress. It was short, smart and clung to his figure well. It had thick enough straps to allow him to wear a bra, which he appreciated. Looking at himself in the mirror, he felt Lulu grin appreciatively.

“I look sexy as hell,” she thought. Illumi rolled his eyes. He didn’t think it had enough elegance for Lecter’s party, but he’d already said that he would be asking for his Master’s input. Pulling the curtain aside, he stepped out into the hallway and pretended to look at himself in the mirror at the end of the walkway, rather than at Hisoka-san.

“What do you think?” he asked in a commanding tone and smirked inwardly when he saw the assistant jump in the mirror’s reflection.

***

At the sound of his lover’s voice, Hisoka looked up, looking over the proposed dress thoughtfully before his brows knitted in a frown. *It’s a bit short, isn’t it? If we were going to a bar, then that would be different. Dr. Lecter is probably expecting something more elegant, and we’re already going to be the centre of attention.* Forcing himself to smile, he tried to decide the best way to explain his feelings.

“It looks lovely on you, but I’m not sure it’s,” he paused, reconsidering his words. *Is the reason that I don’t like it, that it’s revealing, or something else?* “Perhaps something a little longer would be more appropriate?” he suggested.
“Please don’t wear that to Dr. Lecter’s house,” Miriam said, trying not to stare at the pale legs now fully on display. “I...some of the older guests may have heart attacks and I really don’t want to have to perform CPR in a Doctor’s house.”

“I agree,” Illumi said curtly and swept back into the changing room, ignoring Lulu’s tittering laughter at the back of his mind. There was no way she was going to get him to like that guard. It didn’t matter what she thought, he was in charge of his own body.

“Well, that was solved quickly,” Miriam said, staring at Hisoka. “Is she always like that when it comes to clothes? Can I take her with me the next time I need to go shopping? We could work out an exchange programme? You get Zeller, and I’ll take her out for the afternoon?”

"Zeller? Why not Kyoya? I like him," Hisoka replied with a warm smile. Well you may not be as fun as young Kyoya, but you're useful to have around. I'm glad you agreed the dress wasn't suitable. "Also yes, she’s generally very to the point. It's why I like her; she keeps me on my toes.”

“Amongst other things,” Miriam muttered. “And no, you won’t corrupt Kyoya. He’s a good kid, but I do not understand why Jack thought it was a good idea to bring him onto the team. No corrupting the rookie, got it? Bad psychopathic serial killer.”

Drawing the curtain and blocking the rest of the shop from seeing the relief on his face, Illumi stared in the mirror as he stripped out of his outfit. For all of Hisoka-san’s talk of being out of his depth in a shop like this, he had a good eye for design and Miriam did appear to be keeping her word about giving her honest opinion. With a few etiquette lessons under his belt and a good hard injection of self-belief, Hisoka-san would no doubt be able to charm his way through any ball or night at the Opera. The party would be easy.

Can I corrupt you instead? Hisoka nodded and sat down on the chair Illumi had used earlier. "He's too pure for the career he's chosen,” he remarked thoughtfully. "Maybe Jack is hoping to encourage him to consider a different path while he's still young enough?"

Miriam narrowed her eyes. “Damnit, why do you have to make sense. That’s exactly the kind of...thing...he’d pull. The kid only went into this career because his family told him to. You know he’s practically a world-class locksmith? I’ve not come across a lock he can’t break. I don’t want this job to break him.”

Illumi picked the next dress off the hanger. This one was floor length but less figure-hugging. It
only had one shoulder strap, and so, with a sigh, he took off his bra. Thankfully, he’d practised enough after the shower, when he was trying on the clothes that Hisoka-san had bought him, and he was now able to put the device on again without much thought.

Inspecting himself in the mirror, he had to admit that whilst the top half of the dress looked good...the bottom half was not as flattering as he’d hoped it would be.

***

"I hope it doesn't come to that," Hisoka said honestly, surprising himself. Did I really say that? It's true though; I can't lie, the band would punish me. "I mean, he seems nice...I've enjoyed talking to him when he's been on duty. Agent Jones is probably my least favourite of your colleagues, though."

***

“Oh, you can break him,” Miriam said offhandedly before clapping her hand over her mouth again. Frowning at Hisoka, she looked him up and down. “What is it about you? Why am I...babbling?” she asked and activated her Gyo. Beyond the tendrils of Hannibal’s Nen, she couldn’t see anything out of the ordinary. “There’s no way you’re that sneaky. Have you got some fancy perfume on, that makes people tell you what they’re thinking?"

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"No, I'm not wearing anything special. I'm honestly not sure why I have that effect on people," Hisoka remarked and glanced at the band. "Although while I'm wearing this, you can be sure I'm not lying."

***

“Really,” Miriam asked eagerly. “Oh, you so shouldn't have said that to me. Damnit, why am I saying these-“ She turned when she saw Lulu emerge from the dressing room. “Holy...erm...”

***

“What do you think of this one?” Illumi asked his audience, making sure that his tone was as demanding as his mothers. He knew it wasn’t flattering, but he made sure to hold himself with all the self-assured pride of his father. They might not be here now, but he would not cast doubt upon the Zoldyck name.

***

Smiling knowingly at Miriam, Hisoka turned to look at Illumi and his second dress. I like the asymmetric style; we can always find a top like that. It’s a shame it’s so ill-fitting on the bottom; I do like the dress, but I think it would suit Miriam better.

“I like the design, but the fit is all wrong,” he said eventually. “You’d suit the style as a top, but the lower half isn’t sitting properly on your hips. Hopefully, the last dress will be better, darling.”

***

Illumi smiled into the mirror as his Master explained his thoughts. “I knew there was a reason I brought you with me today,” he heard Lulu purr. “You have quite the eye; I couldn’t agree more.”

***
“He’s full of surprises today,” Miriam said darkly. “But I have to admit, he’s right. You’re all wrong for that cut.”

***

“It is, thank you both for your honesty,” Illumi said, stamping down on Lulu before she could do a twirl for their audience.

Heading back into the cubicle for the third time, he looked at the last dress. He wearily took in the long slit that cut almost up to his hip. Hisoka-san was either going to love the idea or completely hate it. If the latter was true, then he knew that he was going to have to think on his feet. Maybe he could pull together a combination of an asymmetric top and skirt?

Replacing his bra and making sure his pins were held in the correct place, Illumi slipped the dress on.

The straps were simple, elegant and extremely flattering for his new neckline. His breasts were fully covered, but the cut of the top was sewn in a way that subtly drew attention to them. It was ladylike without being too over the top.

It was a promising start.

***

“You know,” Miriam said conversationally. “She’s right; you do have a good eye. Why are you so uncomfortable here? I never thought you’d actually care about what people thought of you.”

***

"It's complicated," Hisoka replied, refusing to meet Miriam's eye. "I'd rather not talk about it, especially not here." It's not that I care, so much as there's a difference between choosing to be on display and being forced into it. I highly doubt you want to hear my sob story; I'm a criminal, and you're a cop. You're not supposed to be sympathetic towards me.

***

The slit...actually looked good. The full-length skirt would drape softly around his ankles when he had his heels on, and the angle of the break meant that his leg would not so much be exposed as revealed. There was a subtle difference and, Illumi noted with a pleased smile, Lulu liked it as much as he did.

He pulled back the curtain and practically glided out into the corridor.

“And the last one?” he asked.

***

“Fair enough,” Miriam said and was stopped from saying more by the sight of, quite possibly the most beautiful woman she had ever seen, emerging from the dressing room.

“Lulu,” she gasped, feeling her mouth going dry. “You’re...” *Drop-dead fucking gorgeous, breathtaking, an idiot for dating a criminal... “You look amazing.”

***

Grateful for the distraction Hisoka looked back at Illumi and stared, raking his eyes down from the
delicate neckline to the high split in the skirt. *This one, it has to be this one.* He blinked and swallowed before he asked, “You said we need gloves too, right? I want to see it with gloves, to be sure. I like it; you look...ravishing.”

Turning to the assistant, he tried to appear charming as he asked, "Do you happen to sell opera gloves? We’d like to see the dress with them before we decide if we’ll take it."

***

Illumi allowed Lulu to smile like a Lion as she heard her Master’s praise. “Size small,” he purred and turned to stalk towards Hisoka-san once the woman had disappeared into the back.

He had to walk a fine line; he couldn’t let Lulu get too carried away with her performance, but at the same time, he had to make it appear to the staff that she was in charge.

“Maybe I should keep it on?” he allowed her to say and saw the way Miriam flushed at the suggestion. So you do like it too, he thought. *It’s not just Hisoka-san that I can affect with this body. Interesting. Lulu likes you; I wonder if there’s a way I can turn that to our advantage? Master could do with an ally. You aren’t as stupid as the others; your opinion will likely have weight.*

“We could fuck her,” Lulu pointed out. “Master would enjoy the sho-”

NO!

***

Hisoka continued admiring the dress as it flowed with every step Illumi took, his lips pulling up into a dreamy smile. *Yes, I think I’m going to buy this dress anyway, even if we don’t end up using it for the party. I like it. I’m sure we could find a use for it.* “You seem happy with my choice Lulu, but as much as I’d like you to keep it on, I’ll have to veto that decision. But it’ll give me something to look forward to. Seeing you in it again will make the dinner much more pleasant I’m sure.”

***

“As you wish,” Illumi said and felt Lulu pout. “We wouldn’t want to spoil the party.”

Seeing Miriam continuing to stare at him, he frowned and asked, “Are you OK?”

***

“What?” Miriam asked, snapping out of a daydream about endless legs and soft white skin. “Me? Yes, I’m fine. It’s...it’s a little warm in here, that’s all. You should buy that one.”

***

"We are," Hisoka agreed. "I get the impression that you like this one the best too, sweetheart?" *A little warm in here? It's not that bad.*

Seeing the assistant returning with an assortment of opera gloves, he nodded in their direction. "I think you should keep it on while you pick your gloves," he added, continuing to observe Miriam out of the corner of his eye.

***

“It’s perfect,” Illumi said, ignoring Lulu’s desire to talk with Miriam more and turned to select his
gloves.

“I think I’ll try these,” he said, picking the box from her left hand and inwardly cursed when Lulu ‘accidentally’ brushed his fingers against the assistants. It seemed that Lulu was willing to flirt with anyone. He let out an internal groan when Lulu thrilled at the flush that came over the young ladies cheeks.

Are you trying to make Hisoka-san jealous? he wondered. It won’t work. He does not think like that.

“Hisoka-san?” Lulu replied. “No, I’m not trying to make him jealous.”

Feeling as if he’d missed something, Illumi turned his back to the lady and held the box out for Hisoka-san to open.

“If you wouldn’t mind, my dear,” he said, eyeing the container.

***

"Of course," Hisoka purred, accepting the box and carefully opening it. Giving the assistant a knowing smile, he pulled out the gloves and nodded in satisfaction at the feel of the soft fabric against his fingers. "Let's see how these look then," he prompted, holding up the first glove and sliding it up his lover's arm once they'd inserted their hand. Quickly following suit with the other, he grinned as Illu-chan stroked his arm. "I approve," he said. “And we still need to find a necklace to complete the look, but that should be easy enough. How do you feel about the outfit?”

***

Illumi felt Lulu luxuriate in the fabric and found himself wishing that he didn’t have to take the clothes off. “I like it,” Illumi said, ignoring Lulu’s insistence that he tell them that the outfit was ‘simply divine’.

Turning back to the assistant, he nodded and said, “We will take both items, please, ring them up at the till, Hisoka will pay. I’m going to get changed.”

Without looking at anyone else, and with Lulu’s protests ringing in his ears, Illumi glided back to the dressing room.

Shut up, the jewellers next door will possess shiny rocks, Illumi snapped. That will make you happy. I am sure Hisoka-san will play with you when we are home. You have clothes that make him excited there too.

“I don’t care why you are complaining, and you know it!” Lulu hissed.

I do not care why you are complaining, Illumi thought as he entered the dressing room once again. I care that you stop!

***

Waiting until Illumi was out of sight, Hisoka chuckled before turning to Miriam to say, "You can say it, you know. Whatever it is you're thinking, I sure I won't be offended. Although you'll have to excuse me for one moment."

Getting up, he followed the assistant over to the till, picking up one of the feedback cards along the way. Filling out the form whilst the girl went about tallying up the clothes, he smiled when she
told him the price, and handed over the form, along with his card to pay. "Thank you for taking such good care of my darling, Lulu today," he said, pausing to look for her name tag. "I hope the rest of your day is a pleasant one, Zoe."

***

“You know it’s rude to leave mid-conversation,” Miriam groused, ignoring the fact that Hisoka had actually excused himself. “And I didn’t want to say anything to you. It’s a nice outfit, that’s all. But I’ve said that already, so I don’t know what you were implying,” she added, holding her head high and ignoring the look the girl behind the till gave her.

When she saw the price, she nearly choked. “Holy crap, that’s—”

***

“Not your issue,” Illumi said smoothly, coming back to join his Master. “Shall we go to the store next door?” he asked, hoping to waylay his guard from further comment.

***

“I think that would be a wonderful idea,” Hisoka agreed, watching as Illumi gave the dress and the gloves to the store clerk to put into a bag. “We need a necklace, and perhaps some perfume? I think we walked past a perfumery on the way here; we already have suitable shoes back at the hotel. Am I missing anything else?”

***

“We were going to pick you up a computer as well,” Illumi said evenly, allowing Lulu to direct him to take his Master’s arm in his. Pointedly ignoring Miriam, he looked up at Hisoka san and smiled adoringly. “Why don’t we go and find something shiny to hang around my neck? I’m sure Dr. Lecter will love the view almost as much as you.”

***

*I think Miriam would be the one enjoying the view rather than Dr. Lecter.* "That sounds like a great idea," Hisoka teased using his free hand to accept the bags from Zoe with a polite nod. "Do you have a style in mind that you like? A choker perhaps?"

***

Lulu flushed at the tone in her Master’s voice, and Illumi had to rein her in. There was no way he could face the assistant and keep up the charade of his dominance, and so instead, he said, “That would be lovely.”

***

Miriam did her best to hide her sigh of frustration. She could not understand why a woman as beautiful and strong as Lulu would willingly submit to someone like Hisoka. Granted, he wasn’t quite the ignorant brute that she’d assumed at first, but Lulu still out-classed him by a country mile.

Following the two out of the shop as they continued to discuss the subtle nuances of choker designs, she groaned. There was no way that she could be attracted to the woman, and she certainly wasn’t attracted to Hisoka, no matter what Zeller said. She’d just split up with Jade. She wasn’t that kind of person.
She watched the gentle sway of Lulu’s skirt as she walked. She wasn’t!

***

Illumi felt the refreshing breeze against his skin and took a calming breath. Lulu was getting too excitable. He couldn’t afford to become aroused whilst out in public, but the way his Master was talking...the pins were rubbing against that place already, and without the underwear to cover it, the breeze was travelling under his skirt and...

He swallowed and walked the few paces needed to look at the jeweller’s window display. Was this why his Master had insisted his punishment for taking control in the bath was to go commando today? Did he know what kind of effect it would have on his new body? It certainly was nothing like his male one. No one would know how aroused he was, not without close scrutiny. Hisoka-san did seem to enjoy teasing him, and Lulu was more than happy to play along. Could he really let himself go like that? In public? Was that really what his Master wanted him to do?

***

Seeing Illumi stop outside the jewellers, Hisoka followed suit and case he eyed the large selection of items on offer. *Hmm, I'm sure we could find something better, most of these look far too delicate or downright tacky.* Glancing up the street, he couldn't see any other jewellery stores and resigned himself to going inside. *Hopefully they keep their better items inside; it would be an excellent strategy to deter robbers, I suppose.* "Would you like to see what they have on offer? Or have you already seen something you like?" he asked, his boyfriend hoping they'd choose the former.

***

"These are all tourist rubbish," Lulu thought. "We can’t wear any of these to the Doctor’s party. We’d be a laughing stock."

*I don’t care about us, but we would shame Hisoak-san,* Illumi countered, before turning to his Master and saying, “Inside, I think. These are...not appropriate for the dress.”

***

*Not appropriate?* Miriam thought. *That things two-thousand Jennies! What the hell do you class as appropriate?*

Turning away from the window, and wondering exactly how rich Lulu was, she scanned the street. The boys were huddled in a group across the road. When they saw her looking, they hastily looked down at their phones and pretended to be playing a game.

*Really?* she thought. *You’re still following us? Don’t you have anything better to do with your time?*

***

"No time like the present," Hisoka said as he pulled Illumi over to the door. "If spending time around Danchou was anything to go by, I’ve found that they tend to keep the finer quality things in the back. Of course, not all shops do that, but it looks like this one does," he explained, keeping his voice quiet so that only his boyfriend would hear. "Take a look around, remember money is no object. Only the best for my girl," he added, raising his voice to make sure that the shop staff heard him as he made his way to one of the display cases. *Hopefully, we'll get a better reception here. I'm sure I can pass for a rich eccentric. I honestly didn't think I'd be grateful for Danchou dragging me into these places when we were casing them. It’s funny the way things turn out.*
“Oh, I know a far better way to get what we want,” Illumi heard Lulu purr, and held his breath. He knew what she was going to do and he also knew that Hisoka-san would approve, but that their guard would not.

*Are you trying to get her to hate us?* he thought.

“*Oh, honey, she really doesn’t hate us,*” Lulu responded and leaned up to kiss their Master on his cheek. “Watch me hunt,” she said to him and whipped around to wink at Miriam before prowling towards the shop’s manager. Illumi couldn’t understand how she could walk and sway her hips like that, but he decided that it would be pointless to question it, as it had just happened.

“*It’s all in the hips,*” Lulu teased and grinned again at the manager’s hungry eyes.

***

“And all this time, I thought it was you who was the public menace,” Miriam said dumbfoundedly as she watched Lulu lean over the counter and sweet talk the manager into bringing out his *finest* selection of chokers for her. “She’s actually terrifying, isn’t she? She’s like a chameleon; you never know what colour she’s going to be next. That manager’s a goner and so is your wallet, by the way. She’s going to spend everything you’ve got and more — just a heads up. And before you say anything, I’m not jealous,” she added defensively. “I just feel that it’s only fair that I warn you. That way I get to do the I told you so dance later. Not that I have one.”

***

“Sure you’re not. "What did you expect from my girlfriend? We’ve been together for the better part of a few years now. Do you think anyone less could actually keep me interested?" Hisoka asked with a cheeky grin as he watched Illumi work with an appreciative gaze. "She knows how to get what she wants; I’m the only man she’s ever submitted to, and believe me, I had to earn that privilege."

***

“Yeah, I’m not really into all that stuff,” Miriam said, turning away from the sight of Lulu’s behind and took in the rest of the shop. “What happened to the boyfriend?” she asked conversationally. “I heard him mentioning an anniversary before he disappeared, or was I misinterpreting things again?" Like hell I’ll believe that you’ve been with her for that long. You shag anything that breathes, and even then, if it was dead but on strings, you’d give it a go. There’s no way someone like her would put up with that. Your bill for STI screenings must be more than my mortgage.

***

"Who said it was our anniversary that he was talking about?" Hisoka asked, curious to see how Miriam would respond. "Also, you made it quite clear what you think of my lifestyle, but you can clearly see she's happy. That should be the important thing, right?"

***

“So you aren’t dating him?” Miriam countered, noting the not so subtle change of topic. “Because if I were you, I’d tell him that. The way he looked at you was the way a starving man looks at an extra-large cheeseburger and fries. If he’s not in love with you, then he’s got issues. He spent twenty minutes deciding which cut of tuna to put in your rolls the other day. If you’ve tossed him, then you’re a dick.”
"I thought your job was to watch me, not my partners? And not that I see why you'd need to know, but Elijah is busy with work," Hisoka replied curtly. "That's why he's not been around, and he's aware of my promiscuity. Do you really think one person could keep up with me on their own? I'm not allowed to fight while I'm in custody so I'm using sex to get rid of the pent up frustration."

"That...actually makes a lot of sense," Miriam admitted. "Damnit, why can’t you just be a regular-ass like my ex. Frikkin' Zeller was right. Now I owe him money. Oh, Lord, is the manager actually talking to her boobs? Does he have no class at all?"

"Regular? Honey, there’s nothing regular about my ass," Hisoka said playfully before looking over at the store manager and shaking his head in amusement. Reminds me of Pakunoda, she used to distract guys with her breasts too. "I'd say that's a clear no; don't worry I'm not gonna start a scene. Lulu is enjoying herself, I may dominate her, but she has more freedom with me than with her family. Elijah too, I know how I must come across, to you and your colleagues. There is, however, much more under the facepaint, for those willing to take that chance."

"Oh, I don’t doubt that," Miriam said, idly wondering what kind of a description the manager would give of Lulu if she had to take a witness statement. "I'm just not delusional or suicidal enough to wanna try out for the position. Unlike some, it would seem," she added, tilting her head as she watched Lulu giggle like a naughty schoolgirl and tap at the manager’s hand. "Please tell me she’s not going to do anything stupid."

"I don't think she will," Hisoka assured. "I'm naturally flirtatious with everyone, so I can hardly tell her off for it. I'll intervene if you're concerned about the man's safety." Delusional or suicidal? Was that meant to be an insult at my expense or Illu-chan's?

"You know," Miriam said conversationally. "You really do have sarcastic passive aggression down to a fine art. I am aware this is coming from me. Take it as a compliment. Wow, she would actually eat that man alive if we weren't here, wouldn't she? She'd have him hand over the entire shop. Is...is he getting out an emerald? You can get diamond-encrusted emerald pendant chokers?"

"Emeralds would compliment Lulu's eyes wonderfully, now that I think about it. As for getting the man to hand over the store, I'm sure she could, if she really put her mind to it. You've probably guessed this already, but she comes from an extremely wealthy family," Hisoka explained proudly as he watched his lover cooing over the jewels being offered. "Forgive my bluntness, but I get the impression you don't spend much time in stores like these?"

"They aren't really my area of expertise. The last time I wore a dress was to one of your Doctor’s dinner parties three years ago," Miriam said bluntly. "Oh, God no, that ruby would look awful on
her. Why is she smiling like that? Don’t agree to...did he just swap out the emerald choker? Is he...Hisoka, please tell me I’m not watching a man trying to palm off fakes in his own shop. That’s why he showed her that hideous piece, isn’t it? He was actually trying to distract her. Lord, help us all. I’m going to have to call in the squaddies. Oh, no, I’m going to be on the news. I can not afford to be on the news right now. I have stuff...going on. I have meetings that I have to get to.”

***

Hisoka looked at Miriam curiously but decided not to question her. "I'm sure it's an honest mistake, he's just picked up the display piece in error. It'll be easy enough to straighten out," he suggested before making his way over to Lulu and putting his arm around her waist, smiling at the manager.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything, but I just wanted to let you know that you picked up the display piece by mistake," he told the man pleasantly. "Do you like the emerald choker, my darling?" he asked Illumi cheerfully. "I think it would look wonderful on you; the gems would bring out the colour of your eyes and compliment your skin perfectly."

***

“Oh,” Mr. Hemmingmore said, looking down at the fake in his hand and smiling toothily at... “Mr. Morow? Hisoka Morow? I didn’t...oh, wow. Erm, yes, you are correct, this is a display piece. I’ll...go get the correct one. Can I just say that I’m a huge fan and-”

***

“Please,” Miriam said flatly. “Don’t inflate his ego any more than it already is. Go and get the correct piece. If you are having trouble finding it, you might want to check your jacket pocket.”

She heard lulu chuckle darkly. You knew? Why didn’t you say anything? What the hell were you planning? She watched the Manager’s eyes flash towards Lulu’s chest and rolled her eyes. “It won’t be down her top, I assure you.”

***

“Don’t spoil all his fun, sweetie,” Lulu said, blowing Miriam a kiss. “Marvin and I were having a fantastic conversation. You know he has a wife who keeps Budgies and a daughter who is studying to go into Marine Biology. He was just about to invite me to visit his holiday home in France!”

***

“Well, I, it was, I think you might have taken me a bit out of context there, my dear,” Marvin stuttered, backing away towards the staff door. “I would never have, I mean, I’m just going to find you the non-display piece to try on.”

***

“I’ll be waiting with bated breath,” Lulu answered. Illumi stepped in before she could blow him a kiss too. He felt his body turn to face his Master and listened as Lulu cooed, “He’s such a lovely man; extremely helpful. I have the address of their warehouse if you’re interested. Apparently, they have a lot of stock that they don’t show the general public kept there.”

***

“Honestly, what am I going to do with you? I’m sure Marvin would be delighted to show you around,” Hisoka teased. “I think you should probably give that address to Miriam though;
something tells me that would be better.”

***

“Anything you say, Mr. Hisoka Morow, Sir,” Lulu teased back, stroking her fingers over her Master’s chest and causing Illumi to silently scream. She giggled to herself and turned in Hisoka-san’s arms to look at their guard. “Do you have a pen and paper? I could text you the details, if you want to give me your number...he wasn’t quite stupid enough to write it down.”

***

“Oh Lord, please save us all,” Miriam muttered, scrambling to get her notebook out of her pocket. “Here. Don’t add your number. Please. Jack’s going to have enough questions for me. Hisoka, help, she’s grinning.”

***

“Be nice now, Lulu, write down the address. You can give her your number once I’m no longer under guard,” Hisoka told his lover firmly. “No giving her my number either, I saw that look you just gave me. Just wait till we get back to the hotel.”

***

“Spoilsport,” Lulu groused playfully, but wrote down the address she’d been given. Adding a heart in the corner of the sheet for fun, she handed it over to Miriam and ignored Illumi’s near-constant demands to be let back in control. She was having fun.

“How much of a discount do you think I can get us if I open up another button on my top?” she asked her Master, squeezing her arms together to accentuate her cleavage.

***

Hisoka chuckled and pulled his lover into a tight hug. “Sweetie, if you show anymore cleavage you might get us done for indecent exposure. Just be careful not to fall out of your top,” he replied and kissed her cheek, not sure why he suddenly felt so possessive. “I don’t want to spoil your fun too much, but well, we can’t afford to draw too much attention to ourselves.”

***

“I have meetings,” Miriam said again. “Lots and lots of important, totally not eating into my social life, meetings. I can’t afford to arrest people. I’m a cop. We can’t go around arresting people.”

***

Marvin had been about to join in the conversation and show Hisoka the real choker his girlfriend had asked for, when he heard the blond woman say that she was a cop. Pausing for a moment, he plastered on his most professional smile and tried not to look like he was sweating. Just play it cool, you haven’t broken the law. You didn’t try to sell it. She can’t prove anything.

“Ladies,” he said as confidently as he could. “Mr. Morow, thank you for your patience. I have the genuine piece right here. Which one of you would like to try it on first?”

***

“If I may, I’d like to take a closer look. I’m sure you understand, only the very best is good enough
for my girlfriend," Hisoka replied and held out his hand for the choker. I've watched Danchou inspecting the quality of stolen jewels enough times to know what I'm doing.

***

“Oh, I’m sure you’ll look stunning, darling,” Lulu said adoringly and saw the manager hesitate only for a moment before handing the choker over.

***

“She’s kidding,” Miram assured the bewildered man. “She likes to tease, don’t you Lulu?” she added, glaring at the woman.

***

“Only on days ending in Y,” Lulu quipped, staring at the choker hungrily.

“Give me my collar, Master,” she thought. “It’s all I need. Make me yours.”

We are already his! Illumi growled and tried again to force his way to the surface. Stop blocking me! How are you doing this?

***

Carefully examining the choker, Hisoka hummed thoughtfully. This is definitely a genuine piece; the fake was likely glass. Holding it up, he turned to his boyfriend. “Let’s see how it looks against your skin,” he purred and carefully fitted it around Illumi’s slim neck. “Give us a little twirl; I want to get a good look.”

***

Illumi watched as Lulu gleefully turned, rejoicing in her new collar. Now would be the perfect time to force his way back to the surface of his mind, but he couldn’t bring himself to spoil the huge smile on his Master’s face. He was enjoying himself just as much as she was. He wasn’t needed.

“How do I look?” Lulu asked, delighting in the weight of diamonds around her neck. “Will the Doctor like me?”

***

“I don’t care if he likes you; you’re mine, not his. It looks wonderful; the emerald brings out your eyes. With the dress and the gloves, I’m not going to be able to take my eyes off you,” Hisoka replied happily. I’m not sure what’s happening to you, but you’re different today. Still, you’re happy; I shouldn’t spoil the moment.

***

“He’ll take it,” Miriam said, seeing the look Lulu was giving Hisoka and knowing that they could be a while. “Why don’t you go run up the charge and I’ll persuade him to let go of her long enough to pay.” Get me out of here before I have to arrest someone. Please. I have to be at home on time today; they’re going to threaten me with repossessing my house again if I don’t get to this meeting. Why did I give Jade access to my accounts? “Really, they could be a while. I promise I’ll get her to take it off before we leave. I’m a lot stronger than I look; I can take her.”

***
Seeing the manager nod and walk away quickly to fetch a suitable box, Hisoka chuckled. *Whatever it is, it can wait. We’ll have plenty of time to talk back in the hotel room, and more privacy. I’m afraid I am going to have to take the choker off for now,*” he told his lover expecting him to act disappointed. “It’s far too fancy for everyday wear, but if you behave for the rest of the shopping trip, I’ll let you model the whole outfit later. Sound fair?”

***

Illumi took a chance and pushed his way to the surface while Lulu was distracted. Hisoka-san was being sensible, and the moment required a sensible reply.

“As you wish, Hisoka-san,” he said and unclasped the jewels, handing them over to his Master as calmly as he could manage given the tirade that was happening at the back of his mind. “My apologies if I got...carried away. I,” he took a breath and focussed on Hisoka-san’s beautiful eyes. “I shall look forward to being your model later.”

***

“It’s fine; you seemed to be enjoying yourself. I like seeing you smile,” Hisoka reassured as he accepted the choker. “I approve of your selection; it suits you. At least if I find myself bored by the over dinner small talk, I can at least admire you.”

***

Illumi dipped his head, feigning embarrassment. “Well, dolls are to be admired,” he said demurely. “I would hope that my Master is pleased with what he sees. He deserves to be the envy of everyone in the room.”

***

“With you by my side looking like an empress? I’m sure I’ll be the envy of the city,” Hisoka said softly as he tilted Illumi’s head up so he could kiss him gently on the lips. “I’m glad you’re here with me, I don’t know if I’d cope at this party without you,” he whispered.

***

Illumi felt his heart flutter in his chest and a sudden heat coil in his belly. He opened his mouth to reply when he heard Miriam mutter, ‘Oh, for God’s sake, stop being so dramatic.’ He had to keep her on side.

“You’ll be perfect no matter what, Master,” Illumi whispered back and turned in his arms to look at their guard.

Tilting his head, he said, “I do believe that this would be a case of the pot calling the kettle black, Miss Lass. If you look down, you will see that you have crossed your arms and are actually tapping your foot. I was always taught that, though words could lie, the truth will always be found in your body. Dramatically stating that one should not be dramatic is a rather wonderful oxymoron, don’t you think?”

***

“Says the cleavage on legs,” Miriam countered before glaring up at Hisoka. “You have a choker to pay for. Now let go of your pet demon and buy it it’s shiny things.”

***
Come again? Hisoka snarled inside his head. No, keep calm. You can't afford to make a scene; she's not calling you a demon. Just calmly correct her and pay for the choker. "I think you'll find that my darling Lulu is a fallen angel," he replied stiffly as he released Illumi from his hold. "Stay here. Master needs to pay for your jewels. I won't be long, if you'll both excuse me," he added curtly before heading over to store Manager who had just reappeared from the back and was waiting by the till.

***

Illumi calmly looked at the guard and moved to stand beside her as they both watched his Master paying for their goods.

“A word of warning, Miss Lass,” he said as evenly as he could. “I am not saying this as a threat, I assure you, but if you value your life, I would not call anyone a demon near Hisoka-san again. It is what those in the psychological world call a ‘trigger’ for him. I will not divulge more here, but know that you have been warned. If you say it again and he kills you, then,” he smirked. “I will do the ‘I told you so dance’ on your grave.”

***

Grateful for the momentary distraction to help keep his temper in check, Hisoka bowed politely to the Store Manager as he accepted the small bag containing the choker. Just perfume left to complete our list for Illumi’s outfit; then we need to find a tailor and an electronics store. I really would prefer not to owe Dr. Lecter any favours. Making his way back over to his lover and his guard, he plastered on a wide grin. “I believe our next stop was to be the perfumery?”

***

“That sounds delightful,” Illumi said, taking a step forward and looping his Master’s arm in his. The contact wasn’t unpleasant. “Why don’t you show me how you hunt, this time?” he asked in Lulu’s playful lilt. “I would love to watch my big strong man at work.”

Be patient. We can kill her later if you want.

***

Nodding, Hisoka lead the way out of the shop and back towards the central shopping district. “I’m sure I saw a perfume store earlier,” he advised, scanning their surroundings for the place they’d passed by on their way to the dress shop. “After this, we’ll pick up a laptop. Then it’s just my suit fitting to sort out. Perhaps I should try to incorporate some green into my outfit?”

***

Illumi cocked his head and thought about the question. “You wanted a cane,” he said. “How about you find one that has a green marbling to it? You could have a black shaft, and silver ends. Add a green handkerchief and trim to your pockets, and I would say that you would look extremely handsome indeed.”

***

“Dark green to compliment your choker?” Hisoka proposed as he thought about the suggestion. “I would like a cane, that is true. Only if it looks appropriate though, I don’t want to show you up.”

***
Illumi smiled softly and shook his head. “Yes, Master, you do; that is the whole point. Dr. Lecter invited you to his house, not me, remember?” he said, hoping Hisoka-san would take the hint. “I was your plus one.” He squeezed his arm, mimicking Lulu’s earlier affectionate touches and said, “This is your party. You should shine.”

***

He wants to show me off; I’m not stupid. “You say that like he’s only going to throw the party to get me into his house,” Hisoka mumbled before he spotted the shop he was looking for, and his expression lit up. “I think I see the place I was thinking of, if I’m right, it’s just a little further along and then across the road. Also if he’s the host, isn’t it Dr. Lecter’s party?”

***

“Yes,” Illumi said evenly, glancing in the direction of the store. “I was trying to illustrate a point, was that not clear?”

***

“My apologies, I’ve been a little preoccupied with trying to make sure you look perfect for the evening. I think I may have let it go over my head,” Hisoka replied. “You mean, he specifically invited me so I should be the one to stand out?” Well if I’m to succeed in enticing him into bed, then I do need to look my best. Perhaps the cane would allow me to command more attention? I’m going to need to be on full alert inside his home. There’s no way I’m going to let this opportunity pass me by.

***

“Make him jealous,” Illumi encouraged. “I have the most handsome man in the world by my side,” he said, trying to stress the words like Lulu did. “I want to let the world see you the way I do. Let him take a long, hard look.”

Don’t blush, do not. It’s OK. You can say things like that when you are Lulu, you can. Do not blush.

***

“You always seem to know the words I need to hear,” Hisoka replied with a smirk as they came to a stop outside the fragrance store. “Well we’re here, so let’s get you a signature scent to go with your new look. After all, the most handsome man needs a beautiful lady on his arm.” I know I need him to look at me Illu-chan, but there’s something about how he looks at me that’s a little odd. Something about him, sets me on edge.

***

You sure she doesn’t want Lecter to be on your arm? Miriam inwardly scoffed as she covertly watched the kids who were watching them. There was something about them that she didn’t like. You’re both as bad as each other. Your ‘boyfriend’ was lucky to get out when he did. At this rate, I’m gonna have to warn Hannibal that you’re both out to seduce him.

***

“After you, Master,” Illumi said, and let himself be dragged into the store, managing to control his features, even as the overpowering scent of dead flowers hit him. He couldn’t quite bring himself to open his mouth to speak and was glad that his Master seemed to know what he was going. He
knew that when he did finally have to talk, the taste of all that stale perfume would hit him, but it would be worth it. Hisoka-san was happy, and if dressing up his doll was what he wanted to do, then Illumi would make sure to be the perfect plaything. “Do you know what you want?” he asked, ignoring the discomfort. “What do you see me as, Master?”

***

“To be honest, your choker will already make a loud statement. So I would go for a more understated perfume,” Hisoka explained before making a beeline for the selection of women’s fragrances and frowning at the display case when he couldn’t find anything that explained what sort of scent the many bottles contained. Spotting a member of staff for the small store he approached them with a smile.

"Excuse me, but I was wondering if you could help me? I’m trying to find a suitable perfume for my girlfriend; we’re due to attend a dinner party." He paused to let Lulu catch up. "We’re looking for something on the more subtle side, what would you recommend?"

***

Illumi was doing his best not to breath. Seeing his Master so at ease in this place was extremely confusing; even Lulu wasn’t all that happy, and so when the assistant nodded and disappeared into the back of the shop he felt a slight foreboding wash over him.

When the man came back with a tray, set with five bottles and a container of paper strips, Illumi slid to silently hide behind his Master.

***

“From right to left you will find scents that lie on the more subtly floral side of the spectrum,” George said, eyeing the couple curiously. He was sure he recognised the man from somewhere. Never faltering in his pitch, he watched as a blonde approached, but kept a polite distance. The not so subtle black suit gave her away. Bodyguard? he thought. Who are you, and do I need to get your autograph for my collection? “The right are what we would consider to be a midnight musk,” he finished politely, giving his newest clients a winning smile.

***

I’m not sure floral is the right type of scent for Lulu; Illumi’s more of a woody fragrance to me. Abaki, I think she liked musky scents, but I don’t want anything too overpowering. “I’d like to try the middle one first as a sort of baseline; then I can decide from there,” Hisoka advised, returning the smile and picking up a strip of paper before spritzing it with the perfume.

Hmm, it’s not overly flowery, but it feels a little flat. I don’t think this suits Lulu’s headstrong persona. It reminds me of somewhere, but I’m not sure where. He wafted the perfumed paper before sniffing it again and hummed. Ah, Aiai, Greed Island. Wasn’t that where I took Gon and Killua on that wild goose chase? Probably best not to pick something that reminds me of my little apple. Although, I should still check with Ill-chan before moving on.

“Lulu, could you tell me what you think about this one?” Hisoka asked, turning to face his boyfriend and holding out the strip for him to smell. “It feels more like a daytime scent, would you agree?”

***

Illumi looked down at the strip of paper being held out in front of him and hesitated for only a few
moments before leaning forwards and inhaling.

He resisted clamping his hand over his face, but only just. It reminded him of the more decadent parties he’d been forced to attend when his targets naively believed that he would not attack them in public.

“You are correct, Hisoka-san,” he agreed, and wished that he didn’t have to breathe so often to maintain this body’s oxygen supply.

***

Well, that makes this a little easier. I know I don’t want florals so let’s try the one furthest to the right next. Hisoka nodded to his lover before picking up his next choice and repeating the steps with the paper strips. Less flowery, a lot more woody notes to it. Still, I’m not sure this feels like what I’d expect Lulu to smell like. Perhaps the one in between them?

“Hopefully the third times the charm, as they say,” he said cheerfully as he put the bottle back down on the tray and picked up the one in between his rejected options. Spraying a small amount, he closed his eyes to test the fragrance and paused. That smell; it’s making me feel oddly nostalgic. He inhaled again and hummed. Yes, that smells like Abaki. After the incident with John Doe in the marketplace, we went to the park. The trees were scattering their blossom along the pathways. This is the one; it has to be this one.

“Darling, I think this one would be perfect. It’s delicate enough to compliment you without being too forgettable. If you like it, then I’d like to get you this for you,” he advised as he held out the perfume for Illumi to test. “It reminds me of home,” he added, hoping to encourage a positive response.

***

Curious, despite his distaste for the shop, Illumi leaned forwards and closed his eyes before inhaling the scent from the stick.

Lillies at dusk, the subtle hint of Roses and fresh dew on the grass. It wasn’t overpowering, and Hisoka-san clearly liked it.

He felt Lulu’s gentle request to talk and decided that she had calmed down enough to let her come through again.

“You have a beautiful home,” Lulu said. Her voice was full of admiration, and Illumi inwardly smiled. He could live with the smell, but Lulu, to his surprise, genuinely appeared to like it.

He felt Lulu look up at the store assistant and ask gently, “Do you know where we can find toiletries that smell like this?”

***

“Usually places like this sell gift sets,” Hisoka advised and turned back to the assistant. “I’d like this fragrance, and if possible, if you have a set with matching toiletries, we’ll take one of those too.” He held up the bottle of his chosen perfume and handed it towards the assistant.

***

George smiled and nodded politely as he accepted the bottle. "Certainly, I believe that we have something in the back. This is just new in today," he explained as he collected everything onto the
tray. "Please wait here, and I'll be a few moments."

***

"Are you alright sweetheart?" Hisoka asked as he moved to put his arm around Illumi protectively and glanced around, to find Miriam. "I hope you're happy with my selection; it will suit you well."

***

Realising that Lulu had recognised that their Master was talking to him, and feeling her retreating to the back of his mind, Illumi felt an odd wave of gratitude flow through him. Coming to the surface, he smiled reassuringly and said, “Lulu likes it. It will work well. I trust you, Master.”

***

George re-emerged from the back of the shop with a large bottle of his customer’s selection and a matching gift set. Maintaining his smile, he approached the oddly familiar man, to close the sale.

“Thank you for waiting; this is the large bottle we have in Haze. Currently, it’s on a special offer to get the gift set for half price when bought together,” he advised placing the boxes on the counter for inspection.

***

*I’ll have to wait to ask what that was about.* Hisoka thought before plastering a friendly grin on his face and returning his attention to the shop assistant. “It’s no trouble,” he reassured as he inspected the green box. It had a white ribbon wrapped around it, and ‘Haze’ emblazoned across the lid in silver lettering. “I think it’s just what we’re looking for. I’d like to take a quick look inside, if I may?”

Waiting for the store clerk to nod, he carefully opened the box to reveal shower gel, and body lotion to match the perfume, alongside a smaller handbag sized bottle. “This is what I had in mind; we’ll take it.”

***

“Certainly, Sir. If you’ll just come with me to the till.” George gestured to his left before quickly placing the man’s purchases in a presentation box and taking the man’s card for payment.

It took a few minutes to run through the till, but once everything had cleared, he smiled at his latest customer and said, “Thank you for shopping with us today,” and returned the man’s card, catching a glimpse of the name written on it. He startled in surprise before catching himself and nodding politely.

***

Hisoka gave the man an amused smile when he saw the shock of recognition on his face. “It’s been a pleasure. Perhaps I’ll visit again, next time I’m in the area,” he said cheerfully as he put his card away and accepted the bag and turned to leave.

***

“Likewise, Mr. Morow,” George said to the man’s retreating back and caught the exasperated look the bodyguard gave him. *Well, good day to you too,* he thought snippily and switched his focus to a new couple that had just made their way into the shop.
“I think we should find the electronics store next, Lulu. Unless you want to stop somewhere to get off your feet?” Hisoka asked his lover as he lead him out of the store.

Glad to finally be free of the perfume shop, Illumi breathed deeply, truly appreciating the fresh air of the outside world for the first time in a long while.

“I think I’d appreciate a cafe, Master, yes. Something with outdoor seating, if possible,” Illumi said, dreading the thought of being shut inside so soon after the perfumery. How that man could stand working there was beyond him.

“I’m sure we can find something,” Hisoka agreed easily, juggling the bags so that he could hold them in one hand and take Illumi’s again in his free one. “You were looking a bit frazzled in there. What would you like anything to drink or to eat once we find somewhere suitable?”

“A coffee will do just fine, Master,” Illumi said evenly. “Now that we are out of the shop, I am entirely content.”

He tilted his head slightly and looked up at Hisoka-san. Something was ever so slightly off about him. “Is everything OK with you?” he asked curiously.

Hisoka snuck a glance at the band to make sure that it hadn’t triggered before he said, “I’m just a little worried. You do seem better now that we’re outside. It’s probably just me being overly vigilant. It’s just, something you said while we were in the fragrance store.”

“My apologies, Master, but I’m going to need more information before I can address your concerns,” Illumi said as he tried to understand Hisoka-san’s question.

Are you really that sensitive, Hisoka? Miriam thought as she maintained a polite distance from the chattering couple. You know I was right. Lulu’s a demon in disguise; that’s why you like her. She’s so changeable. You get bored so quickly. The split personality act is why you like her so much. Why would you get annoyed by me pointing out that she can be devious and hot-headed? You don’t think that I actually think she’s a demon, do you? You know those things don’t exist, right?

She watched as Lulu asked Hisoka to clarify something and wondered again about the woman. She wasn’t the bimbo she pretended to be, but her act was a good one. Her speech patterns were so varied that it was incredibly hard to get a read on the real person that lay beneath the bubbly exterior. Why would you warn me not to say that again? Do you actually care, or were you just trying to rub in the fact that you do actually know Hisoka? Why do I care?

Shaking her head, she followed after her charge and scowled when she saw the gang of boys taking pictures. You’re getting bolder, aren’t you? That can’t be a good sign. How long before you all
work up the guts to cross the street?

***

“You started talking in the third person,” Hisoka clarified after glancing over his shoulder to see how close Miriam currently was. “Back in the shop, when I asked if you were happy with my decision. You, don’t normally do that?” He leant in closer and dropped his voice to a whisper. “I mean, I know you’re in disguise, but surely that would give you away if you do that?” Did you not notice that you’d done it?

***

Finally understanding what his Master meant, Illumi nodded his understanding.

“My apologies for the confusion. The body,” he said quietly, trying to think how he could explain what was happening without sounding like he was going insane.

“You’re not mad,” Lulu reassured him. “I am real.”

I know that, Illumi thought in reply. But Hisoka-san won’t.

Thinking on his feet, he said, “Lulu, she...If I make my disguises realistic enough, they tend to form basic personalities. I was allowing Lulu to have a more...active role in some of the more...difficult conversations. It is harder for me to act naturally in certain circumstances,” he explained. It wasn’t a lie. His disguises did have basic personalities. Hisoka-san just didn’t need to know that Lulu had emerged before the body, that was all. He didn’t need to be bogged down in the details.

“She really does like the scent you have selected for her,” he added, wanting to reassure his Master. “And I have to admit that I do not find it distasteful either.”

***

"I thought it was like roleplaying. You learn about the character the more time you spend as them, don’t you?” Hisoka asked, trying to hide his confusion.

***

Illumi thought about what his Master had said. “Almost,” he mused. “When I take on a basic disguise that is what I do, but when the situation requires a more...complete body, they start to take on,” Illumi tried to find words that his Master would understand. “Personality quirks.”

***

Hisoka tilted his head; he felt like he wasn't quite understanding what his boyfriend was saying. "Quirks? You mean you're developing a new personality?"

***

“She will never be separate from me, do not worry,” Illumi said, hoping that it was true. “But I can...she has things that she likes, ways of speaking and,” Illumi swallowed, shifting slightly as they approached the cafe they had visited the other day. “Desires, that are not entirely mine.”

***

“What sort of desires are we talking about?” Hisoka asked quietly as he led Illumi over to an
outside table in front of the cafe. “Is this in a sexual sense? Because if you’re happy to talk to me about it, well, I’m happy to give new things a try. I’m supposed to take care of you,” he paused as he saw Miriam walk past to sit at an empty table close by. Miriam’s become awfully quiet. Is she focusing on her job, or trying to eavesdrop? “We don’t have to talk to about it here, unless it can’t wait?”

***

Illumi raised a brow and tilted his head. “I am happy to talk about whatever you want, Master,” he said quietly. “But if you would prefer that we discuss this in private, then I do not mind. But so that you are aware, she likes it when you tease. She enjoys you dominating her as much as I do, but...that was her in the bath. And in the jewellers. I apologise if she spoke out of turn. She is quite headstrong.”

***

“So was the girl from the circus,” Hisoka replied wistfully before sighing. “You’re not in trouble; I was a little taken aback, but I’m not annoyed. If anything, I was curious. Is it possible that she’s forming from my memories? I mean, I created the picture using my Nen from memory, and Mother used to believe memories could be imprinted on objects. I’ve never considered it could be real, outside of those rare occasions that traces of a person’s Hatsu get left behind on an object. It’s not quite the same though, sorry, I didn’t mean to ramble.”

***

“It could be, Master,” Illumi said, still unable to meet his eye. “The other...complete disguises I have were simply based upon individuals that I saw on the street. The bodies seem to have a threshold for detail, and once I cross it, they take on individual characteristics. One, for example, very much enjoys cinnamon rolls, and you know how much I dislike those abominations.” Illumi shuddered slightly.

Looking back up at his Master’s face, he said, “Lulu is the most complete disguise I have ever made, and I am refining her for you. She will be perfect for you, Master, but...she is stronger than anything I have ever experienced. If I do not sound like myself, that is why. Your theory may have weight. I will look into it.”

She appeared before that, but when she saw that picture, she wanted the body. Did I pick up on your desires before that? How long were you thinking about her before you suggested it?

***

Covertly watching the boys across the street, Miriam looked up when a waitress approached her and placed an order for an extra-strong espresso. Why are you still following us? she thought. You can’t honestly think that I’d believe you’re just fans. Why can’t I arrest people for looking suspicious? Come on, make your move. Do something. I need to hit someone and...well, no, hitting teenagers in the middle of the street really wouldn’t be great, but if you piss off Hisoka enough, I might be able to hit him after he hits you. Come on! Don’t just stand there taking pictures of the love-birds; talk to them!

***

“I remember,” Hisoka replied solemnly thinking back to the first and last time he’d tried to share a box of cinnamon buns with his boyfriend. “I have to ask, but you’re sure that this isn’t going to change you? You’re still going to be you underneath, right?”
Illumi stilled. Usually, he would be confident in his answer that as soon as he removed his pins, the personality would disappear along with the disguise. She would be able to return at any time, but he would be fully in control. But this time...

“I know who I am, Master,” he said, trying his best to reassure him. “This is not a new concept for me, merely a new body. I have never experienced the world like this and, I have to admit, as jarring as it is sometimes, it is not unwelcome. I am learning a lot and,” he felt his stomach flutter. “I like to see you happy, Master. You have not smiled so much in a long time. I know you like her, and,” he felt his lips turn up gently. “I like to see you happy, Master. You have not smiled so much in a long time. I know you like her, and,”

“She’s entertaining,” Hisoka conceded. "I'm happy for her to stay, but not for her to replace you. If that makes sense? This is a lot to take in. Is this why you always kept me away when you were working? You know, if you'd explained this, then I wouldn't have pestered you so much, but we'll adjust. That's what we do."

“All I want is for you to be happy,” Lulu said after Illumi agreed to let her speak for herself. She reached out and took his hand, looking up at her Master through her lashes. “And I love my collar. Don’t worry, Master, I won’t take him from you. We’re a team, and we’re here to keep you satisfied. We’re going to fulfil all your needs. I promise.”

Hisoka stared at the smaller hand holding his own. He wasn't used to Illumi initiating physical contact, even if he'd never refused him. "You're welcome?" he said eventually as he tried to work through everything that had happened and the implications of what he'd learnt. "I think I need a drink," he mumbled moments before the waitress approached their table to ask if they were ready to order. He hesitated for a moment as he looked over the menu on the table. "I'll take the banana and blueberry smoothie, with ice if that's possible? Also, I believe my girlfriend would like a coffee, or have you changed your mind, sweetheart?"

Lulu stroked her Master’s palm with her thumb and grinned. “A cinnamon latte would be lovely,” she said impishly and chuckled when Illumi shuddered. “Yes, I think I’d like a cinnamon latte.”

“Very well, we’ll have the smoothie and a cinnamon latte to be getting on with. If we decide we want anything else, I’ll pop inside,” Hisoka said to the waitress with a smile as she noted down their order. He waited until she’d headed back into the cafe before looking over at Miriam, who was staring intently at her phone while sipping at her own drink, and chuckled.

“Well, I hope you like your drink Lulu, because I’m not going to let you steal mine. No matter how much you bat your lashes at me,” he told his lover teasingly.

“Well,” Lulu purred, lifting her Master’s hand to her lips and kissing it gently. “You did say that I needed to be punished.” She licked her lips and grinned up at him. “Only Elijah considers the loss
of panties to be a bad thing. I rather enjoy the breeze.” She winked and stroked a finger along his palm. “I live to please, after all.”

Leaning forward, she whispered conspiratorially, “Don’t tell him I told you, but Elijah enjoys your teasing as well, he just doesn’t understand why. So keep up the good work. He’s confused and loving it.”

***

“Well, I’m sure I’ll be able to think of something suitable for your punishment,” Hisoka replied confidently. “If you didn’t consider my attempt at discipline to be adequate, then I’ll have to up my game. And I still need to punish you for the bath. If it wasn’t Illumi in charge, then I’ll have to personalise things a little more.”

***

“Oh, I can’t wait,” Lulu purred. “Make sure it hurts. Illumi loves it when you hurt him.”

***

Miriam sniffed derisively. From here, she couldn’t hear what Hisoka was saying to his girlfriend, but, judging by the look on his face, she didn’t want to.

*Please, just get him all horny so that he wants to go back to his room. I can not put up with any more of his mood swings. I thought he was OK, but if he’s gonna write me off for speaking my mind, then he can go hang.*

*Turn him on so that I can go home. I’ve got enough on my plate. I don’t need a goddamn overly-sensitive clown as well.*

***

"Drink your coffee first," Hisoka replied. "Then we still need to finish our shopping trip. I’m sure I can come up with something to make you scream," he teased as he brushed his leg against Lulu’s.

***

“Promises, promises,” Lulu whispered, looking up and accepting her glass from the waitress.

Waiting until Hisoka-san had done the same, she raised it and said, “Here's to a glorious future, together.”

***

*Be careful what you wish for, Darling. "The future," Hisoka agreed and raised his glass. "And all it may bring."*

***

2 Hours later
Hisoka felt happy to finally be back at the hotel room. He'd had enough of dealing with judgemental store assistants for one day, and he still had to find somewhere to get a suit. Sighing theatrically, he flopped down on the large bed and set about removing his heels.

"Lulu," he called out. "Do you think you could be a dear and find a suitable place to get my suit on that computer?" he asked hopefully.

"If possible I'd prefer to avoid going to more of those stuffy clothes shops with their arrogant staff," he paused to take off his shirt. "Do you get used it? I mean, you grew up in a rich household, surrounded by old money. Was it jarring for you at first, when you were younger? I could easily buy the whole store if I wanted, are they acting like that because I'm in the paper or because I look like I don't belong?"

***

Illumi poked his head around the bathroom door as he dried Lulu's hands. She'd decided that it would be better for him to answer and it was strange to have someone in his mind determine that he should be allowed to answer a question. His Master was right; he would undoubtedly have to learn to adapt.

"You have a nervous energy about you when you are around wealth that the store clerks pick up on. It is similar to the way you can always tell when you are facing an opponent that does not believe they can beat you. My clothes are less tailored than yours and yet I believed I belonged, and so they treated me as if I did."

Picking up the box containing the laptop computer and slicing it open with a pin, he continued, "I would be happy to teach you. It would help with your performance at the dinner party." He smiled as he felt Lulu's impish side come out to play and allowed her to take over as she said, "You would be able to play the role of the swashbuckling rogue; Lecter would love it, and I'll enjoy getting to see you steal away his heart, then slice it out, piece by agonising piece."

***

"You're used to being surrounded by wealth," Hisoka said. The only place that I've ever belonged was Heaven's Arena. Some would say that I rose above my station," he countered as he removed his pants, deciding to remain in just his boxers for now. "I'm used to being judged; you learn to expect it after a while. It's not often it that it becomes so tiresome, but I'm not usually preparing for a black-tie dinner party either."

He watched quietly as Illumi set up the laptop computer they'd managed to find after an hour of searching. Getting up from the bed to lean in close, he whispered, "Would you like to see me as a scoundrel? Maybe I could steal you off to bed for practice?" Chuckling, he ran his hands down his lover's sides. "Oh, the wicked things this swashbuckling rogue would do to you." Wrapping his arms around his boyfriend in a tight hug, he nipped at the exposed skin of his neck. "Your villainous Master has a good mind to carry you back to bed and ravish you until sunrise."

***

Lulu let out a high pitched giggle and allowed herself sag against her Master. "Oh, no," she pantomimed, pretending to struggle. "Whatever are you going to do to me? I do so hope that you don't hurt me, you fiendish rogue! I'll have you know I'm a very important Lady! How dare you manhandle me like this!"
"How dare I?" Hisoka echoed with a wicked grin as an idea formed in his mind, and he scooped Lulu up into his arms, bridal style. "Well, let me show you, me' Lady," he teased using his Bungee Gum to make sure she couldn't get free and unceremoniously dropped her on the bed before climbing on top of her. "First I get you on my bed," he purred as he pinned her hands to the headboard. "Then I'm going to make you beg," he continued as he slipped his hands under her blouse to stroke the soft skin of her stomach. "Maybe if you're really good, you'll get to cum."

***

"You wicked," Lulu gasped. "Wicked *reprobate!*" She pretended to tug on her bindings with all her strength, and wriggled as if trying to break free, but only managing to spread her legs further apart. "How dare you say such things to a Lady of *my* standing. Do you know who my father is? He'll," she moaned as she felt her Master's hands exploring her, and glared in the attention. "He'll be...so...angry. Daring to touch me...like... *this.*"

***

"Let him be angry; I fear no man!" Hisoka declared as he tweaked Lulu's nipple and earned himself a quiet moan. "He's not here, but I am. So that means that I'm going to take my time to touch, and commit every inch of your skin to memory," he teased as he moved down to settle himself between her legs and carefully hiked up her skirt. "And I do mean *every inch.*"

***

"Scallywag!" Lulu cried. "How *dare* you shame me like! Oh! You *fiend!* Don't touch me in my shame! No, I can't take it! I am still pure. You defile me!"

She pretended to try and wriggle away, whilst simultaneously managing to do the exact opposite. Even Illumi was managing to enjoy himself. "Sir, I beg you," she gasped. "I am wealthy. My father would pay... *OH!*"

***

"Does that feel nice?" Hisoka cooed as he ran his fingers gently over his lover's pins again before slipping a couple inside. *There's no hiding how much you're enjoying this; your panties would be soaked if I'd allowed you to wear any.*

***

"Good Sir," Lulu gasped, pressing down and impaling herself onto her Master's fingers. "You would defile a pure maiden? You truly are no *gentleman,*" she moaned, feeling Hisoka-san rub his thumb over her pins again. "You, *rogue.* How could you?" She rocked her hips, trying in vain to seek out more contact. "I was saving myself for my *Master.*"

***

"Well, the fun is only just getting started, sweetheart. If your Master arrives to save you," Hisoka purred as he moved his thumb to stroke her clit. "Then maybe I'll ravish him too, I'm sure I could have a lot of fun making you both scream. Who do you think would scream louder?"

Not waiting for Lulu's reply, he removed his fingers and repositioned her so that her legs were over his shoulders. Once he was comfortable, he continued to toy with her, leaning down and beginning to use his tongue.

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"Master!" Lulu cried. "Oh, that's so...oh, you..." She did her best to think, trying to keep up the act as Hisoka-san began to slowly drive her crazy with his mouth. "I was told...told that you should never...OH! That feels...you scoundrel! You devious, horn dog! I'm PURE! " she cried, feeling her Master start to focus. "I could never...so good...I...I would scream more. I would do it for him! You can not defile us both! I would take the shame for him!"

***

_Moan for me, let me hear you. Don't hold back._ Hisoka hummed happily as he continued to lavish attention on Lulu's most sensitive areas before slipping his tongue inside. Slowly fucking her with it and revelling in the way she wriggled in delight, he thought. _That's it, let go. Enjoy what I'm giving you._

***

"Oh, oh!" Lulu cried. "So...Master...I...I am...you toy with me...I have never felt...I am a Lady! How can you...I am coming undone!" _Don't stop. Please._ "I was pure...I did not know...the pleasure...it is forbidden for a maiden...I should not like it so...but...but...OH! YES! IT'S SO GOOD!"

***

_Good girl, that's it, surrender to me. Your body knows who it belongs to._ Bringing his hands up, Hisoka gently ran his fingertips along the inside of his lover's legs, slowly stroking the sensitive skin, changing the pitch of his hum slightly as he continued using his tongue to drive her towards the edge.

***

"How can I feel this?" Lulu moaned, rocking herself on her Master's face. "I'm a good girl. I...I always did...what I was told. You are...you are _corrupting me!_ It feels _so wondrous._ You are... _magnificent! _"

***

Hisoka pulled back with a chuckle, licking his lips as he looked up into his lover's lust blown eyes. "Corrupting you? Sweetheart, I've barely begun to show you what this magnificent scoundrel can do," he teased as he unhooked her legs from his shoulders and crawled his way up her body. "There's still so much left to explore, and darling, you're not going anywhere until I'm done," he growled undoing the buttons of her shirt and grinding his crotch against Lulu's body. "I hope you're ready for me, because you're going to be screaming my name soon."

***

"Master," Illumi groaned, pushing his way to the surface and looking up longingly into Hisoka-san's eyes. "Don't stop," he breathed. "Don't stop until you have shown me everything. I'll scream, and scream, and scream some more. Don't let it stop you. Teach me every lesson. I want to be a scoundrel with you. You're my Master now. I can not go back. Teach me your lessons, and show me your ways." He growled and saw his Master's eyes darken. "I'll help you corrupt my old Master. I'll tear him apart until he submits to you. I am yours." He surrendered and relaxed into Hisoka-san's arms. " _Forever._ "

***
Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:

Illumi, Lulu, Miriam, Zeller, George

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Hisoka, Leroy, George
Whimsy

Chapter Summary

Phinks finds himself in hot water after another visit from the Doctor, and Hannibal finds out how Feitan likes to negotiate.

Machi crossed her arms over her chest with a huff as she leant back against a large piece of rubble and stared at Phinks. "I don't see why we're staying here, I know Uvo and Paku are here, but we've all paid our respects. This 'delivery boy' that Phinks is so obsessed with could come back, and we don't know enough about him or who really sent him. Kortopi and Shalnark are still nenless, so we at least know the boss is alive." She paused and turned her attention to Feitan, who was staring at the doorway. "You know, Feitan, if you stare at the door any harder, it might just collapse. I know you sent the others to patrol and gather supplies, but surely you've considered the possibility of finding another place? There's plenty of abandoned buildings we could lay low in nearby. That way we can still keep an eye on the graves, but from a distance."

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"Want to see the 'delivery boy' in person," Feitan replied calmly, not moving from his position. "He's interesting."

***

"You have a strange way of saying 'potential threat'," Machi retorted. Switching her weight to her other foot, she sighed. "I trust you, but consider it, OK?"

***

Feitan nodded and gripped the handle of his sword before replying, "I will think about it."

***

"You're all idiots," Phinks growled. "He put Shal in a fucking cauldron of chicken broth! Why the hell are we still here? We need to go out there and find that fuck! Danchou's in danger, and you're just waiting for him to show up? For all we know he could be fattening the boss up for Christmas dinner!"

***

"Why Shalnark and not you?" Feitan challenged. "You have Nen; he doesn't. You were a bigger threat, makes him interesting. This place is the only lead we have, where do you suggest looking?"

***

"I hate to admit it, but Fetain has a point there; we don't know who your mystery man is. All we know is that he might know Danchou, and he knows about this place. That's why we need to keep an eye out for him, but I also agree that we shouldn't stay here," Machi chimed in.
“Then we should be tracking down Danchou, not sitting here and waiting to be fucking eaten!” Phinks insisted. “We need to find out where the fucking Hunter Association took him after that damned fight. Screw looking for Vikki, this is more important. We have to stay on the move. We’re sitting ducks here. I am not getting boiled, and if Nobunaga and Shalnark don’t find anything in town, I’m going to look for him myself. They took Hisoka as well, so with any luck, I’ll finally get to give that clown the beating he deserves.”

Machi rolled her eyes. "They're out looking for leads, Phinks. Do you never listen? Shizuku is with Kalluto and Kortopi to get supplies. Bono and Franklin are scouting the area, and we're on guard duty, do you remember now, knucklehead? " She sighed again and approached Phinks to look up at him with a stern expression. "If you go after Hisoka, then I won't stop you, but I won't come to rescue you if he outsmarts you."

“Like I need your help,” Phinks snarled. “He’s a fucking clown, and yes, I was listening, thanks. I just don’t see the point of waiting around here for someone who’ll never show up, when we could be out there helping them.”

Hannibal rounded the corner of the abandoned church and sniffed the air. There was a sweet scent that reminded him of one of his patient’s perfumes. The woman was a neurotic mess, but with any luck, he could talk her into taking back control of her life and murdering her husband before the start of the school holidays. The family would be better off without him.

His ears pricked at the sound of raised voices from inside the abandoned building, and he stopped shy of pushing open the doors to listen at the window. It sounded like Phinks was inside, along with two others that he didn’t know. He’d most certainly made the right decision to come here on his evening walk. Hopefully, he’ll have a bit more fun than he’d had with his last patient of the day. Franklin really was so predictable.

What have you in store for me this time, Mr. Lucilfer? I wonder how many of your legs are, worthy of their position?

"If he's a clown, what does that make you?" Machi quipped. "You and Hisoka could do a great performance as Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dumb. You beat him in that arm-wrestling contest, but he's still smarter than you. Or did you forget it was Hisoka who found the exorcist on his own?"

Feitan listened to the others bickering and took his eyes off the door for a moment to see that Machi was glaring up at Phinks. "Enough, you are both supposed to be helping," he interjected. "We're guarding our territory. Just as important as other tasks. Now be quiet, I'm trying to listen."
"Sorry, Feitan," Machi replied quietly and threw Phinks one last glare before walking back over to her post. *Why did I have to get paired up with Phinks of all people? He's too impulsive, but Shalnark doesn't have his Nen, and he's the only other person who knows what our mystery delivery man looks like. But I'd have preferred to be on patrol, or out with Kalluto, anything else would be better than being stuck with the moron.*

***

Hannibal smiled as he listened to the conversation. The people in the building sounded like bickering children. If he played this right, he could maybe put on another little get-together for his friends. It had been a while since he’d cooked for them and as long as he made sure to keep the tattoos and heads, he could potentially claim the bounty on three Phantom Troupe members in one go. The day wasn’t going to be wasted after all.

Plastering on a polite smile, he straightened his suit and pushed open the church doors.

***

At the sound of doors opening, Feitan turned around and glowered at the stranger who was walking towards them. "The delivery boy?" he asked pointedly. "You know where Danchou being held?"

***

"I would say that I left the boy behind approximately forty years ago, but if you are asking if I am here to deliver another set of flowers, then I am afraid that I will have to answer your question with a no, I am not a 'delivery boy',” Hannibal said smoothly, eyeing the Aura surrounding the young man that had spoken, with curiosity. He was stronger than the others and quite clearly the leader of the group.

He saw Phinks narrow his eyes and inwardly smirked. The man was rotating his shoulder again and judging by the way his Nen was gathering; he would guess that it was a requirement for his Hatsu to work. He would be the one that he would have to trap if they decided to attack. The small man, he could deal with, and the pink-haired woman was a mystery for now.

He concentrated on the leader and gave him a polite bow. "My apologies if I interrupted your meeting. The last time I was here, I didn’t get a chance to pay my respects to the dead, and I was hoping to have that chance now."

***

"You got a funny way of showing it. You put Shalnark in a bloody cauldron!" Phinks yelled. "You were going to cook him, admit it!"

***

"I assure you, Mr. Phinks, the inside of my cauldron is extremely clean," Hannibal replied calmly, watching the man wind his shoulder up for the ninth time. "I would be happy to prove it if you like.”

***

"So it was you then. Why would you come to pay respect to those you do not know?" Feitan asked with growing curiosity. "If you are friend of the Spider why you only appear now? Or are you a
new friend?” He heard Machi scoff from her position behind him, and decided to ignore Phinks for now.

***

“The Phantom Troupe have achieved great things in their time,” Hannibal said smoothly. “I admire strength and wish to acknowledge what they did with their lives.”

He met the small man’s dark eyes and smiled. “My name is Dr. Hannibal Lecter, and I would say that I am a long-term admirer and, yes, a new friend of Mr Lucilfer’s Spider. I would be happy to help if it is needed.”

***

“Help?” Phinks scoffed. “How is cooking us helping?”

***

“You attacked me, Mr. Phinks,” Hannibal said calmly. “I will always defend myself.” He watched the blonde roll his shoulder again. “I will say what I did the last time we met. Do not attack me. You will regret it if you do.”

***

"Phinks will you stop and think, for once?" Machi snapped as she walked forward to get a better look at Hannibal. I've heard of you, but where from? Wait, the Association's bloodhound is a famous Doctor. Could it be him? "How do we know this isn't a trick? The Phantom Troupe didn't achieve those feats you claim to admire by blindly trusting random people."

***

“I would say that the fact that I know the names of the two in the graves and their locations should be enough to prove that I have enough of a,” he paused to emphasise his point. “Connection, to your group. But if you wish for more, then I can tell you that your leader is prone to reading by candlelight and, like me, dislikes rudeness in others.”

***

Seeing Feitan reach for his sword, Machi put her hand on her comrade’s shoulder to ask him to wait. She smiled at him when he nodded and relaxed his posture. "I see, do you know his favourite subject?" she asked patiently, watching Hannibal carefully. "If you are somebody he sees as a friend, he’d have told you that much. I’d also like to know, as I'm sure the rest of the Troupe would, why you attacked Shalnark and not Phinks if it was, as you claim, ‘self-defence?’"

***

"I would like to know that," Feitan agreed tilting his head slightly.

***

“History, and when dealing with a group attack, knowing how to control the situation is key, as I’m sure you, yourselves, know,” Hannibal explained. “Mr. Phinks appears to be rather impulsive. I aimed to remind him of the consequences of his actions. I will add that I told him his comrade had an hour to live. He was in no immediate danger, but it allowed him time to think things through.”
He chuckled when Phinks rolled his shoulder one more time. “Don’t worry, ma chere, I will not use anyone else as an example today.”

***

*So Danchou does appear to trust you, but how much does he know about you? "I see, he is very fond of history. Please forgive the cold reception but I’m sure you understand that we have to be careful. The flowers were very thoughtful. Paku would have loved them. Did Danchou tell you her favourite colour?" Machi asked as she withdrew her hand from Feitan’s shoulder. *Come on Feitan, you know the boss as well as we do. He never shares things about himself unless he feels that it’s necessary. *Don’t let your guard down.*

***

"I agree," Feitan added as he stood to the side so that he was no longer blocking Hannibal’s path. He wanted to see if the man really did want to approach the graves. "You may pay your respects; then I would like to talk."

***

“You can’t be serious?” Phinks bemoaned, staring as the man that had nearly cooked his friend walked calmly past them and approached the graves of complete strangers as if it were his one solemn mission in life. “He’s playing you. You have to see that! He’s a fucking *cannibal!*”

***

“I would ask that you keep your swearing to a minimum, Mr. Phinks. I have already told you that I do not appreciate rudeness,” Hannibal said mildly, clasping his hands and taking in the size difference of the two graves. “I do not like to repeat myself.”

***

Glancing back at the pink-haired woman, he added softly, “He said that she liked purple, so I decided to invest in a bouquet that would reflect that. I don’t know if the dead care for the actions of the living, but it meant something to Mr. Lucilfer, and so it was worth doing properly.”

***

*Let’s add fucking smug to the list too,* Phinks thought with a growl. *Oh, I can’t wait to punch you in that fucking stuck-up face of yours, you pompous rich bastard. You aren’t fucking fooling me, and I’m not gonna let you cook me either. Don’t think I missed the threat behind your fancy fucking words. I’m gonna take you apart piece by piece and post them to your family! You don’t mess with The Spider!*

***

"She did, and she loved flowers, we don’t get many of them back home. I never understood her fascination with them myself," Machi replied keeping her eye on Hannibal as she tried to work out why his name sounded familiar.

***

Feitan watched for a few moments before he decided to follow Hannibal to stand beside Uvo’s grave. "Danchou thinks our actions matter to them," he advised quietly. "So do I, that’s why the
Spider must survive. You understand, Doctor?"

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“I do,” Hannibal said kindly.

***

“Yeah, that’s why you tried to *cook their friend!* ” Phinks spat. “You’re a fucking hypocrite. If you wanna fight, let’s fight!”

***

"Good, then you should be willing to follow the way of the Spider. You are, friend to us now,” Feitan continued thoughtfully. "Phinks also knows and understands the way of the Spider. We have rules that must be obeyed; Danchou's orders are absolute. Do you wish to fight him, Doctor?"

***

"Feitan, you can’t be serious?” Machi asked not quite understanding what he was trying to achieve.

***

"If Doctor is to be one of us, he needs to know our ways,” Feitan replied firmly.

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"But he's not one of us," Machi insisted. "We don't know if Danchou wants him to join or not."

***

Feitan tilted his head again as he looked over at Machi, then turned to look at Phinks in turn. "Danchou not here, I am. I can decide," he reminded the others.

***

“Not for me, you don’t!” Phinks snarled. “Until he wears the mark, he’s not one of us, and I don’t take kindly to being threatened, Doctor.”

***

Hannibal sighed and held out his hand. “Yes, I think I will fight,” he said calmly. “But I only have a grievance with Mr. Phinks here. Forgive me. We haven’t been formally introduced yet.” He gave the two newcomers a small bow of acknowledgement.

Concentrating for a few moments, he summoned his cauldron and watched it engulf Phinks, smiling when he heard a roar of anger from inside. “Don’t worry, I will not light it,” he assured him. “I simply wish to give you time to think. You have very clear issues with your impulse control; I could help you with them if you like.”

***

Feitan blinked and looked over at conjured cauldron appraisingly. "Impressive," he commented. "However, I thought you were a friend to the Spider? We have rules, surely you would wish to learn them?” he asked.
“I am always happy to learn new things,” Hannibal said evenly. “As I have said, I did not light the cauldron. Phinks is in no danger, but I was not going to let him attack me.”

“Fuck you, you arrogant bastard!” Phinks yelled, looking up at the open cauldron top above him. “Get me out of here! You fucking cheating wanker!”

Hannibal’s eyes darkened. “I don’t know either of your names, what should I call you?” he asked the two new Troupe members. “If I am to abide by your rules, then I would ask that you also pay me the same courtesy.”

"Forgive me, with all the excitement earlier, I forgot to introduce myself, I'm Machi, that's Feitan," Machi explained gesturing to Feitan who was still watching the cauldron with interest. "I'm guessing you already know Paku and Uvo?" she asked, nodding towards the graves.

After listening to Machi’s introductions, Feitan turned and looked at Hannibal again. "I'm currently the leader in Danchou's absence, but just call me, Feitan," he added and pointed to the cauldron. "Conjurer? Would be useful for interrogation, if we ensure Phinks will not attack you...you free him?"

"Feitan you know Phinks isn't going to agree to that," Machi countered. I'm not using my Nen stitches in front of the Doctor. As stupid as he is, Phinks is right he's not one of us.

"Phinks will agree, if we can't settle the disagreement then we'll toss a coin. You both know the rules. The Doctor does not," Feitan replied nonchalantly and pulled out a custom made coin from his coat pocket. "Legs do not outrank each other; serious fights are forbidden between members. However, as the Doctor is not yet a member, Phinks and I will settle our dispute. If he wins, then he's free to challenge our guest, if I win then he has to leave him alone."

Machi sighed and crossed her arms over her chest. "Fine, but you know if Phinks loses that you have to let Dr. Lecter replace him. You're the acting head; you can just approve him to join without putting anyone at risk. Phinks won't break the rules. He's all talk."

Twirling the coin in his fingers, Feitan returned his attention to Hannibal and asked, "Will you free him? If he wins the coin toss and he chooses to fight you, then we won't interfere."
“If he fights me, he will die,” Hannibal said plainly. “I would suggest that you do not allow him to do so.” He narrowed his eyes at the cauldron and raised his voice so that Phinks would be able to hear him over his tirade of insults. “I would rather work out a way to settle this without it having to come to blows.”

“Go fuck yourself!” Phinks yelled. “And get me out of this thing!”

He tried to jump out again and only succeeded in grabbing the edge of the rim before sliding slowly backwards and collapsing into the bottom of the pot. *I can’t die in here. I’m not going out like that. Why the fuck hasn’t Feitan just cut his head off?*

Hannibal turned to Feitan and stared at him with a cold, firm gaze. “I will agree to let him out if you will agree to enforce my rule with regards to foul language. I would usually have killed him for speaking like that, but,” he said icily. “If you can guarantee that he will hold his tongue, then he will come to no harm. I am offering you this chance out of respect for our mutual acquaintance, not for Mr. Phinks. If he uses one more foul word in my presence, I will kill him.”

*How much authority do you really have, Feitan? Can you save your friend from himself? Do you want to?*

Feitan nodded. "Phinks is impulsive; he is not a reflection on the rest of the troupe. I agree to your terms also out of respect for Danchou," he bowed before adding. "If he continues to be rude, then I will cut out his tongue. You can keep it as a souvenir, would that be acceptable?"

“What the FU-!” Phinks began to scream, before looking around him and noticing a milky liquid beginning to pool at his feet. It smelt like chicken. “FEITAN! He’s filling it up! He’s filling it up!”

“That is entirely acceptable, thank you,” Hannibal said, ignoring Phinks’s cries. “Now, what are your rules, Mr. Feitan? I would like to know what I am agreeing to before I say yes.”

*I can see why Chrollo left you in charge. You’re cold, logical and know how to appeal to emotion when necessary. You’ll be a formidable foe if you live for another few years, but you’re not quite old enough yet; you won’t best me.*

Phinks rolled his shoulder but didn’t feel the familiar hum of his Nen flowing down into his fist. “What the fu- heck! Feitan! I can’t use my ability! Get me out of here! It’s filling up! It’s at my knees! I’m not gonna die in soup!”

"Normally the Spider has thirteen members, the head and twelve legs. Currently, we are short in
numbers," Feitan began holding up a hand when Machi opened her mouth to protest. "The legs are all equal, but we follow the head. As such, the head's orders are absolute, but the survival of the group is more important than any individual member. Although the head is the only one who can approve a new member, the legs can propose potential candidates. Should one of the Spider be killed, the head can choose whether to inflict retribution or allow the one who killed them to join us. Infighting is strictly frowned upon between the legs, as all are equal. That is why we have our coins." He paused and held his up for Hannibal to see the tails side, adorned with an engraving of a spider web. "One side has our symbol and the other the web. It is also customary for members to be tattooed with the symbol of the spider and their number. My number, when I am not acting as the head, is two. Machi is three and Phinks is five. At present we have no number eleven or nine, those numbers belonged to Uvogin and Pakunoda. As I have fulfilled your request, will you release my friend?"

***

“That all sounds reasonable,” Hannibal said and clicked his fingers. The cauldron vanished and deposited Phinks in a wet heap on the floor. Only the upper half of his chest was dry. “I shall leave you to have a word with your colleague.”

***

Before Phinks had a chance to say anything else, he pointedly turned his back on him and walked over to examine a remarkably intact stained glass window. It appeared to show St. Paul the Baptist. His head was resting on a plate, held by Salome. He made a mental note to find out who had designed the glazing; it was quite beautiful.

***

Machi watched as Phinks got up and shook her head. "You knew what he could do, and you still tried to provoke him?" she asked in amazement. "You know if you wanted to die that badly there are plenty of quicker and less horrific ways to go?"

***

Phinks glared and glanced quickly at the Doctor’s back before focussing again on Machi. “Fuck you,” he hissed, too quietly for the cannibal to hear. “He’s gonna kill us, and you’re all too stupid to see it. There’s no way he’s working for Danchou.”

***

"How are you going to stop him if he has you for breakfast?" Machi retorted, keeping her voice down as she added, "I have my suspicions about him just like you do. But unlike you, I know when to keep my mouth shut. Remember the rumours about the Hunter Association having their own personal bloodhound? I'm sure he was supposed to be some famous Doctor, and that name he gave sounds familiar. Dammit, Shalnark would know if he were here."

***

"We need to keep him on-side," Feitan said as he watched Hannibal admiring the remaining windows. "Danchou could use his Hatsu, it would be good torture technique," he added thoughtfully before pointing at Phinks. "You are no use to the Spider if you get yourself killed. The Doctor is more useful to us alive. He knows where Danchou is. When he's outlived his usefulness I will let you kill him. Until then, you will be polite. I will cut out your tongue if you don't. While
Danchou is missing, I am the head. You will *obey my instructions.*"

***

"Then you can have him," Phinks hissed and stormed out of the church before Feitan had any chance of letting him get poached for science. "Fucking idiots," he muttered. "You haven’t even *asked* him to tell you where Danchou is. You’re just feeding him information and getting nothing in return. I hope he gets you both. You might be large enough for a kebab each."

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"Well, that solves that issue," Feitan said as the church doors slammed closed behind Phinks.

***

Machi stared at Feitan. "You didn't even try to stop him from leaving? Please tell me you have a plan?" she whispered.

***

"Of course," Feitan replied. "If he not here, then he cannot offend the Doctor. Although he needs to prove his loyalty, Phinks threatened him, but Shalnark did nothing to him. Thought you trust, me?"

***

"I do...that’s why I voted for you to resume acting as the head. You didn't let us down before, and I don't think you will now. Just tell me what you need me to do," Machi agreed as she resigned herself to the situation. *This plan better work, I don't want to see the inside of that cauldron.*

***

Nodding, Feitan decided to summon Dr. Lecter back over to continue his reconnaissance. “Doctor?” he called to get the man's attention. "I see you also like the glasswork. I am glad. It's good to have things in common, yes?"

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"It is," Hannibal agreed, turning back to face the remaining Troupe members. He was thinning their numbers nicely. "Are you an art lover?"

***

"Most people do not share my taste in art," Feitan replied easily. "I see beauty where most would not. They would say it's horrific."

***

“I find that it is all a matter of taste,” Hannibal said smoothly. “Some pallets are simply more refined than others. You and I have simply honed ours to a razor’s edge. We both know that mallets can be effective, but they would not be our weapon of choice.”

He pulled out a scalpel from his pocket and twirled it’s sheathed blade between his fingers. “I find that precision and artistry are skills to be admired, no matter the canvas.”
Feitan smirked behind his bandanna as he watched Hannibal's skill with the scalpel. "You would fit in well," he said calmly and took a step towards the other man. "Danchou feels that talent should be nurtured; he embraced my fascination with the macabre. Most others, even back home, would not. The screaming of another can be the same as a melody, would you agree?"

"Given the correct circumstances," Hannibal said, watching Feitan approach him. "Context is always important in these matters." Where are you going with this? "Death is a part of life. If we can appreciate one, why not the other?"

"I like your reasoning," Feitan replied as he came to a stop beside Hannibal and looked up at him. "I would like to propose a wager, do you trust in...Lady Luck?"

"What kind of a wager," Hannibal asked curiously, ignoring the second half of the question. He needed more information before he would agree to anything. Luck had played a large role in his life. Whether it had been good or bad, it had always been present. But that didn't mean that he wouldn't minimise the need for it.

"It's a demonstration of how we settle internal disagreements when talking fails us," Feitan explained. "You're an...astute man. You like to know what you are agreeing to before making a decision. I can appreciate that."

"And how, exactly will this demonstration work?" Hannibal asked, looking down at the coin. "Will I be guessing heads or tails? What will happen if I win?"

"If you win then I would offer to share a demonstration of what, I consider art," Feitan advised as he held up the coin for Hannibal to inspect. "However, if you were to lose, then I will exert my right as the acting head to seek retribution for Shalnark. You said yourself, Phinks is the one you have, grievance with. I will not kill you, out of respect for Danchou. You can examine the coin if you wish, and you may be the one to flip it, or I can have Machi do it."

Hannibal thought long and hard about the answer as he accepted and then examined the coin in his hand. It wasn’t weighted, and as far as he could tell, it must have been a commissioned design. “I would like assurances that I will suffer no permanent or disfiguring injury, should I lose the coin toss,” he said eventually. “I am both a Doctor and a Therapist. My patients need to trust that I can do my job, and I cannot present as out of the ordinary to them."
"Do not worry; we look after our own. If you were ever injured while performing a task for us, we would take care of it. If you would permit," Feitan replied bowing his head slightly. "It would not benefit us if your...appearance became unordinary. Do you wish to be the one to flip the coin?"

***

“Yes, thank you,” Hannibal said and smiled as the sun peaked out from behind the clouds and shone in through the stained glass window. “I think I will call heads.”

Flipping it into the air with a casual flick of his fingers, he watched as it arched high in the dust of the abandoned building and noticed that he was holding his breath. The atmosphere of the room had shifted. Something was about to go very wrong.

Catching it, he flipped the coin onto the back of his hand and made sure his face was impassive as he revealed it to the waiting audience.

***

Feitan watched as Hannibal showed him the spider web design and tilted his head slightly as if weighing up his options. "Tails it is," he explained coolly and reached for his sword. "Stay still," he instructed as he unsheathed the blade he kept concealed in his umbrella, and in one smooth movement, sliced through Hannibal's wrist. "For Shalnark, the debt is now paid. I shall inform the others," he paused in the perfect position to catch the severed right hand and his coin before gesturing to Machi to come over. "You said no permanent injury, will only be temporary."

***

Hannibal gripped his wrist as tightly as he could and forced himself to breathe through the pain. He’d braced himself as much as he could when he’d realised what Feitan was about to do, and the man’s blade was extremely sharp, but he was beginning to feel light-headed from the sudden rush of adrenaline. He’d never enjoyed pain, and what he was beginning to feel now would soon be agonising.

“Thank you for your consideration,” he said calmly. Do you have a way of sterilising it before it is re-attached?” he asked, nodding towards his hand.

***

"This was your plan?" Machi asked Feitan as she got close enough to examine the cut and the severed hand. "No, don't answer that," she sighed and turned to Hannibal. "I'm not a qualified Doctor, but Danchou made a point of getting me several medical books to study. I know enough, but you can correct anything I'm doing wrong if you want. We should have something to clean the wound with," she hummed and searched her bag. "You know I never thought I'd wish the stupid clown was here, his gum would make this easier," she muttered to herself as she pulled out a bottle of sterilised water.

***

"Machi acts as healer," Feitan explained. "You always managed without Hisoka before, you'll be fine," he told her as she took the hand from him to clean it.

***

"I said it would make it easier, not that I couldn't do it. Honestly, Feitan, a little warning would
have been nice?” Machi chided before offering Dr. Lecter a small smile. *Stay focused, let him think he’s the most dangerous person in the room. I don’t buy his story about Phinks. He could have put him in the cauldron without lighting it when he came here the first time.* "I've got experience in reattaching severed body parts. We don't have anything I can give you for the pain I'm afraid. Do you want to sit down or remain standing? I'll be able to work just as effectively either way." *When I did this for Hisoka, he trusted me, but he understood my Hatsu. He let me take the time I needed to fully heal his arms so that no sign of his injuries would remain. You claimed to be an admirer, just how much about us do you know? Do you know about our Nen abilities?*

***

Hannibal tried to wrap his head around the fact that this woman was asking him how he would prefer to be arranged whilst his limb was attached, instead of actually reattaching it, and took another calming breath. This would serve as an in with this group of children, and make it easier to pick them off later he reminded himself. He shouldn’t lash out, not just yet.

“I would prefer for my hand to be reattached, ma chere,” he said as evenly as he could. “As quickly as possible.”

***

Quickly? I would have thought you’d want me to be accurate, if I go fast you’ll have a mark. *What will you do when you realise?* Machi nodded and activated her Nen as she pulled a needle from the pincushion on her wrist. "This will hurt," she advised as she lined up the hand with Hannibal’s wrist. Activating her Nen, and moving in a blur, she quickly and efficiently reattached the limb. The whole operation took mere moments to complete. "It will take a few minutes for you to regain use of your fingers, depending upon how fast you heal. Everyone I've used my Nen stitches on has always regained full use of their limbs, but you may still end up with a scar," she said, watching the passive look on the Doctor’s face as she put away her supplies.

***

“Thank you,” Hannibal said, looking down at the pink line that was all that was left of the evidence that his hand had ever been removed. He tried to move his fingers and watched as they began to twitch. Spikes of agony shot up his arm, and he had to force himself not to show the pain that he was feeling. “You do beautiful work. I am in your debt.”

Looking over to Feitan, he added, “And our debt is paid, monsieur. If you attack me again, I will not be so patient.”

***

Feitan didn't flinch but did nod to show that he understood and agreed. "You friend of the Spider now," he replied flatly. "I will not attack you again, unless given a reason to," he added, observing Hannibal's fingers twitching. "It would be foolish to chase away valuable allies. Are you able to take message back to Danchou?"

***

“I am,” Hannibal said, nodding at the small man. “What would you like me to tell him?”

He looked up when the doors to the church opened again and forced the fingers of his right arm to move into a clenched fist. He only relaxed when he realised that it was Shalnark, along with a thin man carrying a pile of boxes and a large plastic bag. He did not look pleased.
“Oh, look, Nobunaga, it’s the Doctor!” Shalnark said, waving cheerfully. “Hey there, I don’t suppose I could get the recipe for that broth you had me in the other week, could I? It was really tasty.”

"I have a small request actually," Machi interjected. "You said you were in my debt for reattaching your hand and agreed your debt to the Spider for attacking Shalnark was paid. So I would ask that you tell Danchou that we haven't forgotten our history, and we're keeping the Spider alive. I know it may sound like a strange message, but Danchou will be relieved to hear it. "I'm not sure I trust you, but Feitan thinks we need you alive if he only took your hand."

Feitan glanced at Machi then over at Shalnark and Nobunaga. "I agree, please pass on Machi's message. You already know Shalnark," he paused as he put his hands in his pockets. "As we friends now...may I ask about your cauldron?"

“Seriously? ” Nobunaga said, dropping the parcels and grabbing hold of his sword. “Why are we all chummy with Captain Cannibal all of a sudden? You know he’s the one ‘treating’ Danchou? He’s taking care of Hisoka too! It’s all there in Tattlecrime, bet you didn’t think we’d read the stuff on the internet, did you?” he sneered.

Hannibal raised a brow and looked down at Feitan, ignoring the newcomer. “I shall pass on your message and deliver my recipe next week. If you aren’t here, I shall leave it upon Uvogin’s grave for collection. I assume that he would appreciate the culinary arts more than Pakunoda. Now, unless you have anything else to add, I will be going. Please pass on my warning to the rest of your members.”

It would appear that they like to travel in pairs, that’s going to make an ambush harder, but not impossible. I’m going to enjoy taking your little spider apart, Mr. Lucilfer, and I’m going to do it piece by piece. You really should have taught them hospitality and respect. I wonder what you’ll be like when it is only you, standing alone, Chrollo? How will you form yourself an identity then?

"That will be acceptable," Feitan agreed and bowed again. "I will say my farewells. I need to discuss things with the Spider now."

Machi copied Feitan's bow before adding, "Thank you, for taking care of Danchou for us. He's very important to us, but we will continue to fulfil his wishes." Captain Cannibal indeed, so he is the Association's bloodhound. We really have to tread carefully now.

Shalnark waved again as Hannibal bid them all farewell and left the church before frowning down at the pile of boxes on the floor. “I hope the cake survived. You really don’t need to be so overly
dramatic, Nobunaga. Seriously, he doesn’t attack unless provoked. He warned Phinks quite a few times before he trapped me, and now we have the recipe for the stock too! Bolonov’s soups will be amazing!

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“I don’t trust him. He gives me the creeps. Going after the weak like that is a cowards move,” Nobunaga said darkly.

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“To be fair, he didn’t know I was Nenless. He went after me so that he could control Phinks,” Shalnark pointed out. “If nothing else, he’s a good strategist. I’m glad he’s on our side.”

***

"Yeah, Phinks is good at provoking people. Our new 'friend' put him in the pot this time while you were out. Also, Feitan decided to initiate him by cutting off his hand," Machi explained as she moved to help the others pick up the boxes. "He's on our side for now, but I'm not sure that I trust him."

***

Feitan leant against the wall and looked up at the roof. "He's interesting, Danchou must not know. But, his Nen would be useful," he said thoughtfully remembering how calm Hannibal had been about his hand being removed. "He can be useful to us, need to be careful. You said he has both Danchou and Hisoka?"

***

Nobunaga scoffed. “Yeah, I bet he’s already ‘had’ Hisoka. How quickly did he throw himself at him, do you think? I’m betting he waited all of five minutes.”

***

“He doesn’t ‘have’ them, he’s treating them,” Shalnark pointed out. “The Association is keeping them both locked up, but for some reason, only Danchou’s in the Yorknew Hospital for the Criminally Insane. I don’t think Danchou’s insane, do you? Surely, it should be Hisoka in there? He’s the one who’s obsessed with fighting.”

***

"Hisoka is more predictable than Danchou. Maybe that's why," Feitan suggested.

***

Machi shuddered, "Yeah I remember what it's like to be on the receiving end of Hisoka's attention. I'm not sure who I’d feel more sorry for," she admitted. "I mean he's strong, so he fits Hisoka's type. Although, I don't think I'd wish being boiled alive on anyone. Not even him."

***

"If they kill each other then one less thing for us to worry about," Feitan replied coolly. "Although the Doctor's Nen would be a shame to lose."
"Anyway, did you two find anything else out? None of the others have come back yet," Machi asked Shalnark hopefully. "Phinks stormed out earlier. I don't suppose you saw him on your way here?"

"Knowing him, he’s probably at the nearest brothel-bathhouse," Nobunaga corrected, seeing the glare Machi was giving him.

"We didn’t see him, no, but there was an odd pile of clothes outside the pawnshop now that you mention it. But never mind, we found out who the guy is! And where Danchou is...also, the article said where Hisoka was staying too, if you want to know. It might be better not to tell Phinks, though. I don’t want him running after him. Hopefully, he won’t think to read Tattle Crime.”

"I already told him if he goes after Hisoka on his own, I won't go to rescue him," Machi replied. "I wonder if he dropped the clothes because of the soup bath? Ah well, I gave up trying to understand Phinks a long time ago. Although I agree we shouldn't let him know where Hisoka is being held, but any information we have could be useful. Do you think you could access the Hunter website to check out the name? Dr. Hannibal Lecter?"

"I could," Shalnark said, holding up his license. "But without this, no, there’s no way. Do you want me to do that? You could just read the article; it tells you a scary amount about the Doctor, to be honest.”

"It really does. Do you know that he throws huge dinner parties for the chiefs of police and all the toffs around the posh end of town? He spent over five thousand Jennies on the last one. Can you imagine what he must be feeding them?” He shuddered dramatically. “You think we should write to Freddie Lounds and reveal his little secret?”

"No," Feitan said, rejoining the conversation with a firm tone. "We don't know what he'd do to Danchou. Too risky, until we know more. He could send police here.”

"As tempting as it would be, I have to agree with Feitan. He knows where we gather now; it's too risky. Although I would like to confirm my suspicion about his ties to the Hunter Association,” Machi replied. "And I'd rather not think about what he's serving at his table. As long as we can make sure it's none of us, we need to remain focused on the drugs issue. We came back to Yorknew to follow up leads on Vikki, remember?"
“Right, because the cannibal who knows where we’re sleeping is totally nothing to worry about,” Nobunaga muttered. “We have to move headquarters. Look, why don’t Shal and I focus on finding out exactly where in the Asylum Danchou’s being held is so that we can break him out and then the rest of you can find Vikki? The Elders are stepping up the crackdown on the users and getting them clean, but I don’t trust that Hannibal guy as far as I can throw him. I want to know more before we let him get away with shrinking the boss’s head.”

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"That sounds reasonable," Feitan agreed. "Call the others, we need to discuss things with them too. Shalnark, call Phinks. I'll call Franklin, Machi you should call Shizuku."

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“On it, boss,” Shalnark said happily, flipping open his phone with a wide grin. “Things are starting to get fun again. I hope the Doctor sticks around. I bet he can cook other meat just as well as he can people. Ooh,” he added as he punched in Phinks’s number. “Do you think he’d be up for joining us in a barbecue?”

***

Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:

Hannibal, Phinks, Shalnark, Nobunaga

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Feitan, Machi
Standing under the warm spray of water, Chrollo allowed his gaze to settle on the other side of his cell. From the small bathroom area that provided some limited privacy, he could still see the entire space he was currently expected to live in. It was larger than he had anticipated but still smaller than he was used to. It would be sufficient for now.

Currently, he found himself staring at an image of two graves.

He vividly remembered the day the strange drawings had arrived. Ayato had handed them through the small opening in the door with a cheerful greeting, and he had stared at the package in his hand curiously. The paper felt expensive, and when he’d opened the wax-sealed envelope, intrigue had quickly become careful consideration. There were two pieces of paper, and they both contained detailed and skilled illustrations of the abandoned church that had once been his headquarters. There was a floral arrangement lying on top of two very differently sized graves and the silhouette of two men in the background. Seeing graves had surprised him at first, but he’d recalled Nobunaga requesting permission to move Uvo’s body to a more suitable resting place before the battle at the Arena.

While he sat contemplating what must have happened, he’d been surprised to feel a tear streak down his face and frowned. Placing the first picture aside, he looked at the next; a perfect rendering of Phinks and Shalnark, arm in arm and smiling. There was a note on the back that read:

*Danchou, the Chain User is missing.*

He’d thought long and hard about that, but had eventually decided that there was nothing that he could do about the situation from here. He trusted that his Spider would know how to handle things.

Both images were treasures, and he’d chosen to hang them on the wall. Being able to see them had proven to be oddly soothing.

He smiled to himself as he imagined his two Troupe members being forced to pose like that and the fixed grins that would form after a while as he rinsed the last of the institution's cheap shampoo from his hair, and turned off the shower. The noise of the key in the lock sent a thrill of dark satisfaction through him; it looked like he'd timed his test perfectly.

Leaving the shower, he grabbed a large towel and hastily wrapped it around his waist. Checking that he had a suitably shocked and apologetic expression on his face, he rushed out into the room and said, "Dr. Lecter?" he exclaimed. "I'm so sorry...I must have lost track of time."

***

Hannibal raised an eyebrow as he took in the sight of Chrollo Lucilfer in nothing more than a towel
and an apologetic smile. It was the first time that he’d seen the man’s forehead tattoo; a detailed design made up of a diamond, a cross and four spades. He’d seen a picture of it in Chrollo’s file, but seeing it in the flesh was oddly captivating.

“Entirely understandable, after a while in captivity, time begins to slip. I found routine helps,” he said, making sure to keep his voice calm and his face forgiving.

He wondered if the news he’d passed Chrollo two days ago, of the Chain User falling off the radar, had actually unnerved the man, or if this was an act in order to try to rattle him? There was only one way to find out.

Turning his back to Chrollo, he glanced around the room. He noted his pictures had been carefully positioned on the wall, and he smiled when he realised that they would be visible from all angles of the cell.

So there is a sentimentality to you, after all, you do care, he thought. I wonder if you’ve figured that out yet?

He clasped his hands behind his back in a deliberately absent-minded gesture, allowing Chrollo to watch him if he wished, or attack if he was going to. How he would deal with his lack of concern was going to be interesting.

***

"I’m afraid that I haven't really settled into a routine just yet, Dr. Lecter, but I shall take the suggestion into consideration," Chrollo replied calmly, watching Dr. Lecter carefully for his reaction. Are you always this impassive, or have you merely mastered the act?

When he turned his back to him, Chrollo allowed himself a pleased smile and quickly retrieved his clothes.

He had opted for some everyday black jeans with his signature two belts and his usual sleeveless top. The silver lines across it caught what little sun shone in through the high window nicely. As was his custom, he put his earrings back on and covered his tattoo with a bandanna.

"You can turn around now, thank you, Dr. Lecter," he said as he took his position in his usual seat and waited for their session to begin.

***

Hannibal looked at the picture for a few moments longer than was strictly necessary; the memories of that night were still fresh, and he’d found himself regretting allowing the two men to live. It had been a strategic choice at the time, but he’d caught himself fantasising about what they would have tasted like and how they would have screamed as they danced within his cauldron.

Forcing his mind to the present, he smiled and made his way over to his chair.

He looked across at Chrollo and noted the recovering of his tattoo. It was as good a place as any to start, he supposed. “I do hope that you don’t feel the need to cover your artwork on my behalf.”

***

Chrollo waited patiently as his Doctor continued to admire the drawings before joining him to begin their session. The comment about his bandanna wasn't what he had expected for his opening question, and he chuckled at the comment.
"I find that it’s more of a habit to cover it at this point," he said softly and waited to see what Hannibal would do next.

***

“You do not need to hide yourself from me,” Hannibal said. “It is my job to help you both see and understand yourself clearly; hiding your nature would be counter-productive, do you not think?”

Hannibal crossed his leg and waited for Chrollo’s response. It was a risk, starting out in such a blatant manner, but Chrollo’s calm and lack of continued embarrassment at his earlier nakedness suggested to Hannibal that it had been a strategic move on his part. He clearly wanted to see how he’d react. If Chrollo wanted to play that game, then Hannibal was happy to take off his gloves as well.

***

Unflinchingly, Chrollo looked up and made eye contact with his Therapist. "I am a criminal and a thief, Dr. Lecter, what is my nature if not to hide?” he asked. “Does not the spider hide and lie in wait for its prey?” He leant back into his own chair and slouched slightly, trying to appear as relaxed as possible.

"As for seeing me, well, I think you've seen about the same amount of me as the rest of the troupe have. Possibly more in a couple of cases." Living in the close quarters of ruined buildings had meant that he’d had to learn quickly to become comfortable in his own skin. Especially in the cutthroat environment of Meteor City, where such confidence was a handy tool for intimidation. Chrollo had sought amusement on multiple occasions by using his nakedness as a way to show his lack of concern.

Seeing the polite and well-groomed therapist's reaction had been underwhelming; he'd expected a more noticeable response from such an uptight man.

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“That seems rather contradictory, does it not?” Hannibal said mildly, matching the man’s tone. “One cannot be both seen and unseen; unless of course, we present a facade to the world.”

***

"Do you believe that you do not wear a mask yourself, Dr. Lecter?" Chrollo was genuinely curious as to how the man would answer.

"From my experience of people...everyone, at some point, tries to pass off a facade as their real self. I do not pretend, perhaps in a way that makes me more honest than most? A delightful irony I suppose that would be...the honest thief."

***

“My job, as your therapist, is not who I am. I must act a certain way in order to fulfil my role, but I am the same person I am with my friends as I am with you now. It is true, they may see more of me than I present to you - per my professional constraints - but that does not mean that I am presenting a false face.”

Hannibal kept his posture neutral as he continued, “I can not expect anything from my clients that I would not do myself. All I ask is that you are honest with me, Mr Lucilfer.”
So you are more like me than I initially thought. How much can I really trust you? I would find Paku or Feitan's council very useful right now, but that's not a luxury I can afford. Is there a way to be sure whether you're a threat or not? What do you have to gain by helping me other than infiltrating my Troupe?

"You had no issues with my headwear before today, Dr. Lecter," Chrollo replied in a thoughtful tone. "I don't think this is about me hiding anything other than my tattoo, do you like tattoos?"

"Up until today you had not chosen to reveal it to me, Mr. Lucifer," Hannibal said mildly. "I can’t help but think that you were looking to provoke a response."

He smiled and then added, “I appreciate beauty in all its forms; art is no exception.”

"Well, I was in the shower, Dr. Lecter, should I have kept the bandanna on?" Chrollo quipped in response.

Relaxing into his chair, Hannibal allowed the silence to sit between the two of them, giving the man his full attention.

Eventually, he said, “What has upset you today, Mr. Lucifer? You seem uncharacteristically confrontational.”

As the silence settled between them, Chrollo allowed his eyes to wander around the cell, occasionally stopping to take in details before continuing their travels.

One particular pause was to look at the drawing of the grave. It was only when Dr. Lecter spoke that he once more gave the man his attention.

“What has upset you today, Mr. Lucifer?” It was an interesting question. Chrollo hadn't expected it, but it was something that he could work with. Perhaps his charm offensive had taken root more effectively than he’d expected?

He bowed his head and sighed. "My apologies, Dr. Lecter, I suppose I'm feeling frustrated with my inability to properly pay my respects to Paku, and Uvo..." he let his words settle and looked back to the drawing. "As their leader, I feel like I have let my troupe down. I couldn’t be there to help when they moved Uvo's grave."

“You have done what you could now,” Hannibal said softly. “I was happy to help, and I’m sure your Troupe understand. Those who are from Meteor City look after their own; that includes your Troupe looking after you.” He paused for a moment, thinking, before continuing, “And me, doing what I can to make your stay here more comfortable.”

Common ground. You didn't seem impressed by my gifts, but you care for your people. What will
you do when you hear that I too once walked the streets that you call your own? Hannibal wondered.

***

Chrollo smiled at Dr. Lecter and tilted his head as he asked, "That is true that; we look after our own...are you saying that you are also from my city, Doctor? I have to admit; I would never have guessed if you'll forgive me for saying so."

***

"I was eleven years old when my world was taken from me. Meteor City became my home shortly thereafter. It was a refuge, of sorts, for me. I learned a lot from my time there and, I am not ashamed to say that the city likely saved my life. I may not live there now, but I still honour its memories," Hannibal said calmly. "I understand that you may be reluctant to believe that what I say is true, but I have done everything in my power to be hospitable, and to honour the code of the city that saved me."

***

"I see. I was left there when I was very young," Chrollo said. "So I don't remember a time before Meteor City became my home, nor do I remember my parents." He leant forward as he added, "May I ask how you managed to get out? Not many do, and those who leave often come back not long after. You would be seen as a success story were you ever to go back and speak to the Elders; you'd give our brightest children much-needed hope."

Chrollo watched his Doctor for his reaction; he was very interested in the answer. Surely you could help others escape and have better lives, Dr. Lecter? I may be a criminal, but even I send money back home to help provide for those who are trapped.

***

"I was a lover of knowledge, like yourself. I became friendly with a family in Yorknew, who eventually took me in. After extensive study, I earned a scholarship and trained as a surgeon," Hannibal explained.

It was the truth, just not the whole truth. Chrollo didn’t need to know that the family who had taken him in were under the influence of his Nen, or that he killed most of them once he’d secured his position. The only person worth saving had been his Lady Murasaki. She had become his teacher and his first real friend. He’d transferred the house over to her once he could afford his own, but it had not been enough to make her stay.

She hadn’t approved of his desire for revenge; had urged him to forgive the men who had violated and consumed his sister, but he could not. And so, one night, he had awoken to an empty house and a letter, urging him to reconsider; warning him where revenge would take him. It said that if he let it consume what little humanity he had left, that it would leave him as a broken shell of a man. She had explained that she didn’t want to see that happen to him, but knew that he was too powerful, and that she couldn’t stop him. There had been a tear stain on the paper that she had not tried to hide as she wrote that she had, with great regret, chosen to leave.

He had burned the note, but it, like everything else he had ever read, was forever trapped inside his memories.

The house was still empty. His Lady had never returned.
“Now, when I go back,” he said, pulling back to the present. “It is to find those that would pollute the city; those that seek to take and never give. I do my part to cleanse the streets. If you are asking whether I have disowned my past, I would say the fact that I am here with you now, would prove that I haven’t.”

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*Hmm, I see, that's easy enough to verify when I can return home. No doubt you expect me to do that, so I see no reason to believe that you are lying.* Chrollo nodded. "I am sure that the Elders must appreciate your community service. We do not have much, but if we are all to survive, we have to think about the whole rather than the few. It is reassuring to know that not everyone who leaves, forgets where they came from. Have you never considered teaching basic skills back home?"

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“I had never met the Elders during my time in the city,” Hannibal admitted. “I didn’t think that they would welcome my aid. Thank you, Mr. Lucilfer. I will take the offer onboard. Did you have time to read my book?” he asked, making sure to steer them away from his past.

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"I did yes, it was interesting. It...gave me something to think about. There isn't much for me to do between our meetings. The distraction was appreciated," Chrollo replied calmly.

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“Was there anything in particular that you wished to discuss with me?” Hannibal asked. “Or any questions that you had for me that arose from your studies?”

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"I couldn't help wondering if you chose that book for me because you believe that I have Antisocial Personality Disorder. Would I be correct in my assumption?" Chrollo asked.

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“Yes, you would,” Hannibal said with a smile. “You said that you found it hard to understand yourself and that it was something that you would like to do. I wished to offer aid without directly confronting you on the issue. I hope it helped?"

***

Chrollo leaned back in his chair and smirked slightly. "I see, I did draw some parallels between myself and the listed symptoms in the book. The section on Conduct Disorders was intriguing; as I was abandoned, I didn't have any real family structure or schooling. There were few children of my age that I would spend any time with. Growing up in Meteor City does give you a unique outlook to life. Perhaps most of us from Meteor City have this disorder?"

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“It is a hotly debated topic amongst academics as to what actually causes it,” Hannibal said conversationally. “I, myself, tend to lean towards the middle ground. Those with the predisposition, who have been raised in a stable, non-abusive environment and have not suffered any significant trauma in their lives, go on to be entirely happy and productive members of
society.” He gave Chrollo a knowing grin. “Although, that in itself begs the question of what is a productive member of society, and who defines the nature of said society, doesn’t it?”

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"If I had to propose an answer, I would suggest that a person's culture would affect what would be considered productive. As for who defines the nature of a society? Surely that would be the people living within it? If the whole agree that a certain pursuit is worthwhile, any individual pursuing it could be seen as productive,” Chrollo said thoughtfully. "I suppose the next question would be how many individuals are required for a society?"

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“Well,” Hannibal asked, sitting back in his chair. “You consider yourself a citizen of Meteor City, whether or not that is a legally recognised position. So, are there any other societies that you consider yourself a part of?”

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"Depending on the minimum number of people needed, I could possibly say the Phantom Troupe. We have our own rules that we live by, and as the head, I strictly enforce those rules." Humming to himself, Chrollo tried to work out if Dr. Lecter was expecting another answer. "If you are asking if I consider myself a citizen of any other city or country, then I can not say that I do, Doctor. My parents threw me away; I have the scars to prove it. The world does not care for what is abandoned, and they do not consider me to be a citizen of their society. So why should I respect their rules?"

***

“The obvious answer would be, that if you don’t, it will execute you,” Hannibal said evenly. “I can not clear you to return to your Troupe if you do not demonstrate either remorse or an understanding that what you did was wrong. And I can not allow you to leave if you indicate to me that you will return to your criminal lifestyle, although,” he said with a smile. “I cannot dictate that you do not return to your Troupe. Do you understand, Mr. Lucilfer?” he asked, hoping that his underlying message would be received.

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As he listened, Chrollo nodded slightly. "So you would not tell me to stay away from the others, only that I refrain from stealing? I would be fine to resume my position if I steered the Troupe down a different path?"

So that's your checklist? That's certainly useful information to have, but I don't think this place has outlived its usefulness just yet. Or has that thought not occurred to you, Dr. Lecter?

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“A non-criminal path, yes. I can not condone criminal behaviour, Mr Lucilfer,” Hannibal said, refusing to give in to the urge to sigh. “If I must, I have ways of enforcing certain behaviours in order to help reform an individual. However, I would not wish to limit you in such a way. You are an intelligent man. I hope that you can read between the lines and make the necessary changes on your own.”

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"I think I understand, Dr. Lecter, and I appreciate your consideration as well as your faith in me."
Perhaps it would be better for my Troupe to focus on improving life for those in Meteor City in a more productive way? If I am to be executed, then I would no longer be of any use to my people," Chrollo said evenly. "Maybe we could focus more on bringing awareness to the issues we face as a city. At least one of my Troupe is a Hunter; encouraging the others to also become Hunters so that we have more skills could be useful. Then we could teach those skills to those back home. It is certainly something to think about, thank you, Doctor."

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“You are more than welcome, Mr Lucilfer,” Hannibal said, bowing his head politely. “As I have said before, I am here for you, in whatever capacity you need me. In time, I hope to build a working relation—”

He looked up when the door to the cell suddenly burst open and felt a flood of anger fill him. Chilton’s panicked and sweaty form filled the entrance, and Hannibal ground his teeth to keep himself from snapping the man in two.

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"Oh, thank heavens you're here," Chilton exclaimed, sagging against the doorframe. "We have a situation, in the High-risk patient's wing. It's Abel Gideon; he's taken one of the nurse's hostage, and he's demanding to speak to you...and only you." *I hope your happy Will, why did you have to goad him?* "Please accept my sincerest apologies for interrupting, but he's refusing to cooperate unless we find you," he added. “And he has a nurse, did I mention that?”

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“And why does Dr. Gideon want to talk to me?” Hannibal asked, keeping his voice as calm as he could.

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*Of course, you'd ask questions, you don't care about the nurse's life being in danger, do you?*

"Because he knows that you're a respected Hunter and wants to prove that he's the Yorknew Ripper," Chilton babbled. "Please, Hannibal, he's got a hostage. He thinks you'll be able to tell the world his truth because people listen to you."

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Hannibal took a deep breath but managed to control himself enough to give Chilton a polite nod. “I will be with you momentarily, Frederick, I just need a moment with my patient, if you would be so kind?”

He gave the man a pointed look and waited for his response. Hearing that someone else was trying to claim his spotlight was one thing, but finding out that Chilton had been sloppy enough to allow the man to take a hostage, was another.

*Are you truly this incompetent? he wondered. Are you coming running to me because you can not control your own staff? How would Gideon know that I’m here unless you told him? Psychic driving is one thing, but being so sloppy about it is another! People listen to me because I am capable of doing my job! You’re going to pay for interrupting me, mark my words. I’ve allowed you to play with Gideon for long enough. If you can’t look after your toys, Frederick, then they’re going to get taken away!*
"A moment? Yes, of course. I'll be outside," Chilton replied hurriedly, backing out of the cell.

What am I going to do with you, Will? You asked me to keep you away from Hannibal, so why are you making my job so much harder now? Why did you have to push Gideon into proving himself before he was ready? I thought we were a team.

Chrollo watched the exchange and couldn't resist the small smile that pulled at the corners of his mouth when Chilton backed out of the room so quickly. "Well, he certainly seems stressed," he remarked. There's something different about you now, does Frederick not have Nen? He didn't seem to notice the flare in your Aura; then again, it was only there for a moment. "I understand if you're needed elsewhere, Dr. Lecter. I'd hate for the hostage to come to harm on my account."

"It would not be your fault if they did. That would lie with Dr. Chilton," Hannibal said smoothly. "I am sorry that we have to end our session here, but I will ensure that you have some fresh reading material and please." Hannibal looked pointedly towards Ayato and then back to Chrollo. "I am at your disposal. If there is anything further that you need from me, please, do not hesitate to ask."

Ayato can pass on messages to you. I wonder, how well does he know you as a person? Maybe I do have a use for him after all.

"You are most generous, Dr. Lecter, and again, I must express my gratitude," Chrollo replied with a polite nod. "I would be interested in reading anything that you would personally recommend. I find myself curious to see if we share the same tastes, after all."

Hannibal gave Chrollo a quick smirk before rising from his seat. "Well, we share a heritage, why don't we build from there? We can show the world how strong the foundations of Meteor City truly are. Until next time, Mr Lucilfer," Hannibal said, bowing deeply.

When he rose, he allowed a little anticipation to enter his stare. "I hope that the rest of your day will be as interesting as mine. I'm sure that the Hunter Association can learn to see you for the charming, intelligent and diligent man that you are. Meteor City could benefit from a spokesman such as yourself, should you choose to cross the line and learn from my example. Abiding by the laws of the outside world can work in your favour, I assure you."

"I think I would enjoy that," Chrollo said as he watched Dr. Lecter getting ready to leave his cell. "Helping our city is always a worthy cause." Although perhaps you are right, Dr. Lecter. Perhaps I could do more good if I worked with the outsiders instead of against them?

"That it is," Hannibal agreed, heading over to the door. "I shall see you at the same time next week, Mr. Lucilfer. I'll be sure to provide you with a more suitable shower gel as well. Au Revoir."
He opened the door and smiled when Chrollo gave him another polite nod before making his exit.

Turning to the still twitching Dr. Chilton, he said, “Lead the way, Frederick,” and hoped that his tone was not as clipped as it sounded to his own ears.

***

1 Hour Later

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Go back and tell Mr. Lucilfer about my failure, seriously, Hannibal, anyone would think that you ran this place. I am in charge here, and I was doing what I had to do. At least Dr. Gideon had the courtesy to take the hostage into his cell. He was neat about it. Chilton grumbled to himself as he approached the door to Chrollo's cell and nodded to the guards as he let himself in.

Plastering on a polite grin, he said, "Good Afternoon Mr. Lucilfer," and stopped in his tracks when he saw that the man was reading on his bed. "Please forgive me for my earlier interruption. Let me assure you that as the Director of this Hospital, I take the care of my staff, and all of the patients staying here, very seriously. If you permitted, I would like to have a chat with you. Completely off the record, of course; my only intention is to assess how you are progressing and ensure that you are receiving the best possible care."

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Sitting up slowly, Chrollo marked his place in his book and took in Fredericks barely contained bluster.

Why would I be worried about my safety? What happened with Dr. Gideon? he wondered, but smiled politely at the man that was keeping him prisoner.

“That is most reassuring to hear, please, take a seat. I can only offer you water to drink, I am afraid,” he said, gesturing to the sink. “But I assure you it is quite refreshing. You look like you could do with something a little stiffer, though. Is everything OK? I hope the nurse is well.”

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"Thankfully the nurse is physically unharmed," Dr. Chilton replied as he made his way over to the seat Hannibal was using earlier. "Able Gideon didn’t harm her in that sense. I can pass on your sympathies if you would like? It would be appreciated, I'm sure, but please don’t worry, she'll be fine. Dr. Lecter and I were both concerned that the incident interfered with your care. As for the drink, I'll have something later, but thank you for the offer."

The nurse will be fine after she's been through therapy of her own. Why did you insist I come back here, Hannibal? What did you want me to see?

***

“I am glad. Now, you said that you wanted to speak to me?” Chrollo asked, noting the way that the Doctor sagged into the chair and the panicked confusion in his eyes. “You look like you need someone to talk to yourself. Please,” he made sure his voice was as soft and welcoming as he could
make it. “Let me know how I can help, Dr. Chilton.”

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"You help me?" Frederick asked in surprise. "But you're a patient here at my hospital; I'm supposed to help you. I wanted to check to ensure that you were happy with your care under Dr. Lecter. He's a highly respected therapist, although he is known for his rather unorthodox methods. I wanted you to know that you do have the right to request another therapist if you felt that he was not a good fit for you. For example, this cell, it keeps you rather isolated, does it not? Surely you'd prefer one closer to the other patients; to help your social rehabilitation?"

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Chrollo tilted his head. He hadn't known that changing his cell was an option. Were there other Nen-suppressed cells in the facility? Ones that would mean that he could talk with the patients? Did Chilton intend to let him out? Surely he knew what he could do?

“I would love to be able to talk with people other than my guards. They have been extremely polite and a pleasure to chat with, but variety is the spice of life,” Chrollo said, making sure to lean towards the Doctor as he spoke. “These other cells, what would they be like? Could I keep my books?"

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"I see no reason why you wouldn't be allowed to have your books, although you would be moved to the High-risk wing. I'll need time to sort out the paperwork, but well," Frederick paused to look over at the drawings on the wall. "After the incident today, there is an open-cell, and you would have two, 'neighbours'. Although I should warn you to be careful about Mr. Graham; he claims that he can feel things from people if you get too close to him. I'd need to be able to show that you were willing to work with my staff to justify the move, and it might take a little while to arrange. But I'd be willing to do that for you if you'd be alright with me dropping in for a little chat every now and then? Forgive me for saying so, but I find you rather interesting and would consider it a privilege to be able to talk to a man of your skill and reputation."

Did Hannibal draw those for you? They look like his work, just what have you two been talking about in here?

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Mr. Graham can feel things? What kind of things? Is he an empath, or is it just that he can cold-read people? Is he a Nen user too? Chrollo thought as his mind raced through the possibilities.

“It would be my pleasure, Doctor. I have enjoyed your company whenever we have met, and I will be sure to bear in mind your advice about Mr. Graham. Dr. Lecter has suggested that I set my sights upon rehabilitation, so I would not want to jeopardize that. But, if you don't mind, may I ask why this cell has suddenly become clear?"

Did Dr. Lecter find a permanent solution to your hostage situation? Is he really like me? Surely you know; you’re the Director of the Hospital, you have to be able to read people. You can’t be as incompetent as you appear; this has to be an act.

***

"Well, between us," Dr. Chilton said, leaning forward and lowering his voice. "Abel Gideon won't be staying with us at this hospital after today. The cell I am offering used to be his. If you want it."
“He is to be moved elsewhere?” Chrollo asked innocently. “I will gladly accept your offer if Abel won’t be coming back?” He made sure to emphasise his question so that the underlying meaning was clear: What had Dr. Lecter done to him? “Unlike him, I assure you, I will not cause you problems. I am a single-minded person, and I have set my sights on improving my life. With your help, I am sure that I will achieve my goal. I trust you, Doctor, and you can trust me too. I want to help you.”

Should I tell you? I mean, if I can get you on-side, maybe you'd be able to protect me if Hannibal decides to turn on me? After seeing that, I'm starting to wonder whether Will had a point. Only the truly desperate section themselves and I've never seen Hannibal turn as cold as that before. "No, Abel won't be coming back. Unfortunately, for the nurse to escape unharmed, lethal force was required. It's a rare occurrence that we lose a patient under such circumstances, but I am no longer in a position to help him," Frederick explained solemnly. "Although I would like to think that we could both help each other; it seems a bit pointless to me, to keep you isolated if you wish to reintegrate with wider society, I'm sure you'd agree?"

“I bow to your superior expertise, Dr. Chilton,” Chrollo said, getting to his feet and doing just that.

“I am very sorry to hear about Abel,” he said as he walked over to the chair opposite his jailor. “Is Dr. Lecter, OK? Are you? I know how it feels to take a life, and it can be quite an upsetting experience. If you need someone to talk to, I am always willing to listen. I may not have always made the best decisions before now, but I assure you, I am serious about my offer. I want to help the people of my city, and I will need your aid to do so. You can not help me if you are worrying about what you saw.”

He allowed concern to show on his face and offered the Doctor his most sincere look of understanding. “I have experienced many things in my life. You can trust that I will listen if you need to talk. I can keep your confidence, just as I know you will keep mine.”

"I've never been to Meteor City, but I've heard many things. If anyone can help your city, I believe it would be you," Frederick replied with a small smile. Maybe if I do end up being right about Hannibal, I can hide there? I mean your city doesn't turn anyone away, right? "Dr. Lecter is a Double-Star Blacklist Hunter. He's taken lives before in the field. That's why I sought him out; to help the nurse. By the time any police got here, it could have been too late for her. I had to make a choice between the safety of my staff or my patient. It wasn't an easy one, but well, Dr. Gideon is a criminal and only escaped execution because he plead insanity. Sometimes we can't save everyone; it's the hardest part about working in this field. I took an oath to do no harm; I knew there was a very real possibility that my patient wouldn't survive, but it was a choice I had to make. I'm sure you'd have done the same in my position?"

“I haven’t taken such an oath yet, Doctor, but I would imagine that if I had, I would have made it explicitly clear to Hannibal,” he watched Dr. Chilton’s lip twitch into a slight smirk at the use of his informal name. “That I was in need of him in his capacity as a Hunter, not as a Therapist.” He didn’t wait for confirmation that the man had, indeed, done just that, and instead continued with
his careful flattery. Elevating him ever so subtly to the same level of strategist as himself, he said, “If he had been employed as a Therapist, then it may well have been the nurse's life that ended today, not Abel’s. You made the right decision; you saved your staff.”

He bowed his head ever so slightly and allowed grief to show in the set of his shoulders and the tension of his back as he turned to look at the pictures on the walls. “It was something I could not always do, Doctor. We are leaders; we protect our own. Before, I did not have access to people such as yourself and Hannibal; people who wanted to help me and teach me new ways to protect them.” He turned back to Chilton. The man’s weakness was clearly his pride. Dr. Lecter obviously hated him, and it seemed as if the feeling was mutual. He could use that.

“All my life, I have been rejected by the outside world. I thought it was because I was from Meteor City, but Hannibal has proved to me that that is not the case. He learned your ways and has been accepted by you all. Perhaps,” he tilted his head slightly and looked up through his eyelashes at Chilton. “Maybe you could teach me the customs I will need to know in order to integrate into society, in our private sessions? In exchange, I will allow you to ask me questions? Does that seem fair?”

_Do you already know where Dr. Lecter came from, or has he been hiding that from you? You’re a natural gossip, I can tell. What are you going to do with that information, Frederick? What are you going to do with the bones that I throw you?_

***

"Yes, certainly; a mutual exchange that would be beneficial to us both. That does seem most fair. It's only reasonable that as fellow leaders, we support each other," Frederick agreed readily. _Did you just suggest that Hannibal was from Meteor City? I always thought he was from Yorknew? Well, he's lived in many places, but surely Meteor City can’t have been one of them? The man carries himself like he's royalty. 'I'd be more than happy to tutor you in the customs of many cultures. I like to see myself as a cultural anthropologist, and I'm a great believer that we need to understand our patients in order to meet their needs effectively. That includes understanding the society that shaped them. I have confidence that a man such as you would have no issues learning how to fit in within a cosmopolitan city like Yorknew.”

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“I am glad that we could come to an agreement, I look forward to more of our little chats, hopefully in more hospitable quarters,” Chrollo said, watching as the man began to relax. “May I ask about the people I will be housed with? You have already said that one of them is called Mr. Graham and that he is likely to try to derail my recovery. Who would the other person be? I would like to know as much as possible about the people around me so that they do not sway me in my convictions.”

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"Ah yes, Will. He normally keeps to himself but has recently started trying to provoke Abel, and I fear that he was behind our unfortunate event earlier today. You'll be the only one in your cell, but he'd be in the cell to the right of yours. The other cell houses a young woman called Caitlyn she's been making great progress in her treatment, and we're considering moving her to a lower risk ward," Dr. Chilton explained. "My advice would be to be civil with Will, should he talk to you. Just take most of what he claims with a pinch of salt; I mentioned that he thinks he's an empath earlier, didn’t I?"
“You did,” Chrollo said, inwardly grinning with triumph at the news. “I have always had issues with empathy myself. Hannibal thinks it’s because I have,” he made a show of trying to remember the name. “Antisocial Personality Disorder, but I am not so sure. I take no delight in causing harm,” he lied smoothly. “But I will protect my people at all costs. I wonder what Mr. Graham will pick up from me? Do you think I need to worry? You say he orchestrated the death of Abel Gideon, is he likely to try something like that with me?”

***

"He’s said that? Surely it’s too early to make such a diagnosis. Well, I’d be more than happy to give you a second opinion. After all, ASPD, is what we used to call sociopathy and it was widely believed that somebody with that inclination wouldn’t care about social conventions. There are other possible conditions that could explain your empathy issues," Frederick said thoughtfully. "For example, Alexithymia could be the underlying cause, or perhaps you could be on the Autistic Spectrum. I would hesitate to jump to something as severe as Antisocial Personality Disorder so soon. Considering your background, maybe even some form or Posttraumatic Stress Disorder could be at play here. There are many potential reasons for the issues with empathy that you have experienced; we don't need to jump to the most severe one simply because of your criminal activities."

He settled more comfortably in his chair as the knowledge that Hannibal had labelled his patient so quickly sank in. “I wouldn’t worry about Will,” he said offhandedly. “Currently he’s sitting in the corner feeling sorry for himself. He is staying with us under a voluntary section and has only ever caused one other incident. Most of the time, he is quiet if a little sarcastic. If you don’t engage with his delusions, he should be harmless.”

***

Chrollo listened to Chilton’s blustery explanations of the various other conditions that he could be ‘suffering’ from and smiled. He could understand why a man like this would annoy his Therapist so much; he was far too easily led and bought into lies that fed his ego without even questioning them. If he tried, Chrollo was sure that he could be running this place within a month, but...

Will Graham, the empath. Are you really able to feel other people's emotions? If it’s Nen, how powerful are you, and why would you lock yourself away in here? How does it work? I have to see you. I have to be sure. You could be the answer I’ve been searching for, for so many years. If you aren’t mad, then maybe I can talk you into handing me over your ability. I’d finally be able to feel... The idea was captivating, and he almost lost himself in a daydream of imagining what it would be like before he brought himself back to the present when he heard Chilton cough.

“I’m sorry, Doctor. You gave me a lot to think about. I am glad that you are not as quick to judge as Hannibal, but, may I ask,” he paused, making sure to look hesitant and ever so slightly unsure of himself. “If this Will Graham is an empath, then wouldn’t experiencing a murder, however necessary, have disturbed him even more than he was before? What, exactly, happened? I think I should know what I am getting into before I move.”

How did Will react? Tell me, did he really feel Abel’s death? I need to know if it’s Nen or not. Why would he lock himself in here if he has such powerful abilities? He could be running a country, but instead, he’s orchestrating the death of his cellmates. It makes no sense.

***

"Of course, well, as I said, when I checked on him, he was sitting in the corner of his cell and refusing to talk. It reminded me of when he first came to stay here,” Frederick advised. "He would
only talk if he felt it was absolutely necessary, and even then he would use as few words as possible. Before he came here, he assisted the BAU with catching serial killers. Jack Crawford valued his unique insights, and he also used to teach at the FBI academy. He's spent most of his adult life around murder, and criminals. I fear that Abel's recent assertions that he was the Yorknew Ripper stirred up an old obsession of Will’s. He had tried to have Hannibal arrested for the Ripper's crimes, even though he was the one who had stood trial for them. It got very messy towards the end.

***

“He did?” Chrollo asked, feeling genuine curiosity creeping through him. “But you said he was here voluntarily? Does that mean that he was found mentally unfit to go through with the trial?”

Surely Dr. Lecter can’t be the Ripper; he works with the Association. But if Will really is an empath, then maybe he was picking up on his bloodlust?

“If he’s been around so many killers and he really is an empath, then has his mind become warped, Doctor? I don’t want to move from here if I’ll be putting myself at risk,” he said, taking the gamble that Chilton’s ego wouldn’t let him back out of the deal at this stage. “I am, after all, extremely safe in this cell. Doctor Lecter said that he requested this for me specifically because it would fulfil all my needs.” And make sure that I can’t use my Nen. Will you really move me? Do you honestly not know what I’m capable of? Are you going to gift wrap Will for me, Frederick? Please, tell me you are not that naive.

***

"I understand your concerns, but please rest assured, if I felt that there was any danger to you from Will, I wouldn't make the offer. Unlike Dr. Gideon, and Will, you’re a leader," Frederick reassured. "You are an influencer, not the sort to be easily led by somebody like Will. I couldn't see him getting you to do anything you didn't actually want to do already. Plus, you are neither the Yorknew Ripper, nor Hannibal. He has no reason to see you as a threat."

***

Chrollo made sure to let his concern morph into reluctant reassurance. “Thank you, Doctor. You flatter me. I...” He looked down at the floor. “I lead a group of criminals. I hardly think that I can be called an influencer. I am not like you.” He looked up at his jailor with admiration in his eyes. “You inspire me to better myself, so.” He took a deep breath. “If you say that Will is safe, then I will believe you. But you still haven’t told me what happened to Abel. I would like to know what my Therapist is capable of. If he is violent, then I should consider distancing myself from him. If you are as skilled as I think you are, then you may well be a better fit for me, after all.”

What did he do? What did he make Will feel? Did he know he was in the next cell? Did he kill the man to get back at you both? If he did, then that's impressive work. I'll have to ask him about it in our next session.

***

Jumping at the opportunity to steal one of Dr. Lecter’s most prized patients from under his nose, Frederick gave Chrollo a reassuring smile and leaned forward in his chair. He thought back to what had happened and managed to suppress his instinctual shudder. He knew he couldn’t show weakness to a man like Mr. Lucifer.

"Well, when we got there, Dr. Gideon had my nurse in a chokehold, and Hannibal tried to talk him
into letting her go. For a few hopeful moments, I was beginning to think that the situation was calming down. That was until Abel's mood suddenly flipped, and he produced his hidden weapon. He'd stolen a scalpel and started threatening to cut the woman's throat.” Dr. Chilton sighed and closed his eyes for a moment. "Don't worry; we're going to be reviewing the guidelines for dealing with violent patients. We pride ourselves on our safety record. Today was an unfortunate blemish on our otherwise spotless record, I assure you. We can only move forwards, that's what I've always believed, and that is what I intend to do.”

Smiling at Chrollo, he tried to settle himself in his chair and fiddled with his cane. “There was a sudden change in the atmosphere, like the air had grown heavy?"

*He killed a man with my fountain pen. It was a gift from a patient who wanted to thank me for helping them get onto their feet. How do you kill somebody with a pen?* Frederick paused and glanced around the cell, his eyes lingering on the drawing of the graves that Chrollo had placed above his bed.

"It was such a surreal experience," he continued. "Almost like time had slowed down? Dr. Lecter simply reached over and took the pen from my pocket. He looked at it for a moment, and then," he paused and mimed the action. "He just threw it at Abel. I think I blinked, because one moment he was standing holding the nurse, and the next they were both on the floor. She was screaming, and he was clutching at his neck. Blood was spraying everywhere. I've seen people die before - it's an unavoidable part of the job - but I've never seen somebody killed with a pen. I would worry that the stress caused me to hallucinate, but my pen was in the cell and," he gulped. "It was covered in his blood. Don’t worry, one of the reasons it’ll take a little time to move you is that we are going to get the place deep cleaned. I assure you, it will be spotless by the time you move in there."***

“Impressive,” Chrollo said and covered his mouth as if he hadn’t meant to speak out loud. “I do apologise. I...old habits die hard. But, in my experience, anything can become a weapon if utilised in the right way. The neck is a very soft and vulnerable area. If enough force is applied to a pen, then it could easily cut through it. Don’t worry, Doctor; you aren’t going mad.”

He sat back in his seat and deliberately relaxed his posture, trying not to think of Uvo’s requiem celebrations and the way the guard's skulls had sounded as his ballpoint had sliced into them.

“I am happy to wait until the cell is free.” He smirked a little and added a tone of levity to his voice. “I have no other pressing appointments. I trust you, Dr. Chilton. I know you will not let me down, and now I know to be wary of Hannibal, so I am in your debt for that as well. The favours I owe you do keep piling up, don’t they?”***

Frederick smiled wider before he said, "I'm sure we can even the scale, and I would feel remiss if I did not fulfil my duty to you as the one overseeing your care. Dr. Lecter may be your Therapist on paper, but that doesn't mean I don't willingly accept responsibility for your well being. How about we agree that you don't forget about your good friend Frederick when you eventually get released?"

*Your reputation does precede you, even if I don't believe in some of the more mythical parts. But Hannibal knows too much about my practices; I need to take precautions to protect myself if he ever decides to become hostile; there’s no way I’m going to end up like Will. Perhaps we could ‘co-write’ a book on empathy disorders together, Mr. Lucifer? You'd make an excellent case study.*
“I could never forget about you,” Chrollo said softly, using the same tone that always seemed to get Hisoka’s attention. “You’ve potentially saved my life and may well change it for the better.”
He nodded languidly. “You have my sincerest gratitude, and my Spider will be at your disposal, should you ever have need of it.”

If I can get my hands on Will, and he does have Nen, then you will have indeed served the Spider, Doctor. I only hope that the man’s cooperative. I really don’t want to have to force him to give his ability to me, but you aren’t going to be able to tell me how it works, at least, not knowingly.

“You said that Will and Hannibal knew each other before he accused him of being the Ripper?” he asked. “Did they work together? How did he react to seeing Hannibal kill someone? Sorry to pry, it’s just...I’d rather be prepared for my move. I don’t want to upset Will...not after what happened to Abel.”

"They were colleagues before they became romantically involved,” Dr. Chilton replied twiddling with his cane as he decided how much to tell his new potential ally. "Originally, Hannibal was brought in to make sure that Will wouldn't become too unstable; it turned into quite a mess when they got together. There are some in the psychiatric community who believe Will to be the actual Yorknew Ripper, and that his accusation of Dr. Lecter was entirely a projection of his own guilt; that he had a psychotic break because of his empathy disorder. But personally, I think the man has taken one too many trips into the mind of a killer, and it changed him. I could believe that he is the so-called 'Copycat Killer', but not the Ripper himself. My advice would be to avoid those topics with him. When I tried to check on Will, he was curled up on his bed. He...” Chilton thought back to the way the man had shakily held up his middle finger when he’d asked him how he was. “Declined to talk to me. I suspect he's angry that I allowed Hannibal to be in such close proximity to him.”

“Romantically involved? How old is the man? What did you see in the Doctor I wonder? So far he’s been rather bland...there must be something under that impassive skin he’s wearing that he hasn’t let me see yet. Were you drawn to his violence? I’ve seen his anger...what does an empath want with a man like that?

"I would say that he would be your polar opposite, Will feels extremely strongly. It's almost as if he has an abundance of empathy. He claims that he actually feels the other person's emotions as they’re experiencing them. He's tried to demonstrate it to me, but so far I'm not convinced it's more than extremely talented cold-reading," Frederick replied and tilted his head to regard Chrollo more carefully. "As for how sensitive Will can be, well he asked to be locked up here to hide from Hannibal. He's tried to convince several people that Dr. Lecter is a highly dangerous psychopathic serial killer. Myself included.” He paused and tapped his cane on the floor as he considered what he was about to say. "When anyone tries to ask him why he's the only one who thinks this, he says..."
that he saw it in Hannibal's mind. It's why it's widely considered to be part of his delusion; an overabundance of empathy would be just as detrimental as a severe lack of it. I can only imagine what it must be like to feel so suspicious of everyone around you that you start to believe the one closest to you, wanted to eat you."

***

“Wanted to eat him?” Chrollo asked, tilting his head. “I would have thought that someone with the empathetic skills Will does, would not have intimacy issues?”

Chrollo knew that he was taking a risk by showing his insight, but he also needed to let the Doctor know that he could keep up with him in conversation. Someone like Chilton needed to feel as if he had the upper hand, but he also liked to gloat and lording it over someone who can understand that they are beaten was far more satisfying than over someone who couldn’t. He knew that he would have to carefully push him, to keep the man on his toes.

“I have come across cannibalism in my time; the people of Meteor City are often faced with the harsh realities of our world, but Hannibal does not strike me as someone who is about to starve to death,” he said thoughtfully. “The only other usual - and highly symbolic kind of cannibalism - that I know of involves the eating of a loved one, out of respect and the desire to keep them with you, or the devouring of an enemy to cement your triumph over them. But, you said they were romantically involved?” He lifted a brow to emphasise his question and waited to see what the Doctor would do.

***

"I'd find it hard to believe that he was ever at risk of starvation," Chilton sniffed. "I mean you've seen the way he carries himself? Out of curiosity, I looked up the Lecter family name, and he may be related to nobility over in the Kakin Kingdom. Which makes me wonder exactly how he ended up here in Saherta, but people say he's from everywhere and nowhere. I digress, you are right; there are a lot of historical cultures that carried out such symbolic practises. It's my personal opinion," he paused and leant forward even further, making sure that his voice was barely above a whisper. 
"That Hannibal might have books on such things, and during a delusional episode Will put two and two together and got five."

**Although the man is pretty much a wizard in the kitchen, Pariston once joked he'd sell his soul to the Devil to be able to match his cooking.**

***

“He must have been extremely sick for that to happen,” Chrollo said with concern. “Why didn’t Hannibal try to help him? What could have possibly led him to believe such things?”

He shook his head and stared at the floor. “I can’t imagine how scared Will must have been if he truly believed that. Hannibal, I suppose, could be seen as intimidating, but I could never believe...no. He is stern, but I can tell that he cares,” he lied. “How did he handle Will’s accusation?”

***

"He tried to find Will a suitable Therapist. He knows the rules, even if he often bends them. Unfortunately, Will wasn't willing to accept help from anyone Hannibal suggested; I think that's why he didn't suggest me,” Frederick shrugged. "I mean, Will is here because he thinks that Hannibal doesn't trust me. That was the only reason a man like him needed to seek me out. We
were all happy for them when they went public with their relationship; neither of them is the type who find it easy to form bonds. When it all fell apart, we were all equally upset. Dr. Bloom, especially; she's known both of them for a very long time. I choose to believe that on some level Hannibal still cares for Will; he was gracious when I had to deliver the news that he was barred from visiting him - At Will's request of course - After all, he came to me for sanctuary from a man he genuinely believes wants to kill him. I've not seen Dr. Lecter take an interest in anyone else since. If he were a more emotive man, I'd say that Will broke his heart. What else could he do? The man he loves thinks he's a monster; it must have been hard on him to have to be near Will today."

***

Chrollo listened to Chilton speak and found himself being reminded of another man - another 'monster'.

"I know what it is like to be around someone the world sees as a monster," he said softly. "Hisoka would tell me of times that he was called the same when he couldn’t sleep." He raised his head and gave Chilton a gentle smile. "I found that he enjoyed bedtime stories, maybe I will be able to chase away Will’s demons with some when the time comes?"

***

*The Grim Reaper of Heaven's Arena enjoyed bedtime stories? Does that mean that rumour about the lover's tiff was right?*

"I'd be happy to accommodate that idea, should Will be agreeable to it. You are a rather thoughtful man, Mr. Lucilfer, and a quick study. If our chat today is any indication of your resolve, I'm confident that we prepare you for life in the outside world in no time at all. Although, if you'd forgive my curiosity, you read Hisoka Morow bedtime stories?" Dr. Chilton asked. "Was that something you did just for him, or have you made a point of reading to the rest of your troupe as well?"

***

"I only ever read for him on a night. I have not shared my bed with many, but I found that he liked the sound of my voice. I have read him many things, but he responded well to fairy stories. He is a child at heart," Chrollo said with a small, self-deprecating smile. "I read to the rest of my Troupe when they asked for it, or I thought that there was something that they needed to know."

***

"It's hard to imagine him like that, but I've not had the pleasure of Hisoka's company just yet. He's not being housed here," Dr. Chilton explained. "I believe that Dr. Lecter arranged for alternative housing for him. He believes that being in a cell would be detrimental to his recovery. Would you agree? It sounds like you knew him, intimately. I’m interested to hear your thoughts."

*Hisoka being kept in a hotel is stretching the rules even by Hannibal's standards. If Mr. Lucilfer can give me a reason, I might be able to overturn that and have them both where I can study them. How I’d love to get a chance to peer into Hisoka Morow’s mind.*

***

“Well, that depends on whether or not you would like a revolution on your hands,” Chrollo quipped. “Hisoka is a very charming man and does not take kindly to being told what to do. He never enjoyed having to spend time in confined spaces, but I wasn’t ever certain if that was an act
or not. You never really know with him. It would be like him to fake a phobia to further his own plans.”

Chrollo shrugged. “I have spent a few years with him, but I can not say that I truly ever got to know him. He likes to keep to himself. But he was always interesting to be around. There was never a dull moment with Hisoka there, that’s for sure.”

***

Well, it was worth a try. The fact that Hisoka values his privacy is clear. The man's past is a greater mystery than yours, Mr. Lucilfer. But I am looking forward to hearing your interactions with Will; you both have empathy disorders, but you’re on the opposite side of the scale.

"I see,” Frederick replied and silently fiddled with his cane briefly. "Well maybe he'll be good for Hannibal, it certainly sounds like he'll be able to distract him from Will. I believe that he has his sessions with Hisoka the day after yours, so here's hoping it goes smoothly. If he doesn't like to follow orders, that must have made him a challenge to have in your Spider? I would say it would be a testament to your ability as a leader if you were able to get him to behave."

***

Chrollo’s smile darkened. “I learned what motivated him, but in the end, the urge to fight me became too strong, and he forced my hand. I will not apologise for what he made me do. Hisoka does not do anything by halves, but he is also extremely proud and completely single-minded. I could not tame him, nor did I truly ever really have the desire to do so. He was too...intense for someone like me. I can’t see him appreciating Dr. Lecter. That is a man who likes to be in charge. Hisoka will not enjoy that at all.”

***

"It sounds like Hisoka might have something called Erotophonophilia," Frederick advised confidently. "If he does, well, an argument could be made in your favour. We could say that you correctly perceived Mr. Morow to be a significant threat to your life. As for the casualties in the audience, we could easily explain that away as part of your empathy disorder. With the right support, I see no reason why you couldn't return to the outside world. You just need the right person to guide you, and if you forgive me for saying so, Mr. Lucilfer, I believe that I am more than capable of being that."

***

“"I think you may be right,” Chrollo said, lowering his head ever so slightly so that he looked up at Dr. Chilton through his lashes again. “I will forgive you if you will forgive me for saying that I find you far easier to talk to than Dr. Lecter. You have...” he paused as if considering what to say. “There’s a warmth about you; I feel like I could talk with you for hours and never get bored,” he lied smoothly. “Knowing that I am in such capable hands is, I have to admit, extremely reassuring.”

***

"Well, I do my best to care for everyone in my hospital," Frederick replied as he preened under Chrollo's gaze. "I would like nothing more than to see you return to the outside. You are a very talented man. It is merely my privilege to help you find the right path.”

Pausing, he looked over at the small selection of books that had been provided and smiled as an
idea began to form. "You strike me as a fellow bibliophile; I am a published author. If you would permit, I could help you write a book about your life? Help you tell the rest of the world about your city and the daily struggle of life there? We could set up a foundation, with any money made from the sales going towards helping your people. That would be a highly effective way to garner public sympathy, for you and for Meteor City. You could be a modern-day Robin Hood, if you're familiar with the character? If not, well, I'd be happy to get you a copy of his story; he's a thief who steals from the rich to give their wealth to the poor."

***

"I could be?" Chrollo asked, amused at Chilton’s choice of words. “You would be OK with me continuing to steal as long as it aids my city? That is most generous of you. Hannibal was highly critical of the idea.”

***

Think, Frederick, you both know you didn't mean it quite like that. "Well, there are many variations on the tale of Robin Hood. In most, he does for a time, steal to help the poor. There are several versions where he is pardoned by the King, in some of those he chooses to remain with his own troupe, 'The Merry Men'. He's a popular fictional character," Dr. Chilton explained as he tried to correct his earlier slip of the tongue. "Perhaps as part of us painting you as a real-life version of the legend, we could have a fundraiser where you pretended to rob the guests? I'm sure if handled correctly that it would be well received. The upper-classes are rather eccentric, and the people of Yorknew are no exception."

***

Chrollo had to bite back his initial instinct to question the man’s sanity. He really was as stupid as he appeared. Did he not realise that if his Troupe was allowed anywhere near the rich and famous of Yorknew, that they would strip them of everything they owned, likely kill at least half of them and then leave the town, never even thinking to look back?

Schooling his features into a demure, but nonetheless impressed look, he smiled at the ‘Doctor’. “I can tell already that you are the man for me, Dr. Chilton. I’m in dire need of strict discipline and boundaries to help me fight against my instincts, and to be told that you would trust me enough to place all that temptation in front of me, but know that you would be strong enough to keep me under control.” He allowed himself to shudder ever so slightly and relaxed with a sigh. “I am indeed in safe hands, thank you, Doctor. I will be happy to help you with your book if you are willing to do all that for me.”

He held out his hand for Chilton to shake and idly wondered if his palm would be sweaty, or if it would shake in his own. “I am at your disposal,” he said, pouring all the fake admiration into his words that he could manage. “Thank you.”

***

"Well we're both reasonable men," Frederick replied confidently, enjoying the praise. "I have faith in you, and consider myself to be a good judge of character. It's clear to me how deeply you care for your city, and I don't think that you'd do anything that would have a negative impact on Meteor City, or the people living there. I am happy to facilitate your rehabilitation in any way that I can, and I feel an event with such temptations would be the perfect way to prove to the wider society that you are serious about reforming."

And I'll finally be recognised for my genius; the man who reformed the infamous Spider's leader.
“And when would this take place?” Chrollo asked. “Would you time it to coincide with the book launch? I’m no businessman, but it would seem like the best way to boost the sales potential. Would we need to go on tour? It could be fun to stage ‘robberies’ around each major city. I suspect people would find the novelty amusing and it would help to raise awareness of Meteor Cities plight.”

He smiled as if warming to the idea. “Yes, I think we will work well together, Doctor. If you don’t mind, I will keep my official therapy sessions going with Hannibal...for now. I don’t want to make him think that you had anything to do with my choice to switch away from him.” He gave the man a conspiratorial grin. “But I think we both know who I will be working with in the end, and who I will be thanking when I set foot in the outside world again.”

***

You're more astute than you realise; combining a book tour with a charity event could be interesting and attention-grabbing. Would you be willing to give a speech at the event before the donation by robberies? I have no doubt you'd have people eating out of your hand.

"It's not unreasonable to go on a book tour, and as we'd be using the proceeds from the sales, I see no reason why we couldn't combine it with a charity gala style event in a few keynote cities. The thing with novelty is a balance: too much and people get bored, but too little and people will feel like they are being left out. Speaking of which, I wouldn't say we should ignore Hannibal's contributions. After all, if he hadn't chosen to base himself here in Yorknew, we wouldn't have met. It would only be polite for us to thank him for bringing us together," Frederick replied, returning the smile. "I think it would be wise to continue your formal sessions with him; it would make it easier for us to work on our plan without drawing too much attention. We want everything to be perfect for your return to freedom, and I expect not everyone will be happy about the help I'm offering. However, they are not currently under my care; you are, Mr. Lucilfer, and I am always willing to go the extra mile for those who would make good use of the opportunities I can provide."

***

“I bow to your wisdom,” Chrollo said, dipping his head and maintaining his impeccable posture. “May I ask, how long have you known him for? I get the impression that you two are what my Troupe would call, friendly rivals?”

*He looked like he was ready to murder you before he left here, be glad that he had Abel to use as a substitute. I'm going to have to find out everything I can about him; how useful could you be for the spider, Dr. Lecter? What, exactly, are you capable of?*

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Frederick chuckled as he thought about the question. "Long enough to warrant a regular spot on his guest list for his dinner parties. Hannibal had already made a name for himself when I was still a student. You've probably already guessed that he's a bit older than me, and if you're wondering; I'm older than Will. As for us being friendly rivals. Well, there are days when I think he sees me as a sort of personal nemesis. It's always very polite between us," he paused and twirled his cane again. "Dr. Lecter does value his civility - you may have noticed that if you've ever sworn in front of him, he doesn't react well to it - he finds anything vulgar to be extremely distasteful, bordering on an affront to his person. But I fear I've already said too much, after all, I wouldn't want him to think that I was talking behind his back; I'm sure you understand, Mr. Lucilfer?"
There is something slightly unnerving about just how charming you are, even for a sociopath. I can't let myself forget that you're the leader of the Phantom Troupe. Mind you; I'd rather take my chances with you, than Hannibal. Surely even he would have to leave me alone if I became a friend of the Spider.

***

“I must admit that the revelation of his violent nature has come as rather a shock,” Chrollo lied. “He struck me as quite the harmless gentleman. I’d never felt the need to swear, or be rude in any way to him.” He gave Chilton a weak smile. “I’m glad of that now. It seems I’d quite misjudged his character. I hope that I haven’t caused you any trouble? Hannibal won’t,” he paused and made his face contort into a look of worry. “He won’t hurt you, will he?”

You’re petrified of him, aren’t you? You won’t even go into details with me. You just keep getting more and more interesting, don’t you, Dr. Lecter. Chilton’s a Weasel, but are you a Tiger?

***

"I thought it might, but it's not exactly uncommon for Blacklist Hunters. In fact, Victor LeForte seems to believe that the Hunter Association is actually giving psychopaths a free pass to commit crimes," Frederick replied thoughtfully. "I have to admit I am starting to wonder about some of Will's claims after today's events. Although, I don't feel that I need fear for my safety just yet, but I appreciate the concern."

Dr. Chilton rose from his chair, leaning slightly on his cane and added, "Between us, I have been considering getting a sword hidden inside this old thing." He rattled his stick to emphasise his point. "One can never be too careful these days. Besides, I have given you plenty to think about, and I am afraid my duties are calling. My thanks to you, Mr. Lucilfer, for a most stimulating conversation."

***

“LeFort does?” Chrollo said, raising a brow. “I must admit, I’ve never really paid his ramblings much mind, perhaps I should start?”

He rose to his feet and held out his hand for the Doctor to shake again. “It has been a most enlightening experience,” he said. “I look forward to our next meeting. I don’t suppose it would be possible for me to get my hands on a newspaper? I would quite like to see what LeForte is saying. Oh, and good luck with the cane.”

***

A newspaper? Well, I can always have my copy brought over. It’s not like I’m going to do anything other than throw it in the trash.

Smiling warmly, Frederick accepted the handshake. "I'll see what I can do," he said assuredly. "I think I still have a copy of the paper with the latest article on him. If I can find it, I'll have one of the staff bring it to you."

***

“Thank you,” Chrollo said, shaking Chilton's hand firmly. “I am so glad that we had this talk. Now, don’t let me detain you, Doctor.”

He watched as Chilton chuckled and headed for the door. “I'll be here when you next want to
chat,” he said, playing on his joke, and starting to think about everything Chilton had told him. Why would an Empath enjoy being around someone like Dr. Lecter, and exactly how ‘angry’ did he become if you were rude to him? What could Hannibal do? What was his Nen ability and exactly how could he utilise him for the spider? It sounded like Chilton would move him, and he’d have access to Will once he was out of the Nen suppressed cell; that wouldn’t be an issue, but how was he going to talk him into handing over his ability? What was it going to be like to feel?

He felt his heart rate speed up at the idea and smiled at Chilton when he turned around in the doorway. “You have certainly given me much to contemplate,” he said smoothly. “I’m not ever going to be able to forget you, Doctor.”

***

"You flatter me, Mr. Lucilfer. I'll make sure to keep you informed about any changes to what we've discussed," Dr. Chilton replied easily. "I'll try to avoid interrupting any of your sessions with Dr. Lecter in future, please call on me if you need anything further. Alas, I have other patients to see now, so I'll leave you to your reading and contemplation." Giving Chrollo a polite nod in lieu of a bow, he left the room once the guards had opened the door for him.

Well, Frederick, Chrollo Lucilfer seems to be taking the bait. With any luck, you can finally get the recognition you deserve. I don't see why everyone fawns over Hannibal so much, yes he's a gifted Therapist but he's odd. But he knows too much about my rule-bending for me to say anything. Although, if I get the chance, I would like to interview Hisoka as well; both men are as different from each other as Hannibal, and Will were. Maybe it's true what they say about opposites attracting? That might be it. I just have to get this mess with Gideon cleared up, and we'll find out. I'll finally be able to hear what Hannibal’s been saying in his sessions too. Yes, this is going to work perfectly. Thank you, Hannibal. You've given me exactly what I need to take you down a peg or two. The world’s going to see the real you soon enough.

***

Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:

Hannibal, Chrollo

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Chrollo, Chilton
Hisoka takes a gamble and decides to challenge Hannibal's authority in his next session, but realises that he can't always predict where the wheel of fate will stop when Hannibal doesn't react the way he'd anticipated.

The sound of clicking permeated the empty waiting room as Hisoka twisted the sides of the 3x3 Rubik's Cube in his hands. He wasn't really intending to solve it, simply using it as a way to pass the time while he waited. As he messed up the order of the colours, he idly thought about changing the appearance of the sides using his texture surprise, to leave some sort of a message for Dr. Lecter perhaps?

After his origami rabbit had been so well received, Hisoka's mischievous nature couldn't resist trying to leave more gifts. Today he had decided on the small toy he had brought with him, and was intending to leave it on the coffee table. While he continued to wait, he found himself contemplating what his next present should be.

Hannibal waited until the hand on his clock ticked over to the hour marker before opening his door and deliberately sounded out his steps as he made his way over to where Hisoka waited. The man was dressed in a green version of his usual outfit, and he had wristbands on; three bands of green on one arm and two, plus the golden bracelet that Hannibal had attached to him, on the other. He’d swapped out his usual high heels for green flats, and Hannibal found himself wondering at the small change; was that a suggestion from Lulu - something to make him appear more masculine, or was it his own choice? After all, he knew he had his attention now; perhaps the heels had been a decoy all along?

Hisoka was idly fiddling with a small Rubix Cube, and Hannibal had to suppress a twitch of irritation when he heard it’s quiet click.

In an effort to both make the clicking stop, and to get the man’s attention, he stepped forward, and said, “Hisoka? Please, come in.”

Smiling to himself, Hisoka didn't outwardly react to the footsteps approaching him, instead, continuing to twist the Rubik's cube into his desired pattern. At the sound of Dr. Lecter's voice, he looked up from his toy to give a polite nod.

"Of course, Doctor," he replied happily as he made the last move to complete his design, placing the gift on the coffee table as he rose to his feet. Offering Hannibal a warm smile as he entered the office, he took his usual chair and waited to see what would happen next.

Hannibal followed Hisoka into his office, noting that he’d left the Rubix Cube in the waiting room,
and let the door click closed behind him.

Walking over to the free seat, he said, “You seem slightly anxious today, Hisoka. I do hope that nothing has happened to the lovely Lulu,” he lied. “She is quite an impressive woman. I can see why you like her.”

***

*Other than all the sex?* "She's fine, just a little tired," Hisoka said in a conversational tone. "It's been wonderful to spend more time with her. Taking her shopping is always an enjoyable experience. I was surprised to bump into you at the bookstore, you know."

Getting comfortable, he shifted in his chair and crossed one leg over the other. "Do you shop there often?" he asked curiously.

***

“I do,” Hannibal said amiably. “I find they have an excellent selection. I am interested to hear what you think about the book that you chose.”

***

"To be honest it's not a subject I would normally read about," Hisoka said as he recalled his attempts to sit down and read the book. *You said there wasn't going to be a test, but I suppose it's a good job I got Lulu to look at it for me. He's actually rather good at summarising.*

***

Hannibal chuckled. “What do you usually read when you are not preparing for your fights? Maybe I can find something that would suit your tastes?”

***

Hisoka grinned at his therapist. "Normally I would be training, I admit. It takes work to keep myself in this shape, you know. As for studying, I do study magic; a good magician needs to expand their repertoire. I do on occasion study other things that I feel are relevant to me, though."

***

Hannibal arched an eyebrow and sat back, intrigued despite the obvious provocation. “And what would they be, Hisoka?”

***

Hisoka chuckled a little as if laughing at a private joke. "Well, I did find the kama sutra to be fairly interesting if a little tame."

***

“The study of anatomy is always important to any Hunter,” Hannibal smirked. “I found my time as a Surgeon still helps considerably when I’m out in the field. I know many sensitive places others do not.”

***

"That doesn't surprise me. I find that my knowledge of how to please physically can be fairly
useful in a fight. As well as vice versa." He grinned suggestively. "Knowing all the sensitive points on the body works wonderfully with my bungee gum."

***

“I bet that’s quite the experience,” Hannibal said, stamping down on his knee-jerk desire to know more. “Although, I would ask that you refrain from such demonstrations when attending my dinner table. No matter how intriguing the guests may find you.”

***

"I can assure you, Doctor, as much as I may enjoy putting on a show, Lulu wouldn't appreciate starring in that sort of performance. No matter how wonderful your guests might be," Hisoka replied with an enigmatic smile.

***

“I can assure you, all my guests are wonderful in their own way,” Hannibal said mildly. “Although,” he added as he tilted his head. “I have to admit to a certain curiosity as to what drew Lulu and your,” he smirked knowingly and continued, “Wonderful self together?”

***

Hisoka remained silent for a few moments as he thought over how best to respond. The Doctor's Nen would activate if he made up something too far fetched, so he had to be careful. What did draw me to him, or is he a them now? No, don’t think about it here. What was it that drew me to Lulu?

"Well you have met my darling Lulu, I would have thought that her allure would be plain to see." He shrugged. "I can only speak for myself, of course. She reminds me of somebody who I am now realising was more important than I thought...She's stronger than she looks, and oh so brilliant. I like power, Dr. Lecter, and she has it in spades."

***

“Power is certainly alluring,” Hannibal said smoothly. He deliberately looked Hisoka up and down. “I, too, can understand that desire.”

He sat back in his chair and changed the subject slightly, realising that Hisoka would try to derail the conversation if he allowed it to continue. Crossing his legs, he asked, “Did you manage to find yourself a suitable tailor by the way?”

***

The tailor? We never did go back out to find one. Although I remember, Dr. Lecter offered to help me with that. Straightening up in his seat, Hisoka flashed Hannibal his most seductive smile.

"Unfortunately, I haven't. So I was hoping to ask you about that," he said playfully as he ran his fingers along the hem of his shirt. "Do you think your tailor would have something suitable for this?" he asked, looking at his therapist through his lashes as he removed his shirt, and posed for him in one graceful movement.

***

Hannibal didn’t let the stab of desire that shot through him at the sight of Hisoka’s bare chest
show. So this was what you were building up to, mon cher. No wonder you were nervous, bold move, he thought, and stood up from his chair to displace his energy.

“I would have to take a closer look to be sure,” he said as calmly as he could manage, whilst his brain chased through all the different ways this conversation could go. “Please, stand,” he instructed, gesturing to the spot he wanted Hisoka to take.

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Biting back his chuckle, Hisoka stood and draped his shirt over the back of the chair before turning to face Hannibal. "Feel free to look as closely as you want," he purred and held his arms out beside him. How close will you get I wonder? Are you finally going to let yourself touch?

***

Hannibal deliberately stepped into Hisoka’s personal space and let his eyes roam across his skin. He didn’t try to hide the fact that he was enjoying what he saw. For someone who fought so often, he was remarkably scar-free.

Allowing his Nen to pool into his fingertips, Hannibal traced the line of a lipstick mark that had been left on his abdomen.

“Who kissed you, mon cher?” he asked gently, wondering if it really was Lulu. “It’s OK, you can tell me, it will remain confidential,” he explained, looking up into Hisoka’s eyes and resisting the urge to lick where he’d just touched. He wanted to find out how the man tasted so badly; it almost hurt.

***

Hisoka couldn't hide the way his breath hitched at the unexpected touch and closed his eyes for a moment. "It was Lulu," he mumbled as he opened them to look at Hannibal curiously. "It’s her idea of a good luck charm."

***

Hannibal let the rest of his hand lay against Hisoka’s chest and experimentally pressed a fingerprint into the centre of the parted lips.

“She is certainly more outgoing than I had been led to believe,” he said, smirking at the idea that came to mind as he pictured the small and shockingly dangerous woman. “I liked her a lot, what did she think of me?” he asked innocently, waiting to see what Hisoka would do next.

***

"Lulu? Well," Hisoka started and paused to carefully consider his answer. "I think you made quite an impression on her, and the invitation did give me an excuse to buy her a new dress," he offered, and bit back a resigned sigh when he felt the now familiar tingle of irritation under his skin where the bracelet lay against his wrist. The Nen was clearly reacting to his deflection.

***

Hannibal let his hand trail down Hisoka’s side and across to the bracelet. Wrapping his fingers around the man’s wrist, he brought it up to reveal the glowing word. Obey.

“I would suggest that you try that again, mon cher.” He placed his other hand on Hisoka’s waist.
"But this time, maybe answer my question?"

***

"I did," he protested weakly. "You did leave an impression. I’m not sure if she trusts you just yet. Although you’ll have the perfect opportunity to charm her at the dinner party, and put her concerns to rest."

Hisoka felt relieved as the itching started to die back. *Think, the bracelet hasn’t stopped yet, and he’s not going to let it drop until I give him a more concrete answer. But what can I tell him that won’t give the game away?* “It might help me alleviate her concerns if I could tell her who else you were expecting at this little get together? I’ve told her that you wouldn’t reveal our relationship to her family, but can you be sure your guests won’t?”

***

Hannibal watched as the light of his Nen dim slightly but didn’t entirely fade. "I see," he said and ran his Nen-laced fingers further down Hisoka’s top until they dipped ever so slightly beneath the waistband of his trousers. “Well, you can tell her that she has the word of the nations top Blacklist Hunter, that the guests will respect your privacy. They are all people of honour.” He decided not to add that a few of them possessed the quality only in the negative sense.

Why am I doing this? he wondered. *Am I really this attracted to you? Why am I not putting a stop to this?*

Feeling the tight elastic of Hisoka’s underwear, he grinned as a thought struck him. “If you want me to be able to ensure that my tailor can accommodate you, then you will have to take off your trousers,” he instructed, and reluctantly stepped back from the almost magnetic pull Hisoka was exerting over him.

***

"Just my trousers?" Hisoka asked with a cheeky grin as he quickly slipped off his pumps before allowing his trousers to pool at his feet. "I could take everything off if you wanted to be completely sure, but I understand if you have to say no." *I suppose it's a good job I wore sensible boxers, no doubt he'd have gotten suspicious if I was wearing a thong.*

***

“My tailor does not specialise in measuring for underwear, alas,” Hannibal said, not entirely able to hide his amusement as he turned to take his seat. “Please, take the chair to the back of the room,” he instructed, and sat back to enjoy the view.

***

A pity, but I'm sure you'll find a way to get me naked soon enough. Hisoka thought as he felt a small jolt from the bracelet and bit back his moan. *Not sure why he wants the chair moving though, but best not to overthink it right now.*

Collecting his pants, he placed them on the chair before turning around to give Hannibal a good view of his ass as he bent over. He was sure he could feel Dr. Lecter's hungry gaze on his body as he moved, and smirked to himself as he placed it in the back corner of the office. The tingling under his skin increased as he asked, "What would you like me to do next?"
“Bring the Chaise Lounge back to where your chair was, mon cher,” Hannibal said evenly, leaning over and picking up a pad of paper and his set of carefully sharpened pencils.

"Of course," Hisoka replied sweetly, his curiosity piqued. *Just what are you planning? There's no way you'd actually take me in your office, not yet.* He wondered as he crossed the room, swaying his hips with each step.

The chaise lounge was lighter than he'd expected, and he carried it with ease, making sure to have his back to Hannibal as he placed it down.

"Is this what you had in mind, Doctor?" he asked, becoming intrigued when he spotted the pad of paper in his hand.

Hannibal took his time appreciating the view before smiling knowingly at Hisoka. “Not quite, mon cher,” he said, allowing his accent to thicken. “Lie down please, make sure that my band is visible.”

He held the pad of paper against his crossed knees and waited, wondering what the man would do.

"Aren't still life models normally naked?" Hisoka questioned before settling down on the seat and stretching out to give Hannibal a clear view of his muscles. "Is this the part where you draw me like one of your French girls, Dr. Lecter?" he asked playfully as he shifted his position to ensure that the bracelet was on show.

Hannibal began to sketch an outline of Hisoka’s body and said cheerfully, “I don’t think you would enjoy that mon cher, all the French women I have ever drawn have been dead.”

"Well I'm not a woman so I suppose that it would be one of your Frenchs boys instead," Hisoka replied. "Or were they all dead too?"

“Most were,” Hannibal agreed amiably. “But some I did enjoy a friendly chat with every now and then. I studied medicine in France,” he explained, then, without missing a beat, asked, “How long has Lulu been here, mon cher.”

"She surprised me at my hotel, we had a pleasant reunion, and I wanted to take her out and spend some time together." *Lulu is a facet of my Illu-chan, but will your bracelet pick up on that? Just how refined is your Hatsu?*
Hannibal looked at the slight glow on the bracelet with interest. It wasn’t a strong enough reaction for Hisoka to have been outright lying, but nor was it enough to be entirely true.

He continued to sketch as Hisoka flexed his hand. “Do not move, mon cher” he instructed gently. He wondered if Hisoka thought of his time spent with the woman in their phone conversations as Lulu being here with him. “I am curious, though; why did you remove your top?”

"I'm an exhibitionist?" Hisoka replied with a playful lilt. "Although I must confess to wanting to see your reaction, it’s a little warmer than it normally is.”

“You wished to provoke me?” Hannibal asked, noting the glow fade from the band and glancing over at the burning fireplace. It was the anniversary of the day he and his sister had found Meteor City. It had not been warm back then.

"If by provoke, you mean satisfy my growing curiosity, then I suppose I did," Hisoka said, fighting the urge to move; he'd already been told off once already. "You told me to be myself. So I am.”

“You would naturally strip to provoke a reaction from someone who made you uncomfortable?” Hannibal asked as he sketched.

Hisoka chuckled quietly, "It depends on who, where, and why they make me uncomfortable.”

Noting the neutral response from Hisoka, Hannibal became curious. “And where do I sit on that scale?”

He added some finer details to a flower petal and continued to take note of the man’s reaction.

"You, Doctor?" Hisoka hummed thoughtfully. "You remind me of somebody, but I'm still trying to work out why."

He closed his eyes for a moment. "It's like a niggling sensation at the back of my mind when I listen to your voice...you don't look like anyone important from my past. It's just something in your voice if that makes sense? I'm not sure I understand it myself."

Hisoka’s golden eyes opened once more in response to Doctor's Nen, sending a pleasant feeling of fingers gliding over his skin and up his arm.

“And how does the sound of my voice make you feel, Hisoka?” Hannibal asked, intrigued by the
The question had been expected, but Hisoka had hoped the man wouldn't have asked. It was a rather cliched thing. He sighed in response, sure that the answer wouldn't be well received.

"It varies a lot, depending on the tone you take with me, or if I am looking at you." He paused, his mouth was starting to feel dry. "Sometimes you make me feel on edge. There has been a couple of times when I found it almost comforting. Does it affect your ability to be my therapist, Dr. Lecter?"

Hannibal smiled. "Of course not. You will see many people in me, I am sure."

He added a rivet to a chest piece and smiled up at his patient. You wanted to see how I would react to you removing your clothing? You really are trying to seduce me, aren’t you, mon cher. But I have to know why.

Keeping his voice deliberately neutral, but the open and friendly expression on his face, he asked, “You desire me, is that true?”

"I want to see you die. "Surely you don't need me to answer that?" Hisoka countered, wincing in response to the sudden burning sensation coming from the band. "I'd have thought it was obvious," he added, trying to ignore the bracelet for now.

"If you continue to avoid my questions, Hisoka, you will not like the result,” Hannibal said, amused at the man’s clear discomfort. He added a faint tear in the corner of his eye as he sketched, waiting patiently until Hisoka met his unflinching gaze. “Answer, mon cher. I do not like to repeat myself.”

"Yes, Doctor. It's true," Hisoka sighed petulantly as he looked away from Hannibal's stare. "Although, I'm not sure if it's just a fight I want or something more," he added through gritted teeth, gasping slightly when the burning sensations receded.

Hannibal smiled in satisfaction at the answer. You do want me. I wonder why? He returned to his drawing and began to fill in the shading around Hisoka’s outstretched right wrist.

“So you entered into a deal with me,” he said slowly. “That places you entirely under my control. I must admit that I am curious. What was your reason for doing that, mon cher?”

"I don't actually know, but it seemed like a good idea at the time. To be honest, I think you'd be surprised how many things I've done in the heat of the moment, for that exact reason,” Hisoka replied. How long are you going to keep me in this pose? Is this your idea of punishing me for stripping? "I fought with an opponent who appears to be in two places at once. It took me a while
to work out that he was using his Hatsu to clone himself, but he couldn't clone my blood on his clothes. So I let him cut off my arms,” he recounted the memory with a smile. “That was a fun match.”

***

“That was quite the impromptu and dramatic plan, I’m impressed,” Hannibal said, glancing at Hisoka’s wrist. He noted the lack of response and assumed that he was learning to mask his pleasure better. “And yet,” he pointed out. “They appear to still be here, as do you. I don’t see any scarring, so I can only assume that you know someone who can reattach limbs.” He rubbed at his wrist reflexively, and the image of the pink-haired Phantom Troupe member floated across his vision.

You left a scar, ma chere, he thought. And you didn’t have to. It’s a shame that someone with such talent would turn out to be so rude.

He darkened the outline of an ivory leaf and decided to cover all the bases. He needed to know how far Hisoka was likely to go. “Does the thought of killing me arouse you?” he asked, watching for the man’s reaction while he continued to sketch.

***

"You would be right in your assumption," Hisoka agreed happily. "I did pay quite a large amount for them to be reattached, by an old acquaintance. She wouldn't call me a friend, as much as I'd have liked her to though."

Closing his eyes, he thought about Machi and felt a small pang of regret. Despite everything he'd done, she'd always been civil with him. Machi, you never did forgive me for getting Danchou into bed, did you? Still, you could have joined us.

"I find the idea of killing strong opponents arousing.” Hisoka explained. “The more powerful they are, the better. Especially if it gets bloody.” He paused and smirked. "I think you'd look particularly delightful covered in blood, yes. I'd enjoy ending your life.” He groaned as Hannibal's Nen rewarded him, and his cock stirred at the same time that he felt his cheeks flush.

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“Friends are indeed always useful to have,” Hannibal agreed, and placed his pencil down on the paper as he leant forward, watching Hisoka closely. “How would you do it, mon cher,” he asked hungrily, enjoying the view as the man fought to remain still through his growing arousal.

***

"Sorry to disappoint, but I'm more of an opportunist. I don't plan these things out in minute detail," Hisoka replied. "It would depend on the situation we were in when the urge struck me, if we were engaged in battle, or perhaps enjoying some time in bed. I've killed during sexual encounters before; sometimes, the desire to see blood spill gets too much."

***

Hannibal nodded, understanding that desire all too well. “Do you think about us sharing a bed often, Hisoka?” he asked, returning to his sketch and added his initials into a small handkerchief. He couldn’t resist following his question up and smirked as the words left his lips. “How often do I survive?”
"Are you asking if I've been fantasizing about you when I'm back at my hotel?" Hisoka asked teasingly. "I wish I could flatter you, but I'm not usually one for solo pleasure; I find it a little boring, especially when it's so easy to find somebody to share my bed. Although if I were to entertain such thoughts, I'd say your chances of survival would correlate to how recently I've spilt blood; that and how many times you'd taken me to bed," he chuckled. "You see, I wouldn't kill you the first time unless it were in self-defence, I like to savour the powerful opponents."

"I do so love a challenge," Hannibal said, leaning back and settling into his chair as he watched Hisoka’s wrist twitch, then heard the man openly moan in pleasure. "And it seems you do too. Although, I must say that for someone who claims to desire to submit to me, you are impressively combative. Why is that, do you think?"

"Perhaps I need my dominant to prove themselves capable of handling me," Hisoka offered with a wry smile. "You said you love a challenge, so wouldn't you be disappointed if I suddenly rolled over? I'd be lying if I said I didn't consider you to be attractive, but that doesn't mean I won't make you work for my true submission. Nobody's managed to tame me yet. Don't you think you could be the one who actually does?"

Hannibal chuckled. "I suppose that would depend upon your definition of tame. I would hate to see that spark fade from your eyes, but I would also expect nothing less than your full commitment to your desired goal. After all, we are both working together to ensure your continued survival, are we not?" He tilted his head and looked Hisoka over from head to foot as he added, "Although, if you think that I will give you what you desire from me so easily, then you too, I am afraid, are mistaken. You are not the first, nor will you be the last patient who has tried to charm me."

"I'd be surprised if I were," Hisoka replied with a chuckle. "Although, if you were to give in easily, then you wouldn't be interesting, and then I really would have to kill you. Challenge is part of the allure; it's a vitally important part of the game, don't you agree?"

Hannibal openly laughed, "I do, mon cher, and I am glad that you understand. Variety is the spice of life. If a Master can not keep his submissive’s interest, then he does not deserve the position.” He trailed his eyes along the long length of Hisoka’s legs. “And the same goes for the submissive.” One was propped up, supporting his arm, and the other was lying loosely, openly displaying everything for him to see. His mouth watered as he thought about biting into the flesh of his inner thigh and the sounds Hisoka would make as he did so.

How long would it take for him to realise what was happening? he wondered. Probably not too long...unless he was distracted.

Dragging his thoughts back to the here-and-now, he licked his lips and said, “In the spirit of challenge, tell me about the first person you killed during sex.”
Why? What good does it do you to know about that? Hisoka wondered as he growled in frustration. "I slit my Father's throat," he replied a little more curtly than he had intended. "It was simple enough to hide one of the kitchen knives, then, when he was distracted," he glowered at Dr. Lecter. "I reached under the pillow and slashed at his neck. He grabbed for the blade in his confusion. Then, when he realised what I'd done, he tried to stop the blood flow. I sat and watched. I can still see it; the panic in his eyes as he drowned in his own blood. Sometimes the memory is vivid enough that I can smell it." Hisoka closed his eyes and snarled when he felt the band trigger in an attempt to calm him.

No, I don't want to be calm, you stupid trinket.

"How many ways can your Nen influence how I'm feeling?" he asked with a sneer.

***

"I am yet to discover a limit," Hannibal said amiably. "But thank you for your honesty. I can not help you if I do not understand you," he explained, seeing the anger in the Hunter’s eyes.

Turning back to his drawing, he paused for a moment before saying, “Something as clever as that required pre-planning. That’s a stark difference from how you suggested you usually kill. How many had you killed before your Father?” he asked kindly.

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"The boy I pushed out of the tree, was the only one before that," Hisoka replied with a sigh.

***

“And how long had the abuse been going on for?” he asked, adding a reflection in a Greave.

***

Hisoka averted his gaze as he spoke. "It went on for a number of months...it's not something I often think about. The specifics are hazy...I just wanted it to stop." When another calming sensation came over him, he groaned in annoyance. "Just like I want this dam bangle to stop messing with my head!"

***

“You took control back over a situation in which you had none,” Hannibal observed calmly. “At first, there is confusion, after that placation, and then,” Hannibal looked up from his work. “You must either fight or submit. It seems to me that you have been fighting all your life, mon cher,” he added in a softer tone.

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Looking back at his therapist, Hisoka simply stared.

***

“Have you ever truly submitted to anyone?” Hannibal asked curiously.

He suspected the answer was no, which was why he had been sure to go about things the way he had. Both his curiosity and his drawing need further details though and so, making sure to flip the sketch pad shut, Hannibal rose from his seat.
Hisoka had experienced violence at a very young age, and Hannibal knew from experience that that would have left its mark. Crossing the short distance to stand in front of Hisoka, he knelt beside him and waited for his answer.

***

"Only once, because I didn't know better. I didn't know how to fight back," Hisoka mumbled as he watched Hannibal through curious eyes. "Although you'd probably say it doesn't count, I mean it wasn't really my choice. What would you class as true submission? I've topped from the bottom before when I felt an urge to explore that part of myself, but it never felt...right."

The sudden stab of pain caused Hisoka to visibly flinch, and he hissed as his eyes slid closed to savour the feeling. *Am I just looking for the right partner? But I have Illu-chan, and he makes me happy, doesn't he?*

***

“Perhaps the fact that you have never found someone who could Master you is the issue, not the fact that it felt wrong to top from the bottom,” Hannibal suggested. “Someone who could not tell what you were doing, does not deserve to dominate someone as strong and cunning as you, mon cher. True submission, only comes when the one who is submitting chooses it, wholly and with everything they are.” He tilted his head and wondered if Hisoka didn’t see it, or was playing ignorant. *You have Lulu; I have only met her for a few minutes, but even I could see that she is the definition personified. Do you not know what you have on your hands? “And their Dominant does the same. True submission requires a willing partnership; would you not agree?”*

He reached out and hovered his hand over Hisoka’s chest, not allowing the man to distract him from the reason he’d left his seat. “I must check something, mon cher,” he said. “Please forgive me if my hands are cold. I have a little technique to take the edge off; you have felt it before, but I will need to touch you. I want you to follow my instructions, but you can answer my question in your own time.”

Without waiting for an answer, Hannibal bent down and placed his right hand against Hisoka’s left rib cage. He trailed his Nen infused hand up to feel for the top rib and ordered, “Breath in.”

***

*Check what?* Hisoka wanted to ask, but the question died on his lips as he felt Hannibal's hand against his chest and blinked. *He said to breathe in? Why?* He wondered as he complied and watched to see what would happen.

***

Hannibal traced the span of the rib and said, “Breath out,” as he moved down to the one below and felt Hisoka shudder from the feedback of his band. “You’re doing well, mon cher. Thank you for taking the time to think about your answer.”

***

Hisoka fought the urge to lean into the pleasant touch and tried to stay still. Listening to his doctor's voice, he continued to do as he was told. Still, he curiously watched him and wondered, *Just what is he doing?*
“Breath in,” Hannibal said, feeling the next rib and watching Hisoka’s reaction closely. Idly he noted a healed over break in the bone.

_That’s one_, he thought.

***

Hisoka nodded and continued to follow the instructions.

***

As he moved his hands over his ‘submissives’ chest, Hannibal continued instructing the man to breathe rhythmically and deeply, waiting for him to answer. He counted five healed, but never correctly set ribs; just the same as his medical report indicated. Somehow, he’d healed from the damage of the Arena, but had kept these.

***

"Then I've never been anyone's submissive," Hisoka mumbled as he did his best to work out what Hannibal had been trying to achieve. "Lulu wants me as her Master, and I want to be that for her. She was, waiting for the right person. So maybe I just haven't found," he paused and sighed. "What were you checking for?" He asked, trying to change the subject.

***

“Your ribs, mon cher,” Hannibal explained softly. “Your medical records indicated that you have five breaks that have not healed properly. They were old. I wanted to see if I could verify that.”

He gently cupped his hand around the base of Hisoka’s neck and stroked his thumb along his jaw. “Despite being crushed in the collapse of the Arena, those are the only wounds that remain on your body. Nen, emotion and physical condition all affect our bodies in different ways. You have been through significant trauma, and I needed to confirm what the doctors at the hospital had found. I promised you that I would assure your safety, and I always keep my word. You have been good, and so,” he began to increase the pressure on a cluster of nerves at the base of Hisoka’s neck. “You may have your reward.”

He waited a few moments to let the information sink in before pressing harder. He knew that it would send pain causing down his spine and couldn’t wait to watch his reaction.

***

Hisoka felt Dr. Lecter's hand against his throat and shivered in anticipation. _Are you going to hurt me?_ He thought as he closed his eyes and allowed himself to surrender with a quiet moan in response to the pain shooting down his spine. _Yes, like that. You know what you're doing, don't you? More, give me more._ He whimpered, and tensed in reaction to the buried memories trying to resurface.

The grip on his neck didn't let go, and for a moment, Hisoka thought he could hear a voice telling him to be silent. His heart skipped as he bit down on his tongue to keep from making more sound. _Quiet, have to stay quiet. Need to calm down, and be quiet._

***

Hannibal watched with curiosity as the man below him slowly morphed from pleasantly euphoric to panicked over the course of a few seconds.
I wonder what memories stirred inside that beautifully broken mind of yours Hisoka? he thought as he quietly he knelt beside him, and took a firmer grip at the base of his neck. Releasing the pressure on his nerves, he said in an assertive tone, “Look at me, mon cher.”

The simple command would, if Hisoka complied, allow him the escape he needed to come back to reality. For a brief moment, he took the time to memorise what he had seen. Hisoka may not think of him on a night just yet, but Hannibal wasn’t delusional enough to believe that he himself wouldn’t be replaying this moment when he was alone.

***

“Look at me, Mon Cher.” Hisoka stilled as the words broke through his mental haze; it wasn’t the same voice that had wanted him to be silent. Look at you? he wondered as he opened his eyes and tried to recall where he was. Glancing around at the bookcases, he lowered his gaze and blinked as he took in the sight of Dr. Lecter kneeling beside him, he took in a deep breath and felt his band working to calm his mind.

***

“Welcome back,” Hannibal said easily. “You left for a moment.” He stroked Hisoka’s shoulder soothingly. “Please, mon cher, tell me, where did you go inside that wonderful mind of yours?”

***

"Somewhere I don't want to go back to," Hisoka mumbled looking around the office as the last of his anxiety faded away. "Father...he's dead, he's staying dead. I hallucinated, I think?" He frowned. "He was shouting."

***

“I see,” Hannibal said, watching Hisoka calm. “And what did he shout?”

***

"That I had to be quiet, that he didn't want to hear me," Hisoka replied stiffly. "He'd beat me until I learnt to behave...maybe that's why I have the broken ribs? I don't want to talk about it," he added as he continued to stare into Hannibal's eyes like a lifeline. "I could...be good for you too."

***

Hannibal smiled warmly, not wanting to tell the man no, but knowing that he couldn't give him what he was asking for just yet.

“Then there is beautiful poetry in your vengeance,” he said instead. “You stole his voice in the end, Hisoka. You were a brave boy. You did the right thing.”

He moved his hand to rest over his submissive’s heart and noted it’s quickened pace. Looking down at him, he continued to rub small circles into his skin with his thumb. “I told you before, that if you should ever need it, I would be your outlet to ground yourself,” he reminded him. “Do you need that now, Hisoka? You don’t have to speak, not if you don’t want to. You can nod if it is something that you want from me, but I would like to know the answer.”

***

No, I wasn’t, but I'm not that kid anymore. "What did you have in mind? I can't consent if I don't
know what I'm agreeing to. That was the point you were making earlier, right?” Hisoka asked. You're very touchy-feely today, is it because I removed my clothes?

***

Hannibal smiled kindly and said, “I am offering you two choices, one will give you immediate and sharp pain, that will provide you with immediate relief but will wear off in time.” He monitored the beat of Hisoka’s heart as it returned to an almost normal rhythm. “And the other will slowly build, which will allow you something to focus on as we talk. In total, you will likely experience around ten minutes of continuous pain from the second option, and a few minutes of extreme pain, followed by a throbbing sensation afterwards from the first.”

He continued to watch Hisoka’s reaction as he added, “You are, of course, free to say no to my offer, and we will return to our talk with no repercussions.”

***

"Would you want me to stay quiet with the first one?” Hisoka asked cautiously. The way the options had been presented had him curious as to what they could be. "Or would you want to hear me?"

***

Hannibal cocked his head curiously. “I do not require your silence, Mon Cher,” he assured him. “This room is soundproofed for our privacy. You may make as much or as little noise as you desire. This is for you, not for me,” he explained. “I will help you find your balance again, and it will be safe.”

***

*It will be safe? Why is that strangely not reassuring coming from you?* Hisoka nodded and swallowed, "The first one, then, Doctor."

***

“As you wish,” Hannibal said and rose gracefully to his feet.

He walked to a small cabinet and opened the right door. Taking a moment, he pulled out a thin cane and walked back over to stand by Hisoka’s legs.

“Lift your legs into the air, please,” he said evenly and waited.

***

Curious, Hisoka let his eyes track the therapist's movements around his office until he came back to the Chaise Lounge.

“Are you going to beat me?” he asked, eyeing the thin rod in Hannibal’s hand as he shifted his position.

***

Hannibal sat down and pulled Hisoka’s legs down over his lap. “I will cane each foot three times, yes. If you wish for more after that, you can say so. I will not go above ten though; that risks damage. Do you agree to these terms, Hisoka?” he asked, keeping his voice both clear and calm as
he checked the man’s pulse through his ankle.

***

"I've never been caned before," Hisoka replied thoughtfully suddenly glad he'd forgone his heels that morning. "Do I need to be careful after this? Is there anything I need to do to ensure my feet heal properly?"

***

Hannibal nodded appreciatively at Hisoka. “I can assure you, Hisoka, that I will explain each step as is appropriate. I am a fully qualified surgeon; I understand the anatomy of the human body on an intimate level. You are in safe hands. Do not fret about the future. Stay in the present with me, mon cher. Let me guide you through this.”

***

Hisoka blinked and opened his mouth to protest before changing his mind and laying back against the back of the chaise lounge. I've asked Illu-chan to trust me, he always has. He thinks I want to submit; I need to act a bit more like Illumi would. "Alright, I think I'm ready."

***

Lifting Hisoka’s right leg and placing the cane against the arch of his foot, Hannibal nodded again. “Thank you, Hisoka,” he said indulgently. “We shall now begin; do not forget to breathe.”

He drew the rattan back and brought it down, with a clean, hard stroke. The sound of the wood moving through the air was exhilarating, and as it made contact, Hannibal felt the familiar thrill of power rise within him. He knew well the agonising stinging pain that would soon settle into Hisoka’s feet and, eventually, up his legs as well.

“One,” he said, and drew the cane back.

***

Why would I forget to- Hisoka wondered, losing his train of thought as a stripe of warm pain blossomed through his right foot and he cried out in a mixture of shock and pleasure. OK, I think I understand now. He blinked as a small whimper escaped and he had to adjust to the new sensation. It was similar to some of the experiences of pain that he'd enjoyed in the past, but this was much more intense. Taking a deep breath, he closed his eyes and waited for the endorphins he knew would come.

***

Hearing Hisoka cry out was music to Hannibal’s ears, and he felt his heart rate increasing as he imagined what other sounds would slip from the man’s beautiful lips.

“Très bien, mon cher; very good,” he corrected, catching himself before he entirely slipped into French. “Now for the next.”

He brought the second switch down just above the light red line of the other and had to fight back his desire to moan. The impact felt so right.

“Two,” he breathed.
Hisoka's eyes flew open as he cried out in response to the twin line of fire from the second stroke of the cane. He arched slightly as he felt the burning sting climbing his calf and moaned. "Again?" he asked breathlessly.

Hannibal held tightly onto Hisoka’s leg as he waited to bring the cane down for the third time. This one would be higher still and aimed at the most sensitive spot of the man’s foot.

“Always, mon cher,” he promised and swallowed when he realised that he meant every word. Hisoka was becoming visibly aroused, and Hannibal yearned to know what the third stroke would do.

With a firm swing of his arm, he struck his mark.

“Three,” he said and held in the shudder of desire that swept over him.

Hisoka nodded eagerly waiting for the next stroke; licking his lips, he moaned again. "Yes, show me just how much you're willing to hurt me. As the next blow landed, he couldn't stop his body's reaction, bucking his hips as he felt his cock hardening. "Fuck," he panted, riding out the endorphin high. His heart felt like it was beating wildly in his chest. "It tingles," he added with a quiet laugh. "I like it, next foot?" he asked, hopefully, surprised by how willing he'd become. We're just playing a game; that doesn't mean I can't enjoy it.

Chuckling, Hannibal carefully placed Hisoka’s right foot down onto his leg and picked up his left.

Holding it firmly in place, he ran the cane across his sole. “Of course, mon cher. I promised you six strokes.” Pressing down harder, he purred. “I always keep my promises.”

With a lightning-fast flick of his arm, he landed a punishing blow in the centre of his foot and bit his tongue to keep himself from moaning. Why is this so good? What’s so special about you? Yes, Hisoka, scream for me.

"Promises?" Hisoka asked not quite comprehending as he lost himself to the endorphin high and cried out in ecstasy when the cane landed. "Yes," he moaned bucking up again, feeling the fire climbing his right leg joining in a duet with the fresh sting flowing through his foot. "Hurt me," he groaned, closing his eyes and surrendering to the high.

“Yes, mon cher,” Hannibal agreed. The reflex had been automatic, and he realised that he’d only just managed to catch it. Staring down at the writhing man beneath him, he felt his mouth go dry. Hisoka truly was captivating.

You're going to be mine, he thought, as a primal need swelled up inside him. I will have you. You belong with me, Hisoka, like this. Look at yourself. You are so beautiful. You’re perfect; you’re mine.
Moving the rattan up, Hannibal brought the next blow down with a deafening crack. It left a brilliant red line behind that mirrored the other foot exactly.

“Two,” he gasped.

***

"Again," Hisoka moaned as he gripped the sides of the chaise lounge, continuing to pant. "Do it again," he murmured through the haze that had taken over his mind. Why did I never try this before? he wondered as he looked up at Hannibal through his lashes. You look good like this; being in charge suits you. Maybe I should get you to beat me next week too?

***

Hannibal couldn’t hold back the dark chuckle that emerged from his lips. “So good, mon cher,” he praised. “Let me hear your beautiful voice.”

The pain was sending the man into a highly suggestible headspace, and he wanted to set the message in early: He was not his father, and he wanted to hear everything.

Aiming for the same, sensitive spot as the first foot, he brought the cane down for the third and final time.

“Three,” he said, not hiding the hunger from his voice. See me, Hisoka. See how much I want you. Know where you belong.

***

Throwing his head back against the back of the chair, Hisoka closed his eyes and howled in delight. Fuck, I want to cum. He blinked through the haze and tried to focus as the burning continued to climb up his limbs. It was closely followed by a sensation not dissimilar to stinging nettles dragging over his skin. Why is this so good? he asked as he tried to focus on looking at Dr. Lecter, but his head felt too heavy, and he flopped back down with a contented sigh. "What now?" he asked thickly. "You said, you'd guide me.’

***

Hannibal smiled like a shark as he laid the foot down onto his legs. He lay the cane beside him and wrapped both his hands around Hisoka’s right foot, placing his thumbs across the red lines that were still developing on the man’s skin.

“Now I care for you, Mon Cher. We can continue the beating in a bit if you need it, but,” he explained as he began to massage the skin. “For now, I must make sure that you are safe.” He let his face show his amusement as he added. “My apologies if this hurts. It is a necessary evil.”

***

Hisoka’s chuckle quickly morphed into a satisfied groan as Hannibal's fingers started to work the flesh of his foot. "You don't need to be gentle," he grumbled as he tried to press himself against his therapist’s hands. "I'm not going to break."

***

Lessening the pressure, Hannibal raised an eyebrow and quirked his lip. “That is very good to know, mon cher. I will bear that in mind.” He poured his aura out through his fingertips, spreading
it deep into the tissue of Hisoka’s foot, feeling for any possible damage. This was going to prove to be a more entertaining session than he’d anticipated. Once he believed that his message had been received, he pointedly reapplied the pressure, making sure to increase it in the areas that he knew were not damaged.

***

Smug bastard. Hisoka growled internally as Hannibal lightened his touch. "I'm not a doll," he groused before moaning at the renewed pressure and bucking his hips. "I feel...warm and," his breath hitched. “Tingly."

***

"That’s good,” Hannibal said gently. “Call out if it hurts like it did when I hit you.” He continued to massage the flesh and pressed directly over the darkest bruise, wanting to see what Hisoka would do.

He allowed his Nen to travel through his ankle and up his leg, chasing his blood vessels and causing him to let out a low moan when he saw the man’s cock twitch. Patience, Hannibal, he told himself. You have time. You can not push him. He has to come to you; stick to the plan.

"Tell me what you need, Hisoka,” he said, to stop himself from reaching out to touch. “I am a professional, after all. You are in safe hands.”

***

What I need? What do I need right now? I feel good. Hisoka tried to work out what he could ask for. How far will he let this go? "Close, want...to cum," he said eventually. "So close, hurts," he added as he tried to wriggle his toes and hissed at the resulting pain before laughing in delight. "But I like it."

***

“I can see that,” Hannibal said, inwardly groaning, and licking his lips at the thought of taking Hisoka into his mouth and finally being able to taste him.

“Alas, I can’t do that for you, mon cher,” he said apologetically, allowing his eyes to settle on the bracelet. Pressing hard into a sensitive area of muscle at the top of the arch in Hisoka’s foot, he continued, “I have to take care of you. I am your Doctor. But what I can do is instruct you to count out loud for me. Do that, mon cher; count down from ten to one.”

***

"Counting?” Hisoka questioned with a quiet whine as another wave of pain flowed through his limbs. Why do you want me to do that? He wondered as he tried to pull himself back to the present; the endorphin high was still threatening to send him floating away.

Unable to think of a reason to disobey, he closed his eyes and took a deep breath, then began his count down. "Ten...nine...eight...seven," he groaned as Hannibal brushed over a sensitive spot and mentally tried to remember where’d left off. "Six...five...four," he paused for another breath. "Three...two...one?” Curious to see what would happen he waited before starting to ask, "Why did yo-

The thought was forgotten as an intense but pleasurable jolt shot up his arm from his wrist. Moaning loudly, he closed his eyes as he felt himself shudder with the force of his climax. "Fuck,"
he gasped when he was able to speak. "What...just happened?"

***

“You just submitted, mon cher,” Hannibal said, forcing his breaths to remain even. Hisoka was so responsive. It had taken every ounce of self-control he’d had not to move his hands beyond the man’s feet. But, he thought to himself. He was going to be a pleasure to play with.

He’d watched with bated breath as Hisoka’s countdown had neared one. He’d wanted to know if his assessment had been correct, and the feedback alone would be enough to tip him over the edge, and he hadn’t been disappointed.

The man’s orgasm had been captivating, and the slight sheen of sweat that covered his skin was making his mouth water.

“I hope that you remember this the next time you question whether submission is ever truly possible for you,” he said, stroking the sensitive skin of his ankle soothingly.

***

Hisoka blinked as he came down from the high of his climax. I submitted? But you said that both of us need to choose, to be a partnership. "I did?" he asked when he found his voice. So you are interested in me, that's what you're hinting at, right? He gave Hannibal a knowing smile before he continued, "That was, intense. I'm in your hands, what happens next?"

***

Hannibal chuckled and said, “Yes, mon cher, it was. Let me get what you need to clean up.”

Lifting Hisoka’s legs, he got up to collect some wet-wipes from a draw and set the cane back into the cabinet as he did so.

Walking back over to the chaise lounge, he handed them to him. “You may clean yourself up,” he said, resisting the urge to lick his lips at the sight of the wet patch now forming in the man’s boxers. “It would not be appropriate for me to do it. Would you prefer me to stay with you,” he gestured to the seat below Hisoka’s feet. “Or return to my chair?”

***

"Thank you," Hisoka said quietly as he accepted the wet wipes and glanced back at Hannibal’s chair. Do I want you this close while I'm cleaning myself? I'd rather you weren't in the room, but that's not an option. "I think it would be better if you sat back in your chair. I'd feel more comfortable."

He waited for a moment before starting to clean himself up. No point worrying about an audience if there's no avoiding it. Hisoka reminded himself with a sigh. Walking back is going to be an interesting experience. "Do you want me to get dressed?” he asked once he'd finished up.

***

As Hannibal sat back down in his chair, he raised an eyebrow. “No,” he said, picking up his paper and pen. "Firstly, our session is not over,” he explained gently. “And secondly, you will need to rest your feet for at least another half an hour. I refuse to allow you to put pressure upon them until then. But that does not mean that we can not continue our talk. I am here for you; what would you like to discuss?”
"I'm still coming down, so please forgive me if I'm a little out of sorts," Hisoka replied as he lay back down in an attempt to get comfortable. "There is something I would like to know; I trust that I'm allowed to ask questions?"

Hannibal nodded. “Entirely understandable,” he said and looked up from his drawing at the unexpected request. Giving Hisoka a small smile, he said, “I would have thought that I’d sufficiently demonstrated that you have the right to make requests, mon cher. I asked, please, go ahead.”

"You said I’d truly submitted," Hisoka began and gave Hannibal a sly smile. "But you also informed me that the dominant also had to agree to be part of a consenting partnership. So I'm starting to wonder if I wasn't your patient, would you want me sexually? You didn't seem that surprised I stripped for you, but I can't say I wasn't displeased with the end result."

Outwardly, Hannibal gave the appearance of thinking about Hisoka’s question. Inwardly, he was impressed. Hisoka, it would seem, did want to play, after all.

“I wasn’t surprised, no.” He gave the man a broad grin and continued, “It takes more than the unexpected sight of flesh to surprise me, mon cher. But I do concede that the move was unexpected.”

He paused as he worked hard to give the impression of thinking over his words. “You are an extremely attractive man,” he said eventually. “As your therapist, there are obvious boundaries that I must maintain, but,” he met Hisoka’s eyes. “I will not lie to you. That, you have my word on.”

"Am I more attractive when I'm writing in pain for you?” Hisoka asked as he experimentally stretched out his left leg, wincing a little. "I'm just curious. Yes, I know how you feel about lies. I have your Nen around my wrist to remind me.

Hannibal grinned in approval. Good, you do understand me.

After letting the pause drag on significantly, he said, “What is important in this situation is how you feel, mon cher. You are my priority, but in order to help you, I must first know you. He picked up his pencil and began to fill in the bark on a tree branch.

“I believe it is my turn to ask the next question,” he said, taking the opportunity to change the subject. He couldn’t afford to let Hisoka steer the conversation too much, and he hoped that the change of topic would be distracting enough to keep his mind off delving too deeply into his sexual preferences. “Tell me, what are three qualities that you admire the most about Lulu.”

Three things about Lulu? She's based on Abaki so would it count as a lie if I used her? Although
there must be some overlap between her and Illumi. Hisoka hummed thoughtfully. I have to tread carefully.

"If I had to pick, I would say I enjoy her wit. She makes me smile and laugh, mainly because she sees the world so differently to myself," he offered for the first thing on his list. "She's never been afraid of me, which is refreshing and for the last thing, I would say that I admire her determination." He smiled at his therapist as his bracelet rewarded him with a feeling of fuzzy contentment.

***

Hannibal listened intently to Hisoka’s answer and nodded as he added the ten of spades to the break just to the right of his sternum.

“She sounds like she compliments you well,” he said, taking a mental note of his list. “But it is your turn to ask the next question, so please, go ahead.”

***

My turn? So we’re taking turns to get to know each other? Surely you’re accounting for the possibility that I might ask something personal? “If you’re a trained surgeon, why are you a therapist? Surely working in theatre would give you a greater sense of control over others,” Hisoka paused to let the words hang between them. “Or am I mistaken?”

***

“A patient died,” Hannibal said evenly. “Practicing therapy allows me to help people without the risk of unnecessary death. There are many forms of control, mon cher, but I find that the only reliable kind is the one we have over ourselves.”

He returned to his sketch. “Tell me three qualities about your Lulu that you admire, which you, yourself, do not possess.” Let’s see how self-aware you are.

***

"Lulu loves her family..." Hisoka responded almost immediately, "She..." he swallowed. "She knows how to make you feel like you belong even if you don't think you do..." he blinked and took a breath. "She's not afraid to show how she feels."

How personal will you let me get? Perhaps I should test while you seem to be in an agreeable mood. “My turn,” he purred, hitching up his mental guard again. “I’m curious what qualities you loved about your sister, being an only child it’s something I’ve often wondered about. What would you say you loved the most about her?”

***

Hannibal listened to Hisoka’s answers carefully, making a mental note of the pattern that was emerging. It was pleasing to see.

Hisoka’s question was an interesting one, but perhaps not as hard to answer as the man would have liked. He still missed his Mischa, but he had come to terms with her death long ago.

“Mischa was young when she was taken from me,” he said evenly and without hesitation. “She was innocent, in a world that was not. She helped me understand many things about it, as well as myself, but it was her innocence that will always remain with me.”
He allowed himself a few seconds to remember her smile as he stared into the flames of his fireplace. Bringing himself back to the present, he turned to Hisoka and asked, “Do I intimidate you, mon cher?”

He knew the answer, but he had to hear it from the man’s lips.

***

"That depends if you'd like me to be, although I'll admit that you have your moments," Hisoka conceded with a chuckle. "How much of that is you, and how much is buried memories that you stir within me, I'm not sure. However, I do admire your Nen, as frustrating as it can be. I really did think you were a specialist; it was a wonderful surprise when it turned out that I was wrong." I'm still not sure who you remind me of, but only one of the two men I'm thinking of was intimidating to me. Even then the circumstances were different; I'm not afraid to die anymore.

"Have you ever wondered if you'd have taken a life if your sister hadn't been murdered?" he asked after a moment of contemplation.

***

Hannibal smiled, sketching a perfect rendition of a crystal at the bottom of Hisoka’s chest. “I have, mon cher,” he answered smugly and chuckled inwardly as he thought over everything Hisoka had said to him.

“You said that your Lulu is not afraid to show how she feels,” he summarised. “What would it be like for you if you were to be similarly unafraid?”

***

I wonder what conclusion you drew from that, are you like me? Do you get pleasure from the act of taking a life? "I see," Hisoka replied. "I'd imagine that my life would have been very different, I doubt I'd be here," He thought of Abaki and the times he'd bottled his feelings for her. "I might have never left the circus, or I would have left much later. There's a strong possibility I'd have always ended up at Heaven's Arena, but I don't know if I'd have crossed paths with Danchou in this alternative timeline of my life. After all, it was a chance meeting that set my desire for him in motion, just like it was chance that I met Gon at the exam."

Shifting his weight, Hisoka winced as his foot caught the side of the chaise lounge, and groaned softly. Walking back to the hotel is going to be very interesting. "If Mischa hadn't been taken from you, who do you think would have been your first kill?" he asked with a wry smile, deciding to take a gamble.

***

“I have never considered that possibility,” Hannibal said honestly. “I can not say that I know. My life would have been entirely different, though; that I can say for a certainty.”

He added more detail to the crystal. Looking up, he was pleased to see that Hisoka was still relaxed. “Do you want me to desire you?”

***

Well, it would undoubtedly make my plan easier if you did. "Would it make a difference if I did? You’ve made it clear that you have a line in the sand that you can't cross. We don't always get what we want," Hisoka replied evenly.
"Surely you'd find it strange for me not to want my interest returned?" he asked when, much to his chagrin, he couldn't think of a better question.

***

“You strike me as the kind of man who would relish the challenge,” Hannibal said honestly, noting Hisoka’s evasive answer. “Am I a challenge to you?” he asked, wondering how long it would take for Hisoka to slip and allow his discomfort to show. The band had a faint, but still present glow emanating from it.

***

Hisoka grinned as he continued to ignore the itching that had started to spread under his band. _Should I push my luck a little more? I do need more information on how his Hatsu works. Think. What would Danchou do? He always seems to know how to get people to reveal it, flattery perhaps? No, that's too obvious, I could just force the topic? Is it worth the risk? When I still don't know if this can kill me, but my instinct tells me that he wouldn't let it. _Raking his gaze down and back up Dr. Lecter's body, he hummed. "You're definitely an obstacle, but your Nen is a delightful challenge, and I'm enjoying the puzzle of figuring it out," he settled on a half-truth to see how quickly his punishment would escalate. "Do you want to present me with a challenge? Surely you're aware what happens to those who do."

***

“It will keep getting worse if you avoid answering my question, Hisoka,” Hannibal said in a gentle tone as he added a small gash to the picture, just above Hisoka’s right nipple. “It’s rude not to obey when you have agreed to abide by the rules.”

He sketched a stylized wand poking out from the gash. “It’s entirely up to you, of course. At some point, everyone wants to know what will happen.” He smiled at the memory of Mason Verger. He had been wearing a far stronger band than Hisoka, but he didn’t need to know that. “One man chose to keep disobeying and ended up gnawing half a finger off.” He didn’t need to tell him about the fact that that was after he’d eaten half his face.

He watched his submissive trying to breathe through the discomfort. “As for your questions, I think the answer would be yes to both. I always like my patients to challenge me. It helps me grow as a person and keeps my mind sharp. But you might find that our interactions will end rather differently from your last opponents.”

He returned to his sketch. It was almost complete, but they still had time to kill. He wondered how long Hisoka could hold out. He suspected it would be far longer than most, but he would break in the end. Looking down at his sketch, he frowned. The idea wasn’t as appealing as he’d expected.

Pushing the thought aside, he focussed on his patient. “I would advise you to tell me whether you want me to desire you or not,” he said, and waited, hoping that Hisoka would make the right choice.

***

"So it won't kill me?" Hisoka asked through gritted teeth, the itching had become an unpleasant burning, but he was confident that he could last a little longer. Growling, he clutched at his chest when his heart started to race. "Or would you do it first? On account of my rudeness?" Keep focused, he's not confirmed it can kill yet. Does that mean it can't?
“No,” Hannibal said evenly, “It will not kill you. It will reach a peak and stay there. Eventually, if you continue to resist, you will likely start to harm yourself. I will restrain you if that happens. If, after that, you still refuse to answer, you will risk insanity. I would not like for that to happen.”

Hannibal watched Hisoka grind his teeth as he tested his new boundaries. “It would take more than the testing of your boundaries to make me want to kill you, mon cher. I enjoy our talks, but you can take your time.”

"You at my feet, broken and bloody is what I want," Hisoka snarled as he continued to resist the urge to scratch at his arm. "I don't need you to want me. It's irrelevant if you want me or not. Half of the game is the chase, in persuading you, in trying to make you desire me. The more you resist, the more I'd enjoy it when you do eventually give in."

He licked his lips and took a deep breath as his heart started to slow down to its normal rhythm. "I want to make you desire me for my own amusement. It's more enjoyable, seeing the betrayal in their eyes when I break them and tear them apart. Do I want you to want me?" he asked rhetorically wincing at a sudden flare of Nen from the bracelet as his skin started to flush pink. "Yes, so that it'll be more satisfying," he groaned. "When I get to lick your blood from your wounds. I want to watch, as the life fade from your eyes, and you to know that I was the one who bested you."

Hisoka gave a bark of bitter laughter, "Surely, your band can't make me anymore insane than I already am?"

"Mon cher," he breathed, leaning forward. “I think you are exquisite and entirely sane. You see the world differently than others, as do many in our profession, and you paint a captivating picture. I look forward to the competition.

He paused for a second and leant back, adding a drop of blood to a rose’s thorn. “It is not my job to ‘fix’ you, even though you may believe that you are broken. I am here to teach you. To ensure that you are no longer a threat to innocents.”

He checked the time and waited until the Nen feedback running through Hisoka had completely calmed before saying. “We still have ten minutes until you can leave, mon cher. Shall we continue with our questions, or would you prefer silence? Your official therapy session has finished. You are now here as my guest.”

"Do you draw the same line in the sand with me as your guest as you do with me as your patient?" Hisoka asked, still slightly breathless from the ordeal he'd subjected himself to.

Hannibal smirked. “I will not sleep with you, if that is what you mean. However,” he said as he closed his sketch pad and placed it onto the table beside him. “It would be rude of me not to offer you a drink, especially after what you just put yourself through.”

He looked genuinely pained as he added, “I am afraid I cannot offer you alcohol; some codes of conduct still apply whilst you are in my office.” He sighed but continued. “I do have a wide
selection of coffees, teas and assorted fruit juices, as well as bottled water, complete with the safety seal.”

***

Flexing the fingers of his right hand, Hisoka winced a little, the movement stung, but at least the burning had subsided. Well, I got something worthwhile from that test. I feel like I've just spent several hours in the gym though. Experimentally he moved his legs and grunted at how stiff his limbs felt.

"Water would be good," he sighed. "If it's not too much trouble," he added for politeness sake. Eyeing the sketchpad, he asked, "What was your motivation for drawing me?"

***

“As you wish,” Hannibal said with a slight bow and selected a bottle from the fridge he’d had built to resemble his other cabinets. As he poured himself a rich coffee, he flashed a smirk at Hisoka’s question. So they were still continuing to play.

“I like to keep my skills honed, and you presented me with an ideal opportunity,” he explained jovially as he walked back to Hisoka and handed him the sealed water. “How did you find the experience of being a model?”

***

"An Artist, a Doctor, a Hunter and a killer," Hisoka remarked cheerfully as he accepted the drink with a smile. "You've chosen quite a variety of roles for yourself to play. I can't help wondering if there are more that I've yet to discover."

Opening the bottle and taking a large drink from it, he pondered how he'd felt while he'd been posing for the sketch. "There's worse things," he said, opting for the neutral response and rolled onto his back to look at the ceiling with a sigh. "This is rather comfortable, so I can't complain too much. Do I make a pleasing subject?"

***

Hannibal settled down into his chair and sipped at his drink. The rich, bitter taste was pleasing, and as he felt the warmth of the water run down his throat, he contemplated how he should answer Hisoka’s question.

Deciding that actions spoke far louder than words, he flipped open the pad and carefully tore along the pre-perforated line.

Handing the image to him, he said, “Why don’t you see for yourself, Mon Cher. I pushed myself to create a fanciful design, incorporating styles from several artists - Goya, Togashi and Aivazovsky - but I worked to capture your likeness.”

***

Holding the water bottle in one hand, he accepted the offered piece of paper in his free one. Hisoka looked at the drawing with seeming disinterest, golden eyes scanning over the various unexpected details as they widened in surprise.

Dr. Lecter had cast Hisoka as a wounded knight, lying on an enchanted forest floor. His breastplate had been ripped off him and lay on the floor, torn in two by a mysterious beast, who'd lost its
oversized claw in the attack; he'd sketched it is if it were still stuck into the thick metal, just above where Hisoka’s heart would have been.

On his body lay a mirror of the wound; only, where there should have been oozing blood, a bouquet of flowers was blooming. There were five cuts in total, placed exactly where Hisoka’s broken ribs had healed, and each had a unique item emerging from them; a playing card, a wand, a crystal and, in the last, a wound high on his left side, the delicate hilt of a dagger. The word Carnwennan could just be made out across its guard. From Hisoka’s mouth, a chain of knotted handkerchiefs were spilling to the ground.

His long legs were still encased in armour and lay in the provocative pose he'd placed himself in at the start of the session. His bare arms, one resting on his upturned knee, and the other reaching beseechingly forwards across the ground were scratched and torn. Just beyond the reach of his fingers, a tiny white origami rabbit lay on its side, as if it too, had been reaching out for the man's aid. To its left a darker, far larger origami rabbit stood watching, it's blank face somehow managed to seem almost menacing in its dispassion.

The man's eyes were focussed entirely on the stricken creature and held both grief and wonder in equal measure. A teardrop fell from his left eye, and a star slid down his right cheek.

A top hat lay battered and forgotten under a creeping vine of Ivy.

"Why would you draw me like this?" he looked up at Dr. Lecter, still holding the paper, "Why those objects, is this supposed to be some trippy vision of how you see me?"

***

Hannibal smiled at the reaction his picture had received. “The juxtaposition of the ridiculous and the sublime is a concept that has always fascinated me. What one man sees as unbearable, another will see as beautiful. It was never meant to be an accurate representation of you at all. If you wish to investigate further, I would suggest that you look up the artists I mentioned. It’s a sketch of whimsy, I assure you, nothing more.”

Hannibal took another sip of his coffee. “As for the objects, well, you are a Magician, are you not?”

***

Hisoka looked back down at the drawing, "I get the hat, scarves, playing card...and the wand." He scanned the whole image again.

"The dagger and the crystal, though? I don't see how that relates...I'm guessing the rabbits are my gifts to you?"

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"Mythological symbols of magic,” Hannibal shrugged. “As is the Dragon, and yes. I like them very much.”

***

"Is Carnwennan an ancient magic spell?” Hisoka laughed a little, "Magic is just illusion Doctor...although I think Danchou would love this. He always did like that ancient history stuff.”

He put the drawing down on his lap and took another drink of his water. "You're not intending for
me to be the entertainment at your dinner party, are you?"

***

Hannibal chuckled at the question. “I suspect, that whilst you will be incredibly entertaining, you will not be the entertainment. I have employed some musicians, and usually, the food and alcohol do the rest.”

Sipping at his coffee, Hannibal said, “Pardon my observation, but you do seem unusually combative whenever the subject of my dinner party comes up, I can’t help but wonder if I made you uncomfortable with my offer.”

***

"Lulu tells me that I have an issue with believing I belong..." he leant back against the arm of the chaise lounge. "Around people who come from money...because I didn't. She grew up rich, I grew up poor," he explained matter of factly.

***

Hannibal relaxed and said, “I have experienced both extremes in my life. I find that being certain about who you are is the key to handling any situation.”

Hisoka had reopened the subject of his girlfriend again, and Hannibal found that he couldn’t help but ask, “You said earlier that you were attracted to power, and also mentioned that Lulu was not afraid of you. Out of curiosity, how strong is Lulu, mon cher?”

***

"Around 95," Hisoka replied confidently.

***

“And what does that mean?” Hannibal asked as he took a larger sip of his drink. “I’d love you to explain.”

***

Hisoka arched a brow, "That’s my assessment of power. It’s how I decide who is worth killing; Lulu’s potential is off the scale...I might decide to take her life one day." he shrugged. "The higher the number, the more interesting they are as an opponent.”

***

“And what would you assess me as, mon cher?” Hannibal asked, intrigued.

***

Hisoka made a show of humming thoughtfully and sizing the man up; he’d already been wrong once in his assessment. "Well, I would say that you would be over 100, Doctor."

***

“And why is that?” Hannibal asked curiously. Seeing himself through Hisoka’s eyes was a new and invigorating experience.
"You appear to have a similar mastery of your aura as Chairman Netero, who I also considered to be over 100." He leant forward and smiled warmly, "I also wanted to fight him." He felt a surge of pleasure from his wrist, in response to his honest answer.

Hisoka’s band glowed pleasantly; he was telling the truth. Hannibal felt a strange kind of pride well within him. “Flattery will get you everywhere, mon cher,” he said softly. “Perhaps, in another life, your dreams did come true.”

He considered Hisoka carefully for a moment as he sipped at his coffee. “Is Lulu aware of your desires?” he asked conversationally.

Another life? Do you believe in that? "Lulu understands the man she's chosen to invite into her bed, if that's what you're asking," Hisoka replied, choosing his words carefully. "She's aware of my, inclinations," he added as he gingerly stretched his legs and sighed happily when he felt a small tingle in his calves. Sipping at his water, he hummed as his bracelet added more pain in the form of a prickling sensation climbing his arm. How long can I drag this out? You're a lot less guarded then I'm used to.

"I'm confident that, should my urges get the best of me, she'll stand a good chance at ending my life. I think I would miss her though,” he added wistfully.

“She would?" Hannibal asked curiously, noting the positive feedback and the strength of Hisoka’s response. He was most certainly telling the truth. “She does not have a Hunter’s Licence. Has she killed before, mon cher?”

"We've trained together," Hisoka explained nonchalantly. "She's trained in a variety of martial arts, the sex after our spars was particularly satisfying."

He chuckled as he fiddled with the nearly empty water bottle in his hands as he tried to think of a question of his own and distract from the mild irritation from his bracelet. "Would you expect me to date somebody who wasn't capable of matching me?"

Hannibal noted the mild response from the bracelet as Hisoka chose to avoid his question again. Hannibal leaned forward and rested his elbow on his crossed leg. I will take your lack of answer as a yes, mon cher. I release you from your obligation to answer my previous question about your partner’s criminal activity. Thank you for your cooperation, and your consideration for her.”

“I would expect you to date someone who could match you intellectually, if not physically,” he explained. “The fact that she can is extremely impressive. How long have the two of you been lovers?”
"I want to say nearly three years, but it's a few months until our anniversary," Hisoka explained with an arched eyebrow. "I'm not sure if she'd appreciate me discussing our relationship with you, to be honest."

***

“Well, I already know that the sex after you spar is excellent, is asking how long you have been together really so intrusive?” Hannibal asked, looking down at Hisoka’s wrist to see the pleasant glow return.

***

"That was a throwaway comment," Hisoka protested weakly. "And well, no not really but I just wanted to mention it. Just in case."

***

Hannibal chuckled and offered Hisoka a reassuring smile. “Anything you say in this room is confidential, you can always rely on me for that, mon cher,” he said and looked down at his watch.

“It is time to test your feet. I expect that you will experience some discomfort when you stand on them,” he added with a smirk, getting up and offering Hisoka his arm.

***

Already? But we were just starting to get friendly. "I didn't think it had been that long," Hisoka commented as he swung his legs over the side of his seat and tentatively placed them on the floor. He winced at the resulting sting and looked up at Hannibal, deciding to see how the man would react if he accepted his help. Using his therapist to steady himself, he rose to his feet and hissed as his weight added more pressure to his aching feet.

"I think you're right in your prediction, but then again, you are the Doctor," he joked as he tried to adjust to the pain snaking its way up his body once again. "Although I find knowing it's coming is helpful for mentally preparing." Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath as he centred himself. It's not as bad as I expected, I just need to take my time. Maybe I can take advantage of this position?

"It occurs to me that I'm still half-naked," he said teasingly. "How about I show you a trick? After all, you said it yourself earlier; I am a magician."

***

Hannibal arched a brow curiously and nodded. “Be my guest. I look forward to seeing you work,” he said truthfully.

***

"I've always enjoyed an appreciative audience," Hisoka said cheerfully as he glanced at the chair he'd moved earlier and the clothing he'd left on it. "Feel free to use Gyo," he added as carefully adjusted his balance and gave a flick of his wrist. Will you like my Nen as much I enjoy yours?

***

“I had noticed,” Hannibal said appreciatively and activated his Gyo. “Go ahead.”
Grinning, Hisoka moved with his usual grace to attach strands of his bungee gum to his clothes. "This is my bungee gum," he explained as he flicked his wrist to pull the outfit to him. "I find that it, like your bracelets, has many uses," he added as he caught the clothing effortlessly.

"I'm sure I can think of something more interesting to show you soon," he continued, deactivating his Nen and looking back at his therapist to gauge his reaction. "My feet are still rather painful, but I suppose it's time I got dressed, isn't it?"

Watching Hisoka’s elegant manipulation of his Nen had been fascinating, and he was under no illusion that the man was an expert with it.

“Impressive as always, mon cher. You have even turned this into an art form,” he said appreciatively. Reaching out with the hand that wasn’t supporting his patient, he took Hisoka’s shoes and placed them to one side. “I will need to see you walk before I allow you to leave. I’m afraid you are stuck with me for a while longer.”

Noting the way that Hisoka was shifting his weight, he asked “Do you require assistance with your clothing?” and wondered if, now that Lulu was with him, the man would be more or less comfortable with him showing concern about his well being.

Stuck with you? Perhaps we’re stuck with each other; although I could possibly turn this into an opportunity to further my scheme. "The pain is wonderful, but I fear my balance may be a little off," Hisoka replied with a demure smile and gave Hannibal’s arm a gentle squeeze. "Having someone strong to lean on would be nice,” he added playfully.

Hannibal raised a brow at the obvious flirtation. “Then who am I to turn you down during this difficult time,” he chuckled.

"Would you be able to help me with my trousers?" Hisoka asked, hopefully placing his shirt behind him on the chaise lounge. "That will be the most difficult thing for me.”

*How long can I keep you close like this? I'd rather not encourage you to treat me like a doll, but there's something in the way you look at me. You're enjoying getting to touch me, aren't you, Dr. Lecter?*

“Of course,” Hannibal said as formally as he could manage, whilst still smirking.

Taking Hisoka’s trousers in hand, he dropped slowly to one knee, allowing his submissive to use his shoulder for support, and looked knowingly up at him. He knew this game all too well.

*Let’s dance. I can’t wait to see your face when you realise that I’m the lead.*

Rolling up the first leg, he held it out for Hisoka to slip his foot through, and said, “Lift your foot,
Lifting his leg, Hisoka winced from the sudden surge of pain that shot up it. Now that he'd increased the pressure on his other foot, all his weight had shifted. *I should have expected that,* he thought as he carefully moved to put his foot through the first leg of his pants. *How similar as a dominant partner are you to me? Would you want to buy me clothes and pick out my outfits? Or do you just like the control of being needed?* "I just need a moment if possible," he said quietly as he mentally prepared himself for the next round of discomfort. "I apologise if I'm taking advantage of your hospitality."

"Take all the time you need," Hannibal said warmly. "I would be neglecting my duty if I did not support you, and as I have already said, I enjoy your company, so take as much advantage as you like. Let me know when you are ready for the next one," he added, rolling up the next leg and softening his gaze as he met Hisoka’s golden eyes. Every word was true.

_How are you doing this, mon cher? What are you doing that’s so different? Not even Will..._

"Tell me if anything other than your feet requires my attention," he added, forcing himself to remain calm and maintain eye contact.

*Anything Doctor? Surely we’re not at that stage already?* Taking a deep breath to brace himself, Hisoka nodded and smiled down at Hannibal. "I think I'm ready. I know what to expect this time. It'll be easier to handle it. Then once we're done with my pants, I'd like to sit down while I put on my shirt. Which reminds me, could I trouble you for the number for that tailor you recommended?"

"I most certainly can, once we are finished with this," Hannibal said, enjoying the wince that crossed Hisoka’s face as he slid his other leg into the trousers. Pulling them up, he made sure to rise at a slightly faster than normal rate, watching the way his submissive adjusted to him as if he were barely thinking about it.

_Are you so attuned to me that you don’t have to think about compensating, or are you just that aware of your own body?_

He made short work of fastening Hisoka’s waistband and made sure to be nothing other than entirely professional about the whole thing. "Sit down, mon cher. I will get your shoes."

"Could I get your address too?" Hisoka asked cheekily as he sat down and grabbed his shirt, quickly pulling it back on. "I need to know where to go, for the dinner party and what time you want me to arrive. I'd hate to turn up more than fashionably late, especially after you've gone through so much trouble for me already."

Picking Hisoka’s shoes off the side, Hannibal knelt in front of Hisoka and lifted his first leg
carefully.

“You should be receiving a formal invitation through the post in the next couple of days. It has all the details you will need to find my house,” he said, sliding the shoe into place and not bothering to hide his amusement when his submissive visibly winced. He didn’t need to add that he hoped the reconnaissance would be a success; they both knew that it would be. It was part of the game.

He briefly contemplated leaving out a care package in some of the more likely vantage points, but decided against it. The likelihood that they would be stolen before Hisoka found them was too high.

“I’m going to ask you to do a few tasks for me,” he told Hisoka as he slid the second shoe into place and rose to his feet. “I need to assess your physical condition. Is this acceptable to you?” he asked, pointedly seeking the man’s consent before proceeding. The more tasks he could get him to perform, the more he would be rewarded and the better his endorphin high would be. But he couldn’t risk angering him at this stage, not when he had no way of keeping him longer than was strictly necessary. He wanted Hisoka to leave his office feeling euphoric, not enraged. He had to build a positive association early on.

***

”What sort of tasks?” Hisoka asked as he focused on cushioning the soles of his feet with his bungee gum. ”You need to be sure I can walk back to the hotel, don’t you?”

***

“I do, that is correct,” Hannibal said happily. I will be instructing you to move around.”

***

”That makes sense,” Hisoka agreed as an idea struck him. ”If it involves walking around am I allowed to use you for support while I’m getting used to the pain?”

***

Hannibal looked down at Hisoka and was, he had to admit, impressed. “If you need me to, mon cher, yes. But I will only allow you to leave the office when you can make three full laps of it by yourself. You are my last patient of the day for that exact reason. I am aware of the,” he cocked his head. “Additional requirements that your personalised therapy will need. Take the time that you want. Do not worry; I will be assessing you the whole time in order to provide you with what you need.”

***

Where you expecting me to get you to beat me? Or were you hoping? Hisoka wondered as he held out his hand. ”I see no reason not to start if you would be kind enough to help me up?”

***

Hannibal held his arm out for Hisoka to take and grinned at Hisoka’s ability to give his consent whilst passively trying to assert dominance over the situation. “When you get up, I want you to tell me, on a scale of one to ten - ten being the most pain you have ever experienced, and one being the least, how painful your feet are, Hisoka,” he said smoothly and tensed so that the man would be able to pull himself up.
Nodding Hisoka pulled himself to his feet with as much grace as he could manage, and paused to catch his breath. *Going from sitting to standing causes quite the sharp increase in the pain, but I know I’ve gotten through worse.* Looking from his feet to Hannibal, he said, "Right at this moment, I'd say around a six, maybe a little less but definitely more than five."

He closed his eyes and gave a contented sigh as a mild tingling spread up his arm, and he reflexively tightened his grip on Hannibal.

“Hopefully these tasks should help drop that number,” Hannibal said happily. “Now, I want you to get me both my pencil and my drawing.”

Letting go of Hannibal's arm, Hisoka offered him a warm smile. "I think I should be able to manage the short distance unaided," he explained before taking a tentative step forward and letting the pain flow through him. *It's only a few steps, having your arms sewn on hurt just as much and you stayed still for that. Give Dr. Lecter what he wants; the plan’s working well,* he told himself as he crossed the gap from his seat to his therapists. Carefully collecting the requested materials, he turned to make his return trip.

“Thank you,” Hannibal said and took the offered pencil and paper. He turned his sketch and quickly wrote down his tailor's details whilst keeping one eye on Hisoka and revelling in the shudder of delight that ran through him upon the completion of his task.

“Here,” he said after he’d finished. “Everything you asked for about my tailor.” He took a step back and assessed his submissive's posture. Activating his Gyo, he checked to see if he was supporting himself with his gum. He was impressed when he saw that the only thing that he had done was to cushion his feet.

“Shall we up the game?” he asked. “How about you walk over to the fireplace and back?” he challenged, waiting to see if Hisoka would rise to it and complete the task on his own, or whether he would stick to his plan of getting him to stay close.

*Do you want me to cum again?* Hisoka wondered as he compared the distance between the chairs to the distance between him and the fireplace. *I'm sure I can make that on my own, but I was trying to see how much physical contact he would allow. Although I can work with this, he wants to be challenging I'll show him how high that bar is set.* "Sure, I think I can manage that. Now I'm on my feet I'm growing accustomed to the pain, I'd say it's around, five at the moment," he added before heading across the office again.

Watching Hisoka was marvellous. Seeing the desire to perform swell within his eyes was wonderful. Given enough time, oh, the things he would do with him...there was no way he was going to allow the sessions to stop at twelve.

He admired the sway of his hips and the slow, deliberate tread of his slipper-clad feet hungrily.
Hisoka had been allowed his release already, but, Hannibal knew, he wouldn’t be allowed his for a long while. He felt his desire to take and to cherish, morph and shift into the need to consume and kill.

*It has to be tonight,* he thought, as he watched Hisoka almost pirouette as he turned to make his return trip. *It can’t wait any longer.* He had to vent his feelings before they got the better of him. Warmth washed through him as the faces of the Phantom Troupe flashed before him.

He met Hisoka’s blown-out gaze and asked, “How is your pain now, mon cher?”

***

As he began his return, Hisoka shivered slightly; the endorphins were building, and he could feel the high returning. Resisting the urge to bow dramatically, he grinned instead. "Around a four; I'm adapting to it quite well," he sighed happily. "What task would you have me perform next?" he asked as he came to stand beside Dr. Lecter once more.

***

“A lap of the room,” Hannibal said evenly and, in a calculated move, offered Hisoka his arm. “I will assist you if you feel the need. Your gait has been steady so far, and you do not appear to be favouring either leg, which is good. We can rest after. Don’t worry; I will explain to the guards that our session was extended because I struck a nerve, and you needed time to process.”

***

*Did you make that trap so obvious as a test or because you're enjoying this?* "The pain is getting more bearable, but a lap around the office is more than twice the distance I've walked so far," Hisoka advised with a curious tilt of his head. "Although, I think I would enjoy it if you took the first lap with me, just in case it becomes too much. Then if I manage it without difficulty I could try it on my own, would that be acceptable?"

***

“That sounds extremely sensible,” Hannibal said, noting the way his heart sped up when Hioska took his arm. What’s wrong with me?

“What would you like to talk about, mon cher?” he asked as he set off. “The floor is yours.” What will you choose to focus on now that you have me so close?

***

"I have to admit I was a little surprised you keep a cane in your office,” Hisoka said conversationally as he allowed Hannibal to lead him. "Was it a recent addition?"

***

“You are not the first patient I have made this deal with, mon cher,” Hannibal said calmly. “I deal with people who, in their day to day lives, struggle with structure and discipline. I have found that, like many people before me, the cane - or to give it its technical name, rattan - is an effective tool to have in my belt. There are two others in there if you would like to see them. Some patients enjoy choosing the type of caning that they will receive, for others, simply knowing that they are there is enough to keep their behaviour in order.”

He smiled at a memory. “One patient who has recently left my care managed to turn his life around
completely and has recently set up his own hairdressing business, thanks to the threat of those three strips of wood.”

***

"I did wonder," Hisoka teased. "So was the one you used for me the lightest one? I hope you can forgive my curiosity. It's just that caning is a new experience and one that I found rather enjoyable."

***

“Then I shall save them for special occasions,” Hannibal said, noting Hisoka’s genuine interest. “It is the stiffest one, and the varnished finish gives it a sting when it collides with the flesh. I felt that it would give you the kind of sensation that you needed at the time. The others are a Tahiti and a Dragon. They produce a much more intense thud when they impact the body. Have you had much experience with *actual* punishments within the context of dominance and submission?”

***

*Somehow I don't think the beatings I took for running away count.* "Do you mean being on the receiving end?" Hisoka asked as he stamped down on the unbidden thoughts about his childhood.

***

“Yes,” Hannibal agreed. “But I would also like to hear about what experience you have with dealing out punishments too. It will enable us both to move forward if we are open about our experience.”

He turned the second corner and noted that Hisoka’s stride had evened out. *You do heal quickly, don’t you?* “I get the impression that you don’t often trust people to provide you with the kind of pain that I just did.”

***

"People tend to," Hisoka hummed as he tried to work out how best to explain his experiences. "In my experience, people tend to get freaked out by my relish for and ability to endure pain. I'm no stranger to taking a beating, but that's not what you're asking, I know. There was one woman at the hotel who seemed curious enough to indulge me," he licked his lips at the memory of the redhead using his pocket knife on his chest. "I get the impression that I'm more masochistic than most, and those who are willing to try this with me aren't experienced enough. On the other side, I've had many one night stands beg me to hurt them, only to find they enjoyed the idea more than the reality. To be honest, my sadism is a little nuanced, and I don't rely on inflicting pain to satisfy that itch. There's a lot of ways to torture somebody; sometimes, the expectation and fear of hurting are more affecting than the acts themselves. I'm sure you would agree?"

***

“Would exploring your desire for pain be something that you would like to look into with me?” Hannibal asked as he nodded in reply to the question. “I do have...extensive experience in the area. And I can see that you are not the kind of person who would shy away from new experiences. I am happy to accommodate your curiosity if you remain cooperative.”

***

"Are you offering to beat me in our next session?" Hisoka asked, batting his eyelashes and smiling
flirtatiously. "This could become a bad habit if we're not careful. Next, you'll be telling me that you have some japanese clover style nipple clamps in your cabinet."

Why do I want you to say yes? Actually, why am I hoping you'll say you have more than just that? Do I like you?

***

Hannibal laughed and turned his most innocent look on his submissive. “I wouldn’t dream of keeping them in my office,” he said earnestly as they rounded the last corner and started to approach the dresser holding the few canes he kept here.

“Do you enjoy the dull ache that the clamps can provide? Or is it the sharp burn after the blood returns that you desire the most?” he asked curiously. He guessed that it was mainly the latter but didn’t doubt for a second that Hisoka would love the build-up too.

***

Does that mean you have some at your house? "Well, I think I'd enjoy both. I don't really have a toy collection because I move around so much," Hisoka replied as he eyed the cabinet he'd seen Hannibal get the cane from earlier. "I haven't found somebody willing to use them on me, yet. So I never picked any up, and I haven't mentioned it to Lulu," he admitted a little shyly.

***

“You did say that she wasn’t willing to hurt you,” Hannibal said gently, stopping in front of the dresser and opening the door for Hisoka to see the three canes, all of varying sizes and thickness. “Do you resent her for that?” he asked, reaching in and picking out the Dragon for Hisoka to take a closer look at.

***

"No, at least I don't think I do," Hisoka replied as he examined the cane that Dr. Lecter had pulled out for him. "Which one is this?" he asked, daring to run his fingers over the smooth wood. It was thicker than the one he'd been caned with earlier, and he wondered how it would compare. I'm not with Illu-chan for him to hurt me, he wanted to be claimed. To be valued and cherished, and I do. He's mine. He'll always be mine.

***

“It is the Dragon,” Hannibal said, watching the revenant way Hisoka touched his equipment. “It will provide a much more impactful bite.”

He tilted his head, noting the complete lack of apparent discomfort from Hisoka and asked, “Do you often seek out pain?”

***

"Pain is an unavoidable part of my lifestyle," Hisoka replied, shifting his weight experimentally to assess the state his feet. "I don't shy away from it, and I'd say I actively seek it out less often than people would expect. I'd say my feet have dropped to around a three by the way."

***

“A healthy attitude to have,” Hannibal said, adding a reaffirming nod. “I would always advise
people to seek discomfort; it is only through challenging ourselves that we learn what we are capable of. Would you like to keep that one, mon cher?” he asked as the fancy struck him.

He looked over to the rabbits on the side and felt his stomach coil with a warmth he hadn’t felt in many years. “You have given me such wonderful gifts. I would like to repay you in kind.”

***

"Perhaps you could keep it here for, a future session? I mean it's not like I have anyone else who knows how to use it properly, and it seems a shame for it to sit in a bag in my room. It would make a great incentive for me to behave moving forward if you were to use it as a reward," Hisoka suggested. The offer had caught him off guard but he'd always been good with improvising. "It looks well made; it deserves to be allowed to fulfil its purpose.” He chuckled and added, “A bit like a properly trained submissive, don't you think, Dr. Lecter?”

***

“If you wish, mon cher,” Hannibal said, hiding his disappointment behind a polite smile. “But if it stays here, you will have to earn it. I do know how to train my submissives properly. And I do not hand out rewards frivolously,” he added, gently lifting the cane from Hisoka's hand.

Slotting it back into its casing, he closed the door and gestured to the chaise lounge. “It’s time for you to take the weight off your feet. I will inspect them again before I go to talk to your guards.”

***

Hisoka watched the careful way his therapist returned the cane with a sad smile, and nearly missed Hannibal’s instruction. "I look forward to the challenge, I didn't mean to imply that you couldn't train," he paused before he could add, 'me' to the end of the sentence, and looked at his feet in what he hoped would be seen as a gesture of submission. "I'm just a little surprised," he mumbled meekly. "It's not often I'd be offered something like this; in fact, I don't think anyone ever has. A simple thank you feels inadequate somehow.”

He only realised how much he meant the words when the band didn't punish him for lying. Allowing Hannibal to lead him back to his seat, he caught himself wondering how it would feel to kiss him, and if Dr. Lecter would let him. "Thank you for the gift. I don't know what else to say," he admitted as he carefully sat down.

***

“You gave me my Mischa,” Hannibal said, kneeling in front of Hisoka once more and taking his ankle in his hand. “The cane was my way of showing you gratitude. It shall be reserved for you, mon cher.”

He looked up and saw the emotions playing across the man’s face. “A simple thank you is often precisely what the situation requires. Do not underestimate the power of simplicity, especially when it is sincere.”

***

"Well, your bracelet isn't going off." Hisoka held his wrist up to check and chuckled to cover his uncertainty. "I'm guessing it would punish me severely for being insincere," he added. Why am I so unsure of myself? Did my paper rabbit really mean that much to you?

***
“It would,” Hannibal said, rubbing a small circle into Hisoka’s ankle to reinforce the honesty.

Sliding off his slipper, he inspected his foot and nodded, tracing the line across the middle of it with his finger. “Your foot is healing well,” he said. “I am impressed.”

He picked up the other leg and looked up at his patient. “Is there anything else that you would like to experience?” he asked, hoping that the question would give Hisoka the breathing room he needed to deal with his emotions.

***

"I don't know," Hisoka answered, continuing to stare at his band. "It's been a rather intense session this time; I have to admit, therapy with you isn't what I expected. Although I'm not sure what I was expecting, apart from talking about my feelings. Is there anything I should know about your dinner guests before the party? I don't want to be the cause of any controversy, and I know it likely cost you a few favours to be allowed to have me there."

***

“There will be some fellow psychiatrists there, some friends of mine and my student,” Hannibal said as he inspected the other foot and noted the same fast healing. “I can assure you; they will be extremely pleased to see you. You may have already met Pariston, and you will finally get to meet Dr. Chilton. You have nothing to worry about, mon cher. They will be as impressed by you as I am, I assure you.”

***

"Pariston? As in Pariston Hill? Didn't he win the election and then stand down immediately?" Hisoka asked in surprise.

***

Hannibal sighed. “Yes, he did. I warned him not to let his little spat with Ging to get out of hand, but he does so love drama.”

He slid Hisoka’s shoes back into place. “How is your pain now, mon cher?”

***

"It was actually rather pleasant when you were touching my feet," Hisoka replied, grateful for the distraction. "Do they look alright? I don't need to do anything special to make sure they heal? The pain has died back. I’m sure I can walk back to the hotel."

***

“They are healing exceptionally well,” Hannibal said, gently patting them as he got to his feet. “You won’t need to do anything special. I still want to see you walk around the room unaided, but I shall go and have a word with your guard. Don’t worry; they will not ask questions. For now, rest. Take some time for yourself, mon cher, you have earned it.”

***

Well, it's not like I can do anything else, but still, at least I can get comfortable on this thing. "I understand," Hisoka said with a polite nod. "Thank you."
Waiting for Dr. Lecter to leave the room, he stared at the display containing the origami menagerie and sighed before lying down. *What's happening to me?* he wondered. *Am I actually attracted to him? I mean I don’t usually think about kissing; it's something you just do, right?*

Rolling onto his side he looked around the office, looking for details he'd missed on his previous visits. His gaze fell on a statue of a stag with his head raised proudly, and he chuckled. *Somehow that suits you, Hannibal.*

Now that he was fully dressed again, Hisoka became acutely aware of the fire and sniffed at the air. *Is that sandalwood? Why does he have that on every time I'm here? It's not that cold, is it a health thing?*

Sighing, he pushed further speculation about his therapist from his mind and thought about Illumi, and the emergence of Lulu. The pain in his feet was now a pleasant throbbing. *Wearing my flats was a good idea today. I hope Illumi will be happy with how our plan is progressing; it seems that I do have Dr. Lecter’s interest.* He chuckled to himself. *How long have I been here today? I know it's been longer than my usual time.*

The sound of the door opening pulled him back to the present, and he glanced over to see Hannibal walking across the room.

“*My apologies, Doctor,*” he said, sitting up. “*I lost track of time.*”

***

“*Quite understandable,*” Hannibal said, offering Hisoka his hand to help him up. “*I have informed your guard that things ran over because some sensitive areas were touched upon, but that you will be entirely fine to leave with them when you do go out. They understand not to ask you about the session and will respect your privacy.*”

***

"*Thank you,*" Hisoka said quietly as he allowed himself to be helped to his feet. "*I should try that lap of your office, shouldn't I?*"

***

Hannibal smirked. "*If you would like to leave, then yes. I am sure your Lulu will be looking forward to seeing you. I would hate to be the cause of worry.*” He stepped aside and gestured for Hisoka to continue. “*Or of her coming looking for you. Something tells me that my very expensive door would not stand a chance against her.*”

***

"*Not that I'm saying I'll encourage it, but just how expensive is the door? I mean if she did break it, I'd feel like I should pay for the replacement,*" Hisoka chuckled. *You have no idea how easily Illu-chan would just take the door out of its hinges.* "She'd only come looking if all the guards went crazy trying to find me because I'd gone AWOL though, don’t worry. Your door is safe."

***

"*It, and all the walls in this room are reinforced,*” Hannibal said, watching Hisoka set off around the room. “*I don’t want this to come as a shock to you, but I do treat highly volatile and dangerous people,*” he said, making sure to smile indulgently to let Hisoka know that he was joking. “*I wouldn’t do so if I weren’t able to ensure their safety or the safety of the public. But something*
tells me that it wouldn’t stand up to your girlfriend. You choose your company well, mon cher.”

***

"I never would have guessed," Hisoka teased as he approached the stag statue and looked over at the fire. "Do you use sandalwood in the fire?" he asked, hoping to keep the conversation away from his lover.

***

“I do,” Hannibal said appreciatively. “It was Mischa’s favourite. I use it on the fireplaces I have at home too, amongst others, but I have found that this, as well as applewood, prove to be effective at maintaining a calm atmosphere within the room. There is something so soothing about an open fire, don’t you think?”

***

"I've never thought about it," Hisoka said honestly. "I guess it could be soothing. It does add to the atmosphere of the room; it feels more like a room in a large estate. Rather than an office, I mean. The first time I came here, I was surprised."

***

“True change is only ever achieved when the person desires it,” Hannibal said honestly. “I find that providing a less clinical atmosphere helps far more than people would imagine. People are more willing to open up when they realise that the man they are talking to is a person and not an unfeeling number employed by the government. I have worked hard to enable people to see past their assumptions about me. It’s also the other reason I invited you to my home. I am hoping that my guests will see the man that you are, beyond the glaring headlines and expert performance.”

***

"Dare I ask who you believe that man is?" Hisoka asked as he neared the final stretch. "If it makes you feel better, I never saw you as an unfeeling number. You intrigued me at the hospital. It's after people get my attention that I give them a rating on my power scale. I suppose I have a bad habit of doing things back to front?"

***

“You say bad habit, I say unique perspective,” Hannibal chuckled, stepping aside and waiting for Hisoka to join him. “But I am glad that you do not see me that way.”

Offering his arm once again when Hisoka drew up beside him, he said, “I believe you to be a man who has spent his entire life moving, always searching, but never quite managing to find what you’re looking for. I wish to provide you with a safe haven that can shelter you and allow you a place to be still and calm. Movement can be healthy, but when it lacks direction or never ends, it can lead to exhaustion.”

He looked across at Hisoka’s shocked face. “I suppose I want to give you clarity, so that you can fulfil your potential and find what it is that you are seeking.”

***

Do you really think you can? Every time I think have found my sanctuary something invades it. Why should I believe it'll be different now? "What do you think I'm looking for?" Hisoka asked
stiffly. "You're a Hunter, so what is it that you're hunting? I know you're a Blacklister, but I think it's a cover, call it a magician's instinct."

***

"It is not my job to tell you what you are trying to find, mon cher," Hannibal said gently, taking Hisoka's arm and walking them towards the door. "It is my job to help you find out."

He thought for a moment before continuing, “I suppose, in a way, I have dedicated my life to the pursuit of truth. I wish to help you find yours. I make no secret about being a man capable of great violence, but that also means that I am capable of great empathy. I will not leave you stranded and alone, mon cher. I made a promise to care for you, and that is what I will do.”

***

"In my experience that's often the case," Hisoka agreed. "You probably saw something similar in me when I had Lulu by my side. She brings out parts of me that nobody else does, perhaps you'll have a chance to get greater insight at your party? I hope I haven't derailed your plans for the rest of the day too badly. Today has been enlightening. But in the interest of protecting your door, I really should get back to my girlfriend."

Offering Hannibal a polite bow once they reached the door, he added, "Do you have any homework for me this week?"

***

“She is a one of a kind,” Hannibal agreed. “And she is good for you. Your homework for this week, is to learn to slow down. I want you to take time for yourself and to allow yourself to become bored occasionally. Listen to your mind and where it takes you. I know that you will find out where you are heading in the end, but you need to give yourself a chance to rest. Let Lulu take care of you for a bit; I know that she would enjoy it. Let someone indulge you for a change.”

Learn to trust, mon cher. Stop running from your past. Stand still and face it; you won’t be alone when you do. It’s never as scary as you think. I’m here, and I’m strong enough for both of us. You aren’t that child anymore, I promise.

***

"I'll try," Hisoka said quietly. But I enjoy spoiling Illu-chan, even though I know he doesn't need the things I buy for him. It makes me happy, so he lets me. "I'm sure I can figure something out, should I come back, at the same time next week?"

***

Reaching up to brush a strand of hair from Hisoka’s eyes, Hannibal smiled indulgently. “Yes, mon cher. And don’t try. Trying implies the possibility of failure. Do. It need only be fifteen minutes a day, nothing extreme. I’ll see you later in the week, and your invitation should be arriving soon. You know where to find me,” he added, opening the door and letting go of Hisoka’s arm. “Have a wonderful night.”

***

"You too," Hisoka said softly as exited the office and headed through the waiting room. Everything that has happened felt slightly heavy on his shoulders, and he barely noticed the increase in pain coming from his feet. Let Lulu indulge me? Maybe that's the key, I could ask her instead of Illumi?
Caught up in his thoughts, he nearly walked past his guards.

***

Hannibal grinned as the faces of the Phantom Troupe swam past his mind once again. Closing the door, he stared over at his fire. "Oh, I will, mon cher. I most certainly will."

***

"Woah there, Rambo," Zeller said, holding out his arm. "I know the doc said that you hit some pretty heavy stuff, but you look spaced out. Is everything OK?"

***

Stopping just in time, Hisoka blinked and looked down at the arm in front of him, before following it back to see the concerned expression on his guard's face. "I think so," he muttered before plastering on a wide smile. "I'd like to get back to the hotel before my girlfriend starts to worry. Apparently, Dr. Lecter is concerned that she'll break down his door."

***

"OK, not touching that one with a ten-foot barge pole," Zeller said slowly. "Right, hotel Townhilt, here we come."

***

Kyoya glanced between Hisoka and Zeller and decided that it would probably be better if he stayed quiet. Zeller had been worried before, but he seemed fine now.

*If we get him back in one piece we can clock off, and I can start figuring out how the hell I'm going to fit all of Jade's stuff in my flat. Please don't offer him a coffee or, oh God, there's an ice cream stand on the way there. We're screwed. That's it. I give up. I'm never going to have a simple life again. Why did I let Jade talk me into accepting this job?* 

***

"I'd say not to touch it with any length of pole," Hisoka retorted lightheartedly and shook his head. "I don't suppose you know a shortcut back to the hotel? I have a burning need to see my darling, if you know what I mean."

***

"Dude, if your need's burning, you should go back in there and see the Doctor," Zeller deadpanned. "I'm sure he'd keep it confidential."

***

"I somehow forgot that you liked playing with fire," Hisoka sighed. "Is that a yes or a no on that shortcut?"

***

"Hey," Zeller said, holding up his hands and scanning the street to see if the kids were still following them. "I'm here for your safety and inconvenience. Also, I make dick jokes. Turn left here; we can shave five minutes off if we cut through the canal district."
“Yeah, but that’s full of ga- Ah, right, never mind,” Kyoya said, feeling the ghost of Miriam’s raised eyebrow across the city.

“Yeah, and fun clubs too,” Zeller said, deciding to ignore Kyoya’s comment for now. He’d been spending far too much time on shift with Leroy.

I don't care how much fun he clubs are; I just want to get back to my room, Hisoka thought with a shake of his head. "Maybe I'll let you show me the best ones another time, but five minutes less walking is better than nothing. Lead the way," Hisoka said, setting off after his guards and letting his mind drift to thoughts of Illu-chan alone, and naked. The pain from his feet was starting to grow again, and he grinned to himself as he imagined what he would do to Illumi once he was back at the hotel.

Yes, it's been a very interesting day. The Doctor might know how to hurt me, but Lulu always knows how to make me happy. He smirked. The hotel couldn’t come soon enough.

Characters Played by Muffinmadness:

Hannibal, Kyoya, Zeller

Characters Played by themadnovelist

Hisoka

We would like to take the time to say that we hope everyone had a very Happy Holiday and we want to wish you all a great New Year!
The Ace of Clubs

Chapter Summary

Hisoka arrives home after his session with Dr. Lecter and decides to make a start on his homework...Hisoka-style.

By the time Hisoka made it back to the hotel with his guards in tow, the pain in his feet had been reduced to a slight tingling sensation. Do you ever shut up? He wondered as Zeller continued to make pointless small talk.

Putting his hand in his pocket to pull out his keycard, his fingers brushed against the sketch Hannibal had given him. Oh, I'd almost forgotten about that, we need to get my suit still. He said he'd be sending the invite in the post. Shifting his weight from one foot to the other as he came to a standstill outside his hotel room, he smiled at Kyoya, and the guard he'd mentally labelled as the chatterbox.

"Well it's been a pleasure, but I'm feeling quite fatigued, so I'll be staying put for a while. I'd be grateful if you could make sure that we're not disturbed," he told them before opening the door and entering his suite. "I'm back Lulu, things, overran with Dr. Lecter."

***

"Sure," Kyoya said uncertainty and blinked as the door closed behind Hisoka. “What the hell happened with Lecter?” he asked Zeller, who answered him with a bewildered shrug.

“God, I’m glad I’m not his girlfriend,” he sighed, slumping against the wall. “That mans...”

***

“Yeah,” Zeller said suspiciously, glancing between the door and his friend as his mind raced. “Yeah, he is.”

***

Illumi looked up from the computer screen and closed the window he’d been using for research when he heard his Master’s voice. He sounded drained, but he couldn’t quite tell whether that was a good or bad thing.

“Welcome back, Master,” he said as he took in the fuzzy expression on Hisoka-san’s face. “May I ask why?”

“Never mind that, what the hell happened to make him look like he’s on cloud nine?” Lulu snapped. “Ask him!”

I did, didn’t I?

***

"Why what, sweetheart?" Hisoka asked softly as he made his way over to the bed and sat down.
**Dr. Lecter is a smug bastard, but at least I made some progress with the plan. At least I think I did.** Carefully slipping off his shoes, he flopped backwards and looked up at Illumi with a dopey smile. “Did you get up to much while I was out?”

***

“I was researching Dr. Lecter,” Illumi said with a frown. “Why did things run over?” he clarified and waited for his Master’s answer. There was something not right about the man; he was...dreamy. Had he been given drugs?

***

“Did you find out anything useful?” Hisoka asked as he pulled himself up the bed to lie beside his lover. “Officially the session ran over because I needed some extra time to process, due to sensitive topics coming up today. Although the real reason was that he indulged my masochism.”

***

Illumi frowned. “He did?” He looked over his Master’s body and couldn’t see any visible wounds. “What did he do?”

“Where did he touch him?” Lulu snarled.

***

“I never knew caning could be so much fun,” Hisoka replied, still grinning. “He only gave me three strokes on each foot, and I think the marks have healed already. He made me walk around the office to make sure I could move unaided, and most of the pain had gone by the time he let me leave. He has clover clamps at his house too, and he offered me one of the canes he keeps in a cabinet in his office. I think he likes me,” he chuckled and curled into Illumi seeking contact. “But I like you, I like you a lot,” he purred.

***

Illumi tensed at the unexpected contact and tried to think through his confusion. “I like you too, Master?” he said uncertainly. “It's why I'm here. Are you sure he hasn't done anything else to you?”

*How can three strokes of a cane do this to you?*

“Did he give you anything to eat or drink?” he asked, hoping that the answer would be yes. If they could prove that he’d drugged his patient, then this could all end, and they could go back to normal.

***

“A bottle of water. It was still sealed. Why? Hisoka asked but didn't let go of Illumi. "The bracelet triggered a lot today; I got rewarded quite a lot for cooperating. I also found out it can't kill me, so that's useful, I think. I've never been caned before, you know? I liked it; my feet were all fiery and tingly."

***

“I was hoping that he’d drugged you, but apparently he’s more cunning than that,” Illumi said as evenly as he could manage, given the fact that Hisoka-san was slowly wrapping himself around his
Lulu’s form was a lot more petite than he was used to and, he realised with a frown, it was going to be very hard to extract himself.

“Lester’s not the only one who’s cunning, is he?” Lulu teased, and Illumi had to suppress his snarl.

*Hisoka-san has been over-stimulated. We both know what that is like. Now...help. What do I do?*

“Talk to him, you idiot.”

“I never enjoyed canings myself,” Lulu purred, reaching out to stroke a hand through Hisoka-san’s hair. “No one can resist my wonderful Master’s charms. I hope he took good care of you. I’ll have to give him a stern talking-to if he didn’t.”

***

"I'm also a masochist," Hisoka pointed out as he turned his head to look up into Illumi’s eyes. "I enjoy pain; the fast healing is a bonus that I'm lucky to have. Although I don't think I always did, some of my ribs still show signs of damage? I think they might be from punishments I suffered when I was little...my childhood came up today. That's why he caned me, to cheer me up? It worked, and he got rather touchy-feely with me now that I think about it. He definitely likes me.’’

***

“I am aware of your Masochism, Master. It’s why I whip you when you ask me to,” Illumi said, looking down at Hisoka-san with genuine concern.

*I don’t know what to do, he thought. Why is he talking to me like we’ve never met?*

“*He isn’t,*” Lulu sighed. “*He's high as a kite. You really are an idiot.*”

“Of course he likes you,” Lulu purred, reaching out to stroke a hand through Hisoka-san’s hair. “No one can resist my wonderful Master’s charms. I hope he took good care of you. I’ll have to give him a stern talking-to if he didn’t.”

***

"Of course he did, he wouldn't let me leave until he'd made sure I was fine. Although he was worried you'd come looking for me at the office if he kept me too long,” Hisoka replied absently running his hand down Lulu’s arm.

***

“Well, that’s because I would have,” Lulu teased. “Wild horses couldn’t have kept me away.”

She hummed as her Master played with her arm. “You said that your childhood came up and that you found out that you had old injuries?” she asked gently. “Is there anything that I need to be aware of?” She snaked her way down to lie beside Hisoka-san and stroked his cheek. “The next time I hurt you, I want to hear you screaming my name for all the right reasons, after all.”

***

"Father broke some of my ribs," Hisoka explained as he pressed his face against his lover's hand happily. "Dr. Lecter said that the only damage on my body, despite being crushed, was five ribs that showed evidence of being broken a long time ago. I...vaguely remember it happening. Father
did sorta strap me up and made me stay in bed for a few days, but I never saw a Doctor growing up. Although I'm sure that I broke a couple falling out of a tree too, I like high up places."

***

"You do, don't you?" Lulu said indulgently. "Well, that's good to know. I don't have to worry about leaning on you the next time we play Cowgirl and Stallion."

"Oh I'm as strong as a Foxbear," Hisoka teased. "Don't worry about that, although right now I just want to have you close. I don't know why, I just do?"

"I understand, Master," Lulu said gently. "You've had some new and," she paused to kiss Hisokasan's cheek where she'd just stroked it. "Unsettling experiences. I'm glad that the Doctor made sure that you were all good before you left. I'd be a little jealous if it wasn't all part of the plan."

She tweaked his nose playfully. "Just how touchy-feely did he get?"

"I took my shirt off to see how he'd react, and he decided that he needed a closer look. He asked about your good luck charm," Hisoka explained. "He ran his hands over my chest, and he nearly put his hand down my pants? Well, he thought about it at least, before telling me to take them off. He decided to draw me while we talked."

"Oh, please say he secretly films all his sessions," Lulu said. "I want to see that second on his face when he had to stop himself from reaching down..."

She trailed her hand underneath her Master's trousers and stopped dead when she felt a wet patch in his underwear.

Her grin turned wicked, and she licked her lips. "Someone had a very good time with the Doctor, didn't they?"

"His Nen is able to stimulate me enough to reach orgasm," Hisoka sighed. "He was quite adamant that he couldn't do it 'himself', so he gave me a command...so that I'd be rewarded. Now that I think about it, I wonder if his intentions affect the reward? I mean, it's his Hatsu, so it's possible."

"Oh, the things you'd do to me with a power like that," Lulu moaned.

"Umm, if the intentions affect the outcome...then you should expect a lot more sessions that have a 'happy ending'. This is only the second time you've seen him with that band on. Imagine what it's going to be like by the last," she said hungrily. "You'll have him at your mercy. He'll be putty in your hands."

***
Hisoka chuckled and pulled Lulu to lie against his chest with a happy hum. "Somehow I think he wants me to be putty in his hands," he said softly. "Considering that he made a point of telling me, that as a qualified surgeon, he knows all the sensitive spots on the human body."

***

Lulu chuckled darkly. “So he doesn’t know that as the Grim Reaper of the Arena, you do as well?” She rolled him on his back and straddled his waist. “My, my, Hisoka-san. Is the good Doctor, by any chance, underestimating you? Oh, dear. I do hope that nothing bad happens to him as a result.”

***

"I may have hinted," Hisoka teased bucking his hips with a playful smirk. "He does seem to know his way around a man's body though," he added thoughtfully as he rubbed at his neck and remembered the feeling of Hannibal's hand gripping his throat. "He pressed down on the base of my neck. It hurt, so I think he was looking for nerves? Anyway, it was for being good. It was...an experience. He caned me after, because of how I reacted."

***

“And how did you react?” Lulu asked. “Was he punishing you for not enjoying the treat? If he was, I bet he had a surprise when he saw what ‘came up’. Oh, I wish I could have been there.”

***

Hisoka closed his eyes, his hesitancy coming as a surprise. "I had a flashback. He wanted to help ground me. He gave me a choice between two types of pain, and the one I picked turned out to be caning my feet," he said quietly. *I heard Father, why? He's not trying to be a parental figure. I don’t get it.*

***

Lulu slid back down to Hisoka-san’s side and wrapped her arms around him. “Then I’m glad that it worked,” she whispered. “We can talk about it if you like, or just stay like this. Tell me what you need, Master. I’ll do it,” she purred softly. “Whatever you want. I’m yours.” *We’re yours,* Illumi corrected quietly. He didn’t understand how Lulu knew what to do, but he was grateful that she did. He didn’t want to imagine what would have happened if he’d been here alone. *I’m sorry that I’ve failed you, Master. I hope that you can forgive me.*

***

"Stay with me?" Hisoka asked. He wasn't sure that he wanted to talk about the memories just yet. "I feel better having you here. I’d like just to hold you for a little while." *He did say to let Lulu take care of me, does that mean the bracelet is going to go off? I hate that he always seems to intrude on our private moments; I'm not letting Father ruin it too.*

***

Lulu hummed appreciatively and settled in against her Master’s chest. “You feel so wonderful; you know that right?” she said happily. “I could stay here like this with you all day. I don’t think I’d ever need anything else. You’re warm, you’re comfortable, and you have those big, long arms that can reach over to the phone and call room service. And when it
arrives, you can charm or threaten to kill anyone who comes through the door until they wheel it over here.”

She sighed contentedly. “Yes, yes, I think I could stay here with you forever.”

***

"Forever is a long time, wouldn't you get bored?" Hisoka asked as he stroked his lover's back gently. "Also I was thinking a soak in the tub could be nice, Dr. Lecter seems to think I need to let you indulge me for once. That and I need to let my mind go quiet and allow myself to get bored, but I get restless if I'm not doing anything."

***

"I hate to say it," Lulu admitted. "But I'm starting to like the way Dr. Lecter thinks." She jerked at the mental slap she received from Illumi and giggled. "Illumi doesn't though, so it's all OK. The world is still spinning, and the birds are,” she cocked her head and pretended to listen attentively. “Yep, the birds are still singing.”

Squeezing her Master tight, she added, “Let me know when you want me to run you that bath. I think I'll wash your hair and massage those glorious muscles of yours. Humm, then I'll join you, and we can see where the night takes us. I promise you, Master, you'll be extremely relaxed by the time I've finished with you.”

***

"As long as I get lots of bubbles," Hisoka agreed. "Although it might be nice to let you pamper me for a change, is that something you and Illumi want to do? I've never really considered it before."

***

"Illumi loves doing what he’s told, although, ouch, I’m going to pay for telling you that. But it’s true," Lulu said, wrapping her leg over her Master’s so that she could get closer to him. “And I love indulging you. That’s what I’m for,” she purred, pressing into his neck and ghosting kisses along his skin. “I live to make you happy.”

***

That feels nice. Maybe it won't be so bad to let Lulu have her fun? Is this what Dr. Lecter was picking up on? That she wants to do whatever would make me happy? Hisoka kissed the top of Lulu's head and gave a quiet chuckle. "Well, my homework this week is to let you take care of me," he told his girlfriend. "So I'm curious as to what you'd do if you had free reign? Other than pampering me in a bubble bath and riding me like your wild stallion. I'm sure you're full of creative ideas just waiting to be tried out."

***

Oh, no, why did you say that! Illumi thought as he tried to decide whether to take back control or hide at the back of his own mind for the rest of the week.

“Master,” Lulu breathed as she propped herself up on her elbow and looked down at him. “You have no idea.” She felt the delighted grin spreading over her face and stroked adoringly along his jawline. “The things I’ll do to you,” she moaned. You won’t ever want anyone else. “You’ll be on cloud nine by the time I’ve finished.”
“What if I’m already on cloud nine?” Hisoka countered with a wide grin. “Why stop at nine, I’m sure we could go higher, don’t you?”


“Hisoka-san,” Lulu said playfully. “For you, I’d go to nine thousand, maybe even over.”

I hate you both. I hate you both so much.

"Wouldn't that be a little unfair to the good Doctor? He needs to think he has a chance of winning or he won't play the game," Hisoka laughed and kissed Lulu's cheek.

"Then he better step it up a notch," Lulu teased. “I play to win.”

Someone, make her stop...please... Illumi begged, knowing that the universe wasn’t going to respond. She doesn’t care about the plan.

“If he’s any good, then he has to be able to beat me at my best,” Lulu whispered as she leaned down to kiss her Master. “Why would I go easy on him? I’m not going to spoil your game.”

Oh, I...why didn’t I think of that? I knew that. I did. Why is this so uncomfortable?

"You deserve to feel good all the time," Lulu persisted. “Not just with Dr. Lecter.”

Doesn’t he feel good with me? I can...I thought...

“Please, Hisoka-san, let me take care of you.”

"But I feel happy with you and Illumi," Hisoka protested. "All I wanted when he finally let me out of that dam office was to come back to you. I don't want Dr. Lecter; there's something off about him. The way he looks at me; he makes me feel strange. His voice makes me feel like I'm forgetting something, and he keeps stirring up unpleasant memories of my Father."

Reaching between them, he sought out Lulu's hand and squeezed it gently. "When you make me feel good, it's nice because it's you. With him...it's pleasant, but I wish it were somebody else."

"He reminds you of your Father?” Lulu asked, realising that her Master obviously still wanted to talk. “That must be jarring.”

What? Where did that come from? Lulu, how did you switch from making him feel good, to talking about his Father like that? Illumi asked, feeling utterly lost.
"When he had his hand around my throat, I hallucinated. I thought I could hear Father shouting at me, telling me to be quiet. He never liked it if I made any noise; he'd beat me until I started becoming mute. It was my punishment for making Mother leave," Hisoka mumbled with a pained expression, unable to meet his lover's eyes. "Father blamed me. He said it was my fault that she didn't come home from work. I sat by the door waiting, day after day, she never came back. Father said she wanted to leave us, and that I should stop waiting by the door," he took a deep breath. "It was just over a week when he snapped, he dragged me away...I'm sorry but can we talk about something else? Anything else? I don't know why he reminds me of him, but it's there. Maybe it's the way he looks at me, that hungry stare...I don't understand what he's doing to my mind. He looks nothing like the man," he continued to ramble, wrapping his arms around Lulu and clinging to her tightly. "It's all so confusing," he whispered.

***

“It’s OK to be confused, Master,” Lulu assured him, holding him as firmly as she could. “You don’t have to have all the answers now. It’s OK. You have a piece of the puzzle; you'll figure out the rest. I’m here, and I’m never going to leave. I promise.” She stroked his hair. “It’s all OK.”

***

"Could we maybe take that bath together? I want to forget about Dr. Lecter," Hisoka asked with a hopeful look. "It's bad enough his band is going to trigger; I feel like he's always butting into our special time. We'll get him though; we're a team. I'm your Master, and you're my submissive, but that doesn't mean that I can't let you take the reigns occasionally to look after me. I understand that I just wish he didn't make it an order. I want to focus on you and Illumi, not be thinking about him and who he reminds me of."

***

_Do you really want me? I would have said the wrong things. I would have upset you, Illumi thought. I still don’t know what to say. Why would you want me?_

“Exactly, Master,” Lulu purred. “I am, and I’m going to take care of you, and every time you feel that bracelet giving you your reward, think about how glorious it will be to slice him open with your cards. Imagine the taste of his fear in the air. He’s rewarding you for conquering him, not the other way around.”

_I would have never thought of that, Illumi said quietly. Thank you._

“Always, sweetie. It’s what I’m for.”

“Let me run that bubble bath,” she said and kissed her Master’s cheek.

***

"I don't want to let go of you," Hisoka whined. "Maybe I should just carry you into the bathroom? Do you think that would work?"

***

“Well that’s one way to test if your feet are healed,” Lulu giggled. “We’ll flip the fairytale on its head. The wounded Damsel in Distress saves the big, strong Knight in,” she looked down at her body and said, “Disguise.” She kissed her Master’s cheek again. “Sweep me off my feet, darling. Take me to the mysterious land of ‘Bath Room’.”
"Hold on tight," Hisoka instructed as he sat up and pulled Lulu onto his lap. "We need to traverse the 'Carpet Desert' to reach the magical land of 'Bath Room', but your dashing Master will get us there in one piece."

Carefully getting up from the bed, he chuckled; his feet barely stung, even with the added weight of another person. "Let's go on a magical adventure," he declared happily, carrying his lover into the ensuite. This is exactly what I need right now. Thank you, Lulu.

"Sooo strong," Lulu crooned. "My dashing Master, indeed. I can’t wait to see the ‘Bath Tub!’ I hear that bubbles just spontaneously erupt from it when you add water!"

No, you have to put in the bubble bath. First, Illumi corrected, trying to keep up with the conversation.


"Well we can certainly experiment to see if those rumours are indeed true," Hisoka said playfully as they came up to the door and he pushed it open with his foot. "What else have you heard about the miraculous bubbles, my darling?” he asked as he carefully manoeuvred them both into the bathroom.

"They come in different smells! ” Lulu giggled, kicking off her house shoes and wiggling her toes. “I heard that some...even smell like bubble-gum! Isn’t that exciting! ”

He knows all this. I don’t understand. Why are you talking to him like he’s stupid? Illumi asked, but received only a chuckle as a reply.

Laughing with his lover, Hisoka carefully put her down on the corner of the large bathtub. "Well, we made it," he said once he'd stopped chuckling. "So I guess I am now in your lovely hands, I believe I was promised some pampering? Does that mean I should get naked for you?"

"I like the sound of that,” Lulu purred. “But we have a bath to fill first.” She eyed the shower. “Unless you want to have some fun in there while we wait for the elusive bubbles to rise?”

"Would I do such a thing?” Hisoka asked, pretending to be scandalised. "Do you think your Master, would try to distract you by getting steamy in the shower?" he continued with a smirk before removing his shirt and pants. "Although, I do seem to have suddenly lost my clothes," he mused stepping out of his pants and holding his arm out for Lulu.

“Oh, my,” Lulu said, holding her hands up to her mouth and gasping in fake surprise while staring
at her Master’s crotch. “What a big distraction you have, kind Sir. I, well, I don’t know what I could possibly say to such a sight.”

She slid the arms of her sundress off and let the garment fall to the floor. She wasn’t wearing any underwear. “But...oh, gosh, what a situation we find ourselves in. My clothes appear to have come off as well. Whatever are we to do about it?”

You’re both insane, aren’t you? That’s it. Folie à deux. It’s catching.

***

What to do indeed? Hisoka thought as he took a moment to admire Lulu's naked form. "Perhaps I should move you to the top of my to-do list?” he purred as he pulled his girlfriend to her feet. "The shower looks like we’d have enough room for both of us, we could warm up while the bubbles do their thing?"

***

Leaning over the bath, Lulu flicked the hot water on. “Oops,” she giggled. Next, she took the cap off her Master’s most expensive bubble bath and poured a generous amount into the tub. “Oh, dear. I’m so clumsy today,” she trilled.

Sliding it to the side, she let Hisoka-san wrap her in his strong arms and pressed herself against his skin, allowing him to entirely enclose her in his embrace. “Maybe I should stay right here with you, like this?” she whispered. “We can be warm in the shower together then, my handsome Prince.”

***

"That sounds like a wonderful idea," Hisoka agreed as he pulled her into the shower cubicle with him. I like having you here, after all this is over I don’t know what I’ll do when Illumi goes home. Lifting Lulu's hand to give it a gentle kiss, he gave her a warm smile. "Let's get nice and steamy, shall we?"

***

1 Hour Later

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Illumi felt the ripples of water against his breasts and marvelled at the way they appeared to float. The bubbles had long since died away in the water, but Hisoka-san seemed content to stay where he was. He felt him squeeze his waist and looked up to see the happy smile on his face.

“Lulu is good for you,” he said quietly. “I don’t know what I would have done without her.” He leaned his head against his Master’s chest and listened to his steady heartbeat. “How can she know what to do when I don’t?” he wondered. “How is that possible?”

***

Hisoka brought his hand up and rubbed small circles across Illumi’s skin as he thought about the
question. "Maybe you do, on some level? I mean I'm not well versed in these things, but Lulu
knows everything about me that you do, doesn't she? I know I'm older than you, but I am also
pretty childish at times. You love your brothers. When they were little, did you ever play with
them? I know you didn't have a normal childhood, I didn't either, but we found each other, and I
think we work well as a couple."

***

“I would have chastised you,” Illumi admitted. “I thought you were going mad. I never considered
the possibility that you were playing. She just laughed at me and told me never to change.”

He traced the line of his Master’s long fingers and thought about what he’d said. “I did play, when
I was younger, but I stopped when I had to take charge. I don’t even know if I could play, not like
that. I...I understood when you were roleplaying as the Rogue and Maiden, but pretending that the
bathroom was a foreign land? And that the bath was magical?” He shook his head. “I would have
made you upset. I would have said the wrong things and—” He cut himself off. “I am glad she was
here for you.”

***

"Hey," Hisoka said softly as he gently turned Illumi's head to look at him. "Illu-chan, I've been with
you for the better part of three years. You caught my attention without needing to be silly; you still
have my attention. Lulu is fun, and she encouraged me to express my childish side in a way that I
wouldn't normally. Growing up, my imagination was my favourite toy. I loved my cards, but I
wasn't allowed to play with them in front of Father. He was more interested in his beer cans than
giving a child toys to play with, so I created my own. Didn't your brother's ever pretend that they
were exploring a magical forest or a dungeon? I mean, your house is huge. You probably have a
real dungeon now that I think about it."

***

Illumi closed his eyes and smiled. “We do,” he said mildly. “I’ve spent a lot of time down there.
We were never encouraged to imagine like that, though. Everything we did was for our mission.
When I played, I was taught strategy. I plotted how to infiltrate a great castle, or how to assassinate
a beautiful queen. I was given the barest of tools to complete my task and had to wonder what
would be at hand to improvise with.”

He opened his eyes and looked up at his Master wistfully. “One of the few things I was ever given
by my mother was a sewing kit; it’s where my needles come from. They were so beautiful...” he
trailed off, listening to the gentle splashing of the water and Hisoka-san’s ever-present breath. “I
used to dream of killing whole nations with them; of standing on the tallest spire in the land and
sending them out in the night. I would control them all. They would silently slip through open
windows and cracks in the doorframe, then,” he chuckled darkly. “Through skulls.”

“Now,” he said, tracing a droplet of water down Hisoka-san’s chest. “When I dream, I dream of
you.”

He closed his eyes and saw all the ways he’d imagined killing his Master; saw his broken and
bloodied corpse at his feet, and imagined again the momentary triumph he’d felt at his victories.

He gripped his Master tighter and blinked back tears as his heart broke. “You’re all I care about,”
he said, hiding his pain behind Lulu’s charming smile. “You’re all I want, and you’re all I’ll ever
need.”
You care about Killua, don't lie to yourself Illu-chan. It's fine; I know where I stand when it comes to your family. "I had wondered where the inspiration came from for your Nen needles, but I had concluded that it was because it's an easily concealed weapon. That's part of why I like my cards," Hisoka hummed as he idly played with one of Illumi's nipples. "I wish I could see your dream; you'd look beautiful standing on the spire. The eye of your very own maelstrom of death and destruction, wiping out entire dynasties with a flick of your hand," he groaned. "My Angel of Death," he whispered into his lover's ear before nipping the lobe playfully.

"I would be your angel," Illumi said dreamily, allowing his Master full access to his body. "I would bring them back to serve you. To honour the only man who will ever be worthy of me. They would be your army, and with them, you would rule."

"My own army of needlemen? Where would we conquer first? I've never really seen myself as the ruler type," Hisoka mused and licked Illumi's ear. "Although, it could be fun. Maybe I could have Danchou as my court jester? He'd hate that so much, but I could make him watch as I execute the rest of the troupe. Maybe I could spare Machi if she agreed to be my concubine? That's a fun idea."

"You would be exquisite, Master," Illumi said, feeling his heart picking itself up and starting to beat again. Lulu was already excited, and the prospect of having his Master use them as a conduit for his greatness thrilled him just as much.

"We'd start with Jappon," he said breathily. "It would be perfect, and then next, I think the Kakin Empire; that would be a challenge. You would rule it all in the end. My Master, my Lord." He turned his head and looked up into his eyes as he surged up to kiss him. "My Emperor."

"I think I'd like to have Jappon as our capital," Hisoka said softly before returning the kiss. "Kakin would take a while, but it would be a wonderful warmup before taking on the other V6 nations. Does my guardian Angel have a name for this new Empire in mind? Are my subjects to worship me as the new Sun Emperor?" He asked with a chuckle. "Imagine the fun we could have with you and Lulu taking it in turns to appear by my side. We'd keep our subjects guessing. I like the idea of being all mysterious and unknowable."

"I...Illumi began," but found the words dying in his mouth. He didn’t have the type of imagination that came up with names. You didn’t name the dead; you counted them. "I don’t know," he admitted. "I would call it whatever you wished, and I would be anyone you wanted me to be. You would be as mysterious as fog; I have no doubt," he added and hoped that he had said the right thing. This wasn’t how his dreams went, and he hadn’t practised what would happen if the script changed.

"I'm sure we could think of something fitting. If I'd be taking the title of the Sun Emperor in memory of Jappon and it being our meeting place, then you would be my beautiful and deadly
Asriel. The Angel who rules the moon, it's rather apt. I chased you all around Jappon, but I couldn't catch you," Hisoka paused to shift his position, wrapping his arms around Illumi's slim waist. "As my consort, I'd say you'd become like Eremiel, the Angel guardian of the abyss, or if you prefer, the afterlife. Lulu, I feel would be Ariel. They were known as the Lion of God and were an Angel of protection. Lulu's body would allow you to keep your true identity hidden for as long as you wished, and in doing so, allow you to protect me from your family."

Smiling, he lifted his hand to cup Illumi's cheek. "You'd serve at my side; every Emperor needs an Empress, and a most trusted advisor. But you would be my secret weapon, and I would use you to kill those who dared to threaten me or oppose my rule. A beautiful, deadly, Assassin," he whispered silkily as he stroked his lover's skin.

***

Illumi didn’t know any of those names, but it all sounded wonderful...and his Master was smiling. There was a strange warmth coiling in his stomach and without thinking, he pushed himself out of the water and kissed him passionately.

“Yes,” he gasped when he eventually had to pull away. “Always.”

“You’re my world. I’ll kill anyone who dares to threaten you. If you’d let me, I’d kill every member of the council who is trying to have you killed, but I know you’d say no. This has become a game for you. You want to beat them with their own weapons, just like in the exam. If you would turn me into a weapon, then I will strike when instructed. I’ll be your blade. Use me, Master.”

***

"Well, empires aren't created overnight, so that little fantasy will have to wait for a while. Plus, we already have a shared goal; bringing down Dr. Lecter, which reminds me." Hisoka brightened as he remembered the upcoming party. "He's sending me an invitation in the post, which will include his address. How do you feel about scouting out the house for me? I have an inkling that he'll be expecting me, but I'd like to surprise him.”

***

Hearing Hisoka’s request, Illumi felt the world forming back into place around him. His Master may wish to be fog, but to him, he was a light in the dark.

“It would be my pleasure,” Illumi said eagerly. “I’ll find out everything you need to know about the area. I wonder how well he will protect his property? He will have many enemies. I have been hired by several individuals to take out Blacklisters in the past.”

Warmth sprang up inside him despite the cooling water around them. “Thank you, Master. I will find out every secret that the house has to offer.”

***

"Then I'm sure you'll be successful," Hisoka encouraged. "He is rather confident in his abilities, so I wouldn't be surprised if his security is laxer than you’d expect. Which reminds me, I got the number of his tailor. We ever did find one in the end, and I need a suit, perhaps we should call them when we've finished here?"

***

“Umm, that sounds good,” Illumi said, already lost in plans for what he’d have to do if the man’s
house was in a high rise versus if it were in the country. “We should call him and make an emergency appointment. If he’s willing to work with a Hunter of Lecter’s status, then he will likely bend over backwards for you.”

***

“Tailors do emergency appointments?” Hisoka asked. “Would you be willing to arrange that? You know more about this stuff than I do, and I don’t want to risk offending the man. I mean that would be rather rude, and we know how Dr. Lecter feels about that. I wish I knew what his criteria were, he’s becoming such a killjoy.”

***

“Of course, Master,” Illumi said and began to push himself up from the bath. “It isn’t too late; I should be able to catch the receptionist before they close.”

***

Hisoka contemplated pulling his lover back down into the bath but decided against it. “That sounds sensible. The number should be in the pocket of my pants, he wrote it on the back of the drawing he did,” he advised as he allowed himself to enjoy the view of Illumi’s naked body. "Do you think we should consider ordering some food too? I don't know about you, but it's been a while since I've eaten anything."

***

“I will use my burner phone to call the tailor, and you can decide what we eat,” Illumi agreed. “That will be the most efficient use of our time.”

Picking up a warm towel from the rack, he held it open for his Master to step into. “You should get out as well; the water is becoming cold. We can’t afford for you to catch a chill.”

***

Moments like this are how I know you really do care for me, Hisoka thought with a small smile as he pushed himself to get to his feet.

"That sounds perfect," he agreed, climbing out of the tub and accepting the warm towel with a pleased sigh as he felt the soft material against his skin. "You know I quite like the idea of cuddling in bed naked and planning all the way we can kill Dr. Lecter," he mused. "What do you think? After we've made our phone calls, of course."

***

“I would be happy to do that,” Illumi agreed and heard Lulu’s sigh at the lack of enthusiasm in his voice.

“I mean,” he tried to correct. “I would be happy to do that with you Master.”

Better?

“How can you make it worse than totally blank? How?”

***

"Are you alright, Illu-chan?” Hisoka asked with a touch of concern. “I know you're not the most
emotive person, we've been together long enough. Surely you know it doesn't bother me?” Why would you repeat yourself like that? I know you don't say things you don't mean, I accepted you as you were. Didn't I?

***

“Lulu sighed at me,” Illumi explained. “I...” He frowned. “I thought that I should try to express myself. She...you like her when she does, but she’s reliably informed me that I did it wrong. I,” he hesitated for a moment as an uncomfortable feeling of shame crawled up his back.

“I should make that call,” he decided. Getting out of the bathroom seemed like a logical solution to the problem.

***

"Illumi," Hisoka said gently as he put his arms around his boyfriend. "It's fine; I appreciate you trying for me. If you want to work on it, then we'll do it together. I would like you to be a bit more expressive, but it's not going to make me leave you if you're not. Let's make those calls, and then we can relax."

***

You would like it? I didn’t know. I...but why? Emotions just get in the way. I didn’t know that you wanted-

“Put a towel on and get the phone, Illumi,” Lulu thought with a sigh. “You both need food. I know I do.”

Yes, right, of course, Illumi thought and nodded at his Master.

“As you wish,” he said and reached for a towel.

***

"It's been, rather intense today. I'm glad you're here with me," Hisoka replied as he let go to let Illumi dry off. I really mean that, I'd be lost right now without you. Dr. Lecter, he's doing something to me. I'm not sure what, but we're going to figure it out together.

***

“I am pleased you feel that way,” Illumi said, wondering how that could possibly be true. “I’ll speak to the tailor. I know your measurements, but he will likely want to confirm them in person. We can go to the shop tomorrow. With your permission, I will pay him an advance from your account. That should serve as an incentive to accommodate your requirements.”

***

"That sounds reasonable," Hisoka agreed. "Do you think he'd come to the hotel if he's outside my range of movement? I think he is, but I’m just thinking ahead."

***

“I would expect so, if Lecter recommended him to you,” Illumi said. “But I doubt he’d send you to someone that you wouldn’t be able to get to.”

***
"That makes sense, but I just find it hard to trust the man," Hisoka sighed. "He's just...I don't know. Let's speak to the tailor and worry about Dr. Lecter later," he added as he walked out of the bathroom to find the room service menu. Why am I so on edge? He hasn't gotten to me that badly already, has he?

***

“You will enjoy the tailors,” Illumi assured him as he followed him out of the room. “They like to play dress up too, and you will be the centre of everyone’s attention. I can not imagine a man turning you down as a model,” he added, hoping that the complement would help lift the mood.

*He was so happy.*

“And if not, then we can always kill him and find another,” he suggested offhandedly.

***

Hisoka chuckled as he sat on the bed. "I'm not sure Dr. Lecter would appreciate that, but it could be fun. It honestly wouldn't surprise me if the guys are waiting for me to get in touch,” he said thoughtfully as he scanned the menu. "I mean, he's controlling. That's pretty clear, and he's got Pariston Hill coming as well as Dr. Chilton, who is who I was almost assigned to for therapy. He does want to show me off. I wouldn't be surprised if his tailor is the only one who'd be able to squeeze me in. When we met him in the book store, did anything about him seem strange to you?"

***

“Not particularly,” Illumi said as he fished the paper out of his Master’s pocket. “But I didn’t imagine that he would be nor-” His words died as he unfolded the sheet.

“You said he had drawn you but...Master, you are being killed by a dragon and those things. You’re so...” He felt a sneer forming on his lips. “How could he cast you like this? You would never be so weak!”

***

Looking up from his reading, Hisoka patted the space beside him. “It’s not meant to be a portrait of me,” he explained. “I questioned him about it, and he gave me a list of artists he’d taken inspiration from. Artist is another of his ‘faces’, alongside therapist, surgeon, Hunter, and killer. In a way, I think he’s trying to tell me something, but without saying it?”

***

“What, that he understands culture?” Illumi asked, taking his seat. “I can see influences from at least three different artists here, possibly more. I understand that, but I can not see this as anything more than a gross misrepresentation of you. It is everything that you do, not everything that you stand for. Why would you reach helplessly for the dying? Or passively allow yourself to be gouged open while this pathetic rabbit watched on from the shadows? You would be fighting. This is a list of everything you are not...” He blinked. “Which shows that he knows you.”

He turned the sheet over and memorised the number. “May I kill his tailor on principle, Master?"

***

"I'm not sure, but he did make a point of saying he couldn't help me if he didn't understand me,"
Hisoka said as he eyed the elegant handwriting on the back of the picture. What if it's a warning? He included two origami rabbits and a bunch of magical objects, but being a magician is just part of who I am. Don't be daft Hisoka; it's just a drawing. It's whimsy. He offered you a fancy cane as a gift; he likes you, remember?

***

“This feels like a lot more than just a throwaway sketch. The man is a double star Hunter; even my Grandfather respects him,” Illumi said, tossing the picture onto the side table so that he didn’t have to look at it anymore. “He wouldn’t do something on a whim. Do not be fooled. Everything a man like him does is planned. He won’t make spur of the moment decisions.”

He typed the numbers into his phone. “He’s showing you exactly how much he sees,” he added darkly, before hitting call.

***

He offered me one of his canes, but he didn’t plan for me to be caned today. I had a choice. True, he didn’t let me pick the cane or something else, but he let me choose based upon the amount of pain they would cause. Hisoka watched his lover on the phone for a moment before turning his gaze back to the menu in his hands. I wouldn’t have chosen the cane if he’d had suggested it in that way, but I don’t know what the second option would have been. He’s subtle, but he was manipulating my decision. Still, it felt fantastic, and he seemed a little resigned when I asked him to keep my new toy with him. Listening to Illumi’s voice, he sighed and tried to regain his focus. He needed to decide what food they would be eating tonight.

***

As Illumi talked to the exceptionally polite receptionist, who assured him that they would be welcome to come by the shop at any time tomorrow, he watched his Master closely.

There was a subtle unease about him that hadn’t been there earlier, and he couldn’t decide whether it was the fact that he was now present, or the subtle shift in their conversation. He didn’t want to keep bringing up uncomfortable topics, but it was necessary. Hisoka-san knew that, surely? It seemed obvious to him that the more they talked about the Doctor, the less power he would hold over them. His Master had said that he was making clear advances and that he was confident that he was successfully seducing him. So why did he look so sad? The only variable that had changed was him.

I should leave him to you, he thought. You make him happy.

“You do too; he just said so,” Lulu reminded him.

He’s lying to spare my feelings. I do not know why, he replied as he finished his call. Take care of him, he instructed and sank to the back of his mind.

***

Maybe I should have just accepted the therapy? I could have found a way to come back here to kill him after couldn’t I? Hisoka wondered as he tried to decide between seafood or one of the many steaks the hotel offered. I don’t know if it’s helping, but it feels like no matter what I do, Dr. Lecter is ahead of me. I’m not used to this, I don’t like it and why can’t I just make a simple decision? It can’t be the bracelet, can it? He glared at the metal band on his wrist and realised that his lover had finished up their phone call. “I'm not sure if I want fish or beef, do you think we should get
both?” he asked.

***

“That sounds like a great idea,” Lulu said, deciding that now wasn’t the time to argue with Illumi, and slid closer to her Master. “We can have a feast to celebrate your success.” She stroked his arm and grinned and added, “Then gasy, bloated cuddle sex to top the night off.”

***

“A feast to celebrate my progress with Dr. Lecter? Sure,” Hisoka agreed. "Maybe I should order us both a mixed grill and see who can eat it all first? I mean, if you want to be all gassy and bloated that would do it." So you let Lulu take control again?

***

Lulu chuckled warmly. “You’re fantastic, you know that?” she asked before leaning in and kissing his cheek. “Add in the Chocolate Gateau while you’re at it, and a large bottle of Champagne. We want our Master to be happy, after all.”

She slid her arms around his waist. “And if you stay like that,” she added. “Then whoever answers that door will as well.”

***

"What do I get when I win this little competition?” Hisoka challenged as he pulled Lulu onto his lap and nuzzled her. "There needs to be a prize, don’t you think?"

***

“You want to do that?” Lulu laughed, touselling his hair. “To all that meat? Do you secretly want me to get fat?” she teased and poked at her Master’s side.

***

"That’s why I’d ravish you," Hisoka laughed. "To burn off all that extra energy, and you know I can go all night."

***

“Cannibal,” Lulu teased before dipping down to peck a kiss on his lips. “Tell you what, why don’t I give you a little incentive to buy those extras while you’re on the phone?” she said alluringly. “If you order them, I’ll let you have a starter course while we wait for it to arrive. I’ll even get the door if you can make me cum before they knock.”

***

Cannibal? Where did that come from? "Maybe you shouldn't give your Master ideas," Hisoka said playfully before nipping at Lulu's neck and shoulder, then kissing the abused skin. "You do smell and look rather tantalising right now," he added cheekily.

***

“Oh, my, and from such a beautiful mouth too,” Lulu teased. “Are you going to ravish me? Just eat me all up? I could recommend a place for you to start.”
"What if I decided that you were too tempting?" Hisoka asked playfully as he licked and nipped Lulu's ear. Is this something that Illumi secretly likes? "I think I can guess where you'd want me to start my dear. Master knows how to make you squeal like a little piglet, is that what you want me to do to you?"

"Like you wouldn’t be the cat that got the cream," Lulu giggled, and toppled them onto their sides. "You still have to call them up, silly - No treats before ordering. I’m going to make you work hard. I don’t want to open that door."

"Meow," Hisoka chuckled and kissed Lulu on the lips gently. "Maybe I should stick you to the bed, then order our food and just have my way with you anyway? Then when they bring our meal, I’ll consider releasing you."

"Well then, whoever’s lucky enough to open the door will get a fabulous view,” Lulu purred. “Oh, I do hope it’s Leroy. Ah, that man does fill my heart with joy. I think it’s the combover that tips the scales in his favour. Should we ask him to join us?"

"Maybe we should ravish him? Let him die happy?" Hisoka joked as he rolled onto his back to grab the phone. "Not sure he’d taste that good, probably a bit too salty for my pallet. Best stick to normal room service."

"Maybe we should just kill him and leave the rest for the morticians to have fun with?" Lulu agreed. “Oh, I’d love to make that man bleed. Death by a thousand cuts would be too good for him."

"I love it when you get murdery," Hisoka crooned happily. "Tell me what you'd do to him. I want to hear it all. Every gruesome detail, once I've called room service though, something tells me I'll end jumping you."

"I think I’d start with the hair," Lulu said dreamily, trailing her fingers over the swell of her breasts. “I’d tie him to a chair and make him watch as I plucked it out strand by strand...then I’d slice off those ears as he screamed. Maybe I’d attach a few fake nails onto him - pink of course - and I’d have to take his old one’s off first, to make room, you understand. I wonder what his body looks like under all that drab? I suppose if he’s good looking enough, we could tip him upside down and use him as an umbrella stand for a bit? I’m sure he’d enjoy himself eventually."

"Do you have any of those wonderfully wicked ideas for when we get the good Doctor at our
mercy?” Hisoka asked with growing intrigue. Oh dear Illumi, have you been holding out on your Master? Such a naughty boy, I'm going to have to think about what to do about that.

***

“He can be the candelabra,” Lulu said with conviction. “Strap him up, drill the holes for the handles, stuff them in and hoist him away.” She stared towards the ceiling and smiled. “Maybe we could rent one of those nice stately halls? His screams would sound beautiful in there.”

***

Yes, definitely been holding out on me. “Lulu,” Hisoka growled. “I’m going to need you to let me call room service because, at this rate, I'm not going to be able to control myself enough. So be a good girl, let Master call the nice people who make the food and then you’re going to be screaming my name. So I suggest you get some water, you’re going to need it.”

***

“You were the one who asked,” Lulu said smugly as she reached for the glass on the bedside table and held it up, winking at her Master when she took a sip. “I’m a good little girl.”

***

“Yes, you are, which is why Master is going to order us a feast, and then he’s going to play with you,” Hisoka agreed, shifting his position to hide his tenting problem. Fuck, how are you so good at that? Illumi doesn't get the dirty talk that much, but Lulu? Taking a deep breath to calm himself, Hisoka picked the menu back up and hit the button to place their order.

***

Thank you, Illumi thought as he watched Hisoka-san excitedly ordering his food.

“You’re always welcome,” Lulu replied, getting comfortable on the bed and wondering how long she’d be able to hold out against her Master’s clear determination to make her cum.

He likes what you say, Illumi noted. You should do it more.

“You can as well, you know,” she noted.

Not the same as you can, Illumi pointed out. He likes it when you do it more.

“That’s because you don’t try,” she countered.

And you didn’t exist last week.

“Fair point,” she admitted, licking her lips when their Master finished selecting the most expensive drinks on the menu. “Hold on, we’re in for a fun ride.”

***

30 Mins Later
Miriam growled as she pushed the food cart along the corridor.

“I don’t see why we have to go down and collect it from the kitchens,” she groused when she saw Zeller pointedly looking anywhere but at her. “I mean, it’s not like he’s got spy equipment ready so that he can burst out of the door naked whenever an unsuspecting bus-boy walks past.”

“Master! Oh, MASTER!” Lulu screamed as she came for the fifth time in as many minutes. “Master, don’t stop!” She grabbed his hair to keep him in place as he skillfully worked her with his tongue. “Fuck! So GOOD!”

“Seriously?” Miriam deadpanned.

“Seriously,” Zeller agreed. “They had a bet. She was screaming that she wouldn’t be getting the door until, what, ten minutes ago?”

“Five,” Kyoya corrected.

“Five minutes ago,” Zeller amended. “Now, well, she’s just screaming. Is there anything good on there? I’m starving.”

Miriam batted his hands away. “Get your own. I just hope that they hear the door. I’m not going in there.”

That’s it, scream for me. You know I love making you sing. Hisoka thought humming happily as he continued to tease Lulu with his tongue, alternating between touching her clit and the pins that kept her shape. Can we make it to six orgasms before the food arrives?

“Well, fuck you, Hisoka,” Miriam muttered and watched Kyoya scamper to the side to give her access to the door. “Time to interrupt your fun. I hope your balls turn blue.”

She banged on the door with her foot.

“Room service!” she yelled. “Get it while it’s hot!”

Great, guess number six will have to wait. It would be Miriam too. Hisoka grumbled to himself as he pulled away from Lulu's body and looked up at her with a grin. "Well, you heard the lady, and I
believe I won the bet. So I suggest you go get our food before she kicks down the door,” he teased. "Not that I would mind the audience, but I like this room."

***

Lulu whimpered, but reluctantly pushed herself to her feet.

“Well,” she gasped. “We’ll just have to put a pin in that then.”

Steadying herself against the wall, she took a few tentative steps and realised that yes, her legs were still, thankfully, functional. “Showtime,” she chirped and set off for the door.

***

"Good girl," Hisoka encouraged. "I promise we'll have lots of more fun once we've eaten our fill. You remember Miriam? The lady who came dress shopping with us, I think you liked her. So be nice," he teased.

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“I’m always nice,” Lulu purred and reached out for the door.

***

“Hisoka, I swear to God if you answer the door naked one more ti-” Miriam began and felt the words die in her throat.

“You’re not Hisoka,” she managed.

***

“No,” Lulu said dreamily. “But he’s in here if you’d like to join us. I’m sure he’d be more than happy to accommodate someone as beautiful as-”

***

“I have your food,” Miriam blurted out and slid the cart into the room. “Nice to see- I mean talk to you. I’ll be naked- I mean, going. You’re very good- pretty- thank you for using room service. Bye.”

***

Lulu watched with an amused smile as the woman pulled the door shut, and heard an audible whimper followed by the sound of two men bursting out laughing.

“Well, I think she’s going to enjoy herself tonight,” she said happily, grabbing the cart.

Pushing it forward with an exaggerated wiggle in her step, she trilled, “Oh, Master, I have a feast fit for an Emperor.”

***

_I wonder if she'll try to avoid being my escort for a while?_ Hisoka thought as the laughter from outside died down. _Something tells me she's not going to forget today in a hurry._

Sitting up on the bed, he watched appreciatively as Lulu wheeled the cart over to him. "I do hope
so; you're Emperor is rather hungry." he teased. "You did a fantastic job of whetting my appetite earlier, and from the sounds outside, somebody else's too."

***

“She’s cute when she’s flustered,” Lulu agreed. “Can we keep her? I mean, if we’re turning Leroy into an umbrella stand and Hannibal into a candelabra, then I think we should keep her as a pet. She’ll look cute growling inside a cage, and oh, imagine the noises she’d make as we played with her!”

***

"Do you want me to put ears and a tail on her too?" Hisoka asked with a chuckle. "I do think she'd suit a nice collar, shame she'd never willingly accept her submissive side. She hides it well, but it's there if you know what to look for."

***

“As long as I get to fit the nipple clamps,” Lulu moaned, lifting the covers for their food and sniffing appreciatively.

“We both know that you’d break her in the end; she’ll bow to your will. You’re my wonderful Master; you always get what you want.”

***

Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:

Illumi, Lulu, Miriam, Zeller, Kyoya

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Hisoka
The Phantom Troupe gather to discuss how to proceed without their leader at the helm and Phinks decides to try to make new friends.

“Personally, I don’t see what the problem is. It’s not like he hasn’t seen naked women before,” Shizuku said as she rounded the side of another rubble-filled street. “I don’t know why they didn’t let us in.”

***

“The man said that I was too young,” Kalluto reminded her. “I think they were serving alcohol there too. They didn’t seem too happy about me being there; maybe I should stay away the next time you visit? I don’t want to be a bother.”

***

Nobunaga stopped for a moment before shaking his head. “You’re not a bother Kalluto,” he said reassuringly. "We just need to find another way for you to help out. The bouncer is just doing his job; if anything, we could always pretend that we were there as a test to ensure the club isn't serving underage customers. I'll go back later with Phinks; maybe that will distract him from his clown obsession."

***

“Well, I know that I’m not as strong as you all yet,” Kalluto explained. “I have a lot to learn...and although alcohol doesn’t affect me, I know that I’m not allowed to drink it yet.” He fiddled with his sleeve. “I think Phinks would be a better person to take with you. I’ve never really liked clubs anyway,” he admitted. “Whenever Illumi would take me to them for training, I felt so out of place.”

***

“You'll get there, and I'm sure we can continue your training in a way that you find more suitable. Maybe you could join Machi on her patrol? You get along with her, don't you?” Nobunaga suggested.

***

“Hey, he gets along just fine with us too,” Shizuku said defensively. “It’s the bouncers that he didn’t like- What’s that?” she asked, pointing to a parcel that had been left in the doorway of an old church. “And do I know this place? It feels familiar.”

***

Looking at where his teammate was pointing, Nobunaga resisted the urge to sigh. "That's the old headquarters," he reminded her. Taking a couple of steps closer, he drew his sword to carefully poke the package. "Well, it doesn't seem to be booby-trapped, but you two stay there; I'll take a
closer look," he instructed before crouching down to inspect the package and squinting at the neat handwriting on the attached note.

"For my new friends, please accept this token of gratitude for your previous hospitality. PS: You may keep the bowl," he read aloud, and scratched his chin thoughtfully. *Well, I can only think of one person who would know to leave something here for us. But I better take this back for Feitan to look at. Captain Cannibal doesn't strike me as the hands-off type. If he wants to kill somebody, then he’d do it while he looked into their eyes.* Carefully picking up the parcel, he carried it back to where the others were waiting.

"Looks like we’ve got a special delivery," he offered in explanation to Kalluto's curious look. "We should discuss what to do with it with the others; the new base is only around the corner," he reminded Shizuku.

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“It is?” Shizuku asked, running for a few steps to keep up with Nobunaga’s long strides. “Why did we move? Was there a leak?”

***

“A cannibal found out where we were staying, and Fetian thought that it would be better to sleep somewhere that wouldn’t risk us being eaten in the night,” Kalluto explained patiently. “My brother always recommended against being eaten; although, if it came down to it, he suggested that we offer up Miluki first.”

When he saw the blank looks he was getting, he added, “He’s fat. And no one likes him.”

***

"That sounds like very good advice," Nobunaga replied as he tried to picture what Kalluto’s home life was like. "Hopefully Shalnark will have turned up while we were out. I never thought I’d miss his annoyingly happy attitude."

***

“Who?” Shizuku asked curiously

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“Don’t worry; I’m sure you’ll remember him when you see him,” Kalluto offered, patting Shizuku’s arm and wondering what kind of brain damage she had.

***

At the Base

***

“Look, I don’t care what you all think, I’m *telling you* Hisoka killed them!” Phinks insisted.

“They gave their Nen over to Danchou, they were within that damned radius Shalnark found out about, and they were investigating the dealers. It all adds up! Hisoka’s *working with the druggies!*"
I can’t believe you don’t see it! He’s using the investigation as cover. It’s exactly the sort of thing he’d do!"

***

“I don’t believe that the Hunter Association are that stupid,” Bolonov pointed out. “And the BAU are also involved.”

***

“They are sending Hisoka to be therapised by a damned cannibal,” Phinks countered.

***

“That doesn’t make him a bad person,” Bolonov said, folding his arms. “I have eaten the flesh of my clan. It can be a noble-”

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“He tried to make me into soup!” Phinks exploded. “There’s nothing noble about Phinks soup!”

***

"I agree,” Franklin joined in and pointed at Phinks. "You'd have to be noble first, before you were made into soup, for that to happen."

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"Danchou knows about your tribe," Machi told Bonolenov with a kind smile, ignoring the others for now. "But there's a difference between your funeral traditions and what Dr. Lecter was doing." Hisoka is sneaky, but he has no loyalty to anyone. The only way he'd work with the dealers is if he was after somebody in their organization himself.

***

“I wait to reserve judgement,” Bonolenov said, turning away from Phinks when he heard the sound of the lobby door opening below them.

Heading over to the railing, he looked down and smiled. “Our scouts return, and with a gift, no less. Let’s hear what they have to say on the matter, shall we?”

***

Nobunaga looked up as he entered the building, towards the sounds of raised voices and nodded in greeting to Bonolenov. "Phinks again?" he shouted up to his colleague, who shrugged in reply, and he laughed. "Alright, we'll be up in a minute. It looks like we got a special delivery," he added and held up the box to give his friend a better look.

He took the stairs three at a time and made his way through the drab grey corridors before emerging onto the balcony to join the others. Glancing around at the group, he asked, "Any news from Shalnark or Kortopi? Also, why are those two fighting anyway?"
"Nothing yet," Feitain replied as he eyed the box in Nobunaga's hands suspiciously. "Also, Franklin agreed Phinks would not make a good soup. Where did you find the parcel?"

"Oh, yes, I agree," Kalluto said helpfully. "He really is not a good cook. I’ve swapped with him three times now for campfire duty, and I don’t even mind."

"Soup? I'm going to leave that one alone," Nobunaga replied. "We walked past the church, and this was on the doorstep. I think it's from our new 'friend', Dr. Lecter. I figured you'd want to look at it, so I'll put it in the kitchen for now."

"Kitchen?" Feitan asked with a tilt of his head.

"He said we could keep the bowl, so that suggests it's food of some sort," Nobunaga explained before walking past the others to the small kitchenette.

"I hope it's vegetarian," Machi sighed. "Otherwise I'm not eating it."

“Like fuck, that man’s ever made anything vegetarian,” Phinks huffed, following Nobunaga. “If that’s a Shalnark head, then I’m going to do the ‘I told you so’ dance.”

“I thought you believed Hisoka to have killed him?” Bonolenov asked, noting the small hint of glee in his teammate’s tone.

“They’re working together,” Phinks snapped. “You know the cannibals bent over and let him stick his di-”

“It doesn’t smell like a head,” Shizuku interrupted, wandering up to Nobunaga’s side and peering over his shoulder. “It smells like chicken. I remember something about a recipe for soup?”

"Shalnark asked for the recipe from Dr. Lecter," Feitan offered. "Maybe it's soup?"

"Hopefully it's actually chicken," Machi added and glared at Phinks. "Also since when you were
you the expert on all things cannibal Phinks? Do you really think Hisoka would knowingly agree to eat a person?"

***

“He teamed up with the chain user, Machi. There’s nothing I’d put past him,” Phinks said emphatically. “Now open the damn package. I can’t stand seeing your hopeful faces every time you hear the door creak. The boys are dead, and I’ll put money on that being Shalnark soup; poor fuck.”

***

"Alright, no need to get your panties in a bunch. I'll open the damn thing," Nobunaga groused as he put the box down on the countertop and carefully detached the note before ripping the brown packing paper, revealing an envelope addressed to Shalnark, lying on a Tupperware box, with a large covered bowl inside.

***

Once he'd finished reading the note, Feitan took the envelope from Nobunaga and turned it over in his hands. "For Shalnark?" he asked as he examined the wax seal on the other side of the envelope.

***

"Wasn't it Shalnark who asked for his recipe?" Nobunaga shrugged, opened the Tupperware and looked at the contents of the bowl before putting the lid back on. "OK, whatever it is. It's definitely not, vegetarian; I'm not sure we should eat it."

***

"I told you so," Phinks smirked. Leaning back against the fridge, he frowned when Bonolenov pushed passed him. “Hey, don’t shove,” he groused. “Oh, dude, I know you’re into the freaky stuff, but really?” he groaned when he saw the bandaged man lift the lid of the bowl and sniff appreciatively.

***

“This is not human,” Bonolenov said confidently. “But it does smell fantastic.”

***

“Are you sure?” Kalluto asked quietly. “We aren’t going to have to eat people, are we? My Grandad said that he had to once. I...don’t think I want to eat Kortopi. He was so small...”

***

"Bonolenov's tribe ate their dead," Feitan replied as he opened the letter to see it's contents. Inside the envelope was a handwritten note, a list of ingredients and details steps for how to make the soup.

*My dear boy, thank you for enquiring about my recipe. Enclosed, you will find everything you need to make it yourself, and a sample to test your creation against. I do hope that you enjoy your time with it as much as I have.*

"Soup was for Shalnark," he added once he finished reading. "Do you want to try it?" he asked
Bonolenov curiously.

***

“It would be rude to let such a wonderful creation go to waste,” Bonolenov said happily, picking out the bowl and carrying it over to the main table. “If anyone could get me a spoon?” he asked politely. “It would be appreciated. There is room to share if you like?”

***

“I’ll have some,” Kalluto said and gathered his courage as he took a step closer to the table. “I’ve never had human- I mean chicken soup before. Grandad said that people taste like pigs, so if this tastes like chicken, then we know that it isn’t Shalnark or Kortopi!”

***

"I'll grab you both a spoon," Nobunaga muttered marvelling at how calm Kalluto was about the idea of eating a person. *Bono, I understand not being bothered, but the kid? What sort of home do the Zoldycks have?* After a few moments of searching, he found some assorted cutlery and handed his colleagues their spoons. "Well, if it's good, then we'll have to get some chicken so we can make it for Shalnark as a welcome back present."

***

Leaving Dr. Lecter's note on the side, Feitain decided to join the others at the table. Collecting a spoon and sitting besides Kalluto, he turned towards the curious child. "Smells good," he agreed. "If it tastes good then we'll make more."

***

“Isn’t that why Shalnark asked for the recipe?” Kalluto asked with a frown. “I remember him saying that he was looking forward to trying it out.”

***

“Yes,” Bonolenov agreed. “That is what a recipe is for. Not everyone barbeques everything,” he added, raising his eyebrow at Phinks’s ‘humph’ and Feitan’s non-plussed stare.

“I’ll teach you how to do it,” he promised the boy as Franklin settled down next to him and carefully passed him a spoon, holding it between two massive fingers.

***

“Shouldn’t you heat that first?” Shizuku asked, reading the note for herself. “And it said that it was so that this Shalnark guy could compare to. I don’t think you’re all supposed to eat it now.”

***

"Shalnark knows what it tastes like," Feitain informed Shizuku, recalling the events his colleagues had recounted for him the first time they'd run into Dr. Lecter. "Besides, he's not here; I'm sure we can make more. It's fresh, still warm."

***

Franklin hummed in agreement, although he was certain neither of their missing colleagues would be returning. "Shalnark would be upset if we let good food go to waste," he added. "Why don't you
try some? Dr. Lecter is as good as a chef as the rumours about his dinner parties would suggest, and this is definitely chicken.

***

"I'm still not sure I want to eat anything made by Dr. Lecter," Machi complained as she watched her friends sharing the soup. Who knows who he's cooked and served in that bowl? We all know how Danchou feels about eating other people; we're supposed to be a standard for the city to aspire to. "I'll go and patrol the area. You guys enjoy it." Turning away from the table, she paused and couldn't believe her own ears when she said, "Do you want to join me, Phinks?"

***

“Hell yeah,” Phinks said, pushing off from the fridge and sneering disgustedly at the others. “I hope Shalnark comes back as a ghost and eats the lot of you. I can’t believe you’re actually going to.” He covered his mouth and ran to the sink, gipping twice before he could gain control over his stomach.

Wiping at his mouth, he decided that leaving as quickly as he could, would be the best plan. “Lead the way, Machi,” he groaned and trailed after her as she left the room. He refused to meet Kalluto’s worried eyes.

***

"Is he going to be OK?” Kalluto asked Nobunaga. “What’s wrong with him?”

***

"He's dealing with his own issues about Dr. Lecter," Nobunaga explained and ruffled Kalluto's hair. "Don't worry about him kiddo; he'll get over it."

***

“If you say so,” Kalluto said, smoothing out his hair and doing his best not to look annoyed. “But I don’t see why the prospect of someone else being killed would upset him, and if Franklin and Bono both say that it’s not a person, then…” He straightened his parting and frowned. “Then it's not either of them. I thought he was supposed to be an adult? He makes no sense.”

***

"Phinks doesn't always act like an adult," Franklin interjected. "He's too impulsive and reckless."

***

Feitan looked between Kalluto and Franklin before shrugging. "Phinks...acts without thinking. Dr. Lecter threatened to eat him."

***

"He did? I thought it was Shalnark he did that to?” Nobunaga asked in surprise.

***

“And why would he care?” Kalluto asked bluntly. “Nobunaga threatens to kill him every two days, but he doesn’t mind that. Why would the Doctor threatening to kill him make a difference?”
"Well if he weren't such an idiot, I wouldn't threaten to kill him. Man, I wish Uvo was still with us, he'd knock some sense into him. As for why Phinks cares, well Danchou gave him orders to look after Shalnark. You know about Danchou's Nen, right?" Nobunaga asked. "Both Kortopi and Shalnark don't have Nen at the moment, which is why I don't think it was a good idea to let them go out alone. Damage has been done now, though."

"Shalnark has a Hunter License," Feitan replied. "He's not helpless because he has no Nen."

"I know he does, but Kortopi?" Nobunaga insisted. "He doesn't. I get that he was going stir crazy and all, but surely one of us could have gone with them? Even if it was only to the centre of town."

"They would draw the least attention," Franklin chimed in. "They'd be looking for strong Nen users, Hisoka has a lot of enemies. As they can't access theirs then they were the best choice for the job; they'll find their way back, or they won't, but the spider must survive. That is the most important of our rules."

"Enemies like the Spider," Feitan added, pointing his spoon at Nobunaga. "You'd kill Hisoka if you had the chance, wouldn't you?"

"Well yeah...he helped that dam chain-user kill Uvo, but he's under constant guard. There's no way I could get close enough," Nobunaga replied defensively.

"Why not?" Feitan asked. "You are one of us; what would stop you?"

What do you mean what would stop me? He's got those guards with him, and the BAU have powerful Nen users working for them, Nobunaga wondered as he stared at Feitan blankly trying to work out what his leader was getting at before sagging slightly against the worktop. "Alright, I think I get your point. If they're using En to scan the area, we'd show up like lights on a bloody Christmas tree because our Nen would react to it. I still think somebody else should have gone with them though, for the record."

"I'll take that into consideration," Feitan replied. "If they come back, I'll let you go with them on their next job."

"Speaking of Christmas," Shizuku said, resting against Franklin's side. "How does the soup taste? Maybe we could use it as a starter for our celebrations! We could get the Doctor to make it for..."
"Shalnark as a present!"

***

"It's delicious, do you want to try it?" Franklin asked and offered Shizuku his spoon. "I'm pretty sure with Bono's help we could replicate the soup for Christmas, we just need to source the ingredients."

***

"Do I like chicken soup?" Shizuku asked sceptically. "I mean, I’m not sure if I should. Phinks seemed really mad."

***

"It tastes fantastic," Kalluto said, sipping at his spoon and grinning. "But we can keep it for a Christmas secret?"

He looked hopefully up at Bono. "We could practice a lot to get it perfect?"

***

Fishing a chunk of chicken out and sliding it into his mouth, Bonolenov grinned back at the small child. "Oh, yes. We can find out where he got his chicken from too. It’s magnificent."

***

"Really?" Kalluto asked excitedly. "I can see if I can follow him to the shop?"

***

"We could leave a note on the church door asking," Franklin suggested. "That way we'd be able to confirm if he's coming back to look for us. He's made this for Shalnark; surely he'd be flattered if we continue to show an interest?"

***

Feitan turned to Kalluto. "We can do both," he decided. "Kalluto, you're very good at tracking. Do you think you could track Dr. Lecter for us? Not just to do his shopping, we need to keep an eye on him, and he doesn't know you're one of our group."

***

"I have a few things I could try," Kalluto hedged, not wanting to give too much about his Hatsu away. "I’d need to get close to him, but that shouldn’t be a problem," he added hastily when he saw Feitan’s frown.

He remembered his mother’s stories about the Doctor and Illumi’s warnings never to go up against him, but Killua’s determined face also floated across his mind's eye. Kill would never give up, and he couldn’t either. He had to get Killua to come home, and if that meant facing Dr. Lecter, then that was what he would do.

***

"He needs to know where you are to use his Nen," Feitan warned. "You can't let him see you, or read you as a threat. Are you sure you can get close?"
"You can't be serious," Nobunaga exclaimed. "You're going to send the kiddo on his own against the cannibal?"

"Kalluto is one of the Zoldycks," Feitan replied calmly. "Young, but highly skilled. Doctor won't know he's a spider."

None of you have ever noticed me, Kalluto thought. If I can beat the Spider, then I should be able to at least pretend to bump into the Doctor. That’s all I’d need to do to get my confetti onto him. I’ll do it like Illumi taught me.

“I can do it,” he said, wishing that everyone would stop looking at him. “The Doctor doesn’t know who I am. He won’t know I’m a threat. I’ve done things like this before, and the people I have tagged never knew. I’ll do it in the morning before he goes into work; that way we can track him all day.”

"How long do you think you’d need?" Feitan asked, holding up a hand to signal the others to be quiet when Nobunaga opened his mouth.

“I...I don’t know. I mean, I’ll have to set up position, and track him and get to know his rout—” Kalluto began to say, but stopped when he recognised the impatient stare he was being given. “I’ll have it done as quickly as you need, Sir,” he amended. “I won’t let you down.”

Feitan nodded. "We know where he works," he advised. "Shalnark found all that information before he vanished. I can take you to scout out the area later, after dark. Would that allow you to formulate your strategy?"

“Yes,” Kalluto said quietly. “Thank you. I...I will practice until then.”

He put his spoon down and got up from the table. “Thank you very much,” he said, bowing to the rest of the Troupe. “I will return at sundown.”

Bonolenov watched as the small boy left the room and chuckled. “Don’t worry, Nobunaga,” he said cheerfully. “I’ve got Shalnarks cell phone tracker working. We can keep an eye on him from here. He’s not the only one who can track people without them knowing.”

Shaking his head, Nobunaga decided to sit down. "You know, you're just full of surprises Bono," he said conversationally. "I just hope the kid is as good as his confidence suggests."
"Danchou respects the Zoldyck clan. He'll pull it off. There's no need to doubt him just because he's young," Franklin pointed out. "Besides I remember a while ago you wanted to let two young boys who had been following you and Machi join our ranks. They can't have been much older then Kalluto is now."

"Gon? I remember him, yeah...nice kid. Do you think he might have changed his mind about joining? It's been a been what, two or three years?" Nobunaga perked up at the memory of the kid who reminded him of his friend.

"No," Feitan replied firmly. "Too reckless, he wouldn't be good for the spider."

"The kid was talented, but don't forget Hisoka had a strong interest in that boy. It would be foolish to give the clown another reason to come after us," Franklin added, seeing the way his colleague deflated. "We'll find somebody else to bring up our numbers, after we're through with Vikki."

"Fine, I admit defeat," Nobunaga grumbled. "On the topic of Vikki though, I've been thinking about inviting Phinks to check out that club. The one Shizuku and I went to scout out earlier. Maybe it'll help him get the stick out of his ass. What do you think?"

"They wouldn’t let us in," Shizuku grumbled. “I wanted to see what it was all about. It sounded fun,” she added, grinning hopefully at Nobunaga. “Boobs, Buts and...” she tilted her head. “I can’t remember. Maybe if I come with you both, I’d get to see inside?”

"See inside where?" Machi asked as she came back into the kitchenette. "I swear Phinks needs neutering, did I miss anything while I was out?"

"Oh, that club we were checking out," Nobunaga replied before asking, "Wait, where's Phinks? Don't tell me he's disappeared now too?"

If only. "No, I know where he is. I left him propping up a bar in some sleazy strip joint that he insisted we go into. For the 'investigation'; he just wants to stare at some tits if you ask me. Anyway, don't let me ruin the party. How was the soup?" Machi asked as she looked for a cup to get a drink of water. "Was it people or something else in the end?"

"Chicken, was good actually. At least Phinks is away from Hisoka," Feitain offered.
"Sorry Nobunaga, it looks like Phinks predicted that you wanted him in a strip club," Franklin joked, unfazed by the glare his comment earned him.

"Yeah," Nobunaga said grumpily. "I don’t suppose you checked out the name of the club before you got dragged in by Phinks’s libido?"

"Boobs, Butts and Braziers," Machi replied, sipping at her drink. "And it was as tacky inside, as the name suggests. Some young jock tried to chat me up, so I left. Not my scene."

Bonolenov prodded the portable tracker Shalnark had made and grinned at the screen. "Yep, he’s still there," he said happily. "Let’s hope he’s sober enough to give us a report when he gets back. Better him than the kid though, so that’s a silver lining at least. At least we know he won’t be able to do anything too reckless while he’s hypnotised by the swaying of breasts and music that I would not even subject upon my worst enemy. What did you see in the short time that you were there? Do we have reason to believe that the hellhole belongs to Vikki?"

"I wasn't really there long enough to get a good idea. Phinks left me almost immediately to get a seat by the bar," Machi explained as she turned her cup in her hands. "Almost as soon as he was out of earshot, this guy," she shuddered. "He looked like he was fresh out of school. He was trying to buy me a drink. The whole thing just felt staged; like he'd been waiting by the entrance for a woman to come in? It's one of those gimmicky type places where guys have to pay an entrance fee, but if you have tits, you get in for free. To be honest, I feel like I need a hot shower. The walls were covered in glitter."

"That sounds pretty," Shizuku said mournfully. "Now I really want to go. I wouldn’t have to pay, guys would buy me drinks, and I get to watch dancing while surrounded by glitter. What more could a girl ask for?"

"I would suggest that you start with some self-respect," Bonolenov said with a casual shrug. "But that’s just me. Phinks hasn’t moved, and Kalluto is walking up the high street now."

"Don't you think that's a little harsh?" Nobunaga asked a little taken aback. "Shizuku is you know...special in her own way, but that's why she's one of us," he paused and glowered at Machi when he heard her snigger into her cup.

Franklin cracked his knuckles and turned to Bonolenov. "Do you know the range on that thing?" he asked, staring at the device in his teammate's ungloved hands with interest. "Are we sure it's wise
to leave Phinks on his own?"

***

"He'll be there all night," Machi replied dismissively. "Although I'd be happy to keep an eye on Kalluto, sitting around waiting for the Doctor to come to find us just doesn't feel right."

***

"Now you're starting to sound like Phi-" Nobunaga started and closed his mouth when Machi glared at him and held up his hands. "OK, why don't I just go and drag the knucklehead back before he gives himself a hernia trying to plan things on his own?"

***

“That sounds like a good idea,” Bonolenov said as he tapped more buttons on the screen. “And it appears that Shalnark set this up to reach to the outskirts of the city at the very least. We should be fine.”

***

“Can I come?” Shizuku asked hopefully. “I would love a few hours of dancing. Maybe I can talk to the man that wanted to chat with Machi? He might be up for a round on the dance floor, do you think?”

***

"Machi can go to Kalluto," Feitan instructed before looking at Shizuku and Nobunaga in turn and adding. "Both go, Phinks is loose cannon. We need to guide him back."

***

"Well looks like you're going to get to see some sparkles after all Shizuku," Nobunaga replied with a grin as he stood up. "You know, Blinky might be useful to figure out if that club is one of Vikki's."

***

“He can?” Shizuku asked, tilting her head. “I don’t think people would appreciate him on the dance floor.”

***

“You know it’s not that kind of ‘dance’ club,” Bonolenov said curiously.

***

“Then what type is it?” Shizuku asked.

***

“The kind that people take their clothes off in,” Bonolenov said with a sigh. “For money.”

***

“Then I’ll get paid to dance if I take my clothes off?” Shizuku asked, feeling a plan form in her
mind. “How many other bars does Vikki have? Maybe we could make a profit. I get in for free, so...”

***

"Shizuku, you can’t take your clothes off for money. Everyone will see your spider tattoo, and then Vikki will know we’re in Yorknew, we’re keeping a low profile, remember?” Machi gently reminded her colleague.

***

“I have a tattoo?” Shizuku asked in surprise, turning on the spot to try and see her body. “Where? Is it good?”

***

“You should take her now,” Bonolenov advised. “I’ll keep an eye on everyone. If you go off the tracks, I’ll send in the big guns.” He winked at Franklin.

***

"Yes, you have the Troupe symbol on your stomach, on the left. I was hoping you could use Blinky to do some hoovering in the ladies toilets once we get inside the club," Nobunaga explained taking Shizuku’s arm to lead her outside. "Vikki is the person drugging and kidnapping people from our city, and we need to confirm the club is his. If you can get Blinky to hoover up around the sinks where the girls would likely be shooting up, then we can be sure we're looking in the right place. Do you think Blinky can do that for us?"

***

“Oh, sure,” Shizuku said. “That sounds fun. Where are we going again?”

***

“You see,” Phinks said to the bartender. “It totally makes sense for the script! I mean, if we have the bad guy killing off the hero’s gang and making it look like the other dude was doing it, then the hero’s will never believe the protagonist!”

***

“You know Barry stopped listening to you five minutes ago, right?” Daniel asked the weird guy with no eyebrows. “But, just so you know, I’d totally watch the crap out of that film.

***

“I know, right!” Phinks said to the stranger. “I mean, come on, I don’t get why the others don’t see it?”

***

“The clown is totally playing everyone. I feel ya, bro. I can see it. He has the most to gain and, well, in the end, you should always follow the money,” Daniel agreed. The bar was quiet, and the girl on stage looked like she was dead inside. Browless was the best entertainment on offer.

“What are you drinking? I’ll get your next round, and, you know what, let’s make it a double!”
“Kid,” Phinks said sincerely. “I don’t know who you are, or where you came from, but you have a friend for life in me.”

Nobunaga peered up at the blinking sign above the door declaring that club had live girls and repressed a shudder. *I hope we don’t see anyone I recognize from back home in there.* Looking over at Shizuku he nodded and said, "This is the place, remember we're here to get information and then to bring Phinks back with us. Just follow my lead if you forget the plan, act drunk." Putting his arm around his friend's waist, he led them both to the club entrance. *This place better be one of Vikki's, or I'm going to beat Phinks to a pulp for making me set foot in a hellhole like this.*

“Sure, I can do that,” Shizuku agreed happily, wondering why Nobunaga was touching her.

Looking around, she saw a man she thought she recognised and waved happily at him. “Oh,” she said as they approached. “It’s you, why do I recognise you?”

“Lady, are you OK?” Sal asked, not really caring about the answer. The tits on this one were spectacular. If they did something about the outfit and the glasses, she’d be great.

“Yes, thank you,” Shizuku said happily. “Have I seen you before?”

"I don't think you have dear," Nobunaga replied before the bouncer could answer. "She'll be fine, just a little tipsy if you know what I mean. How much for us both to get in?"

"Tits go for free, but you know she was here earlier trying to get us to let a little girl in with her and her boyfriend in there?" Sal said, eyeing the guy that had just spoken. “You in some sort of heavy metal band, or something? Because I hope you’re hiding some muscle under all that hair. Her boyfriend’s pissed, and I think he’s settling in for the night."

“I have a boyfriend?” Shizuku asked curiously.

“Dude, whatever it is she’s on, you need to tell the boss about it,” Sal laughed. “It’ll get you a small fortune, and all the pussy you’ll ever need.”

"Yeah I'm the bass player," Nobunaga lied easily. "You don't happen to mean a stocky blond with no eyebrows, do you? Cause I've been trying to find him; he's our drummer, and the tits is one of our groupies. I'm just trying to show her a good time, and she wants to see dancing girls." He
reached into his pocket and pulled out a small wad of cash and held it out to the bouncer. "This be enough? As for talking to your boss, I'd have to run it by past the others. Our manager usually gets the gear for us, but I'll be sure to mention it."

***

“You play the guitar?” Shizuku asked, staring up at Nobunaga in confusion. “I don’t remember that.”

***

“A fucking fortune,” Sal laughed, tucking the cash into his pocket and waving the guy through. “Good luck.”

***

“But, you see, the problem is, the actual problem, actually is, you see,” Phinks slurred. “They don’t see it. Why don’t they see it, Danny boy?”

***

“I don’t know, Mr. Sphinx,” Daniel said, trying to console his new friend. “But you don’t need their permission to do what you want to do. You’re a strong, independent man, who don’t need no...others. You go and write the script that you want to write. Screw them; they just can’t see your genius.”

Watching the weirdo getting more and more wound up had been fun, but he was starting to get to the mournful stage of being drunk, and he was fast running out of distractions. He might have to start really listening to him soon. Please, if there is a god, could you send me an out? Thanks.

***

Entering the club, Nobunaga looked around to get his bearings. He noted the stage with a glassy-eyed girl twirling around a pole and shook his head. Classy place you've picked to drown your sorrows in, Phinks.

"OK, we should scout the place out and then try and find our missing idiot. Let's go find the ladies room so you can do your cleaning," he advised wanting to stay away from the stage for as long as possible.

***

Turning when he heard the door open, Daniel peered around the pillar as his new ‘friend’ droned on about his crazy script. He really hoped that his bosses son never caught wind of the damned thing. If he did, he’d pay for the movie to be produced himself.

Maybe I could call him up and palm the mad Egyptian onto him? he wondered, then brightened when he saw a couple coming into the bar.

“Hey, dude, look over there. I’m sure they’d love to hear your ideas. Why don’t we go talk to them?” he suggested, praying that he’d be able to pass the guy off onto someone else before he started to lament the loss of his artistic freedom. He really didn’t need to hear about that.

***
“Who?” Phinks asked and turned to look at where the kid was pointing.

When he finally focussed, he heard a growl spew out of his mouth. “Them,” he hissed. “I knew it! They’ve come to stop me!” He stood up and heard the bar stool clatter to the floor behind him. “You think you can stop me!” he yelled and saw the girl on the pole stop mid drop. “You can’t stop ME!”

***

“Oh,” Daniel said quietly, slowly sliding away from the crazy man. “I take it you don’t want to tell them your idea?”

You had to go pray for a distraction, didn’t you? You know that God hates you. Now you’re going to die in a bar fight. Good job, Daniel. Really, damn good job.

***

"So much for being discreet," Nobunaga muttered under his breath when Phinks started to yell. "Shizuku, you go find the ladies room and do your thing with Blinky. Hoover around the sinks that's where we'll likely find any remaining drugs. I'll deal with the knucklehead."

***

“That’s fine, the music sucks here in any case, and she isn’t doing the drop splint right,” Shizuku said amiably and wandered off to find the ladies room.

***

“Hey, hey, don’t you walk away while I’m yelling at you!” Phinks cried out.

***

“I think she’s going to the toilet,” Daniel pointed out, seeing the determined look on the woman’s face.

Shut up, Daniel, don’t provoke the drunk guy anymore. It was funny to listen to him before. Now you hand him over to the new people to deal with. Natasha’s in the back. You can go fuck her while Sal deals with the new people. Yeah, that’s the new plan. Not dying in a bar fight; that’s what we’ll call it.

***

“Toilet, shcmoilet,” Phinks slurred, glaring at the new guy. “I know Shizuku! You aren’t fooling me! And what are you looking at, Nob-nobu- Mr. Nabagator! Get a new name, that one’s stupid!”

***

"I'm looking at a drunk knucklehead," Nobunaga retorted before turning to the stage besides Phinks with an apologetic smile. "I don't suppose you could give my associate and I some privacy? You really don't want to get caught up in this, trust me."

***

“I’ll show you out,” Daniel offered when the girl shrugged and got down off the pole. “I know the manager,” he explained to the long-haired guy.
“Fuck you all!” Phinks snarled. “You’re all against me!”

“Broksi,” Daniel said sardonically as he helped Jasmine down from the stage. “With that attitude, we will be soon. I wish you the best of luck with the play.”

“I never liked you anyway!” Phinks jeered as he watched the retreating back of his would-be friend and the swaying backside of the girl beside him. “Fucking traitor! You’re working with the CLOWN!”

“You’re still going on about Hisoka?” Nobunaga asked incredulously. "Phinks, the guy is under armed guard with the BAU. What next? The BAU is secretly in on the drugs ring?"

“Yes! YES! It all makes SENSE!” Phinks said, turning back to stare at his friend. “Bonunaga, you’re…you’re…FANTASTIC! That’s it! That’s the missing spiece!”

"Alright, well how about you tell the others all about it back at the base, huh?" Nobunaga asked before looking around for Shizuku. OK, hopefully she doesn’t forget why she’s in there. I’d rather not have to go looking for her.

"And miss all the fine ass, tits and, oh,” Phinks said, staring at the empty stage. “Where’d the boobs go? Did I see Shizuku before?"

"You were about to start a fight, so they had to take the dancer into the back for her own safety. Dude, how much have you drunk? Also, Shizuku is…cleaning up the ladies room with Blinky," Nobunaga explained exasperatedly. "Are you going to be able to walk back? Cause I’d prefer not to have to carry you."

“There’s dead bodies in the bathroom?” Phinks said, deciding to bite back his instinctive reaction to call the dancer a wuss in favour of the more pressing issue. “You mean I missed a fight? Why didn’t you come and get me!

“There was no fight, and there weren’t any bodies either,” Shizuku sighed. “Nothing interesting ever happens in places like this. Let’s go.” She prodded Phinks in the side and nodded when he remained standing. “He can walk.”
"Yeah, leaving sounds good. Before that young lad comes back with the manager," Nobunaga agreed as he surveyed the club to make sure there was nothing else worth investigating. "I dunno why but there's just something off about this place. It gives me the heebie-jeebies."

***

“It’s the purple glitter walls,” Phinks said, then paused as he listened to what had just come out of his mouth. “Holy shit, I’m in a place with purple glitter on the walls! GET ME OUT OF HERE!”

***

"You know you can walk, right?" Nobunaga asked and pointed to the exit. "The door is just over there?"

***

“You know,” Shizuku said thoughtfully as she stared at the trail of debris Phinks had left behind as he’d sprinted for the exit. “I think, maybe, if we tell him that Hisoka’s taken to wearing purple spandex, he might leave him alone.”

***

Hisoka in purple spandex? Oh great now I'm picturing that clown in freaking spandex. Pausing mid-step to shake the mental image away, Nobunaga shrugged. "I'll let you tell him, but I'd make it glittery. It seems to be the combination he doesn't like."

***

“Tell who to add glitter?” Shizuku asked, and waved at the bouncer as they exited the club.

***

Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:

Phinks, Shizuku, Bonolenov, Kalluto, Daniel

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Nobunaga, Feitan, Franklin, Machi, Sal

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We would like to let you all know that we are so grateful for all the feedback and faves that we have received since we started posting. We love you all so much! We’re going to have to switch to a two weekly posting schedule due to changes in work schedules, but thought that it was only fair to let you all know. We hope that you have a very happy weekend <3
The Emperor

Chapter Summary

The day of the party arrives, and Hisoka continues to play his dangerous game of cat and mouse.

"Are you sure this is the right place, Lulu?" Hisoka asked sceptically as he looked up at the house, before glancing back at his ‘guards’. "Somehow I thought his home would be...bigger."

He fidgeted with the hem of his waistcoat. The three-piece suit did look good on him, and it fitted well. Even Hisoka had been hard-pressed to deny that, but he still felt a little uncomfortable. What made it even worse was the fact that the ‘Jade’ woman had come back onto duty after her apparent ‘compassionate leave’ had run out. As far as he could tell, there wasn’t a compassionate bone in her body, but he’d been having fun acting the part of ‘bemused boyfriend’ all the way to Hannibal’s house. She was incredibly easy to wind up.

Kyoya looked up and down the street. This was the kind of area his twelve-year-old self would have imagined a BAU officer would live in. The houses had neat fences or walls; the pointing was all perfect and, most importantly of all, they were all, without exception, detached.

I’m in the wrong job, he thought miserably. He knew from experience that these houses were no safer than the ones he’d grown up in. In fact, half of them seemed far less secure if the locks he’d seen on the front doors were anything to go by. But if you got caught robbing these houses, the penalty would be far worse than if you stole from your neighbour on the local council estate. Private Law, he thought to himself. Miriam had told him that the word privilege had derived from the concept, and his life so far had not proved her wrong.

He watched Hisoka straighten his jacket again. Definitely in the wrong job, he groaned as his stomach gave a worrying flip at the sight of the Hunter dressed up in his suit. He should not have looked so good. I really don’t get paid enough for this. I really don’t.

“Yes, now stop fidgeting and knock on the door,” Illumi snapped, playing the part of the put-upon girlfriend for their audience.

He was wearing the black strappy heels Hisoka-san had bought for him, along with the long black dress and the opera gloves. He’d had time to buy himself a new clutch bag to keep the makeup that his Master had expertly applied to his face in, and the smoky, dramatic eyes, along with the blood-red lips that had looked at him from out of the mirror after Hisoka-san had finished his work, had rendered him speechless.
“I still don’t understand why you are wearing the perfume Lecter left though,” he muttered under his breath, weary of their audience. “It is clearly a feminine scent.”

***

Hisoka turned to look at Lulu with a playful smile. "It suits me," he replied and winked at Jade, who scoffed back at him. He’d been pleased to see that his suggestion of a hair clip for Kyoya’s gift to her had been put to good use, but had not enjoyed the suspicious look he’d received from her when he’d complimented her on it after he’d introduced himself at the hotel. The woman was beautiful but could put the Zoldyck’s to shame when it came to paranoia. He was going to have to have words with Miriam about her taste in women.

With a nonchalant shrug and a playfully cryptic smile, he knocked on the door. His nerves were rising, and he did his best to stamp down on them as he leaned on his dress cane and waited for the door to be answered.

"I know I’ve already said this, but you do look absolutely wonderful Lulu," he teased, grinning like a Cheshire Cat. “They won’t know what hit them when you walk into the room.”

***

Illumi felt Lulu preen. “Thank you, Master,” she said before he could stop her and internally sighed. She was so easily distracted.

Reining her in, he continued, “The scent was designed for women-” but stopped halfway through his explanation when the door silently opened.

***

Hisoka’s retort died on his lips, when the front door opened and who appeared to be Dr. Lecter’s butler peered out at them questioningly.

"Good Evening," Hisoka greeted the butler, giving him a polite bow. "I believe we’re expected this evening, my name is Hisoka Morow,” he paused and gestured to his lover. “And this is Lulu Nikolaev, my plus one.”

Looking the couple over with a bored expression, the butler listened to the introduction and glanced over at the guards before responding. "Very good Sir, Madam." The man returned the earlier bow. "If you would, please follow me?"

“We would be delighted.” Hisoka replied playfully. Taking a moment to check on Kyoya and Jade. “I’m afraid we’ll have to leave you outside, although if I get a moment, I’ll ask Dr. Lecter if he made arrangements for you to be able to come inside or not.”

***

Illumi followed closely behind his Master, ignoring the perplexed looks their guards gave them and made sure to stay a modest distance behind the two men. He took in the details of the house as they walked. Lecter had an eccentrically gothic taste in sculptures, and wall decor, as well as a wide collection of what he guessed, were rare pieces of art hung in just the right place to catch the eye.

If decorating ever became weaponised, Illumi thought, he would employ the Doctor without hesitation. The place was perfectly balanced between being aggressively intimidating and the most welcoming trap he’d ever seen.
Keeping his silence, for now, Hisoka carefully cast his gaze over the artwork on the walls and resisted the urge to sneer. Are you really this pretentious? he wondered. The suits are one thing, but you actually live here? When their tour came to a sudden stop by an open door, he thought he caught the sound of Dr. Lecter's rich laughter mixed in with a small crowd.

"Sir, Madam," the butler turned to address them with a stiff nod towards the room beyond the door. "Your host awaits the pleasure of your company in the withdrawing room," he added as he stood aside to let them pass.

"Thank you," Hisoka said with a gracious smile as he led his lover into the lavishly decorated room. "Lounge, why can't you just say lounge? It's not a 'withdrawing room'. I had to train Illumi out of that habit years ago, don't tell me the Doctor calls it that too? Is this a house or a museum? I feel like I'm in an antique fair, not a dinner party. I swear, if he greets me in a smoking jacket, I'm leaving. I don't care how rude he thinks I am.

Looking around the room, Hisoka counted fourteen heads and suspected that there were a few more throughout the house. Well, let's get this over with. "Lulu darling, should we greet our host and let him know we have arrived?" he asked, turning to Illumi questioningly, but giving him a warm smile when he saw the overly blank look on his face. You don't like the decor either, do you?

Hannibal felt the spark to his bracelet and smiled. He’d thought the strange urge to move towards the door had been a subtle joke that Pariston was playing, but no, that pull was most definitely Hisoka.

Excusing himself from his conversation with Margot Verger, he strolled over to the entrance and smiled. “There’s no need, mon cher,” he said politely. “I am extremely pleased that you could make it. May I say that you make quite the tableau. You are full of surprises.”

Fighting his urge to offer Hisoka his arm, he caught a scent on the air and sniffed. Quirking his brow, he smirked at Hisoka before turning to Lulu. “May I ask the name of the scent you are wearing Miss Nikolaev? I am not familiar with that particular blend.”

Hisoka smiled at his therapist before answering for his lover. "Do you like it, Dr. Lecter? I believe it's called Haze," he said, stepping into the conversation smoothly. “It made me nostalgic, and it suits her. Don’t you agree?”

Hannibal turned to Hisoka with an amused grin. “I do, but I believe the gift that you are wearing was intended for your Lady; I specifically said on the card that it was an apology for placing her in a position to have to do the reconnaissance, instead of you.”

He leaned into Hisoka’s personal space and inhaled deeply. “The scent of deception suits you, though, I’m impressed.”

"It does, doesn't it?" Hisoka agreed with a pleased smile as he preened under the Doctor's gaze. "We'd already purchased Lulu's perfume, and it seemed such a shame to let your gift go unused.
Almost rude even,” he added as he put an arm around Illumi. "We do very much appreciate the thought though, don't we sweetheart?"

***

“The sandwiches were much appreciated as well. You will have to let me know who your butcher is, the meat was delightful,” Illumi lied smoothly. He was immune to pretty much every poison known to his family, but that didn’t mean that he couldn’t succumb to an infection.

***

“I source my meat locally,” Hannibal said, smiling at the couple. “I take great pride in butchering and preparing the animals myself. That one was a particularly rare specimen that I managed to procure recently.”

He gestured to a waiter to get his attention, “May I offer you a drink?” he asked them both.

***

"That would be wonderful, thank you, Dr. Lecter," Hisoka replied easily, "How about you, dearest?" Is that Champagne your waiter is bringing over? Is this you showing off, or are you just that well off?

***

“Champagne would be fine, thank you,” Illumi said with a shy smile.

***

“Would Champagne be acceptable, Hisoka?” Hannibal asked. “I have a selection of other wines, spirits or beers if you would prefer,” he added, ensuring the waiter was within earshot.

***

Sure, why not. I'm in a rich guy's house so he can parade me in front of his rich guy friends. "That sounds delightful," Hisoka replied warmly. "Are we expecting many more guests tonight, Dr. Lecter?"

***

Hannibal’s smile remained in place as the waiter quickly appeared with their drinks. “No, no more, mon cher. As I said before, this is a small gathering, and I am glad that you are here. The people I want you to meet will be fantastic character witnesses for your case and, well, it never hurts to make new friends.” He took in Hisoka’s unpainted face, his straightened hair and his subtly eccentric outfit. It had even been finished off with a cane and handkerchief that had been knotted in one corner. “If you wished to impress, then you will no doubt do so. You are both breathtaking.”

He turned to Lulu and said, “Ma chere, I commend you on your skills as a tutor. I am sure he will have the rest of the room eating out of his hand in no time.”

***

“I should be the one thanking you, Doctor,” Illumi said politely, dipping his gaze and feigning embarrassment. Don’t comment on the number of people. This is a small gathering for my family, Hannibal’s too, probably. Please, Master. I know you won’t agree but think of the Troupe. It’s only
a few more than them.

“You provided Hisoka-san with an opportunity that he has never had before, he was eager to learn new skills and,” he paused pointedly. “Grow, as a person.” He ignored Lulu’s laughter. “We couldn’t turn down such an opportunity.”

***

"Well I didn't want to embarrass you in front of these lovely people," Hisoka said playfully as he tried to seem genuinely happy to be there. "Although I'd say we have a give and take arrangement, with my attempts to coach you to take the Hunter Exam. I fear, I am likely a better student than a teacher."

***

“Please do not put yourself down like that Hisoka-san,” Illumi said, looking up adoringly into his Master’s eyes. “You are the best teacher I could have ever asked for.” He reached over and hesitantly stroked a finger along the top of his Master’s hand, taking it into his. “I am learning so much about myself from you.”

***

“And I highly doubt that there’s anything you can do to embarrass me in front of Pariston. I have known the boy since he was twelve years old,” Hannibal said easily. “I fear, Dr. Chilton, on the other hand, may embarrass himself. Margot...well,” he glanced over at the small gathering of people who were talking by his fireplace. “I would love to hear what you make of her. Alas, her wife could not make it this evening; she has to look after their little boy.”

***

*Did you assume I was referring to you, or just hoping? Because I was meaning Illu-chan. No matter, I can work with this. Maybe you'll succumb to flattery this time?*

"Well, that's certainly reassuring to know. I'd hate to repay your kindness by accidentally making a fool of myself," Hisoka said as he glanced around at the small group. "Especially when you've gone to this much trouble for my benefit. I'm sure they'll be another opportunity for me to meet Margot's other half."

***

“I am sure you will, Alana is a good friend,” Hannibal said, neatly skipping over Hisoka’s assumption that all this was put on for him. “When she found out that you would be attending, she asked me to pass on her apologies.”

He gestured towards the fireplace. “Would you like to meet those that could make it?”

***

"I think I'd like that actually," Hisoka replied as he glanced over to the fireplace again. "What do you think, Lulu? Should we mingle?"

***

Illumi frowned, completely thrown by the unexpected question. “I thought that was why we were here, Ma- Hisoka-san?”
Why are you asking me?

"Because that’s what normal people do, you idiot,” Lulu said, groaning.

***

Hannibal smirked. Well, she certainly is quite wonderful, isn’t she?

***

“Please, lead the way,” Hisoka said cheerfully as he gave Illumi a gentle squeeze. “I’m excited to meet the former Vice-Chairman. I’ve heard many interesting things about him.”

***

“He was rather intrigued by your little stunt at the election,” Hannibal said happily, leading them towards the fireplace. His apprentice was still there, along with Margot, who was looking as if she were trying to work out how to feed him to her pigs.

“I think he rather likes you,” he added as an aside to Hisoka. “But with Paristion it’s sometimes hard to tell.”

***

Illumi followed, Hisoka, squeezing his hand in return as they headed towards Partiston Hill and a woman that he could only conclude was the mysterious ‘Margot’. Maybe the woman would be able to provide him with some insight as to exactly why Lecter had really invited them to his house?

“You don’t think it’s for the reasons he said?” Lulu wondered.

Do you? Illumi countered.

“I think he has a vested interest in keeping him alive, and that works for now.”

***

Half an Hour Earlier

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“No, I’m sorry, I just can’t see it,” Frederick said, shaking his head. “Hisoka is a Gladiator that has been allowed to run around, Masterless and wild. He jumps through no hoops but his own and from everything I have read about him, would rather massacre the people in this room, than make small talk with them.” He waved at a waiter to get his attention. “I can see why a romantic like yourself would want to believe that Hannibal had that kind of sway over him, but, and I mean no offence, Mr. Hill, you do not understand the criminal mind the way I do. I know a murderer when I see one, and Hannibal would not risk our lives on a whim. He opened the invitation to Hisoka simply to be polite, trust me.”

He picked up a curiously pink-tinted pate that was artfully arranged on a cracker. “There’s no way that Hisoka Morow would come to a house party, no matter how delicious the food maybe.”
Margot scoffed and took another sip of her drink. She might not like the company, but watching Frederick dig his own grave that much deeper each time they met was always worth the hassle of coming along to Hannibal’s quarterly parties.

"Ah, but you see it would be rude to accept the invitation and then not show up at all. Also, if Hannibal made the offer out of formality, well it would appeal to Hisoka’s sense of humour to accept and show up,” Pariston countered with a smile. "He is a most unpredictable character, and if there is one thing you can count on Frederick, it's that he won't do what you expect."

“And that is precisely why he won’t come,” Chilton pointed out. “You are expecting it. This pate is extremely interesting. Do you know what it’s made of?”

“I think it's more likely, but by your own argument he will show up. After all, you are expecting that he won't,” Pariston replied with a hint of amusement. "It appears we have ourselves a case of Schrodinger's Hunter," he chuckled. "As for the pate, I believe it's made from a rare breed of pig. It was quite hard but gratifying to track down." He added as the memory of Kurapika's shocked indignation flashed through his mind. "One of those once in a lifetime opportunities and Hannibal saw fit to share his good fortune with us. We are truly blessed."

“Then,” Margot said with a sigh. “Why don’t you two ‘gentlemen’ put your money where your mouth is? The loser has to source the pig for Hannibal’s next party. If Hisoka shows up, then Pariston gets a reprieve if he doesn’t then,” she smiled at Chilton. “You’ll be the one sourcing our supper.”

“I would be more than happy to accept your wager,” Pariston declared and turned to Chilton with an enthusiastic grin. “What about you? Will you meet my challenge?”

“Absolutely not,” Frederick blustered. “But I will be more than happy to accept Miss Verger’s wager.”

“That’s Mrs Verger, thank you, Frederick,” Margot sneered. “I’m married,” she reminded him. “Nothing’s changed since the last time we met.”

“It’s such a pity your wonderful wife couldn’t join us tonight,” Pariston replied with mock sincerity. “I do so enjoy her company, how is she doing these days? And your son too, I do hope they are both well.”
“They’re fine,” Margot said coldly. Not that you care.

“Well,” Frederick said, bouncing on the balls of his feet as the silence stretched between them. “I’ll look forward to tasting your pig next pig in August, Mr. Hill.”

Present

Hannibal bowed politely, “Pariston, Margot, may I introduce you to Mr. Hisoka Morow and Miss Lulu Nikolaev?” He smiled warmly at his apprentice and saw the look Margot gave him over her wine glass. “Hisoka is an extremely skilful Hunter and Miss Nikolaev is looking to take the exam soon.”

Turning to Lulu, he added, “Pariston is a scientist whose interest lies in the field of genetic engineering and Margot is the woman in charge of the Verger family estate.”

“I remember you,” Hisoka said to Pariston. "You ran for the chairman position, but it went to...Cheadle Yorkshire? I didn't know you were a scientist, have you stepped away from working for the association?"

Intrigued, Pariston honed in on Hisoka. “I’m so glad you made it, we were wondering if we’d get to see you tonight. You just missed Dr. Chilton. He was saying how worried he was that you wouldn’t grace us with your presence,” he held out his hand for Hisoka to take. “I’ve heard good things about you.”

Hisoka arched a brow but accepted the offered hand after Illumi took his drink for him. “The pleasure’s mine,” he replied. “When Dr. Lecter told me you would be here, well, I couldn’t let this opportunity pass me by. Hopefully, I can live up to my reputation.”

“Oh I’m sure you will,” Pariston said cheerfully enjoying the chance to talk to somebody that wasn’t Margot Verger. Why does Hannibal bother with inviting you? Honestly, Margot, you wouldn’t know interesting conversation if it hit you in the face. “Hopefully you’ll be able to join us for the next dinner, I’m happy to say that Dr. Chilton will be providing us with the next pig.”

“He is?” Hannibal asked with an arched brow. “Whatever possessed him to make that offer?”
Margot smirked. “I prefer to think of myself as more of a who, Hannibal.”

Illumi raised a brow. He knew of the Vergers - they had been frequent patrons of his family - but he had never met her.

“He lost a bet,” Pariston explained gleefully. “He didn’t think Hisoka would come, but here he is and looking most resplendent. The loser agreed to provide a pig for the next dinner. It was Margot’s idea.”

Seeing the look of panic in Hannibal’s eyes, Margot mentally awarded herself a point and sipped at her drink. “Don’t worry, Hannibal. I’ll make sure his offering is up to your...standards.”

Really? What standards do you need for a pig? Are you going to get one shipped in from the Viska Forest Preserve? Hisoka wondered. Just how dam posh are you Dr. Lecter?

Hannibal gave Margot a grateful nod, ignoring her less than subtle comment about his particular set of standards for his meat. “You have my eternal gratitude, ma chere. Now, I am afraid I must leave you for a moment. It would appear that I have to go talk to a man about a pig. I shall leave our guests of honour in your most capable hands.”

Or a pig about a man? “Don’t worry Hannibal, I’ll take good care of them,” Pariston assured with a wide grin.

“I have every faith in you, my boy,” Hannibal said, patting Pariston on his shoulder and zeroing in on the flash of a cane beside the buffet table. “Please excuse me.”

My boy? Just how close are you? Hisoka thought as he watched Dr. Lecter’s retreating back. Why does he have to look so good in that suit? No, not thinking about that, talk to Pariston and remember the plan.

Still smiling, Pariston turned to Lulu, ”Now, Hisoka, don't tell me this lovely lady is your girlfriend? You simply must tell me how you managed to catch her attention, and you're looking to become a Hunter did I hear correctly?”
Illumi feigned awe as he saw that Hisoka was too distracted by Hannibal’s departure to take in what Pariston had said. Looking up at the blond, he tried to work out what to say. He’d met the man on a few occasions over the years and had never been that impressed by him. He came across as all bark and no bite; he was a man of little substance.

“I, yes, Sir. I hope to take the exam next year. Hisoka-san has been training me. He is a great man.” He hoped his performance would be enough to get past the man’s keen eye.

***

Pariston looked back over at Hisoka who seemed to be more focused on Hannibal for now. *Are you always this shy? Surely there’s more to you if you’ve caught the attention of the Grim Reaper. What are you hiding?*

"Oh, I have heard many interesting things about your boyfriend. Although I am curious, doesn't it bother you? That nasty business with Heaven’s arena, with the Troupe Leader?” he asked in a neutral tone, watching intently to see how she would react.

***

“Why would it bother me, Sir? Hisoka-san was not at fault. He is not responsible for the actions of a criminal?” Illumi said earnestly, not allowing his gaze to falter from Paristons curious stare. It wasn’t a lie. He believed every word.

***

“No, but he is responsible for his own,” Pariston said smugly. “He has quite the reputation for his own criminal activities,” he paused when he saw Hisoka snap to attention to stare at him. “You were once a member of the Phantom Troupe, or am I mistaken?” he asked the redhead.

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"I was, but that was before the fight. Which if I may respectfully point out was between myself and Danc- Chrollo Lucilfer as a pre-agreed battle between two Floor Masters. It was not my decision to weaponise the referee, the audience, or to blow up the building,” Hisoka chimed in with thinly veiled irritation. *He's probing for weakness; this is another of Dr. Lecter's tests. I should have known. Pausing to take his drink back from Illumi, he sighed. *I think under the circumstances I was allowed to protect myself."

***

“Oh, of course you are,” Pariston agreed with a Cheshire cat grin. “It’s just well; I understand this must be a most difficult time for you both. People can be, so judgemental don’t you think?”

***

"They can judge all they want, I know I'm a controversial figure right now. But can I trust on you to ensure that her relationship with me won't affect Lulu's chances?” Hisoka asked in an attempt to steer the conversation away from the Arena. "I know you're not the Vice-Chairman, but you have connections. Surely you agree with Netero's view that to be a Hunter, one must simply demonstrate the necessary skills?"

***

"Of course I would be delighted to champion your lovely lady," Pariston agreed with reverence
before bowing his head. "I couldn't agree more, rest assured Lulu. When you come to take the exam, you will only be judged on your merits and not the company you keep. You have my word on that."

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“You are most kind,” Illumi said evenly, dipping his head. “I shall endeavour to live up to both of your expectations.”

***

“I have no doubts,” Hisoka said reassuringly. “If I did then I wouldn’t keep you by my side.”

***

“You’d be hard-pressed to find a better compliment than that,” Pariston agreed as he continued to observe her reactions. “I must say, Hisoka is a most fortunate man.”

***

“Really, you don’t say, it’s almost like we’re dating him,” Lulu sneered.

“Thank you, Mr. Hill,” Illumi said respectfully. “I am glad that you can provide such valuable insight into my boyfriend's mentality, and after knowing him for such a brief period as well.”

***

Margot snorted into her wine glass and did her best not to choke. “Oh, I like you.”

***

_I never thought I'd be wishing for Dr. Lecter to come back._ "Now we have that out of the way," Hisoka said trying to smooth over any ruffled feathers. "I didn't realise you and Dr. Lecter knew each other, from the way he talked to you it seems you're rather close?"

***

“He’s like a father to me,” Pariston shrugged. “I’ve known him since I was a child, but if you want to know more about him, you’ll have to ask him yourself.”

***

Hisoka chuckled. “Oh, I wouldn’t dream of asking you to share his secrets with me,” he replied, resisting the urge to glance around the room for their host. “I’m his patient; it wouldn’t be appropriate. I was just surprised, that’s all.”

***

“That’s quite understandable; after all, like yourself, I do value my privacy.” Pariston paused as he felt a familiar buzzing in his pocket and pulled out his cell phone. “Oh, I’m afraid you’ll have to excuse me for a few moments. I’m sure Margot can keep you company until I return.” Smiling at Lulu one last time, he made his way to a quieter corner of the room. _I thought I told them not to bother me unless it was an emergency, surely La Forte can wait until the morning?_
Once he was confident that Pariston was out of earshot, Hisoka lowered his voice as he spoke to Lulu.

"I know Hannibal said his apprentice would be here, but I really wasn't expecting it to be him. It looks like you have an admirer for the evening, though."

***

“He’s a child who masquerades as an adult,” Illumi said dismissively. “My family have never cared for him.”

***

“You’re in the minority there,” Margot said, still banging her chest. She’d set her glass on the mantle next to a set of glowing red eyes in a display case. “If Pariston thinks that you stand a chance of being a potential sparring partner, he’ll follow you to the ends of the Earth.”

***

Illumi turned to Margot and smiled. Now that he looked more closely, he could make out small fading scars on her skin. “I know someone else like that,” he said evenly and saw her eyes flicker to Hisoka. “Yes,” he confirmed and smiled up at his Master. “He’s a persistent man.”

***

“You enchanted me,” Hisoka said playfully. “I am but a moth to your flame, inextricably drawn to you. Blind to the potential danger you could be, but oh so happy you chose to give me a chance.”

***

Margot raised an eyebrow and smirked. *Yeah, so enchanted that you were drooling over Hannibal as he left.*

“How beautiful,” Margot said, forcing herself to smile.

***

Illumi nodded. “I believe he is, yes, thank you.”

“You know she was being sarcastic, right?” Lulu pointed out.

*Oh.*

He looked up at his Master. “You have changed my life, and for that, I am forever grateful,” he added, hoping that Margot would understand.

Better? he wondered.

“No, but it was adorable, it’s fine. She’s not going to change.”

***

*OK, I’m really not sure what to say now Illu-chan, but thank you?* Hisoka tried to work out a suitable reply as he met his lover’s eyes.

***
“I see,” Margot said, raising her eyebrow and deciding that there was a definite need for a topic change. Glancing at Hisoka’s wrist, she sighed in relief. “Nice bracelet. How are you finding it?”

***

_Bracelet? What, oh, the Nen. Right._ “It’s been interesting. I’m trying to view it as research. Did you have one yourself?” Hisoka asked, latching onto the topic. _Maybe you can give me some insight into Dr. Lecter, and this won’t be a total waste after all._

***

Margot smiled briefly before sipping at her drink. “Not any more, but I found mine to be rather useful when I did. It was a get out of jail free card if you like. Mason, my brother...well, when he was alive, he didn’t much appreciate Hannibal’s approach to discipline.”

She swirled her glass and said offhandedly, “I wouldn’t advise resisting.”

***

_Mason, yes, Illumi thought. That was one of the men who would request that father personally carried out his jobs. He never liked him, but he was annoyed when he died. I wish he would have told me what happened. I never did work out if he killed him or not._

***

“It sounds like Dr. Lecter has known your family for a long time,” Hisoka observed. “Did your brother resist? To be honest, I don’t really see the need to. It’s more fun to try to toe the line between either type of activation.”

***

Margot snorted. “Oh, I bet Hannibal loves you. He likes people who are willing to play his game. Mason didn’t.” She stroked a hair from her eye and sighed heavily. “He ended up eating his own face.”

She looked up at Hisoka and then up to the mantle where the eyes floated in their case. “Be careful, Mr. Morow, Hannibal likes to collect curiosities. Make sure you aren’t too interesting.”

***

Hisoka glanced at the Kurta eyes with disinterest. _Flesh collecting? That doesn’t seem to fit you, but then again I’ve been wrong so far._

“Most people find me the wrong kind of interesting,” he remarked as he looked back at Margot. “Usually they want me far away from them, as far as possible. It would be an interesting change if he did decide to try and collect me. He’s certainly an eccentric if he’s home is anything to go by. Although I didn’t expect him to be a Flesh Collector, that is a surprise.”

***

Margot chuckled darkly, “Oh, Hannibal’s full of surprises. He values the things that others reject.”

She looked down into her drink and saw her carefully made-up eyes staring back at her. “It’s why I’m here.” She swirled her glass and watched her image blur into ripples. “Hannibal accepts what the world rejects. He’s an excellent therapist, but he is a man I would not cross.”
“Then I am grateful he has taken such a keen interest in helping me,” Hisoka replied as he watched the ripples in the glass. “I’m hesitantly hopeful about the future. I’ve heard nothing but good things about him. Even if I was rather resentful originally, I’m coming around to the idea that he might want to help. Was it like that for you?”

Margot swirled her drink and looked over Hisoka’s shoulder to see where Hannibal was.

“He was...supportive of my more unorthodox ideas,” she said eventually. “I didn’t believe him at first, but now.” She met Hisoka’s golden eyes for the first time. “Now I don’t doubt him for a second. He always keeps his word.”

"That’s certainly good to know. I can use that. “I’ve found him to be very accommodating and patient,” Hisoka advised. “The band makes things a bit more interesting during our sessions, but I think it’s been helpful. It’s given me a sense of direction.”

Margot smiled. “Yes, it certainly can do that. Mine read, Plan, Prepare and Learn, what does yours say and do you know how they work, he never would tell me?”

“He’s given me Obey, Civility and Growth,” Hisoka said as he held up his bracelet to give her a closer look. “How familiar are you with Nen?”

Illumi smiled politely and watched the conversation with interest. You aren’t upset about your brother’s death, interesting. Most people would be. Are you like us?

“Oh, that stuff. Will tried to talk to Alana about it the last time she went to visit him,” she said, dipping her finger in her drink and sucking the red liquid off it thoughtfully. “It’s some kind of magic according to him. He tried to claim that Hannibal was using it to kill people, but well, he would, wouldn’t he?”

“Well, I know I have used it that way,” Hisoka said with a slight smile. “That’s what landed me here. Nen is a fascinating skill. The bands are made of it. He’s what’s known as a Conjurer. I’m still figuring out exactly how it works, but if I were pressed to give a theory, it would be that it’s imprinted with what’s called Manipulation Nen.” Do you have Nen yourself? Your aura doesn’t feel strong enough, would you have been an emitter? Maybe I should offer to baptise you?

“Who’s Will?” Illumi asked, noting the glazed look in Margot’s eyes. “And why would he claim that Hannibal has been killing people?”
Snapping back to reality, Margot gave Lulu a grateful smile. “He’s Hannibal’s ex. He’s in prison for murder. He has been trying to convince anyone and everyone who will listen that he didn’t do it.” The poor bastard. I tried to warn him about Hannibal. I wonder what he’s going to do with you?

"Now, I don't think it's very polite to talk about our host's love life. Or to traumatise his honoured guests," Frederick chimed in as he joined the conversation by the fireplace. "Honestly Mrs. Verger, as a long-standing friend of Hannibal's, I’d expected better from you."

“Well, I am so happy that I have a man such as yourself to put me in my place,” Margot sneered. Turning to Hisoka and his girlfriend, who appeared to be looking at Dr. Chilton in genuine confusion, she added, “My apologies for traumatising you both. Sometimes I forget myself.”

"I assure you, we're not so fragile. There was no harm done; it was an enlightening conversation,” Hisoka tried to reassure Margot before turning to the newcomer.

Who are you supposed to be? He wondered taking in the man's cane and finely tailored suit. You look like Dr. Lecter-lite in that outfit. "It's generally considered rude to butt into another person’s conversation too, Mr?"

“Doctor,” Hannibal gently corrected, sliding into place beside Hisoka. “Doctor Chilton, and it’s quite OK. Margot isn’t talking about anything that isn’t a matter of public record.”

“Why would your love life traumatise us?” Illumi asked and narrowed his brow when he saw Hannibal’s lip twitch up into a smirk for a split second.

“The things Will has accused me of are not pleasant,” Hannibal said softly. “But he is safe now, and that’s what matters.”

"Yes, he is quite safe and getting the help and support he needs. Dr. Frederick Chilton," Frederick said, introducing himself to the group. "Would I be correct in my assumption that you are, the Mr. Morow that I’ve heard so much about?"

“You would,” Hisoka replied cautiously. “My thanks for your concern but it wasn’t necessary. Although I would ask that you just call me, Hisoka, you’ll make me feel old otherwise,” he joked.
“Of course, Hisoka. I hope you’re enjoying the evening so far? I noticed Mr. Hill seemed to be quite taken with you,” Frederick said as he noted the close proximity of Hannibal to his patient.

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Hisoka chuckled. “That’s rather surprising, he gave me the impression that he was more interested in my girlfriend,” he replied with a hint of amusement. “Allow me to introduce Lulu Nikolaev.”

***

“Of course, it’s a pleasure to meet you, Miss Nikolaev,” Frederick said, giving the woman a warm smile. You’re really his girlfriend? That explains the smugness at least, and Pariston’s sudden melancholy about unrequited affection. The man’s such a drama queen.

***

“Pleased to meet your acquaintance,” Illumi said, starting to bow, but caught himself and turned it into a courtesy just in time.

***

Margot rolled her eyes at Chilton but caught the partial bow from Lulu. Ingrained habits like that were hard to break, but the ‘woman’ had been smooth with her cover nonetheless. She wondered how long ago her transition had taken place, and why she wasn’t more concerned about how close Hannibal was to Hisoka.

Didn’t you believe what I told you about Will? He’s going to try to make Hisoka a part of his collection. You can’t be that smitten with him that you’ll let Hannibal have him without a fight? Surely you aren’t that stupid?

***

"The pleasure is all mine, Miss Nikolaev." Dr. Chilton replied with a smile, "I hope you're enjoying your visit to Yorknew City? Do let me know if there is anything I can do to make your stay more pleasant."

***

Illumi froze and felt his hand twitch as he resisted the urge to summon his needles. “I am sorry that you would think so little of my boyfriend that you would assume that my ‘visit’ has not been a pleasant one, Doctor. May I ask where you think I hail from?”

***

Seeing the direction the conversation was heading, Margot decided that she’d rather watch from a distance.

Mouthing the words, ‘Little Girls Room’ to Hannibal, she smiled at him and made her exit whilst she still could.

***

Dr. Chilton watched Margot leave before he noticed the curious look Hisoka was giving him and felt his heart skip a beat. “Well, it’s just that, surely you’d like to see more of the city than just the area around the hotel?” he asked as calmly as he could manage. “I meant no disrespect, I assure
you.”

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“And, surely, Dr. Chilton, you had noticed that I possess legs?” Illumi countered. “I am free to go wherever I like. I promise you, Hisoka does not chain me to him. I am choosing to remain in his company.”

***

Hannibal smirked and raised a brow teasingly at Hisoka. “An intriguing thought. How far can your Bungee-gum stretch, mon cher?” *Do you see what I mean now, Hisoka?*

***

“If I’ve detached it from my body, it’s around ten meters. Although, I’ve never actually tested to find it’s limit while still connected,” Hisoka mused. “Perhaps you could help me with a little experiment once I’m no longer caged?”

***

“I would be delighted, and I’m sure my colleague would happily help as well, wouldn’t you, Frederick?” Hannibal said, imagining the joy on Hisoka’s face as he tried to target a fleeing Chilton with his Nen. “I’m sure it would be a hugely enlightening experience for all involved.”

***

*This hocus pocus again, Hannibal? You really should know better than to encourage your patient's fantasies.* “Of course,” Chilton replied a little stiffly. “If you think it would benefit your patient, then I’m sure I can help you find a more suitable volunteer. I do have a hospital to run.”

***

“That you do,” Hannibal said, doing his best to hide his amusement. “But all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, as they say. I’m sure that after Hisoka has completed his therapy and has been signed off as my patient, we could all benefit from some exercise, don’t you?”

***

“Well I have to confess I work hard and play harder,” Hisoka replied teasingly. “If you’re sure you could keep up with me, Dr. Chilton, then I would be happy to arrange something. But it would have to be at the end of my therapy.”

***

*If I can keep up? Frederick thought incredulously. Seriously, I can’t believe Hannibal is even entertaining your delusions. Everyone knows the Arena’s fights were staged that’s why nobody took it seriously when there was a bomb threat.*

“Well, we’ll have to wait and see, won’t we,” he said to Hisoka with a curious look. “You certainly seem to have maintained your wit during your time in custody. Perhaps your inability to adapt was greatly exaggerated?”

***

Flashing a mischievous smile, Hisoka chuckled. “Oh, I assure you,” he purred. “Nothing about my
“reputation has ever been exaggerated.”

***

“Hisoka-san is far more than a simple showman,” Illumi said confidently. “His abilities are many and varied, but,” he added a note of concern to his voice as he looked down at the Doctor’s cane. “Are you sure that you would be able to provide him with the competition that he would need to stay interested in you? Hisoka-san is still healing from the injuries he sustained at the Arena, but,” he looked back up and tried to look worried. “If you aren’t fit and able, then you shouldn’t let him goad you into doing something that you are incapable of. I don’t want you to hurt yourself further.”

***

Hannibal had to contain his urge to laugh aloud at the look on Chilton’s face. He slid the hand closest to Hisoka into his pocket to stop himself from reaching out to touch Hisoka and claim him as his own. He was already standing on the edge of the man’s personal space; he couldn’t afford to set off too many red flags. It would have to be enough to see Hisoka and his lady slowly winding Frederick towards his breaking point. Hisoka would be his. He would come to him. He didn’t have to touch.

But I want to.

Forcing himself to turn towards Chilton, he waited to see what the man would do.

***

“That’s most kind of you to say, Miss Nikolaev,” Frederick replied, forcing a smile that didn’t meet his eyes. “There is still time for me to improve my own health, perhaps I could follow your boyfriend’s example.”

***

“There’s no need for flattery, but if you wanted to hire me as a personal trainer, then I’d have to decline. I’m still a Hunter, and until the decision to revoke my license is made, then I’ll be looking to return to that life. Although, perhaps I could make an exception,” Hisoka suggested with mirth dancing behind his eyes. “Perhaps you would like to join us, Dr. Lecter? I’m sure a man of your reputation must take excellent care of himself.”

***

Hannibal smiled and before he realised what he was doing, had pulled his hand out of his pocket and placed it against the base of Hisoka’s back. Covering for the instinctual gesture, he allowed his Nen to pool into his palm and let the warmth to pass into him, rewarding him for the careful flattery.

“I do my best to stay as healthy as I can,” he said. “But I’m always open to broadening my horizons. What is life if not a series of new and exciting experiences, after all?”

***

“A man after my own heart,” Hisoka replied as he tried to ignore the warm sensation flowing up his spine. “I like to consider myself a Hunter of many new and exciting experiences. Especially the ones which have a little danger to them,” he added as he handed his empty glass to the waiter who passed by. “What about you, Dr. Chilton? Are you a thrill-seeker?”
Dr. Chilton watched the display with intrigue. He wasn't a stranger to unorthodox methods, but Dr. Lecter really was something else. *Why do I feel like I’m an unwelcome extra in a private moment?* he wondered.

“I think I’ve done my share of thrill-seeking already,” Frederick said quietly, leaning on his cane. “I’m afraid I’m rather boring these days, but I take my pleasure where I can. You get a special feeling of satisfaction from watching those under your care grow and blossom into the people they were meant to be. Sadly, it’s not always possible to foster such growth, but for those unlucky few, we do our best to make them comfortable.”

Hisoka paused to look Dr. Chilton over carefully. “Would it be presumptuous of me to think you and Dr. Lecter know each other through your work?”

“We do, Hisoka. You’re not considering requesting a change in therapist, are you?” Frederick asked feeling emboldened and blaming it on the heady atmosphere of the room. “I’d be more than happy to take over if Hannibal felt it would be in your best interests. Although you would have to give up the hotel room, I’d expect.”

Feeling Hisoka’s back muscles tense, Hannibal narrowed his eyes. “I am afraid that I can not permit you to do that, Frederick. Hisoka is at a critical stage of his treatment, and I will not allow you to derail it. You already know my feelings about confining someone like Hisoka, and you also know the detrimental effect that switching therapists can have on a patient, especially mid-way through their prescribed treatment.”

“However,” he kept his gaze even as he turned to his patient. “I would not wish to take your voice away from you, so, and I insist that you answer honestly, do you wish to switch from my care and take Frederick up on his offer? I assure you, the accommodation at the hospital is entirely fit for purpose, and you will receive three square meals a day.”

*No, you don’t get to palm me off on him. Not after you put your Nen on me.* Hisoka growled inside his head as he schooled his features into a concerned frown.

“Why would I want to move to the hospital? Lulu wouldn’t be able to stay with me,” he countered as he tried to work out what Dr. Chilton was trying to achieve. *Is this a test? Are you both testing me?*

“With all due respect, Dr. Chilton,” Hisoka said, switching his attention to the man who wanted to reduce the size of his cage. “I didn’t really believe in therapy, so Dr. Lecter has had to work hard to gain my trust. My girlfriend has come all this way to see me as well. Why would I allow myself to be separated from her now?” He smiled when Chilton seemed to shrink back under his steely gaze. Forcing himself to relax, he looked back at Dr. Lecter.

“You have shown a greater understanding and willingness to work with me than most,” he said in softer tones. “I won’t lie and say I’m happy about the arrangement, but, I know that you are trying to make it as comfortable as it can be for a man like me. The effort hasn’t gone unnoticed, nor is it
unappreciated."

***

“There you have it, Frederick,” Hannibal said, feeding more Nen into Hisoka’s still tense back. “You have it in his own words. I have already promised him that I value his opinion, so I hope that you will honour it too. I refuse to take Hisoka’s options away from him and I will step in if you try to do so again. Unlike Will, he does not belong in your cages.”

***

“Please accept my apologies if I caused any upset,” Frederick backpedalled before glancing over Lulu’s shoulder to try and spot somebody else he could escape to talk to. “I'm not sure what has come over me tonight. If you’ll excuse me, I think I need to get a little air. It was a pleasure to meet you both, Hisoka, Miss Nikolaev.”

Taking a moment to give them a polite bow, he turned to make a hasty exit. Why did I say that? He’s Hannibal’s patient, and Hannibal was right there! Don’t panic, just try and get through the rest of the evening without putting your foot in your mouth, and it’ll be fine.

***

Hannibal watched Dr. Chilton leave dispassionately. “My apologies for my colleague,” he said. “I do hope that he has not cast a shadow across the evening?”

***

“It’s fine. You didn’t know he would do that. You did try to warn me about him making a fool of himself. I’d say he managed it,” Hisoka said as he pointedly looked at the mantelpiece above the fireplace. “Are you a flesh collector? I couldn’t help but notice your centrepiece.”

You gave me the impression you wanted me, so what was that about? Is he really that idiotic?

***

“I have a few select pieces,” Hannibal said, following Hisoka’s gaze and smiling at the memory of the fear in the Kurta’s eyes as he realised that his Nen was useless against him.

“I was a surgeon before I switched to psychiatry. I like to remember where I came from and what the study of anatomy did for me when I was younger,” he explained. “My teacher had a set,” he said, remembering the way the man had screamed as he had cut him open. The women who took his class had not mourned his loss. “And so when I saw these, I knew I had to have them.”

***

“Well the Kurta’s red eyes were said to be one of the most beautiful colours in the world,” Hisoka mused as he suppressed a shudder. “I’ve never seen the appeal myself, I can think of a much more pleasing shade.”

***

Hannibal smiled and turned to Hisoka. “So can I, mon cher,” he said softly. “And I’m sure that Lulu can too.”

***
“I can,” Illumi agreed, stepping forward and reaching out for Hisoka’s hand as Hannibal lowered his arm. He watched the Doctor move back and tried to understand the look on his face as he did. “Red has its place, but if I were to pick my favourite, then I would have to say that gold shines brightest in my heart.”

***

“My darling Lulu,” Hisoka said softly as he took his lover’s hand with a grateful smile. "Not many would be as forgiving of my quirks as you are, I hope you weren’t feeling ignored?"

***

“Not at all,” Illumi said. “It’s never been hard to accept your...quirks, because,” he ducked his head. “You have always accepted mine...Master.”

***

It was a risk. They hadn’t agreed upon this beforehand, but it was clear from everything that had happened, that Hannibal was a man who loved power. Openly displaying his acceptance that his Master was submitting to someone else would only seek to reinforce the man’s power trip, and lessen the threat that he would pose in his eyes.

“I understand all too well the need for the...unorthodox,” he added. “Intimately.”

***

“We both do,” Hisoka agreed as he moved to put his arm around Illumi to hide his surprise at the use of his title. “And I feel that Dr. Lecter does as well. Master is in good hands. Still, I am glad that you’re here with me.”

***

“Quite the unconventional family,” Hannibal said as he watched Lulu duck her head shyly into Hisoka’s chest. “But love, like beauty, knows no boundaries and does not play by any rules. I am pleased that you have found each other.”

He was shocked to hear the words come out of his mouth, but, he realised with a jolt, they were true. “I am here to help, and unlike the dear Dr. Chilton, I do not wish to clip your wings. I am here to see you fly.”

***

_If you’re not careful it’ll be me who gets to see you fly, perhaps I should dangle you from the roof with my Nen?_ Hisoka smiled amused at his own internal dialogue as he allowed himself to relax with Illumi leaning against him.

“He’s not like us,” he said thoughtfully. “He’s not as unconventional, so I doubt he’d be able to really be of much help. You, on the other hand, Dr. Lecter have shown an unusual depth of understanding which makes it a little easier to cooperate.”

***

Hannibal smiled and took in the tableau before him. Hisoka’s eyes perfectly matched the rich, yellow flames of the fire behind him and the sleek black of Lulu’s dress, coupled with her pale skin and ash-blond hair was striking in the warm light of the room.
“I am glad,” he said, offering Hisoka a bow of his head. “I myself am a man of unusual tastes, so I feel that it is only fair to accommodate the unorthodox in others. “But, you must be hungry, please,” he turned and gestured for a waiter carrying a selection of elegantly displayed, bite-sized hors d'oeuvres to come over to them. “I insist. What kind of a host would I be if I did not ensure that my guests were well fed? The main meal will be ready within the hour, but until then, feel free to eat whatever you like.”

***

“I’m sure the meal will be delightful, we’ve both been looking forward to it. Am I allowed to ask what these are?” Hisoka asked as he picked up a small cracker with some sort of pâté that looked oddly familiar to him.

***

“A selection of the finest meats from all over the country,” Hannibal said simply, watching the waiter offering the tray to Lulu next.

***

Hisoka looked at the tray with interest, he had to admit the food did look good, and it smelled even better as he gave the pâté a quick sniff.

"Did you use the same meats for those sandwiches may I ask?” he said as he gave his lover a quick glance before deciding to take the plunge and eat the appetizer.

***

“I did,” Hannibal said with a knowing chuckle. “I had that particular beast made into the roses at the top left of the plate. It reminded me of a flower, cut as it came into bloom. I used it to make the pâté as well, how do you like it?”

***

If you have Danchou as your patient too I bet he just loves you. "The pâté is delightful, I almost feel guilty for eating it,” Hisoka said honestly. "Only almost, mind. It would be rude not to enjoy it now that it's been prepared so wonderfully."

***

“It looks delicious,” Illumi agreed as he turned to look at the plate. He had been curious about the sandwiches, but the risk of infection had been too high to eat them at the time. Now, as his Master had pointed out, it would be rude to refuse. He reached out for the rose-shaped meat that sat on a small, circular crackerbread and asked, “May I?”

***

Hannibal nodded graciously and watched Lulu select and then eat his sampler. The thrill that ran through him was intoxicating. Lulu hadn’t let go of Hisoka, and Hannibal wondered if, like him, she too felt the need to be close to the man. What’s happening to me? he wondered. Why am I losing control? Has the association misunderstood your Nen? Are you able to manipulate? How strong are you, mon cher?

Taking the tray from the waiter, he laid it down on the side table next to them and selected a rose for himself. “I never feel guilty about anything that I eat,” he said, feeling the thrill of a fresh
challenge rising within him. “Our food gives us life, and life is to be enjoyed, wouldn’t you agree?” he asked Hisoka.

***

“I’m a hedonist at heart, what’s the point of being alive if you can’t enjoy it? I’ll never understand those who shy away from dangerous pursuits. The thrill of adrenaline as I face a truly strong opponent,” Hisoka sighed as he picked up another piece of meat from the tray. “Well, it’s one of life’s greatest pleasures. Although, I can understand why, for some, it would be food, were you ever a Gourmet Hunter?”

***

Hannibal chuckled. “No, never, I prefer to keep my work and my hobbies separate, but you are not the first to ask. Food is my life’s passion. After knowing the pangs of hunger, I have grown to truly appreciate it for the gift that it is.”

He glanced down at Lulu and softened his smile. “How are you finding it, ma chere?”

***

“It’s even better than I remember, Doctor,” Illumi said and selected another piece, this time around it was a ball that looked like some kind of beef. “You are quite the Renaissance man; Science, Art and now it turns out that you can Cook too. If I weren’t so impressed, I’d be envious.”

***

"I can understand your appreciation Doctor," Hisoka said mildly as he eyed the rest of the selection before deciding to copy Illumi and try the spherical piece of meat. "Although I never had the patience to learn the craft like you have. Should I be worried, Lulu?” he asked teasingly before popping the morsel into his mouth.

*If this is one of those Viska Forest pigs, no wonder Menchi wanted to fail us all. Everything looks like it's pork, but each one tastes so different.*

***

Amused, Hannibal turned to Lulu to see how she would answer.

***

Illumi ducked his head and flushed, “No, Master, I assure you I have never desired anyone but you.”

“*He was joking, you idiot,*” Lulu thought and sighed when Illumi frowned. “*How the hell did you cope before I came along?*”

*I avoided talking to people unless it was absolutely necessary and Hisoka-san was never so...complicated. Something’s changed since his fight. I don’t understand why he would joke like that? He knows that I hate the Doctor. He frowned and bit into the beef. It was delicious.*

***

"*It's alright,*" Hisoka said soothingly as he put his arm around Illumi. "*Master is just feeling rather playful tonight. I know how you feel about me,*” he added gently before resting his chin on his
lover's head and smiling over at Dr. Lecter.

***

“Do not fear, ma chere,” Hannibal said gently. “I am a renaissance man in every sense of the word. Hisoka will never have to fear me stealing you from him.”

***

Illumi frowned. Why would I fear that? he wondered and felt Lulu rolling her eyes.

“Thank you, Master,” he said, ignoring her. “And...I had never feared that, Doctor. I know that Hisoka-san will always return to me and that if he did not, then he would be dead. Unless you intend to kill him, then I do not see the need to worry.”

“He’s gay, you dingus.”

***

“I don’t think we’d need to worry about that,” Hisoka chimed in. “After all, the good Doctor has been kind enough to give me this opportunity to make friends and powerful allies. Wild horses couldn’t stop me from trying to find my way back to you.”

***

“I’d kill the horses that tried,” Illumi growled and startled when he heard Hannibal laugh.

***

“Now I understand what he sees in you, ma chere,” Hannibal said, offering the small woman a toast, before sipping at his drink. “I was right. You are a Viper. How magnificent.”

***

“A rose by any other name as they say,” Hisoka agreed. “I have always been rather fond of Vipers. They look so unassuming until they strike. By then, it’s too late, as I learned when I fell under my sweet Lulu’s spell. Not that I’m complaining, she’s a delightful challenge, and she keeps me on my toes. I’d imagine if I were more inclined towards submission, like her I’d need a firm hand.”

***

Hannibal raised a brow. “I have no doubt,” he said curtly as a sudden fair of irritation spiked inside his chest. Are you trying to provoke me, mon cher? You know you’re submissive. Your Lulu knows. You’re playing a dangerous game, Hisoka. If you think that I will not discipline you simply because you are a guest in my house, then you are woefully mistaken.

***

“I hope I’m not interrupting,” Pariston interjected as he put a hand on Hannibal’s shoulder with a gentle squeeze. “Is everything alright? I know Hannibal’s food has been known to bring out the more primal desires inside of us. But I assure you, Miss Nikolaev, you don’t need to shelter against Hisoka for protection. Hannibal’s a teddy bear once you get to know him, I promise.”

I had a feeling that Hisoka could be trouble, but making Hannibal start to lose control? That is a surprise. Are you going to turn out to be the thing he’s been searching for, after all? Either way, this evening is going to be most entertaining. Hopefully, senas geras teve* isn’t too far gone to pick
up the warning.

*Good old father*

***

Illummi bridled at the suggestion that he would need protecting and took in the casual way that Pariston was touching Hannibal. “I assure you, Mr. Hill, I am not sheltering from anyone.”

***

Blinking as he ran Pariston’s warning through his mind, Hannibal mentally shook himself and smiled winningly at Lulu. “We were just talking about that exact topic, my boy,” he assured Pariston. “Lulu is a lady of hidden depths.”

**I nearly lost control. Why, and more to the point, how? What would I have done if Pariston hadn’t been here? I have to get a hold of myself. I can’t let the mask slip, not here. Does he suspect? Is he trying to get me to expose myself in front of a crowd? How could he know? He narrowed his eyes. Has Lulu been scouting more than just the outskirts of my house? Mon cher, you have been a busy boy, haven’t you?***

***

“I would expect nothing less from somebody who managed to catch the attention of Hisoka Morow,” Pariston agreed with a smile as he allowed himself to relax again. “Please accept my apologies for butting in. I just had a sudden urge to drop by.”

***

Hisoka looked pointedly at the hand on Hannibal’s shoulder before looking up at Parison’s smug grin. Why do I want to move your hand? he wondered as he tried to straighten out what had happened in his mind. The air changed, and now it’s back to normal? Was that your aura, Dr. Lecter?

“It’s quite alright,” he assured. “It’s not often we get the opportunity to be seen publicly as a couple you see, so we’re enjoying not having to hide.”

***

“A hidden affair?” Pariston replied with a mischievous air. “Say no more. Your secret will be safe with me. Hannibal here can vouch for my ability to keep your confidences.”

***

“Then you have my gratitude,” Hisoka said plainly, finally managing to look away from the man’s hand...that still hadn’t moved.

***

Hannibal chuckled, noting how long it had taken for Hisoka to look away from Pariston’s hand. So you do want me. You weren’t merely playing before. How interesting. Are you that unaware of yourself, mon cher? Do you genuinely think that you do not desire to submit to me? Is that why I had the urge to drag you away? So that I could prove it to you?
“Pariston, my boy,” he said, patting the man’s hand. “Your timing is impeccable as always. Would you be able to hold the fort here whilst Hisoka and I have a little chat? Lulu is, of course, free to join us if you would like,” he added, nodding to Hisoka. “This is not a formal therapy session, after all.” I can’t risk you provocuing me like that again. If you want a firm hand, I’ll give you one, but I need to know precisely what you know about me, mon cher. How have you found out?

***

“Of course,” Pariston agreed as he wondered just what kind of chat Hannibal intended to have.

***

Well, this isn’t what I expected, just what are you planning? You know you can’t make me disappear so either you want to talk, or you’re actually giving in to my flirting?

“I would appreciate having Lulu with me,” Hisoka said as he sought out his lover’s hand. “I must confess my curiosity as to what you wish to discuss that requires privacy.”

***

“We can discuss that when we get there, mon cher,” Hannibal said, stepping away from Pariston. “I’ll leave the guests in your capable hands until we return. We shouldn’t be too long. If the two of you would care to follow me?” He gestured to the exit of the living room. “There is a private room across the hallway to your left. It has a blue door.”

***

"Of course Doctor," Hisoka agreed, stamping down on the sudden influx of butterflies in his stomach. "Shall we, my dear?" he asked Lulu before making a move towards the door.

***

Giving Pariston one last glare, Illumi nodded and followed his Master, readying himself should Hannibal try to attack. He watched as Hannibal passed him and moved to lead the way.

“Don’t do anything stupid,” Lulu warned. “You can’t win this by killing him. Let Hisoka-san do his thing. We aren’t here to interfere.”

This feels like a trap, Illumi snarled.

“I know, but he can’t do anything here, not in front of all these people. Don’t be impulsive.”

I’m never impulsive! Illumi roared.

Lulu snorted. “Of course, sweetie, of course.”

***

Reaching for Illumi’s hand, he gave it a squeeze he smiled at his lover as they were led down the hall. This is certainly going to be interesting, do you really just want to talk? Or are you going to address the elephant in the room?

“You certainly have an eclectic taste in decor,” Hisoka commented in an attempt to break the silence. “I’m guessing some of the more interesting items are from your travels as a Hunter?”

***
“I’m an unconventional man, Hisoka,” Hannibal said quietly, opening the door and gesturing for his guests to enter the room. “I have lived in many different places. Each piece has its own place in my heart. After you, mon cher.”

***

*Oh, I hadn’t noticed, I’m sure every therapist uses Nen on their patients and keeps sex toys in their offices.* Hisoka thought a little sourly as he passed through the door and took in the room.

Looking around, he saw the spartan, pale blue walls. There were several comfortable-looking sofas and chairs surrounding them and in the middle of the floor stood an unremarkable and rather plain-looking table. He frowned when he spotted a large cupboard nestled in one corner. *What’s this room, supposed to be? Am I going to be put in time out?* he wondered as he felt Illumi come to stand beside him.

***

*I don’t like this,* Illumi thought, noting the discreetly placed rings for shackles to be attached to, along with the easily cleaned floor. *This is a trap. I have to get Master out of here.*

“No!” Lulu commanded. “No, you have to trust him.”

*I do trust him! I don’t trust Lecter!* Illumi snarled.

“Then let me do the talking. You’re in no fit state to help anyone. Calm down!” she insisted, pushing up and forcing Illumi into the back of his mind.

“Well, this is cosey,” she said, hearing the door click closed behind her. “I love what you’ve done with the place.”

***

Hisoka chuckled as he felt his lover’s energy shifting. *Lulu?* "I’m a little confused myself; it’s not what I expected," he admitted as he tried to sense where Hannibal was and felt his heart skip a beat. “It’s definitely more private, and the colour on walls is nice,” he commented.

***

“Thank you, mon cher,” Hannibal said as evenly as he could while he fought against his instinct to grab the man in front of him and rip his clothes from his skin. He needed to touch, to claim, to own Hisoka. It was exactly as Pariston had said; he felt primal. He hadn’t felt this in touch with his instincts since he’d left Meteor City and it was unnerving, to say the least.

Tilting his head, he looked Hisoka over and asked, “Why were you trying to provoke me, mon cher? I would dearly like to know.”

***

“Provoke?” Hisoka echoed. “I wasn’t, at least I didn’t think I was being...Dr. Lecter I was trying to get to know everyone a bit better. Dr. Chilton irked me, I have to admit, but Mrs. Verger seemed nice enough. Wouldn’t your band trigger if I was being deliberately provocative? Surely that would break your civility clause, or am I mistaken?”

***
Lulu tittered. “Oh, if you think *that* was provocative, you’ve got another thing coming, Doctor. Hisoka wasn’t even *trying*.”

She saw the man’s eyes narrow. “Oh, I’m sorry, I forgot, I have to be demure and polite. The perfect little wallflower, don’t I? Bad Lulu,” she slapped her own hand and winked. “I’ll learn my lesson one day.”

***

“Lulu,” Hisoka admonished even as he felt himself breaking out in an amused smirk. “You know I’d find you boring if you were a wallflower, it’s your wildness that I’m drawn to. Although I would suggest that you don’t talk to our host like that too often, but you are right. I hadn’t actually started trying to really provoke anyone yet.”

Grinning, Hisoka took a step towards Dr. Lecter as he looked the man up and down with a hum of approval. “Do you want to see me try?” he purred. “I know I’ve been very naughty during my therapy sessions, but like you said earlier, this isn’t a formal session. So surely the rules don’t apply? Show me how unconventional you really are. I’ve been a very bad man. I think I need *punishing.*”

**What will you do? You can’t attack me, not here. I have to leave in one piece because I have guards outside. It’s your move Doctor.**

***

Hannibal heard a low and dangerous growl escape from his throat and let go of the tight hold he had over his Nen until it flooded the room. His relaxed posture straightened, and he hardened his eyes.

“I couldn’t agree more, Hisoka,” he said with deceptive calm. “Go over to the table. It’s time that I showed you a *firm hand.*”

***

“Do you intend to give me a spanking?” Hisoka teased deliberately taking his time as he moved over to the table.

***

“Oh, I do hope so,” Lulu chirped, clapping her hands excitedly. “You’re both so *handsome!* Oh, please tell me that I can watch? Will you make my Master *scream* for you, Doctor?”

**What are you doing? You’ll get him killed!**

"Oh, shut up, you drama queen. Hannibal wants to shag him, not shank him. What planet have you been living on?"

***

“Whether he screams or not is up to Hisoka, ma chere,” Hannibal said, pouring his impatience into his aura to see whether Hisoka would speed up. “But you may watch, yes.” He gestured to the sofa that would leave her directly in Hisoka’s line of sight. “So long as you remain quiet. Your Master will most certainly need his cane by the time he leaves this room. I would suggest that you do not add to his punishment.”
Do you really think you can hurt me enough for that? “I’m honestly curious to see what you have in mind for me,” Hisoka said playfully as he leant against the table and winked at Lulu. “Be a good girl for me now, and I’m sure you’ll get to enjoy the show.”

“I can’t wait,” Lulu breathed, sitting down where she was told and allowing the slit in her dress to fall open to reveal the full length of her leg. “Let me hear you sing, Master.”

“Take off your jacket and bend over, resting your forearms on the table,” Hannibal instructed, feeling his pulse quicken at the thought of laying his hands on the man again. “We don’t want such a beautiful creation to get damaged, do we?”

“No, it would be a shame,” Hisoka muttered as he complied with the instruction and bent over the table once he’d laid the folded jacket down.

“Precisely, Hisoka,” Hannibal said as he ran a Nen infused hand down the man’s spine. “Your Lulu deserves a show, after all,” he added, taking up his position behind the man and seeing the eager glint in his girlfriend’s eyes. Leaning forward, he whispered into Hisoka’s ear, “Let’s find out exactly how firm of a hand you need, shall we?”

“You’re doing this for Lulu, and for the mission. Not for him, just let him have his fun. He’s crossing the line of his own accord; it’s just a case of keeping him from going back.

“Only one way to find out,” Hisoka teased as he resisted the urge to arch up into the hand stroking him and bit his lip. “I’m ready,” he murmured.

“Indeed there is, mon cher,” Hannibal said as he reached around the front of Hisoka’s trousers and undid his belt with practised movements. Flicking open the button of his trousers he gently instructed, “Tell me what you know about me. How have Lulu and you been going about your research?”

“Research?” Hisoka asked in surprise. “You’re my therapist and a Blacklist Hunter? Until today I didn’t realise you knew Pariston Hill. I know you’re Nen type, I could guess things from your house, but that’s why I’ve been asking you questions. What am I supposed to know?” he asked as he tried to think through his confusion.

“You scouted my house,” Hannibal pointed out as he unzipped Hisoka’s pants. “Or at least, your darling Lulu did.”
Hisoka didn’t outwardly react. He had expected this after his belt had been undone. Instead, he tried to think about the question. *But Illu-chan didn’t mention anything out of the ordinary, I’d remember.* “It was Lulu,” he confirmed. “I guessed you’d know if I was there because I’m marked with your Nen. She didn’t mention anything that you’d be wanting to keep secret. If I’d thought that you were trying to entrap me, I wouldn’t have come.”

“Good, mon cher, I am glad that you would not be that foolish,” Hannibal said as he slid the man’s trousers down. “I commend you on your choice of scout, by the way,” he added, stroking the base of Hisoka’s spine and revelling in the feeling of power. “She left no trace. I would not have known that she had been there if I hadn’t have been expecting her. You are an exceptional teacher, with an even more exceptional student. Do I need to worry about her trying to kill me?”

“Only if you intend to kill me,” Hisoka replied confidently. “She swore herself to me when I became her Master. My death belongs to her. If anyone takes her prize, then she’ll ensure they meet their end by her hand.” He closed his eyes and commanded his body to relax. “I’m also an unconventional man,” he added.

“I have no doubt, you also have excellent taste in partners,” Hannibal said, surprised by how proud he felt about Hisoka’s choice. “I suspect that she is as equally skilful as you are. A man like you would settle for nothing less,” he purred, sliding Hisoka’s boxers down to meet his trousers on the floor. His ass was exquisite.

Hannibal licked his lips. “Could she kill you right now, mon cher?” he asked, forcing himself to look at Lulu’s amused face. It was a perfect mask; she gave nothing away.

“She could try. Something tells me that you wouldn’t be passive enough just to watch that happen,” Hisoka countered. “Are you asking to see me fight?”

“No, mon cher,” Hannibal said with a chuckle, allowing his hand to rest on the man’s ass, and stifling a groan at the feeling of his skin. “You are correct. I wouldn’t stand by and let her do that.” I was wondering how you would react to the idea. You seemed delighted at the prospect of fighting before. I wonder, do you not believe that she is ready to face you? Is she another of your fruits? “Nor would I allow her to interrupt our show. Shall we begin?”

“I’m not ready for Illu-chan to leave me just yet. I wouldn’t let you take him from me, or Lulu. “I think that would be for the best,” Hisoka agreed. ‘It seems a little cruel to keep Lulu’s treat from her. She’s been good. Not even made a peep.’”

“And who am I to keep such a charming Princess from her entertainment?” Hannibal chuckled,
drawing his hand back. “Don’t worry, I won’t go easy on you,” he said before smacking his hand down hard onto the right cheek.

***

Hisoka’s witty remark died on his lips as the hand resting on his buttock was removed and swiftly came down hard against his bare skin. Unable to brace himself for the impact in time, he couldn’t stop himself from yelping in surprise.

So this is what you decided on for my punishment? he wondered as shock quickly wore off. A simple spanking isn't going to be much of a deterrent. He smiled to himself. He was confident that he could endure this.

***

Hannibal brought his hand down again, equally hard, against the other ass cheek. “Tell me, Hisoka, what did you hope to get out of provoking me? You say that you aren’t submissive, but you appear to be challenging me to prove you otherwise.”

Before the man had a chance to speak, he landed his next blow, just above the top of his leg.

***

Now that Hisoka knew what was coming it was easy to brace himself for the next blow. He grinned to himself when he managed to remain silent. When another strike came almost immediately after Dr. Lecter’s question, he cried out and looked to his lover.

Why are you asking me this? You want me, don’t you? I’ve been throwing myself at you since the start, what else would I be after?

“I’d have thought it was obvious, I’ve made no secret of trying to get you into a sexual encounter,” he said between breaths as he revelled in the endorphins that were starting to flow through him. “You’ve met Lulu, if I want my submissive to be able to push me, surely I’d be the same as the submissive?” he challenged.

***

At the sound of Hisoka’s second yelp, he couldn’t hold in his smile. He saw the bracelet glow and wondered what Hisoka would do. The answer had been honest.

“So you simply want sex?” Hannibal asked, slamming his hand down again.

***

Hisoka groaned loudly as he felt the next impact, combined with the subtle activation of the bracelet. As much as he didn't want it to, he was starting to feel good. He grinned over at Lulu.

"Is that really so hard for you to believe?” he countered the question with his own before he allowed himself to sag against the tabletop. “I’m all about fun, and you can ask my guards how high my sex drive is,” he added playfully.

***

Hannibal Landed two blows in quick succession over the already reddened skin, ensuring they were both slightly harder than the ones before.
“I have heard mention, yes,” he said, delighting in the way Hisoka was responding. “So I would be a prized conquest? Where would I sit compared to Freddie Lounds?” he asked with a smirk.

***

Lulu squirmed in place as she watched Hannibal spank her Master. His skin was turning pink, and her mouth was going dry at the thought of having him bend like that for her.

She smiled as he grinned at her in between the blows.

***

“That’s hardly a fair comparison,” Hisoka complained before moaning as he felt his arousal building with the harder blows. “I wouldn’t play submissive to her, but I have offered to take that role for you.”

***

“Yes, mon cher, you did,” Hannibal purred. “But I don’t play games. I promised you that I would help you understand yourself, and I will.” He landed three hard blows in quick succession. “I always keep my promises.”

***

Hisoka cried out louder with each successive strike. The pain from his wrist was combining with the heady rush of endorphins from the beating, and he couldn’t stop the giggle that forced itself out from his throat as his cock twitched against the table.

"You did mention that, but you also mentioned helping me with my weaknesses," he reminded Hannibal as he rode out the waves of sensations flooding his mind. "I also remember that you only want to help me as a patient."

Sighing in delight, he bit down on his lip hard enough to draw blood. "I also think you'd like to see me truly submit." He licked at the wound before adding, “Did you expect I’d make it easy for you? Words don’t mean much to me unless you back them up with actions. If you want my real submission, you’re going to have your work cut out for you.”

***

Hannibal smirked and slammed his hand down again, giving the man the endorphin high he was seeking. “And what made you think I would not understand that, mon cher?”

***

"Well you're still trying to be my therapist, aren't you?” Hisoka asked cheekily between quiet moans as he gripped the table.

***

Hannibal heard Lulu’s quiet chuckle and allowed Hisoka a pause in his spanking.

_Trying to be, mon cher?_

“You have something to say, ma chere?”
“I-” Lulu paused when she realised that she’d inadvertently broken the rules. “No, Sir,” she said and dropped her gaze and did her best to ignore Illumi’s protests that she’d placed Hisoka-san in danger. She knew she hadn’t. The way Hannibal was looking at their Master left her with no doubt at all that he wanted nothing more than to take him then and there. It was only his stubborn insistence upon keeping up his act that was stopping him.

But Hannibal had told her to stay quiet. She wanted to find out what would happen next.

***

"Lulu, it’s OK. Master would like to hear what you wanted to say,” Hisoka panted, looking at his doll, and the submissive pose she’d taken on. "You wouldn’t refuse me, would you?"

***

Lulu looked up and met her Master’s eyes before glancing at Hannibal, who raised his brow in challenge.

She grinned. Turning back to Hisoka, she realised that he must be angling for more pain. *Let’s make this count,* she thought, and opened her mouth to speak. “Violence, for you, Master, well, it’s just foreplay. You’d never truly submit unless they could claim your body as well.”

It was the truth, and everyone in the room knew it.

Looking back up into Hannibal’s lust darkened eyes, she purred, “You’re still his therapist and so, Sir, my apologies if this comes across as vulgar, but I don’t see how you could claim him and satisfy him without,” she licked her lips deliberately. “Fucking him.”

***

Hisoka chuckled briefly before flashing Lulu a seductive smile. "Good girl," he praised. "You do learn so quickly for me; I don’t know if I could have put it better myself. Although I would be slightly disappointed if the good Doctor hadn’t realised that by now."

***

Hannibal let the hardest blow yet land directly on the middle of Hisoka’s left cheek. “I see,” he said evenly. Leaving his hand in place, he deliberately bent forwards, laying himself over the man until his lips were almost touching his ear. “Did you think that I would make it that easy for you, mon cher?” he whispered, throwing his own words back at him. He had no doubt that Hisoka could feel his arousal, but he needed the man to understand that he had far more self-discipline than anyone Hisoka had ever called ‘Master’ before.

Leaning back up, he landed the next blow on his right cheek. “Lulu,” he said. “Do you want to see me *fuck* your Master?"

***

Lulu looked at Hisoka for permission to answer. “Master?” she asked with a cheeky raise of her brow.

***

*I want you to fuck me. I don’t care if Lulu gets to watch or not. You marked me with your Nen, and then you dare to hint about letting me be caged?* Hisoka snarled inside his mind as the fog of lust
continued to descend. *I'll have you, Doctor, I know you want me.*

“Tell him, sweetheart,” he gasped as the latest rush of endorphins hit him like a wave. “Remember, it’s rude to lie. Be honest,” he cooed happily as he melted against the hard surface of the table. “Master knows when you’re lying to him.”

***

“Yes,” Lulu breathed. “I want to see you make him scream.” She was going to need a new set of underwear if things continued like this.

***

Hannibal felt his lips quirk into a smile. “Then we better show her exactly what you’re capable of, shan’t we, mon cher?” Hannibal said and gently patted Hisoka’s bright red ass. “We wouldn’t want to leave you unfulfilled, would we?”

He set off for the wardrobe in the corner of the room and pulled open one door. Reaching inside, he selected a thick wooden cane that was almost identical to the one he had in his office and walked back over to Hisoka, making sure he could see everything.

***

_Caning? Are you trying to test the limits of my masochism, Doctor?_ Hisoka’s eyes locked onto the piece of wood as he recalled the way he’d felt when his feet had been beaten. _How different will it be on my ass? Are you going to make me cry out? Will you not stop until I do?_

"I hope you’re enjoying the show, Lulu," he purred as he continued to watch Dr. Lecter approach him.

***

Lulu nodded and resisted the urge to touch herself. The image the two men were making was captivating. She knew that speaking now would break the spell and Illumi’s warnings to hold her tongue were still ringing in her ears. Hannibal had made it quite clear what would happen if she talked, but no one in the room seemed upset about the fact that she had. Illumi didn’t count.

***

“*I think five on each side should do it,*” Hannibal said, as he resumed his spot beside Hisoka’s ass and placed the cane against his right cheek. “You will count the blows aloud for your Lulu, mon cher. She won’t talk, not unless she wants your punishment to be doubled. This is between us now,” he added in a far more gentle tone. _Let me show you how much I understand you. Let me free your mind. Give in, Hisoka. Let yourself enjoy your submission. I know you need this; you need me._

***

_Five this time? You know you’re just rewarding me, right?_ Hisoka felt his heart quicken with excitement and looked over to Lulu. _Be good, don't interfere. This needs to happen. We need Dr. Lecter to think he can take me from you._

"Let’s not keep our wonderful audience hanging," he murmured and waited to see what would happen.
Hannibal chuckled and landed the first blow. “Indeed,” he said with open delight. “We wouldn’t want that, mon cher.” He hadn’t held back and watched with open fascination as the red welt formed on his skin. “She’s been so good,” he added, stroking his hand over his mark.

The first strike landed before Hisoka could brace himself and he found himself unable to hold back the low groan that followed in its wake.

"One," he growled defiantly, smirking at Lulu as he caught her eye. "Such a good girl," he agreed as he felt fingers tracing the tender skin of his cheek.

Hannibal aimed the next blow to land diagonally across Hisoka’s ass. He watched as the red line blossomed from the top of the cheek down to just below the middle. “Umm,” Hannibal agreed, licking his lips and resisting the urge to bend down and taste. “A shining achievement.”

Hisoka maintained eye contact with his lover, and he heard the faint swish in the air as the cane came down on his ass for the second time.

"Two," he moaned as the fiery pain continued to build steadily, and his dick twitched one more.

Hannibal landed the third switch quickly across the bottom of Hisoka’s cheek.

Lulu watched, captivated as her Master howelled and counted the falling blows across his already sensitive ass. Each time Hisoka-san found her eyes and each time he remembered the number, but she could see the fog descending.

Hannibal was sending her Master into a state of mind she knew all too well. Her underwear was soaked through, and she didn’t quite know what she was going to do when it came to an end.

When Hannibal switched to the second cheek, she saw her Master’s knuckles go white in an attempt to stay still. As the first two strokes landed, she watched his legs beginning to tremble. Is the pain that bad? I’ve never seen you like this before; it’s just a caning? Who are you acting for? she wondered.

He’s not acting, look at his eyes! Illumi growled. What’s Hannibal doing to him?

“Three!” Hisoka screamed.

Hannibal had to pace himself. He had to prove to himself that he was disciplined enough to remember not to touch Hisoka now. He had an audience, and more importantly, Hisoka had to know that he was in control.

Landing the next blow centimetres below the last, he watched the welt form and revelled in the
man’s reaction.

***

*I’m losing myself, I need to hold on,* Hisoka commanded himself as he began to pant; his arousal was becoming almost painful. The wood under his hands was solid, but it wasn't enough to keep him anchored. *Lulu, my precious doll. I need you.*

Desperate golden eyes locked onto his lover's green ones, and he felt his heart jolt when he saw the lust and desire on her face. Unaware of his body's involuntary movements, he arched when the cane landed, shuddering with the effort to maintain his grip on the table as he whimpered softly.

"Four," he rasped, his throat was raw from his screams.

***

Hannibal made sure the last hit would count. He’d saved the centre of Hisoka’s cheeks for this exact moment and landed the blow with expert precision across the middle of both. He waited, knowing that once Hisoka called out the last number, the bracelet would fire and the man would be rewarded for his obedience. The anticipation of seeing him fall apart was everything he’d ever wanted. Hisoka danced on the knife’s edge as if he were born to live there; he was perfect. He was all he would ever need. He had to have him.

***

The final blow landed as Hisoka was still coming down from the last one and he tightened his grip on the table when it landed. *Fuck me already! he snarled inside his head You want me, we both know it. Even Lulu knows it.*

"Five," he croaked and felt the sudden sharp increase in pain as his bracelet fired. Closing his eyes in response, he desperately tried to process what was happening to his body. "Lulu, sweetheart?” he whimpered as he tried to resist his mind's desire to switch off and surrender. His whole body was on fire; he felt wild.

The Nen attached to his arm pumped into him, and a sharp tingling began climbing his arm. It spread throughout his chest like a forest aflame. *Why can’t I move?* he wondered as he tried to let go of the table, but his fingers wouldn't comply with his mind. *What's happening to me?*

With a sudden surge, he felt himself fall over the edge. His vision went white, as the orgasm that had been building this whole time finally tore through him. "Lulu!” he gasped, collapsing back against the table, far too exhausted to do anything but lie against the cool surface of the wood and let himself feel everything. The vice grip of his hands finally let go. He wanted nothing more than to lie against his lover and feel her in his arms.

***

Hannibal felt the surge of pride at what he’d managed to achieve fill him as his legs buckled beneath him, and the man collapsed onto the table. Reaching out to support him, he gently whispered, “I have you, mon cher, I have you. You’re safe. You’re always safe with me. I promise.”

He looked over to Lulu, who had remained in position on the floor, despite the wild look in her eyes. “Lulu,” he said, keeping his voice deliberately gentle. “Please get the lotion from inside the wardrobe and bring it to me.”
When the woman nodded and got to her feet, he switched his full attention back to Hisoka. “I’m going to lie you on the table now, mon cher. Lulu is here. She’s helping,” he stroked a soothing hand down his back as he moved into position. “Do not fight me. You are safe.”

***

Safe? Hisoka blinked as the thought bounced around in his head. Am I really safe? He wondered as he felt somebody running their fingers down his spine. He winced a little before allowing himself to go limp against the table once more. "Lulu?" he asked with uncertainty, the hand that was touching him didn't feel like his doll's. "Safe?"

***

“I am here, Master,” Lulu said warmly, returning with the cream as she watched Hisoka-san fall against the table. Hannibal was certainly strong enough to help him into position. She had never believed her Master could become so pliant and so...vulnerable, but here was the proof staring her in the face. Illumi was growling inside her head, but to her, it was captivating.

She knelt so that she was in front of his face as his arms flopped limply down the sides of the desk. She watched Hannibal carefully move his legs so that they were lying flat and made sure that they wouldn’t fall over the edge of the folded down table.

Looking back up at Hisoka-san and saw confusion in his eyes. “Your Lulu is here, Master,” she said, handing the lotion to Hannibal and reaching up to cup Hisoka-san’s cheek.

***

"Lulu," Hisoka sighed happily as he tried to press himself against her hand. His head felt too heavy. "Did you, like it?" he asked before he started to chuckle at how silly he felt and winced at the rawness of his throat.

"Feel heavy," he complained as he tried to lift his arm. He couldn't quite manage it still.

***

Hannibal warmed the lotion in his hands as he waited to rub it into the raw skin of Hisoka’s ass. He listened as Lulu reassured him that he had been magnificent and did the work of explaining to him what ‘sub-space’ was. It was quite clear that he’d never experienced it before.

He didn’t try to suppress his smile of triumph when Hisoka laughed and tried to move his arm again. Bending down, he began to massage the warmed cream into his ass, and he chuckled happily when Hisoka moaned with delight.

“You did so well, mon cher,” he assured. “Let yourself enjoy this. I’m here. You’re safe, and you have your beautiful Lulu.” He used the same technique as last time, adding his Nen to help stimulate the healing, and providing Hisoka with the added reassurance of feeling the truth behind his words. Aura never lied, and he didn’t either. He had to know that he was safe.

***

"That tickles," Hisoka said as he wriggled a bit under Hannibal's hands. The cream felt pleasantly cool against the warm tingling of his sore skin. Wanting to touch Lulu he tried to lift his other arm, frowning when he felt the same stiffness.

"You look pretty tonight," he told his lover as he gave her a dopey grin.
“You do too,” Lulu chuckled. “You did so well, Master,” she purred. “I’m so happy, right now.” She knelt up and kissed his forehead as he drifted on the cloud of pain. “You’re magnificent.”

“I couldn’t have put it better myself, ma chere,” Hannibal said happily.

"I am, aren’t I?” Hisoka agreed as he tried to focus on the hands massaging his ass but couldn’t quite manage it. His mind was still clouded, and he felt oddly tired.

"You're such a good girl," he mumbled instead, resisting his body's demands for sleep. "So glad you're mine, my precious doll."

“Always, Master,” Lulu reassured and squeezed his fingers.

Hannibal continued his steady massage, making sure that there would be no lasting damage to either the skin or muscle below. He would be safe to leave the two of them soon and return to playing the consummate host. Not that he wanted to. He felt a pang of sadness at the loss. He wanted to stay like this forever, but, he reminded himself, there would be other times. There would be more of this; he’d make sure. They had half an hour until the food was served, that should be long enough for Hisoka to fully recover.

“Lulu,” he said quietly and saw the woman look up at him curiously. He reached into his pocket to extract a key and held it out for her. “This is the key to the room. I’m going to have to go back to the party. People will ask too many questions otherwise. I will tell them that Hisoka needed some medical attention. I’m trusting you to take care of your Master and continue with the massage for another few minutes, at least. I have worked the deep tissues, and there will be no lasting damage, but he will still bruise,” he warned. “Is that OK?”

She nodded as she rose to her feet and took the key from him. He moved around to take her place and knelt in front of Hisoka.

“Mon cher,” he said gently, stroking the hair out of his eyes. “I do not want to go, but I must. You are always safe here, and Lulu is staying with you. I have to make sure that when you return to the party, no one will question your absence. It is my duty to take care of you now, and so, although I do not want to, I must return to the guests. Do you understand?”

“Why do you have to go? It’s your party. You can make something up. You want to fuck me I know you do.

“I think so,” Hisoka mumbled sleepily as he stared down at Hannibal curiously. “Guests,” he yawned. “Awkward questions.”
“Yes,” Hannibal chuckled. “I’m doing it for you, mon cher. I’m going to tell them that you have had an issue with your sciatic nerve; that will explain the limp if you have one when you leave here.”

He stroked his cheek. “Enjoy this, Hisoka. You earned it. Feel free to move to the sofa if you like after you have come back to yourself a bit. Lulu will take care of you. I trust you both.” He smirked. “Enjoy your time alone in here.”

***

“Sofa would be comfy,” Hisoka hummed. “Sleepy, don’t want awkward questions. Dr. Chilton is silly. Why would I switch to him?” he grumbled as he flexed his fingers. “Feel all tingly,” he sighed as pins and needles started to creep through his limbs.

***

“You wouldn’t,” Hannibal laughed. “And I would not want you to. I offered you the choice because I do not want to cage you.” He stroked his hair. *Oh, mon cher, you’re adorable. Why do I have to go?* “I wanted you to be the one to strike the final blow to his ego. I will always give you that chance. Watching you cut him down was poetic.”

***

“But you have to go,” Hisoka commented as he felt the hand carding through his hair. “To stop the questions.”

*Why are you petting me? I’m not your pet. You said you had to go so why are you here?*

***

Hannibal chuckled again and stood up. “That I do, even if I do not want to, mon cher. I would far rather stay here with you.”

Turning to Lulu, he watched as she finished warming the cream in her hands. “No one will disturb you whilst you are in here,” he explained. “The meal will be ready in half an hour. Take your time with him. Make sure he comes down gently.”

Straightening out his clothing and making sure that his arousal had fully died down, he pulled in his Nen and readied himself to face the crowd. Nodding one last time to Lulu, he forced himself not to look back at Hisoka as he walked determinedly from the room.

***

Shaking off some of the residual grogginess, Hisoka tried to look over his shoulder at Lulu.

"You enjoying touching my ass?" he asked with a hint of mischief. "The tingles aren't going away, is this what I do to you and Illu-chan? You know, when I make you get all foggy?"

This can't be subspace, can it? I'm not the submissive one, I've played the role, but I'm not submissive. I don't submit.

***

“Yes, Master, it is, and I really am. These welts are impressive. He hit you hard,” Lulu said happily. “Today’s turned out to be a lot more fun than we thought, hasn’t it?”
"How angry is Illu-chan?" Hisoka asked, trying to be serious even as his head still felt as if it were full of cotton wool. He giggled when a wave of prickly pain shot up his spine at his lover's touch. "Careful I’m still a little sensitive, you know."

"Not as angry as he expected, but he isn’t ready to be let out yet, Master," Lulu reassured, and rubbed over the area that had made Hisoka-san giggle again.

"We have half an hour. If he’s not calmed down by then, I’ll stay with you. He’s more...confused than anything. But he’ll get over himself. Anyway, the Doctor told me that I had to take good care of you.” She smirked. “The way he looked at me made me think he’d just about held back the ‘or I’ll kill you slowly’ line. It was quite cute, really. He likes you a lot.”

She kneaded his ass a little harder as she mused, “You really are like a magnet for everything dangerously sexy, you know that, right?”

"I hope you're not trying to imply that I’m not myself, dangerously sexy," Hisoka replied arching a brow even though Lulu wouldn't see it. "Magnets work by attracting opposites. Or am I such a rule breaker that I even break the laws of physics?" he added jokingly.

“Master, you’re the most dangerous man I’ve ever met. I wouldn’t submit to just anyone,” Lulu said, raising her brow. You really aren’t with it, are you? He’s done an impressive number on your brain. I’ll have to take notes.

She worked over the sore spot as she went on, “And I don’t think anyone else has ever even turned Illumi’s head, let alone made him feel the way you do. Sexy doesn’t begin to cover what you are; physics be damned.”

She decided that things needed to return to a lighter note and leaned down to scoop him up into her small arms, letting him feel the power of her Nen holding him safe. “Let’s go over to the sofa, and you can tell me all about where else you’d like me to massage, Master.”

"I can think of a few places,” Hisoka teased as he smiled up at Lulu allowing her Nen to soothe him. "Master is a little stiff, but I’m sure you'd be happy to help me with that."

“Always,” Lulu chuckled and set off for the sofa, and the fun that she knew would follow.

Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:
Hannibal, Illumi, Lulu, Margot, Jade

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Hisoka, Chilton, Pariston

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Judgement

Chapter Summary

The party at Dr. Lecter's household continues, and it's not only Hisoka who is pushing his luck now.

After Hannibal had left the playroom, he’d been surprised to find that concentrating on what his guests were saying was harder than usual. His mind kept slipping back to the playroom door and what lay beyond it. Hisoka had been intoxicating, and Lulu had, contrary to what he’d expected, added to the excitement.

He had left for a reason; he reminded himself. He had to follow through. He knew they needed time alone, and he had to build Hisoka’s trust in him gradually. He had to let him see that he trusted him to be left alone in his house and that he trusted in his choice of partner as well.

With ten minutes to go before the meal, he found himself standing outside his own room; arm braced to push open the door before he stopped. The chances of Hisoka not rewarding his ‘doll’ for her good behaviour were slim, and he did not want to walk in on that.

Feeling Pariston’s eyes on him, he smiled at the man and returned to the party with a determined stride.

***

Watching Hannibal seamlessly step back into the role of host, Pariston nodded and returned the smile as he sipped at his drink. He understood his mentor’s desires to go back into the room. What he didn’t quite comprehend was why Hannibal had suddenly become so susceptible to Hisoka’s charms. Waiting for the perfect opportunity to politely excuse himself, Pariston nonchalantly allowed himself to come to a stop by the entrance to the playroom.

Activating his Gyo, he checked for any residual Nen that might have been left there but found none. Frowning, he reached out to touch the handle lightly but pulled his hand back almost immediately in response to the scene that flashed before his eyes.

That’s odd, there’s no Nen on the door. Why did I see Hisoka’s future? he wondered as he ran the vision back through his mind and stood back to lean against the opposing wall. So you’re going to come back? You’ve really set your sights on Hannibal after all, haven’t you Hisoka? Oh, if only I could tell him.

He chuckled as he filed away the mental image of Hisoka sleeping peacefully with his head on Hannibal’s chest, while Hannibal read to him in his native tongue. I'm going to have to keep a close eye on you, Hisoka, aren’t I? he thought as he walked back to rejoin Hannibal and the rest of the party.

***

Hannibal made polite small talk and pointedly did not look at the door again as Pariston circled, like a sparkly sheepdog. He understood the man’s concern, but nonetheless, he was mildly
perturbed by the implication that he wasn’t in control. He’d mastered himself and, what was more important, he’d Mastered Hisoka as well.

*He won’t be making any more trouble. You don’t have to look at me like that, my boy. What have you seen? What do you know?* He cursed himself again for the suggestion that he make his Hatsu more powerful by limiting it to never being able to tell anyone what he sees. It was perfect at the time and had allowed Pariston the peace of mind that he’d needed to know that he wouldn’t take advantage of him as his father had, but now...

He growled again but kept his polite smile in place. He would work it out in the end; he always did. This was their little game. The knowing grin the man was giving him though...

Feeling a familiar jolt in his gut, he spun around and was relieved to see that, with five minutes to go, Hisoka had emerged. He was leaning heavily on his cane and had an arm around his Lulu. He was walking with a limp, but he looked satisfied in a way that he had never seen before.

He felt a swell of pride rising in his chest and ignored the smug grin on Paristons face as he made a beeline for the couple before anyone else had a chance to take them from him.

***

*Let’s see how the rest of this little party goes then, how close to cracking and dragging me off again can I get you, Doctor?* Hisoka thought as he leant on Lulu and allowed her to lead him back over to the fireplace.

He smiled and gave a little wave to Dr. Chilton when he caught the other man staring at him. "I expect Dr. Lecter will have been waiting for us to come back out," he whispered to his lover. "Remember what we agreed, I want to see how far I can push him."

***

Chuckling, Lulu watched Dr Lecter cutting through the crowd like a shark. “Oh, I wouldn’t forget that plan if my life depended upon it, Master.” She came to a standstill by the crackling flames and stood on her tiptoes to kiss his cheek. “The guest of honour approaches,” she whispered. “Let’s see if we can have him panting as much as I did in his little room of delights.”

***

Turning to face his therapist, Hisoka leant on his cane for effect as he plastered a broad smile on his face. *Time for the Second Act. The intermission was rather fun, but we’re approaching the main event now.*

“Hello again, Doctor,” he said in the most polite tone he could muster. “I hope that my back issue hasn’t caused you too much trouble. I am grateful for both your understanding and your hospitality.”

***

“It was my pleasure, Hisoka,” Hannibal said warmly. “Caring for my patients gives me a deep sense of satisfaction. I assure you, we are all selfish creatures at heart. What brings me great joy, is knowing that I have helped,” he added and smiled down at the small woman beside him. “You both have a glow about you. I take it that everything was to your satisfaction, my dear Lulu? Do you have any concerns you would like to raise? I always appreciate the feedback.”

***
“None at all, Doctor,” Lulu said doing her best to channel the shy way Illumi had talked earlier and failed miserably in her attempt. She was still aching pleasantly from the thorough fucking Hisokasan had given her and couldn’t keep the smile off her face. “The evening so far has been extremely satisfying.”

***

"I couldn't agree more," Hisoka added playfully. "I'm looking forward to seeing how the rest of the evening plays out."

***

Hannibal smiled, finding that he was genuinely happy to hear the affirmation. “I am glad.” He was going to continue, but at the approach of a familiar aura, he turned and scowled at his apprentice. “May I help you, Pariston?” he asked curtly. “I was in the middle of checking up on my patient.”

***

"Please forgive the intrusion, but I was concerned about Hisoka. I couldn't help noticing that Lulu had to support him. I know you said that he was having nerve issues, but I wanted to make sure that you didn't need an extra set of hands," Pariston explained not rising to the annoyance in his mentor's tone.

I can't tell you what I saw, or it won't happen. Although, perhaps I could tell you without directly saying it? You've been acting a little strangely ever since you accepted him as your patient, but this is odd even for you Hannibal.

***

Hannibal raised a brow. “I assure you, Hisoka has no lasting damage. He is a resilient man.” Why are you really here? “As you can no doubt tell, they are both fighting fit.”

***

Pariston had a twinkle in his eye as he put a hand over his heart as he said, "Oh, je suis sûr qu'ils le sont, cher papa*.”

Turning to the others standing by the fire with a gleeful expression, he added, "I trust you’re both having a wonderful evening?"

*Oh, I’m sure they are, dear Papa.

***

“Absolutely delightful, Mr. Hill,” Lulu purred. “Hannibal is such a considerate host. I couldn’t have asked for a more entertaining evening. It’s been eye-opening, to say the least.”

***

“That is simply marvellous,” Pariston replied with enthusiasm. “Papa’s dinner parties are rather famous, so I am pleased to hear that you’re having fun. And you, Hisoka? How have you been finding it so far? I understand that this isn’t your usual scene, but you appear to be enjoying yourself?”
Papa? Where did that come from? “Thank you for your consideration. I assure you that I’m in good hands with Dr. Lecter,” Hisoka replied as he looked between Pariston and the man in question. “I was just thanking him for taking such good care of me when you joined us.”

“Please, excuse us for one moment,” Hannibal said, to his guests as he grabbed Pariston by the arm and led him into the corridor. “À quoi jouez-vous maintenant, mon garçon?” he hissed. “I assure you, I have everything under control.”

*What are you playing at now, my boy?*

“Are you quite sure, Papa?” Pariston asked plainly and allowed his gaze to travel down the hallway and land on the playroom door. “We both know what’s behind there, are certain that you have all the cards? Hisoka Morow’s a tricky man. If he’s set his sights on you, then you need to be fully prepared for the consequences if he intends to get close.”

Hannibal narrowed his eyes. “I am in control, Pariston. Whatever it is that you have seen that’s causing you to hover like a curious cat, stop it. Now. I know my own mind, and,” he stressed. “I understand Hisoka’s.”

*Are you so sure? If your obvious attraction wasn’t blinding you maybe you’d see my warning for what it is.*

“I assure you, I didn't intend to insult you,” Pariston smiled. “Surely, it’s not unreasonable for me to want to look out for you, Papa? You’ve gone to great lengths for me in the past, but if you’re sure you have the situation under control, then I’ll back off for now.”

*For now? Hannibal thought as he refrained from rolling his eyes. “Mon garçon*, I love you from the bottom of my black little heart, but you try my patience like no one I have ever known. Now is not the time for this. I have to see to the party. Behave yourself with Hisoka,” he warned. “He is at a critical point in his therapy, and I will not have you chase him away.”*

He looked at the grandfather clock against the wall. He had two minutes before the serving staff would announce the meal. “We have to return,” he added. “Will you be joining me?”

*My boy*

“Of course, I’ll always be by your side. But you’re right, this isn’t the time,” Pariston agreed readily. “I won’t ruin your party, I promise.”
Oh, Papa, I wouldn’t dream of chasing him away. If anything, I’m trying to make sure you don’t accidentally scare him off.

***

Making his way back into the living room, Hannibal was startled to see Frederick trying to wax lyrical about something to an entirely amused Lulu. Hisoka was staring at him as if he were an overly eager bunny that had wandered into a cave with two stunned but starving Lions. He was sorely tempted to see if he would pounce.

Hearing Paristons amused chuckle beside him, he resigned himself to having to rescue his suicidal colleague.

“Frederick,” he said, walking back over to the fireplace. “How nice of you to join us again. I do hope I’m not interrupting anything important.”

***

Hisoka smiled and hoped his relief wouldn't be too obvious when he heard Dr. Lecter's voice. I can't believe this man is in charge of a hospital, who decided that was a good idea?

"Welcome back Dr. Lecter," Hisoka said warmly. "I trust everything is alright? Dr. Chilton was just explaining to me how they’ve been working to rehabilitate some of the patients at the hospital he runs. It's been rather interesting, but feel free to interrupt."

***

“A thankless task, but one that we all appreciate very much,” Hannibal said, moving to Hisoka’s side and placing his hand on his shoulder in a deliberately territorial act. The fact that Hisoka had appeared to still be questioning whether Chilton would get his hands on him, let Hannibal know that it needed to be laid to rest once and for all.

“How is my dear William doing these days?” he asked politely. “I do hope that he’s started eating again.”

***

“Ah yes, Will,” Frederick hummed as he tried to decide how little he could get away with telling Hannibal. “He’s been off his hunger strike for a while. I’m sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but he’s still not changed his mind about you not be allowed to see him. In fact, he’s gone as far as to insist that he’ll resume the strike if he sees you anywhere near his cell again, after that unfortunate incident with Dr. Gideon. One of the orderlies was able to convince him that starving himself wouldn’t, ultimately, be worth it.”

***

“Well, I am very glad that your orderlies, at least, are trained in the art of negotiation,” Hannibal said, being as pointedly polite as he could. “Will deserves some understanding, after all.”

***

You really don’t like him, do you? So why did you invite him, is it because of this William person you’ve been talking about? Hisoka wondered as he felt a trickle of Hannibal’s Nen flowing into him. If I want to seduce you, should I continue to make fun of your rival?
Hannibal was only slightly disappointed when the waiting staff sounded the bell to signal that the meal was ready.

He’d re-arranged the seating slightly. The small tables that he’d had set up in his dining room held six people, and he’d ensured that the table Hisoka and himself were seated at, also had the people they’d talk to that evening around it as well. He was looking forward to seeing how the rest of the evening played out.

As Hannibal lead them all through to the dining room, Hisoka did his best to keep up the act of leaning on Lulu and his cane. When the tables came into view, he noticed small nameplates designating everyone’s assigned seat for the meal. The discovery that he was to be seated to Dr. Lecter’s right, and that Lulu was across from him, gave him pause for a moment. *You want me close, is that so that you can keep a tighter grip of my leash? Getting a little ahead of yourself, aren’t you, Doctor? I need dinner and a movie at least if you’re not going to put out on the first date.*

Standing by his chair, he looked mournfully over at Lulu. “Please accept my apologies that I can’t get your chair for you,” he said softly. “But you, know how bad my back has been tonight.”

“Allow me,” Margot said as she found her seat beside Hisoka’s lover and pulled it out for her. “It will be nice to have some female company.”

She watched as the woman smiled warmly at her and allowed Hannibal to take over supporting Hisoka. The transition was seamless. The way Hannibal’s eyes focused on the man-made her wonder what he was planning on doing with him and exactly what kind of ‘treatment’ he was giving him.

“Thank you,” Lulu said, forcing herself to remember to not be openly flirtatious, especially with a married woman.

*I’m going to need you to stop sulking and help,* she reminded Illumi as she walked around to her seat, thanking Margot again for her kindness.

Hannibal allowed Hisoka to lean against him as he put on his expert show. He spoke so that only those closest to them would hear, “Allow me, Hisoka,” he echoed, pulling his chair out for him with his free hand.

When Lulu let go, Hisoka bit back his instinct to protest; he knew he had to keep up appearances. Instead, he leaned into Hannibal and allowed himself to be guided down onto his seat. Focusing on cushioning himself with his Nen, he quietly mumbled his thanks and tried to get comfortable.

*Why is he affecting me like this? It’s just a game; he’s not my Master. It makes no sense.*
Not wanting to be outdone by Hannibal, Dr. Chilton made his way over to Pariston who was watching everything with a bemused expression.

“Please, allow me, Mr. Hill,” Frederick said with mock sincerity as he pulled out the other man’s chair. “It appears to be the latest craze, please take your seat,” he added in explanation when Pariston gave him a quizzical look. Returning to his place at the table once he was content that his gesture wouldn’t be rejected he settled in and wondered exactly what kind of meal this would turn out to be.

"My thanks, Dr. Chilton,” Pariston replied blankly as he sat down. Taking note of the seating arrangements, he wondered why his Mentor had sat him next to the boring Verger Woman.

_Time for the real fun to begin, will you be able to maintain your mask once Hisoka starts to turn on the charm, Papa?_

Hannibal waited until all his guests had been seated before taking his own at the head of the table. He was opposite Pariston, with Lulu to his left and Hisoka to his right. The evening promised to be entertaining.

Sliding his leg slightly to the side, he found Hisoka’s foot and stopped there, leaving it to rest next to his. He was curious to see what the man would do.

Raising his crystal glass of Chardonnay, he waited until he had the tables full attention. “I would like to thank you all for attending tonight's gathering. I would like to make a toast to old friends and,” he looked at Lulu and then allowed his eyes to fall on Hisoka. “New.”

Dr. Chilton smiled politely and joined in the toast before turning to Hisoka. "So it appears that I have the pleasure of your company again. I hope you don't mind me commenting that I noticed you were having some difficulty walking. Has Hannibal given you anything to take the edge off the pain?"

"I assure you, I'll be fine," Hisoka replied, feeling a little confused. _Surely you're not suggesting that Dr. Lecter would allow me to mix painkillers and alcohol? Do you hate him that much? What is it between the two of you that has you acting like this?_ "It's just an old injury from the incident at the arena," he added politely as he decided to brush his foot up Hannibal's leg to see what reaction he would get. "Thank you for your consideration, but please don't let worries about me get in the way of your evening."

_How interesting_, Hannibal thought, ignoring Chilton’s obvious ploy to try and provoke him and instead, leaning his leg into Hisoka as he felt the man sliding his foot up his leg.

“T have assessed Hisoka, Dr. Chilton, do not worry,” Hannibal assured the man. “His injury is healing well. It simply needed proper massage and a little spinal adjustment.”
"I see, well forgive my impertinence. It's an occupational hazard to want to offer assistance," Dr. Chilton replied calmly. He wasn't entirely convinced, but if Hisoka was playing along, there wasn't much he could do.

“Hannibal's assessment was very thorough, Dr. Chilton, please don’t fret,” Lulu said as the waiting staff emerged with their meal. It appeared that the main meat was pork, and there was a dazzling array of fresh and exquisitely arranged vegetables surrounding it. “And he has shown me some new techniques to help Hisoka-san feel better. I must admit to being pleasantly surprised by how he’s handling him. My darling can be quite a handful at times, but the Doctor, well, he seems to know what he’s doing.”

"As I said before Miss Nikolaev, he is a most fortunate man to have you by his side," Pariston said, jumping into the conversation. "I don't suppose you have a sister?"

“Unfortunately, Mr. Hill, I don’t think you would find my sister’s company as enjoyable as mine,” Lulu said coyly. “She is not one for the outside world.”

"That's a pity," Pariston sniffed, but maintained his air of joviality. "In our earlier conversation, you mentioned that you were being coached for the Hunter exam. What do you currently do?"

“I'm a scientist like yourself. I specialise in botany,” Lulu said easily. They’d decided that this was the best cover story for her and it allowed for her to draw on Illumi’s extensive knowledge of poisons. “But I am hoping to become a Hunter like Hisoka-san as soon as possible.”

"Maybe not exactly like me," Hisoka teased. "I shudder to think what your family would think of me if I encouraged you to get into a rivalry with the Phantom Troupe." Pausing to brush his foot slightly further up Hannibal's leg, he added, "Although, I can recommend a good therapist. Should the need arise, and I can assure you he's very thorough."

“You flatter me, Hisoka,” Hannibal said and smiled at Hisoka as the man explored further up his leg. He was curious to see how the bracelet would react should he try to provoke him too much in the present company.

“Something tells me she’s learnt from your mistakes already,” Margot said as she accepted a top-up of her wine from a waitress with a polite smile. It was going to be a long night. No one had ever insisted that she had to be sober for it.
“What is life, if not a series of lessons, Margot,” Hannibal said amiably. “Hisoka has simply chosen to learn some that very few ever dare even to face.”

"Well, they do say that the wise person learns from the mistakes of others, Mrs Verger," Dr. Chilton replied. "I do not doubt that our lovely Miss Nikolaev is more than capable of handling Hisoka, or he wouldn't be with her."

"Oh dear, I fear that my reputation may have preceded me," Hisoka said with a mischievous chuckle. "Would I be correct in that assumption, Dr. Chilton?"

"Please, Hisoka, I'm not your therapist, and we are all friends here. Call me Frederick," Dr. Chilton said with a smile. "I must confess to holding a certain academic curiosity about you if you'll forgive me. Your name has come up rather a lot since your fight with...You call him, Danchou, don't you? When you refer to Mr. Lucilfer, I mean."

“I do call him that,” Hisoka agreed. “Amongst other things that would not be suitable for polite conversation, Frederick,” he purred and smirked when he saw Dr. Chilton blush slightly at the use of his name.

So that confirms Mr. Luciler’s claims that you and he were romantically involved. Are you trying to provoke Hannibal by flirting? At his dinner table? “I just find it rather interesting,” Frederick remarked. “Considering how things ended between you, that you’d still use such a title for him.”

“It’s his title; he earned it,” Hisoka replied pointedly.

“Gentlemen,” Parison interjected before Dr. Chilton could continue his pitiful attempt at provoking Hisoka. “This is a dinner party. Surely we can find something more suitable to discuss? Hannibal, you’re the one who so graciously brought us together. Perhaps you should lead us in a more pleasant topic of conversation?”

Margot raised her brow at the remark but didn’t say anything. She’d been enjoying watching Chilton somehow managing to squirm on his own line.

“I must admit that I was curious to hear how your research was progressing, my boy?” Hannibal asked as he speared a roasted parsnip. Hisoka’s foot had stopped rubbing against his leg, but the man hadn’t pulled away. Interesting, he thought. So you do know where the limits lie.
"Oh, you know how it is Hannibal," Pariston sighed dramatically. To the amusement of some of the other guests. "It's slow going with all the neverending red tape, and Cheadle is delighting in being an obstacle as usual. I probably shouldn't have stepped down to let her be the chairwoman but what's done is done."

"I have always preferred science to politics, myself," Hannibal agreed, delighting in watching Hisoka slicing into his meat. "I do not envy you."

"The appeal of science is becoming more apparent by the day. Although there is a part of me that misses my time as the Vice-Chairman, maybe I’ll apply to take it back up if dear Kurapika doesn’t return. Some dangerous people own those eyes he’s hunting, and I’ve heard a rumour that a few sets even ended up in the hands of drug lords. I do hope he’s being careful," Pariston lamented before turning to Lulu.

"So, Lulu, I simply must ask. What draws you to botany? Are you interested in becoming a Botanical Hunter?" He flashed her his most winning smile and was highly amused when she raised a brow in return.

"Plants don’t argue back," Lulu said happily. Pausing as a memory surfaced, grinned back at Pariston and winked. "Normally."

Margot smiled and took a sip of her wine. You've met your match there, Pariston. Good luck. She’ll have you bending over and begging for more in no time.

"Normally?" Dr. Chilton interjected. "Perhaps I picked the wrong branch of the sciences to go into," he mused as he pushed away the memory of Dr. Gideon being skillfully dispatched with his pen.

"I could introduce you to some friends if you like, Doctor," Lulu said happily. "Don’t worry, they don’t do drugs or own Kurta eyes, so you’ll be perfectly safe. Just, well, don’t annoy the Begonias.” She ignored Illumi’s reminder to calm down and let him die back into the recesses of her mind. “They don’t like it when you back-chat them,” she invented.

Hannibal tried not to laugh and pressed his leg more firmly against Hisoka’s foot to ground himself. Where did you find her, mon cher? Back-talking Begonias? Surely he can't fall for that?

"Oh I remember those," Hisoka said, joining in cheerfully before stabbing a small piece of pork
along with some of his vegetables. "Aren't they the ones that spit venom? Maybe once I'm free, we could go back and visit?"

***

“They talk, and they spit?” Dr. Chilton asked incredulously as he looked at everyone else to see their reactions. “Surely such a plant would be more widely known?”

***

“That depends,” Pariston said jovially. “I have heard talk about such flowers being found on the Dark Continent. Although, everyone who goes there and comes back tends to be a little, unreliable,” he added.

***

Hannibal chuckled at the memory of seeing Nettero and Zeno’s wild-eyed faces as they wandered back through YorkNew City. It had seemed as if they were seeing everything for the first time. Unreliable, indeed, he thought, resisting the urge to laugh aloud. I couldn’t get a lick of sense out of those two for months after they came back. Thankfully, they came down from their clouds eventually. I wonder who you know who has been over there, ma chere? Was it a planned excursion or do your family have links with the underground smugglers?

He let himself savour the unique flavour that came with Kurta meat and let the conversation flow around him. Hisoka was warm against his leg, the food was delicious, and Dr. Chilton was turning an increasingly interesting shade of off-white. The evening was perfect.

***

“Did you go to culinary school as well as medical school?” Hisoka asked after swallowing his latest bite. It looks like pork, but it doesn’t taste like I’m used to. I don’t recall the pork we made at the exam tasting like this either. “This isn’t quite like anything I’ve ever eaten before, what about you Lulu?”

***

“No, I am self-taught,” Hannibal said as he spotted Pariston deliberately zero in on Frederick and chucked when he heard the phrase ‘brain feeders’ being mentioned. He could only assume that he’d started to tell him about the Pap.

“I have always had an exceptional sense of smell. I was aware that one of my teachers had stomach cancer even before he was, and as a boy, I had a distinct advantage when playing hide and seek.” It had come in useful when it came to avoiding the predators that roamed the streets of Meteor City at night on more than one occasion. “Taste and smell are the oldest of the senses and are the closest to the centre of the mind. I chose to use my enhanced abilities to educate the palettes of those around me. I find experience and life are two of the most unforgiving, but rewarding teachers, don’t you?” he asked Hisoka.

***

“That is certainly one way to put it,” Hisoka smiled, remembering the look on Moritonio’s face when he’d beaten him. “What doesn’t kill us, only serves to make us stronger in the end.”
Turning to Lulu, who was chuckling quietly to herself as she ate, Margot said, “I’m honestly curious, what do you see in them?”

***

Lulu chuckled, “It’s rather like a fire,” she explained. “The challenge is seeing how close you can get before you’re burned, or you smother it. Beauty and destruction all rolled into one. It’s exhilarating. I’ve never felt so alive as I have when I’m with him,” she said, drawing on the truth of Illumi’s attraction to their Master.

***

Raising a brow, Margo took another sip of her drink. “If you say so,” she said, wishing that Alana could have joined them. Why did Morgan have to get sick tonight of all nights? She’s as mad as the rest of them. We’ll be lucky if everyone gets out of here in one piece. Hannibal, you’ll have to call me a cab tonight, because there’s no way I’m staying sober for this. You invited clowns, and now you’ve got yourself a circus. Bravo.

***

Why do you know so much about this? Dr. Chilton wondered as he swallowed and looked down at his plate. If so many people don’t make it back alive, it’s no wonder travel there is so heavily regulated. Is this why you Hunter’s believe in that weird magic?

"That all sounds extremely fascinating, Mr. Hill. Although if I'm honest, I prefer my holiday destinations not to try and kill me,” he remarked once he'd gotten a chance to speak. "I find it's rather counter to the point of a vacation."

Turning to Hisoka in the hope of a less threatening topic of conversation, he said, "You know, Hisoka, all this talk of plants aside. I would love to know how you met such an... interesting lady?" He swallowed. “Who seems to know so much about these exotic plants. Is there a romantic story of forbidden love?"

***

"I'm not sure I'd quite call it forbidden," Hisoka replied with a grin. "I'm afraid it's probably not as exciting as you might think."

***

“Now, now, my dear, no need to be so coy,” Lulu tittered. “He was so romantic. There were cherry blossoms and this gorgeous little private onsen. Oh, the things he did to me that night...” She trailed off as Illumi’s memories surfaced and gazed adoringly at her Master. “I knew, then, that my life had changed forever.”

***

They really don’t need to hear about my safer side. I have a reputation to maintain, Lulu. “Yes, well, I’m just glad I finally found somebody I could share my little hideaway with,” Hisoka replied, forcing a smile. “I’m touched that you still feel so strongly about that night, maybe I need to take you back to Jappon soon? Still, maybe that’s a topic better suited to this evening when we’re alone, don’t you think, sweetheart?”

***
Hannibal smiled and leaned back into his chair, stroking his foot against Hisoka’s leg in a soothing gesture. “Oh, I don’t know, it sounded quite romantic to me. It’s nice to hear that you are capable of more than violence and can think of more than your own desires. A person is not whole until they can interact with others in an empathetic way. The fact that you are capable of great cruelty, Hisoka, led me to believe that you are also capable of equal amounts of empathy, and your Lulu has confirmed my hypothesis. Love, romance and forbidden trysts in misty lagoons are what great dinner parties are all about,” he teased gently. “Ask Dr. Chilton. He knows a thing or two about forbidden romances himself.”

***

"Oh, I highly doubt my romantic life or lack thereof would be quite as interesting as your own. If you don't mind me saying so," Frederick replied.

***

“My past is an open book, Frederick,” Hannibal said, glancing over to the shelf by the unlit fireplace where Will’s highly photoshopped face could be seen glaring at them from a cover. “I believe you wrote it.”

***

Frederick allowed his eyes to wander to the books and resisted the urge to sigh. “We both know that I wrote that book about Will,” he said stiffly remembering how Will had insisted repeatedly that Hannibal was the real Yorknew Ripper. “Just as anyone who has read it will know that he believes you to be a killer, and he is very much alone in that view.”

***

Oh, you poor delusional little man. I’m amazed you’ve survived as long as you have. Maybe it’s the fact that you’re a worm that won’t stop wiggling that’s kept him from killing you for all these years? Or is it because you’re keeping Will ‘safe’ for him that he’s let you live? Margot wondered.

“Indeed,” Margot said silkily. “You’re as much of a killer as I am, Hannibal, everyone knows that.”

***

“I knew there was a reason I liked you,” Lulu said enthusiastically. “Oh, I can already tell, we’re going to be great friends.”

***

“In the spirit of new friends, I’d like to propose a toast,” Pariston declared as he raised his glass. “To new relationships, and the new opportunities they bring us. I’m sure we’ll find you the right special someone, Frederick.” He chuckled when the man paused mid drink to stare at him.

***

“I’m afraid I’d have to politely decline your offer to play matchmaker,” Dr. Chilton said stiffly, thinking of the young woman he’d met at the Hospital. “I’ve actually already started seeing somebody. We were keeping it quiet.”

***
“A forbidden romance maybe?” Margot asked, glancing at Hannibal’s all too knowing smirk. *No woman would voluntarily date you* “Will we ever get to meet them? I’m sure Hisoka would feel far more comfortable knowing that you weren’t trying to whisk him away for yourself. What’s the name that’s itching to escape your lips?”

***

“I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but Hisoka really isn’t my type. Even if I might turn out to be his,” Dr. Chilton quipped. “I’m as interested in men as you are.”

***

“Women do have such a *glow* about them, don’t they?” Lulu said dreamily, clapping her hands together and sighing. “I do so love it when Hisoka-san invites his special guests back with us on our date nights. Ah, such fun times to be had. I can *entirely* see where you are coming from, Doctor. But I would suggest that you keep an open mind. My darling is *very* skilled.”

She felt Illumi trying to wrestle back control of their body and smirked. “He’s a man who *craves* new experiences.”

***

*Well, I did try to warn you, so I guess I’ll have to wish you the best of luck with this one, Papa,* Pariston thought as he grinned into his glass.

***

Hisoka felt Hannibal pause the stroking of his foot up against his leg and they both turned to stare at Lulu.

"Variety is the spice of life, as they say," he agreed once he regained his composure and smirked at Dr. Chilton who was studiously stabbing at his food with his fork. "I'm sure if Frederick decides he wants to take a ride that he's more than capable of tracking me down. It's not like I can go far."

He paused when he saw Dr. Chilton choke on his drink and chuckled as Pariston stood up to bang him on the back to make sure that he was alright. "Oh dear, was it something I said?" he asked Hannibal innocently before brushing against his leg once again.

***

“I think Frederick just needs to make more time to relax,” Hannibal said happily. “He works so hard. I do my best to encourage him to leave his hospital, but, alas, he does so enjoy what he does. I am glad that he’s found himself a special someone though.”

***

“What about you?” Lulu probed. “You’ve mentioned someone called Will?”

***

“He’s...” Margot cut in, seeing the way Hannibal’s jaw tightened. “Not in the picture. He had a bit of a breakdown.”

***

“Ah, so you don’t share him with Dr. Chilton then?” Lulu said innocently, wondering which of the
men would snap first.

***

Hannibal hid his smile behind another mouthful of food as he heard Frederick begin another round of hacking coughs.

“No, ma chere,” he said gently. “Will was not that kind of man. I was monogamous whilst I was with him.”

***

*But are you that kind of man?* Hisoka wondered as he glanced between Lulu and Dr. Chilton. *I hope you know what you’re doing Lulu.*

***

“No, ma chere,” Hannibal said gently. “Will was not that kind of man. I was monogamous whilst I was with him.”

***

But are you that kind of man? Hisoka wondered as he glanced between Lulu and Dr. Chilton. I hope you know what you’re doing Lulu.

***

“Such a shame,” Lulu said, leaning forward and stroking her small fingers over the back of Hannibal’s hand. “It makes me sad to think that he’s missed out on so much in life.”

***

“Will is a unique soul,” Hannibal said, smiling fondly at Lulu. “But I am afraid, ma chere, that I am as fond of men as Dr. Chilton is of women, as I am sure you know already.”

***

“Will is a unique soul,” Hannibal said, smiling fondly at Lulu. “But I am afraid, ma chere, that I am as fond of men as Dr. Chilton is of women, as I am sure you know already.”

***

Lulu’s smile broadened. “I like a challenge,” she purred. “And believe me, I can make myself into a very convincing man when I want to. Trust me; you’ll never know.”

***

Chuckling, Hannibal speared the last of his meat, delicately dislodging Lulu’s hand. “Alas, my sweet, I fear that I would. My nose does not lie, but I applaud your tenacity nonetheless.” *Oh, Hisoka, she’s fantastic.* “I pity the man who underestimates you.”

***

“The women too,” Margot added under her breath. *Are you suicidal? You’re trying to seduce Hannibal in front of everyone ...and he’s letting you ? What the hell is in this wine?*

***

“Oh, there have been a few unfortunate souls who did that,” Hisoka joked. “It’s not a mistake you tend to have the chance to make twice. Especially not around those begonias.”

***

“My dear plants do appreciate the company though,” Lulu said happily. “They sing so sweetly after.”

***

Margot choked on her drink. “You feed people to them?” she asked incredulously. *Are you admitting to murder?*
“No, I let them have a little chat,” Lulu said, mirroring Illumi’s usual blank response. “I wouldn’t do that to my plants. They’re quite picky eaters.”

Hisoka chuckled. “No, to be honest, they’re much too small to be able to eat a person. Although the idea is amusing,” he said cheerfully. “There would be much easier ways to dispose of a body if one were so inclined. Moving on, if I may, to a more pleasant topic, the Cherry Blossoms in Jappon are well worth the visit if you’ve never been to see them. Maybe you and your lovely wife could go for a holiday?”

“Thank you,” Margot sneered. “I’d never thought of that. I’ll have to remember to find time in my schedule in between looking after a two-year-old and running the Verger family business. I’m sure my wife could drop her patients too. Thank you.”

“Now, now, Margot,” Hannibal said in a warning tone. “Remember what we talked about. There’s no need to be overly defensive. We’re all friends here.”

“Well, I for one have been having a delightful evening,” Pariston said. “A wonderful dinner with friends is one of the best ways to spend one’s time, don’t you think, Frederick?”

_Do you really think everyone here is so trustworthy, Mr. Hill?_ “Well, it’s certainly been a nice change of pace,” Dr. Chilton agreed. The atmosphere around the table had been switching faster than a set of traffic lights. “Dare I say I even learnt a few things. We truly live in an interesting world with so much still to be discovered.”

“But that is precisely what makes life worth living,” Hisoka added after eating another bite of his food. “Life would be so dreadfully boring if every day were the same. It’s why I like to hunt for fresh challenges. I’ve never been one for sitting still. My mind wanders, and I feel compelled to follow.”

“Is that what drew you to take the Hunter Exam?” Dr. Chilton asked seeing an opportunity to confirm more of the hints Chrollo had dropped in their private sessions. “Was it just the challenge of the profession, or was it something else?”

“Something else,” Hisoka replied with an amused smirk before turning back to Hannibal. “What about you, Dr. Lecter? Is there any interesting story behind your own journey to becoming a famous Blacklist Hunter?”
“Nothing too special,” Hannibal said lightly. “Growing up where and how I did, I learned a particular skill set and decided that I wanted to put it to a use that would benefit society, rather than detract from it. You can use a knife for slicing vegetables as well as skin, and you can slice skin to help as well as to harm people. I try to find the beauty in everything around me, and,” he added, nodding at his guests. “Everyone.”

3 Hours Later

“Please accept my thanks, again, for a most enlightening evening, Hannibal,” Dr. Chilton said as he stood on the doorstep. “No doubt you’ll be in touch when you need me to pay up on that bet I lost,” he added with mock sincerity as he tried to ignore the guards who were talking between themselves. No doubt they’re waiting for Hisoka, I wonder if their evening was any better than mine?

Turning to Hisoka, who was stood beside Hannibal, he continued, “It’s been a pleasure to finally meet you, and you as well Lulu. I would love to stay to chat some more, but I’m afraid I have an early meeting tomorrow, so I really must be on my way.”

“The pleasure was all mine. It’s been a very entertaining evening. Please don’t let me keep you,” Hisoka replied with a polite bow to hide his smirk. “Perhaps we’ll do it again sometime.”

“Yes, perhaps we will,” Frederick agreed, giving the guards one last look. Hopefully, Mr. Lucifer can shed some light on Hisoka’s behaviour when I talk to him next. There’s just something rather off, but I think it’s best not to get too close.

“Have a safe journey, Frederick,” Hannibal said jovially and chuckled when the man gave him a relieved nod and left as quickly as his self-taught manners would allow.

Turning to Hisoka, he smiled warmly and offered him his hand. “I hope that you have enjoyed your visit as much as I have, mon cher,” he said. “I took the liberty of giving your guards the leftover entrée’s as well as some warm drinks. I know the night isn’t too cold, but I hoped that it would leave them in better spirits than I found them in for your journey home.”

“I’m sure it will have been much appreciated, thank you. I didn’t know if you’d have allowed them inside,” Hisoka replied as he accepted the offered hand. At least I know Kyoya would have been grateful for it. “It really has been an entertaining evening, are your dinner parties normally that lively? This was my first time attending a function like this, so please forgive my ignorance.”
Hannibal smirked and brushed his hand down Hisoka’s arm to straighten out his jacket as Lulu came to stand by their side. “Only when you’re here, mon cher. I can’t think of the last time I enjoyed myself so much. Feel free to come back at any time.”

“I’d be careful what you wish for, Monsieur,” Lulu chirped. “He may just take you up on that offer. That Black Forest Gateau was to die for.”

Hisoka chuckled as he put his arm around Lulu. “Are you sure it’s not you who wants to come back, darling? Just to get more cake?” he teased. “Although I do agree, it was wonderful. You are full of surprises, aren’t you, Doctor?”

“Always, mon cher,” Hannibal said, forcing himself to let go of Hisoka’s arm. “I find that people without secrets are most tedious; even Frederick had some.” He winked. “Although he doesn’t hide them as well as he thinks.”

“With sweet talk like that, you might be right, Master,” Lulu tittered. “I may well be coming back. I want to know what you put in your cakes,” she said to Hannibal. “You’ve managed to turn cooking into a forbidden art, and you know what they say about those...”

“That they are the most interesting kind,” Hannibal finished, beaming at the two of them. “Alas, it must wait until next time. I promised Jack that I would have you both home before midnight.”

“Well, we wouldn’t want to get you in trouble with Jack,” Hisoka replied with a small grin. “I’m pretty sure that my guards are due to finish their shift around then. The cake will have to wait for another evening, shall we leave our host in peace, dearest?”

Lulu pouted. “You mean we can’t stay and play some more?” she asked with a flutter of her eyelids. “I’m pretty sure I saw a bull-whip in the cupboard...”

“We have to go back, Lulu. You should leave some mysteries for another night,” Hisoka said firmly.

Hannibal smirked. “I’m sure that Kyoya and Jade will be grateful for you, allowing them to get home on time, ma chere. Why don’t you go and brighten their evening? I’m sure Jade could do with some special attention. Her girlfriend left her recently, could you be so kind as to send her my regards and bring a smile to that beautiful face of hers for me?”
Lulu beamed. “Of course, it would be my pleasure,” she purred and kissed Hisoka on the cheek before skipping down the path to meet them at the gate. “Hannibal says hello,” she sang. “And I have been given a top-secret mission!”

Did you encourage her on purpose? Or did you want me to yourself for a moment longer? Hisoka wondered as he watched his lover head to the gate and shook his head. “I almost feel sorry for Kyoya. She’s already taken a shine to him. Lulu can be a bit, overly friendly. I hope Jade won’t be too overwhelmed,” he commented before looking back at Hannibal. “Is this where you secretly whisk me off to kiss me goodnight?” he asked cheekily.

Hannibal reached down and took Hisoka’s hand. Looking him pointedly in the eye, he kissed the back of it and whispered, “Au revoir, doux Prince. Jusqu’à la prochaine rencontre.*”

Dropping his hand, he smiled. “Give Lulu my best, mon cher, and I hope you enjoy the rest of your night as much as I have enjoyed mine.”

*Goodbye, sweet Prince. Until next we meet.

“I’m sure we will,” Hisoka replied quietly, not sure how to respond except to leave before he pushed his luck too far. “I’ll see you again soon, for my next session...thank you for inviting me. I really should get back to the hotel,” he added quickly before bowing as Illumi had taught him and making his exit.

I need to be more careful. There won’t always be a guard around. If I had been alone would he have let me leave? he wondered as he caught up to a happily talking Kyoya and Lulu. Jade, he noticed, was standing off to the side. Apparently, she was sulking.

“Lulu, it’s time for us to get back. You can continue your little mission while we walk,” he told her as he leaned in to give her a kiss on the cheek.

Hannibal watched, amused, as the group left for their hotel. Hisoka only glanced back once, and the quizzical look on his face was glorious.

Closing the door when they were out of sight, he headed back into the house. The waiting staff were busy cleaning away the plates and, after a few moments of checking, he found Pariston propped up on a barstool in his kitchen.

The scent of Jasmine tea filled the air, and he gave his apprentice an amused bow. “Once again, you tracked it down,” he said. “I am impressed. No matter where I hide it, you always seem to know. It’s as if you always know where it’s going to be, my boy,” he chuckled, pulling up his own stool and sighing contentedly when Pariston slid a full mug towards him. “Thank you. It’s been quite an evening.”
“Indeed it has,” Pariston agreed. “I think Frederick may have outdone himself this time, I’ve never seen him make such a fool of himself. And Hisoka’s lovely lady, Lulu, oh what a gem she is. The line about the plants was truly inspired. I liked her.”

“Yes, they did seem to throw Frederick off his game a bit, didn’t they?” Hannibal noted, sipping the tea and letting the scent override his urge to find Hisoka and drag him back into his bedroom. “I wonder what came over him? Maybe he was as taken with Miss Nicolaev as you were? He did appear somewhat overly eager to impress her.”

Maybe the same thing that came over you? “It’s quite mysterious. I don’t think he was even aware of what he was doing himself. I’d love to know how she managed to woo Hisoka. He’s rather well known for jumping between partners. At least that’s what I’ve heard on the grapevine,” Pariston remarked as he enjoyed the way the cup warmed his hands. “I know Netero had high hopes for him, but he’d never tell me why. Whenever I’d ask he’d just laugh and walk away, he was such an infuriating old man at times.”

“Well,” Hannibal said, running his fingers down the back of his hand. “It doesn’t sound like Lulu is the monogamous type either, so maybe Frederick is in luck? Let’s just hope that the venomous Begonias don’t get him first, shall we?”

Maybe he saw the potential I see in him? Hisoka is powerful, all he needs is to be steered in the right direction.

Pariston laughed, “Yes, it would be such a shame if he were to end up as fertilizer. No doubt you have much grander plans for him when the time comes.”

“Well, a little birdy told me that he would be providing the pig for the next party,” Hannibal smirked.

“You know me; I couldn’t quite resist helping him dig his own grave. He’s a little too easy sometimes,” Pariston mused before sipping his drink. “If he ever figured out what you really thought of him, I’m sure he’d flee Saherta. He’s not the bravest of men.”

Hannibal chuckled. “Oh, I would love to see him try,” he said darkly. “Although, I suspect it wouldn’t be much of a chase. I suspect he’d seek shelter on the islands of the Republic of Gorteau. The weather is to his liking, and he has an Aunt who lives close by. Besides, he wouldn’t be able to stay anonymous for too long; he’d seek out the publicity of escaping me soon enough.”
“I have no doubt; he doesn’t like being in your shadow. He’d do anything to get one up on you,” Pariston agreed as he looked out into the garden. The outline of the large oak tree was just about visible in the fading light.

“But he’s just that right level of incompetence,” he commented. “Good enough to keep his job, but easy enough to nudge in the direction you need him to go.”

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“I think that’s why Jack hasn’t insisted that he’s removed from office,” Hannibal said happily. “He’s a weasel, but a useful enough one to live for now. Although,” he added with a snarl. “If he ever tries to take Hisoka from me again, then he’s going to find out exactly why I’m the top Blacklister the Association has to offer.”

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“Pop goes the weasel as they say,” Pariston chuckled. “Do you really think he’d be foolish enough to try? Hisoka did shoot him down, and I can’t I blame him. I’d want to stay with Lulu too. I wonder if I could cross-breed those plants that she invented into existence? Talking plants could be an interesting research project.”

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“Although rather hard to prune, I’d expect,” Hannibal said, sipping his tea. “And he wouldn’t need Hisoka’s permission. It’s not like the man has a say in what happens to him right now. I was doing that for show, and proving my point. Hisoka needs to trust me. There are enough corrupt officials around right now; he needs to think of me as trustworthy.”

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“That is all very true, but do you think you’re making progress? He’s clearly got his own agenda; men like him always do. I noticed you gave him one of your bracelets,” Pariston replied, turning to look at his mentor again. “How did he react to that? I’d imagine he was rather angry about it?”

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“He was the one who suggested I gave him a collar,” Hannibal said. “I made a counteroffer, and he agreed to it. He hasn’t protested, if anything I think he was impressed. He’s not over the moon about it, but he appears to have worked out that it can be used to his advantage. I saw that Margot was pointing to her wrist when she was talking to him earlier. He at least appeared to be interested in what she had to say.”

He took another sip of his tea and let himself relax. “No, I think Hisoka is starting to trust me. He likes to push, but he has realised that I do have lines that I will not allow to be crossed. He’s rather like you in that sense. You both relax once you know where the boundaries lie.”

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“It sounds like he was looking for the line in the sand, and now that he’s found it, he’s content to get as close to it as possible. Talking of boundaries, I did want to ask you for a favour,” Pariston advised as he put his cup down on the counter. “I trust you’ve been following things with that Victor fellow? The one who’s deciding to make it his life’s mission to take down the Association?”

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“If you’re going to ask me to kill him, then I will have to decline,” Hannibal said politely. “I have too many eyes on me right now, and he is surprisingly well guarded. For a man who claims a ‘humble background,’ he’s guarded like a paranoid Emperor.”

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“Isn’t he just? There’s just something that doesn’t add up about him, and well, he’s been trying to get my attention recently. As has Cheadle,” Pariston sighed. “I think she’s realised that she needs me as an ally. I’m tempted to ask for my old position back as the price of my support. That still leaves me in a pickle with Victor, though. I can’t have him killed not yet. The timing would be too suspicious.” He paused to pull out an envelope from his suit jacket and held it out for Hannibal. “I got this in the mail last week; he’s arranging some sort of charity fundraiser as a ‘giving back to the people’ publicity stunt. There’s an invite and extra tickets for me to bring some special guests. I was hoping that you might be willing to go in my place? It’s really not my scene.”

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A party full of rich socialites, not your scene? Hannibal thought as he took in the gilded paper and rich embossing on the tickets. Why do you really want to avoid him? What’s going on? Why did I tell you to keep your predictions to yourself? Oh, if you hadn’t have killed your father, I would wring his neck for what he did to you.

“It would be my pleasure,” he said, taking the tickets and seeing the date a few months from now. “I’m sure I can rustle someone up to be my plus one. Are you sure you don’t want to come? I’d love to see the man’s face if you brought Cheadle with you.”

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“As amusing as it would be, I don’t like the man. Have you seen him on his soapbox when he’s on the news? I assure you, he’s worse in person. I’ve been trying to find out where he’s really from,” Pariston explained. “There’s just a few things that don’t add up about him. People who cross him tend to disappear and when he opens new branches of his ‘business’ there’s been a few things that tend to happen at the same time; trends that I’ve noticed. I wish I could tell you more, but the time isn’t right. Although, if you really want to put his nose out of joint, take man as your date and make sure not to hide that it’s a date.”

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“How young should we make them?” Hannibal asked, tickled by the mental image. “And how much of a Sugar-Daddy should I appear to be? Are we talking early twenties and blond or should I pick someone more age-appropriate?”

What kind of trends are we talking about? Do you think he’s Mafia?

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“Why don’t you go for the lower side of age-appropriate? They should be able to draw attention but not so much to steal the show,” Pariston suggested with a grin. “After all we want him to know you’re there and unashamedly gay. He’s a traditionalist, that’s what he calls it anyway. I call it the wrong side of history.”

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“I won’t let you down, and who knows, Maybe Victor can bring the pig for the next party?” Hannibal replied, grinning at Pariston. “I do like some well-aged meat.”
“I’m sure you’d enjoy him,” Pariston said confidently as he picked up his cup to finish the remains of his drink. “After all, he looks after himself and is in fantastic shape for his age.”

“Hopefully he’ll put up a half-decent fight. Has anyone ever found out what his Nen type is?” Hannibal asked. “He has to have an ability. No one ages like he has without a thorough mastery of the craft.”

“I’m currently trying to find that out,” Pariston advised. “There’s just something about him, and it’s not like there’s a tried and tested way to know just by looking at him. What I do know is that he has some insane charisma working for him. Whoever this mysterious benefactor that he keeps making cryptic references to is, then they have to be wealthy. I think they’re possibly his Nen teacher. I’ve done some digging, and as I said before, it just doesn’t add up. I’ve come to the conclusion that he’s lying about his age, or that he’s got Nen.”

“He has Nen,” Hannibal said with certainty. “People stop lying about their age after a certain point. They realise that it isn’t something to be ashamed of, and he’s using it to his benefit. He’s playing the role of the classic ‘wise man’ and has a docile younger woman to reinforce it. No, he’s too confident for someone without Nen.”

“His wife, if they are actually married, is on record as being older,” Pariston said with a small smile. “I’ve been wondering if she’s more than she seems.”

“She is?” Hannibal said, staring at Pariston with genuine interest. “Then maybe she has a Hatsu that can make her appear younger? What do we know about her? If they are both as old as they say they are, then they are a powerful couple indeed. No wonder Cheadle is worried. Fortune has smiled upon you, my boy. I hear opportunity knocking at the door.”

“Well, I knew it had to be bad for her to consider coming to me for help,” Pariston agreed. “I still have those who are loyal to me in the Association who feed me information. Perhaps she’ll come running once her pet Kurta can’t return to her. It’s a matter of time, and I’m sure Victor will want to try and get a handle on you once he’s seen you at the Gala. If anyone can handle him, I know it’s you, Papa. You also have the added bonus of being somebody Cheadle respects, and it’ll annoy the other Zodiacs if you get to go instead of them.”

“Anything for you, my boy,” Hannibal said, patting Pariston’s arm. “And you do present me with such fun little challenges. I’ll have to think hard about who to bring. They’re going to have to be just the right mix between flamboyant and obedient. He’ll have to be a perfect mirror to his wife. Maybe I should consider a short term engagement soon? What do you think?”
A short term engagement? Sure why not, as long as I play my cards right I’m sure my little vision will come to pass. The big question is, what exactly are you, Hisoka Morow? It would be ideal if you were to go to the event, I just have a feeling.

“Do you have somebody in mind?” Pariston asked innocently.

“No one that would fit the bill jumps out at me,” Hannibal said thoughtfully. “But I can always find someone handsome enough and fit them with a band; that won’t be a problem. They’ll have a good time and an unfortunate accident shortly after. Why do you ask? Do you have any suggestions?”

I know you do, who are you thinking about? Because if you’re still trying to set me up with that man from the university who just so ‘happens’ to be an expert on the Dark Continent, then we’re going to have words.

“Well, you didn’t like my last suggestion for a potential partner so I wouldn’t dream of suggesting anyone new. But yes, you could always find yourself a handsome boy toy and just stick a bracelet on them,” Pariston agreed. “I mean you are an eligible bachelor, I’m sure you’ll have no trouble finding somebody. It’s just, if you had your eye on someone then maybe you could use the Gala as an excuse to ask them out,” he added cheerfully.


“No, I learnt my lesson there. I was more thinking. I’m sure I could line up at least a few suitable candidates who I’d like to vanish. If you were planning on arranging one of those unfortunate accidents, well, I’m sure they wouldn’t be missed,” he replied before lifting his empty cup. “Did you want another?”

“That could be useful, thank you,” Hannibal said. “If you could select men that have a dancers build then that would be most useful. From what I have seen of his wife in the papers, that would be the best mirror for her physique. They should have Nen, but not be a manipulator. A rare hair colour too, and striking eyes,” he added, thinking aloud as he pictured Victoria LeForte. “Yes, that could be very useful. But I’ll have to meet them before the Gala if we are to be believably engaged.”

So you’re in denial because you still want Will? Hisoka’s going to have his work cut out for him if he wants you. “I’m sure we can find somebody like that,” Pariston assured as he thought through his current list of potential targets. “I’m sure I can arrange a meeting, do you have a prefered Nen type apart from not being a manipulator?”
“I wish I knew what hers was,” Hannibal said, getting to his feet and starting to pace. “But in the absence of further information, I would say something subtle. I can’t be seen with anyone too garish. It wouldn’t be believable. I need someone who would elevate my status by complimenting me. The Doctor that everyone knows and loves is too refined to have anyone who would risk embarrassing him at a public event.”

“Subtle, hmm I’ll definitely bear that in mind when I pick some possible companions. Would you prefer them not to be a Hunter?” Pariston asked as he started to piece everything together, Hisoka would be a wildcard that they couldn’t risk.

“No, they should have a licence, and they should be well known for it if possible,” Hannibal said. “Someone of prominence, like your professor, but with an actual personality. My binding can’t do all the work. I’m going to need to be able to hold a conversation with them.”

Chuckling to himself, Pariston stood up and took their empty cups to the sink. “Well if they’re well known we’ll have to arrange their accident carefully,” he mused. “But I can find somebody. I like to think I know your interests well enough to make a good match.”

Then the professor was a prank? How bored are you now that Nettero’s gone? Hannibal thought. “I eagerly await your selection, my boy,” he said, trying to plot out how best to get close to Victor’s wife.

“Do you by any chance know when their next public appearance will be?” he asked. “I’d rather like to meet them in person.”

“It’s not been confirmed, but there has been talk that they’re going to be coming to Yorknew in the next few weeks. It would likely be next month,” Pariston replied as he leant against the counter. “I’ll try to get some more concrete information for you, are you thinking of trying to scout out his Nen?”

“I am,” Hannibal said and straightened when a young waiter poked his head into the room, saw that they were still talking and ran away again.

“Would you care to join me outside? It’s a lovely evening, or did you have plans?” he asked. Unbidden the image of what Hisoka might be doing with the rest of his evening came to mind, and he mentally slapped himself for his lack of control. Now was not the time to be thinking about Hisoka.

“As always I cleared my schedule for your dinner party, so I’m free to stay. Should I fix us both
another drink before joining you in the garden?” Pariston asked.

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“My apologies,” Hannibal said, shaking his head. “Yes, that would be lovely my boy, your question slipped my mind. It’s been an eventful evening.” The image of Hisoka’s red-raw ass and the sounds he made as he came caused him to have to take a breath. “Perhaps the fresh air would do me good? Yes. Let’s go out. It’s been too long since you stopped by. The house has been feeling rather empty of late.”

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Well, if you play your cards right that might not be the case for much longer. “That sounds like a splendid idea, let me get a tray for our drinks, and I’ll be right out. Maybe we’ll get a good view of the stars? It’s a wonderfully clear night.” Pariston paused to add fresh teabags to their cups. “You know you can always ask me to drop in; after all, you are my only family.”

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“I am not so bored of my own mind that I’ve been reduced to the level of begging for company just yet, but the offer is appreciated,” Hannibal said, opening the large glass doors and stepping out into the evening air. He took a deep breath and sighed contentedly. “Everything just smells so much fresher after the sun goes down, don’t you think?”

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“I have to say, I’ve never really thought about it,” Pariston admitted as he brought their drinks over on a small tray. “But then again, I don’t have your sense of smell. Although, I do have a fondness for night-blooming flowers, just like you, so perhaps I am a little biased in favour of the dark.”

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“Aren’t we all?” Hannibal chuckled. “The average person has no idea how beautiful the dark is. They never let themselves feel her embrace and live their lives in fear of what lies underneath her exquisite cloak.”

He collected his mug and sat down on the garden bench, crossing his legs and grinning wickedly up at his apprentice. He began to quote his own words from long ago and wondered if Pariston would remember how he used to soothe him back to sleep. “The key to loving the dark, my boy, lies in knowing that there is no creature in heaven or on earth that is more terrifying than ourselves.”

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Chuckling Pariston left the tray on the nearby table before taking a seat across from Hannibal. Bedtime stories Papa? Are you experiencing a rare moment of whimsy?

"And once we understand our potential, we can allow the dark to take us into its embrace. Allow ourselves to become one with the shadows, an impenetrable peace. That belongs to us, the real monsters going bump in the night," he finished as he picked up his own drink and inhaled the faint scent of jasmine. "I remember how you used to tell me that when I was younger, and I was never quite sure if I could trust you. It seems so long ago now."
Hannibal smiled and sipped at his tea. “I remember it well. We saved each other back then. Perhaps history is set to repeat itself again?”

He looked up at the sky and saw the clouds slowly drifting across the moon. “I hope that you believe me now, and know that I am proud of the man you have become.”

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“Perhaps it will,” Pariston agreed happily. “I know I made things hard for you at the beginning, but despite all that, I was still glad you came. Even if I couldn’t tell you back then, it was a relief. Fear is a powerful thing, and it makes us act strangely.”

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“I know you tried to warn him what would happen and that you saw me coming,” Hannibal said, reaching out and patting Pariston’s knee. “I understood you better than your young self could have known. Natsugashi is a word that my aunt taught me. Its literal meaning in English is ‘Nostalgia’, but in the language of Jappon, it translates more to the warm feeling that accompanies a happy memory from your past.”

He smiled and looked at Pariston’s face. The moonlight seemed to shimmer on his skin for a moment. “That’s how I feel whenever I see you walking through the corridors of my house again, my boy. I have no bitter memories, none at all. I even think of the rows we had and find myself smiling. Do you remember the drama that came along with the darling Aysi?”

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“Oh my darling Sunday, I remember Aysi and how her mother would chase me away from the garden gate,” Pariston said with a quiet chuckle. “You’d keep telling me that I was becoming dangerously close to unforgivable rudeness. Ah, that was a fun time. I wonder what became of her. She wanted to be a nurse when she grew up.”

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“You always did know how to dance on that knife-edge,” Hannibal chuckled. “You had me worried that I would have to kill you on more than one occasion. I’m so glad that you never forced my hand.”

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Pariston smiled over his cup. “Well, life is rather boring without a little danger. Don’t you think?”

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Hannibal laughed. “You sound like Hisoka. Do I need to keep you two apart?”

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“Ah, I’m far more interested in Lulu,” Pariston replied. “Although, I fear he may try to fight me for her affections, so maybe that would be for the best.”

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“I wish you luck with her,” Hannibal said jovially. “As long as you don’t mind sharing with Hisoka, then I can’t see him risking another fight so soon. He’s far from suicidal. He reminded me
a lot of your younger self; trapped and alone. I want to help him see that his cage need only be temporary and that his isolation is a choice. He needs people, but he’s terrified of rejection. It doesn’t help that he appears to have a rather severe case of Erotophonophilia. He pursued Chrollo and forced him into killing him because of it, although,” he added, brightening at the thought. “He doesn’t appear to relish the idea of killing his Lulu, so there may be hope.”

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“I thought it was hearsay that he died. You mean that he did actually resurrect himself?” Pariston asked in surprise.

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“It would appear so,” Hannibal agreed. “He was most certainly medically dead for a good few minutes. He must have used some form of post-mortem Nen to bring himself back. He’s an obsessive character. It wouldn’t surprise me to find out that that was his plan all along. He seeks out strength in all its forms as if it were a religion. I pity the fool who lets him see their weakness.”

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“I’ll definitely have to watch myself around him,” Pariston remarked. “He was a firm favourite at Heaven’s Arena, maybe that’s what motivated Chrollo to blow the place up? You can’t exactly steal a building, but by destroying it, he has, in a way, managed to take from Hisoka what he valued the most. Do you think he’s likely to resume his pursuit once you sign him off?”

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“I suspect he might,” Hannibal said with a shrug. “I intend to make it very clear that if he does, he is to leave the asylum intact. He’s not foolish enough to outright say it though, but I intend to do my best to steer him away from Mr. Lucilfer. They are both far more interesting alive.”

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“That would be quite a sight, Hisoka whirlwinding through Frederick’s corridors leaving carnage in his wake as he hunts for Chrollo. They really would have no choice but to lock him up, and then when he inevitably escapes,” Pariston paused thoughtfully. “They’d probably send you to bring him back dead or alive. As entertaining as that image is, I think I prefer him as he is now. He is a fascinating man.”

*If you are indeed a man at all. Do you suspect anything about him yourself, Papa?*

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“Isn’t he just?” Hannibal chuckled. *Oh, the things I want to do to him. I haven’t felt like this in years. Is this why I’m getting so nostalgic? Having him here made the house feel like a home again. Not even Will could do that for me.*

“I can’t wait to see what he’ll do once he’s completed his therapy. He’s at a crossroads right now, and being able to watch as he runs through his choices is delicious,” he said, licking his lips. “What I wouldn’t give to be able to have a taste of that wicked mind...”

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“Would you really be satisfied with just a taste?” Pariston asked curiously. “Surely it would be more satisfying to watch his metamorphosis. If he is, as you say, at a crossroads, then he may
choose to reinvent himself. It’s not every day you defy death itself, rather fitting for one who called
himself the Grim Reaper, I have to admit.”

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“Oh, I don’t think I could ever delude myself into thinking that I could be satisfied by just a taste
of that man,” Hannibal said honestly. “I would have to have everything or none at all.”

He shook his head, amused at the situation he’d found himself in. “It’s why I’m holding back,” he
admitted. “I know that if I give in to his charms, I won’t be able to stop myself from taking
everything I want, and more. He’s my brand of Heroin. For all our sakes, I can not let myself give
in. No, as you said, I will have to be happy with watching the man that emerges from this particular
cocoon.”

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“Well, he’ll have his work cut out for him if he decides to take on your iron will. I am certainly
looking forward to seeing his progress,” Pariston mused as he sipped at his drink and leant back in
his chair. *Heroin? That’s one way of putting it if only you could see yourself and your reactions to
him. *Do you think he’d make a good addition to the Blacklist Hunters? You know we did lose a
few during that murder spree while the election was taking place.”

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“That’s the direction I’m hoping to steer him in, yes,” Hannibal agreed. “He needs a focus, just as I
did. Legal murder will help take the edge off his wilder urges and help smooth things over when he
inevitably gives in and goes ‘off-book’. Hopefully, he’ll have learned to be less...open, about his
desires. If nothing else, I’m looking to teach him the power of subtlety. Right now, he’s severely
lacking in that department. His girlfriend too, although that does seem to be something she’s
choosing to turn on and off. She’s quite an interesting creature in her own right. There’s something
that’s not quite adding up about her. Hisoka was incredibly reluctant to talk about her at the start,
and I’m finding myself wondering why.”

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“A man like Hisoka likely has many enemies. Perhaps he was trying to shield her from them? If
that is the case, perhaps him starting to tell you about her is a sign he’s willing to trust you?”
Pariston suggested.

***

Hannibal laughed aloud. “Oh, my dear boy, she tried to flirt with me. And that was after I gave her
boyfriend such a beating that he had to use his Nen to cushion his behind whilst he sat to eat. No,
that woman is fearless. If he’s trying to protect her, then he’s fighting a losing battle. She doesn’t
need protecting from the world; the world needs protecting from her.”

He gathered himself and smiled. “But I see your point. Perhaps, if he is looking at her through
rose-tinted glasses, then he may have been trying to protect his find. He is rather territorial and is
slowly starting to open up to me. He requested that she joined us in the playroom.”

***

*Yet he wants her to become a Hunter, which will draw more attention to her connection to him.
Although it would also give him more confidence in her skills.*
“I did notice the way he was looking at her, and the protective body language, Papa. Territorial would be a good description,” Pariston agreed with a thoughtful expression. “I’d imagine he’s making a spectacle back at the hotel, such a mass of contradictions. He clearly invites people to watch him work, but then refuses to let people draw close to him. I wonder what Lulu did to achieve that feat, and if that’s why he was so secretive.”

***

“Making a spectacle of yourself is an easy mask to hide behind,” Hannibal said, giving Pariston a knowing grin. “She has likely seen behind his mask.”

***

“You make him sound like a Dragon jealously guarding his treasure,” Pariston joked. “Except, in this case, the treasure is who he really is under all that makeup.”

***

“Indeed,” Hannibal said. “And what a treasure it will be.”

***

“Are you sure that you’re not planning to play pirate?” Pariston asked with a mischievous smile.

***

“Only when the time is right,” Hannibal chuckled. “Hisoka is a fantastically complex lock. I’m enjoying the process of picking him open at present. I can’t take...yet.”

***

*When the time is right, should I start the countdown now? I know you won’t move while he’s under your care.* Smiling, Pariston sipped his drink and let the familiar silence settle between them. The future was going to happen, and it was comforting to know that they both understood the direction it would take.

***

Characters played by Muffinmadness in this chapter were:

Hannibal, Margot, Illumi, Lulu, Kyoya

Characters played by themadnovelist in this chapter:

Hisoka, Pariston, Chilton

***

All google translate mistakes are our own. Thank you for reading <3
Chrollo and Chilton continue their game of one-upmanship, much to the dismay of a particular inmate, who just wants to be left alone.

Chrollo looked up from the latest book that Hannibal had given him. This one was all about the stages of grief.

He'd spent most of the session in a numb haze, monotonously going through the motions of polite conversation after he'd been told that Shalnark and Kortopi had been given up for dead by the Troupe. On the surface, the book had been a gift to 'help him process his feelings', and he knew that's how he would have to play it as far as Dr. Chilton was concerned. But in reality, both he and Dr. Lecter understood that it had been a guidebook. He'd have to be able to show the appropriate 'stages of grief', and to do that; he had to know what they were.

"Has Hannibal left?" he asked as Dr. Chilton strode confidently into the room. "And so soon today. I hope you don't mind me saying that the blue of your suit brings out your eyes extremely well. My compliments to your tailor."

He had to keep him on-side. If there was someone taking advantage of his absence to pick apart his Troupe...Vikki... No, he had to trust that his men could handle it, but he also had to be in a position to act if anything else happened. He couldn't stay here anymore.

***

"Yes, he seemed to be in quite a hurry today. Most unlike Hannibal, I do hope he's alright. Purely as a concerned colleague, of course," Dr. Chilton replied as he preened slightly before taking his usual chair. "I felt a bit of colour might be a welcome change, at least something more subtle than the curtains Hannibal likes to wear. Anyway, I'm not here to talk about him. I'm here for you Mr. Lucifer, how have you been since our last chat? Have you made a decision about moving to the other room?"

***

Chrollo chuckled on queue and showed open appreciation for the man's derisive joke. *How jealous are you that you can't pull off his outfits, I wonder?*

He held up the book in answer to Chilton's first question and smiled sadly. "Hannibal thinks that I am having problems processing my grief over my former Troupe member's deaths, and I think he may be right. I've only glanced through his latest book, but I think that it will be helpful. As to the move, well," he made sure to brighten his smile and let it show in his eyes. "I think the time has come for a change of scenery. Somewhere a little brighter, perhaps?"

***

"Well, I'm certain the other room is a little bigger, and that the window is better positioned to let in more natural light. Perhaps that will help?" Frederick replied glancing up at the small window
behind Chrollo. "We all grieve in our own ways, and I would say that it's a positive step to take the
time to process everything that happened. You did have Mr. Morow chasing you around the world
not long after you lost your compatriots. Evading a Hunter wouldn't be the most helpful experience,
in that regard."

***

Chrollo chuckled appreciatively. "No, I suppose it wasn't, you're right. Hopefully, my new cell,
sorry, room," he deliberately corrected. "Will provide me with the restful atmosphere that I need.
With a man who believes himself to be an empath beside me, I'm sure I will have all the
encouragement anyone needs to remain calm and contemplative."

***

"Ah yes, Will Graham. I'm sure the two of you will get on well, perhaps even be good for each
other?" Frederick proposed as he leant back and crossed his legs. "It's been a long time since I've
seen him properly socialise, so please don't take it personally if he's rather aloof. I'm sure he'll
warm up to you. All the same, it's probably best not to mention Hannibal."

***

"Believe me, Doctor, I am tough to offend," Chrollo said flatly and let the silence stretch between
them.

***

Fiddling with his cane, he looked around the spartan cell, focusing on the small bookshelf and the
pictures of the chapel next to it. "Have you ever talking to anyone about your loss? From the time
we've spent together, you often mention the things you admire about your colleagues. Sometimes
we cling to those positives as a way to feel like they are still with us."

***

"People come, and people go," Chrollo shrugged. "In the end, aren't we all but memories?"

***

_You're not usually this reserved when we talk, did something particularly troubling come up in
your session with Hannibal? I can't see it just being the talk of your bereavement, but it can wait.
Perhaps I can offer an olive branch to allow you a chance to distance yourself for a short while.
"Talking of memories, that reminds me. I wanted to ask if you had any requests, I could ensure that the shelves are fully stocked in time for us to move you._"

***

_Bribery will get you everywhere, Doctor_, Chrollo thought but forced himself to sit up at the
mention of new books. If he were honest, he'd read knitting weekly if it were offered; no
knowledge was ever wasted, or useless. But he had an image to maintain.

"My apologies, Doctor, I have a lot on my mind," he said, banishing the image of Shalnarks
smiling face and Kortipies hopeful shining eye from his thoughts. He'd given them sanctuary...and
he'd failed them. That's what Hannibal had implied, wasn't it? But they knew the risks, how had he let them down?

He shook his head. "Yes, yes, I would be most grateful for some new reading material. Perhaps something about empathy would be useful?"

***

"I can certainly see what I can find," Dr. Chilton agreed. "We do have a wide selection of non-fiction books in the Hospital Library, for those who wish to keep up with their studies while they are staying with us. If psychology is a special interest, I can arrange for a selection to be left for you to look through?"

***

"Well," Chrollo said, ducking his head ever so slightly, hoping to hit self-deprecating. "I was thinking that maybe I'd be able to help Will."

***

"I see, well that's very commendable. To be honest, what I think he really needs the most right now, is a friend," Frederick replied thoughtfully. "Perhaps you and he could help each other in that sense?"

***

"That's what I was thinking," Chrollo agreed, happy that Chilton was playing along. "I miss my Troupe. The isolation is teaching me how important human company is," he lied. "I hope to be able to offer Will a sympathetic ear if I can, but I would first need to understand him."

_Come on, Chilton, you can get there. Tell me what you know about him. Why has he really locked himself away from the world?_

***

"It's something many take for granted. Humans are pack animals at the core. We need our own kind, Will, well he's never really been one for socialising with people. Before he came to us, he used to adopt strays, he preferred their company. When he came to me for help, to shelter him from the world, I was rather surprised, but he wouldn't be talked out of it," Chilton explained patiently. "He's likely to be rather closed off. His previous work left a lot of mental scars. It didn't help that he was already suffering what has been classified as an empathy disorder; he's insightful. I'm not quite sure where he draws his conclusions from, but he's highly skilled at profiling criminals. Some people would say it takes one to know one, he was accused of being the copycat killer but the case was overturned. He never really recovered, he still insists Hannibal is the Ripper."

***

_So he truly believes Hannibal is a Cannibal? Interesting._

"I have always found that animals tend to be drawn to those with a kind heart," Chrollo said, thinking through what Chilton had told him this time and comparing it to the last time they had talked about the man.

_That would suggest his Nen is strong. Why would Hannibal eat people? He's not starving...did you misinterpret a funeral rite?_
"It bodes well for the future. What would you suggest that I do by way of an introduction?"
Chrollo asked, looking to flatter the man's ego as much as he could now that the cell transfer had been agreed. "I wouldn't want to startle him."

***

"I'd advise that you'd be better off letting him come to you; he's naturally curious. As much as he likes to shy away from people, I have noticed that he can't help wanting to confirm his insights. If you were to ever come face to face with him," Frederick paused to tap his fingers along the side of his cane in thought. "I can't guarantee you ever would, but, should the opportunity arise, don't expect him to make eye contact. If you've ever known somebody who was classed as autistic, then he's similar to them with his dislike of eye contact. I can make sure you're provided with a book on that subject too; you may well find it useful."

You want to understand the man who understands everyone but himself? Is love of challenge the common thread that connects you and Hisoka? You're both so different. It's hard to imagine the two of you ever got along.

Shifting in his chair, he smiled at Chrollo warmly. "I'm sure you'll be able to entice him, after all, you're a natural-born leader. Just let him decide when to make the first move; that's the best advice I can give."

***

Treat him like a stray dog, really? That's the best advice you can give me? How long have you known him? Surely he's not that fragile. Hannibal detests fragility; even I can see that.

"Thank you very much. I will certainly bear that in mind," Chrollo said, smiling gratefully. "I am so glad to have met someone with insight like yours; your visits mean so much to me. I hope," he shifted uneasily in his chair, echoing the way Machi always looked when she'd been embarrassed. "Well, I hope that I can be as helpful to Will as you have been to me. I will admit, I find myself at a loss without someone to guide. Even if I can't be as good as you, I would still like to help someone who clearly needs it. Potential should never be allowed to go to waste."

***

"Potential is a terrible thing to be allowed to grow stagnant, but with unusual gifts like his comes the need for a careful guiding hand. Will feels like he was left to flounder by those he should have been able to trust; he got too close to the minds of the killers he helped to catch. When he fell," Frederick sighed. "Nobody thought to try and catch him. He's hiding here, but I don't think he actually trusts me."

The image of Will blankly staring at him across the table in one of the private interview rooms passed through Dr. Chilton's mind unbidden.

Pushing the thoughts away, he leant forward before continuing. "If you think you can help him, Mr. Lucilfer, I would be happy to support your endeavour. As long as it doesn't appear to be causing or adding to Will's distress. Perhaps you're exactly what he needs? As the one in charge of his care, it would be remiss of me to deny him, or you, the chance to help each other."

The empath and the emotionless sociopath, you'll make a fantastic case study. Hannibal won't be able to outdo me with this one, especially as Will Graham is still refusing to see him. Finally, I'll get the recognition I deserve.
"We really should agree a day for your transfer; I was thinking before the end of the week? Unless you would like to move sooner? I'm happy to accommodate you, but I'll need time to source your books, everything else will be in place later today."

***

*The end of the day? My, my Frederick, you have been a busy bee, haven't you? This has to be a test. I can't appear to be too overly-eager.*

"You are too kind," Chrollo said, dropping his voice into a smooth, differential tone. "A man like me... I am so very grateful that you can look beyond my past. I want a fresh start, I do." He paused, as if thinking over his options, and forced a worried frown onto his face. "But I don't think that I should rush Will. If he's anything like the strays I have known, then he will need time to adjust. All the noise and people that the renovation will have forced him to endure will have taken its toll on him. No, I would rather wait until everything is entirely ready for me. It wouldn't be fair on him to put my selfish desires before his needs." He hoped he sounded convincing.

I need to find out everything I can about empathy first. I wonder if Ayato can be useful, after all. I'll have to include a request for more books about grief too. Hopefully, Lecter will think that I've made a connection and am trying to hone my act. He wants me to live. Does Meteor City really need me? The *Spider* is what it needs. That will carry on without me; I made sure that it would. And with Shalnark and Kortopi gone as well, Feitan will be looking to recruit more to our cause. He blinked as the pieces fell into place. *Are you hoping to join us, Doctor? Have I reminded you where you truly belong? It could be useful to have friends in high places, and if I can get Will to hand over his Nen, then I can find out where your loyalties really lie.*

"I'm sorry if that sounded impertinent, Doctor," he added. "It's just... well. You said not to scare him. I have found that for those who are easily startled, gradual change tends to sit easier in their minds. And Will has been through a lot recently. I'd prefer he associate me with peace, instead of chaos."

***

"No, that's perfectly fine. You're absolutely right of course he has been through some very trying times," Dr. Chilton said assuredly. "I'll make sure that all the renovations are completed by the end of the day. Then we can leave a day or two between that your move, so he has a chance to settle." *Oh good, the gamble paid off, now I'll have time to fit everything that I said was in there. I wonder if I could find a way to sort out some regulation curtains?*

***

*I wonder what Will could tell me about you that I already don't know. I'll have to plan this carefully. I can't be too similar to Hannibal; force won't work, and if he really is an empath, I won't be able to hide things from him. No, I need time. I need more books. I have to get you out of here.*

"Thank you for your understanding, Doctor," Chrollo said, allowing his eyes to soften. "If you could give me as much material as possible to help me understand Will, I would be so grateful, but," he sighed sadly. "I don't want to keep you. I know how busy you must be. The fact that you even manage to make time to come and see me shows me how much you care. I won't let you down. And I promise," he added truthfully. "I will give you material to write about for years to come. The world will know the name Frederick Chilton. You have changed my life; I want everyone to know that."
30 Minutes Later

Will rolled his eyes. Chilton was genuinely arguing with the fitters over where to put a bookcase? Surely whoever was going in the cell wasn't that rich? Who the hell was he trying to impress?

"You know whoever it is, isn't worth it, right, Frederick?" he said as he stood up from his cot and walked the three paces to the bars of his cell. "You're the world's Buttmonkey; I thought we'd had this conversation already?"

"Yes, I believe you have mentioned your opinion on that subject before. Several times," Dr. Chilton replied mildly. "Also, maybe if you were a little more cooperative with the staff, I'd have the remit to upgrade your accommodations."

"Ah, but you see, I'm not your type, Frederick," Will said, slipping into the mindset of the Black Widow of Geardou and leaning provocatively against the bars and fluttering his eyelids. "And I'm no one's bitch. Whatever the unlucky lady next door is doing for you, well..." He smirked and allowed himself to slip, just for a second into Hannibal's calm, and determined mind. He saw Chilton turning over an open fire, skin glistening with seasoning and pain. His mouth watered. "I didn't think you wanted my mouth in such a private area, Dr. Chilton."

"I don't, you know I'm not interested in men Will. Also, it's not a lady who will be moving in; this area is for male patients," Frederick replied with a put upon sigh as he continued to watch the workmen adjusting the bookcase. How hard is it to put it against a dam wall? "We all know who wanted you to be their bitch, and the jury is still out on if you ever laid back and thought of Saherta."

"What would you do if I told you that it was Hannibal that liked me to do that to him?" Will said with a deliberately provocative smirk. You still fall for the old tricks, don't you? Do you really believe that I'm so far gone that I didn't know this was the male wing of the 'Hospital'?"

"He loved to look up into my eyes and have me see all the depraved things he wanted to do to me," he sneered. "But that one day, he let his mask slip... that's how good I am in bed. How about you, Frederick? Have you ever made the lovely ladies of this facility loose themselves? Have you ever made them show you their truth? Who's unlucky wife is trying to bribe you to look after their poor, misguided husband?" he asked, and felt every prickle of annoyance, every stab to the ego and every inch of Chilton's disgust as if it were his own. You're too easy, Frederick. Why hasn't Hannibal eaten you already?"

"I'd say people already think you're delusional," Dr. Chilton said dismissively. "You make all these claims about Dr. Lecter, but there's not been a shred of evidence to be found against him. But don't
worry, no matter how much you try to annoy me and get under my skin, I won't go back on my promise. Although he seemed rather hurt when he found out you'd requested he be barred from seeing you, he's always asking about you. In fact, he was enquiring about your well being just the other day, when I was at his house."

***

"Of course he was," Will laughed. "He's wanting to know if you're fattening me up for Christmas, but now he can't get to his Turkey."

***

"OK, I get you're annoyed with me, and that you genuinely believe Hannibal wants to kill you; but a turkey, Will?" Frederick asked with growing exasperation. "Even without being fattened up, I highly doubt you'd fit inside his oven. Or that he'd be able to eat a whole person by himself, so unless he's the head of some super-secret cannibalic club, I just can't see why you're so certain of this. Also, surely Jack would have found out by now unless you think he's secretly in on this plan to eat you as well? Because I sure as heck am not, for the record."

***

Will chuckled. "Ah, but, while you were at his house the other day, did you happen to have some 'rare and delicate' meat?" He felt the answer as the flash of recollection hit him. "Or did you take my advice and go vegetarian?" he asked pointlessly.

"Whether or not you want to join the club or not, Hannibal's made sure you're in it," Will pointed out. "Let's just hope that he doesn't ask you to help him pad out the menu."

***

"I think the bookcase looks fine there, let's just leave it there. Great, I'm sure you can get the new bed in the right place without my supervision?" Dr. Chilton said to the workmen, who rolled their eyes but gave him a thumbs up. Just what has gotten into you today, Will? You're not usually this pissy, is this because of Dr. Gideon?

"I believe Miss Verger supplied the meat for the party," he told Will curtly as he made his way to stand in front of his cell. "Or is she one of these secret Yorknew Cannibals too?"

***

"I believe that she believes that too," Will said patronisingly. Have you not gotten over Alana choosing Margot instead of you? How long are you going to 'conveniently' forget about the fact that she's married? For pity's sake, Frederick, they have a kid. "Hannibal likes to keep people on-side, and it gives him a chance to check up on his student. I wonder how they'll find you when the time comes? A bitter, chewy pig, I'd say. Resentful of its lot in life right up until Hannibal slipped it into the industrial oven that's hidden away in his basement."

Come on, that was too easy. Just huff and change the topic back to who's going to be my new neighbour like a good little worm. You know I can play this game all day. I'm going to make you regret the moment you let Hannibal set foot in here. Have you any idea what it was like feeling him again? Feeling Gideon's fear and pain as his neck was sliced open? Have you, Chilton! Do you know what was worse than that? Enjoying it. I felt Hannibal. You made me see it through his eyes. It's going to take a lot more than a hiss off apology that you didn't even mean to get me to forgive you for that!
"Oh yes," Will said when he felt Chilton's puzzlement. "He has a basement. He dug it out himself."

***

"And I'm sure he used this magical superpower you keep insisting is real too. What was it called again? Nem? Anyway, magic isn't real, and people don't randomly dig out basements. That house has a basement anyway I'm sure," Frederick retorted. "It's certainly old enough. Look I want to help you, but you need to tell me what's really going on. I know you probably want to protect your masculinity and make him out to be this larger than life monster. But men can suffer from domestic abuse too, and if that's what was happening, well it's not too late to open a case against him for that."

Pausing, he looked back into the cell that would soon house Chrollo and sighed before taking a small step towards Will. "I can get Alana to come and talk to you. She's had more experience with these types of cases. I'm sure she'd be able to convince Jack to listen, and well, I always did think he would be the possessive type. So if you say he was hurting you, I'd believe you." It's got to be that, I saw the way he was looking at Hisoka. Like he used to look at you, but I can't help you unless you drop this fantasy story. Let me help you.

***

Will tightened his grip on the cell bars as he felt Chilton's sympathy. It was real and it was far worse than his pride or self satisfied smugness could ever be. "I don't need your pity, Frederick, I need you to believe me. I came to you for a reason."

He swallowed and gritted his teeth. "He made me watch as he boiled people alive. I felt it all. It was as if I were in...I could feel everything..." He realised he was shaking. "I've told you everything. If you don't think that would be good enough to count as abuse then, I'm sorry. I can't help you. But if finding out what it feels like doesn't earn me more than a shelf with my own autobiography on it, then I'm going to have to only award your establishment three out of five stars for accommodation. Unlike whoever's moving in next door, I don't lie to get what I want. I tell the truth."

***

It would if it were true and we could prove it. How do you expect me to prove that? We can't ask Hannibal to demonstrate with a death row inmate. Execution is one thing, but boiling people alive? That's definitely inhumane and unjust punishment.

"Next door? Oh, right, yes your new neighbour. You may have heard of him, actually," Dr. Chilton said as he pushed away the mental images Will's words had conjured and grabbed onto the safer topic. "It's Chrollo Lucilfer, the man whose been sent here to be evaluated as fit to stand trial for terrorism. He's accused of blowing up that fighting place, heaven's tower? I think Jack took you there once; he felt rather guilty when you fainted."

***

"So you let Hannibal kill someone beside me, and now you're moving a terrorist into a luxury upgraded cell?" Will said incredulously. "Chilton, have you lost your mind? He has to be in the Nen suppressed cells! " he insisted, ignoring the gumph about the Arena. "He's going to break out, you utter buffoon!"

***
"On the contrary, I've found Mr. Lucilfer to be a very charming and considerate young man. I believe with the right support that he could reform and become an asset to his community. Surely you wouldn't deny him the chance to prove himself?" Dr. Chilton countered.

***

Will banged his head into the bars. He read the papers. "Frederick," he said as clearly as he could. "He turned people into living bombs. He's a Psychopath. Of course he's charming. That's what they do. I am not going to let myself become a walking boom-box!"

***

"I'm aware of what the various survivors have claimed Will, just as I am aware that many witness statements contradict each other. The creation of living bombs is one of those points," Dr. Chilton insisted. "Right now, Mr. Lucilfer is grieving, and he doesn't know how to handle that. Some human interaction would be good for you both. Besides, it's not like he can touch you through the cell wall, is it? The most he can do is talk to you, and if he threatens you, then I'll have him moved back into isolation. But surely you can't see it as fair that Mr. Morow gets to live in a hotel at BAU expense while Chrollo's locked away from everyone?"

***

"What? Why would I care what happens to bungee-gum boy? And the 'worst' Hannibal ever did to most people was talk to them," Will pointed out. "I just don't want to wake up one morning by going bang. Chilton, please, you can't do this to me. What the hell have I ever done to deserve this? I know you don't believe in Nen, but I promise you, you will regret letting him out of that cell for the rest of your life if you do this. And I will gloat when this blows up in your face, even if I'm the one exploding. You'll have the smuggest, most annoying ghost you've ever conceived of following you around for the rest of your life."

Don't do this to me, Chilton, I can't take any more. I'll slip over the edge for sure this time, Will thought, begging the man to listen with every line of his body. I don't know if I'll come back.

***

"Will, I can't hold back another patient's recovery because you don't like me, or them. If your prediction comes to pass, then you have my consent to haunt me until you get bored. Maybe you'll become a poltergeist, and you can uncover the missing evidence against Hannibal. Until then," Frederick paused and nodded towards the workmen who had just finished. "Until then, I have to give all my patients a chance. If I can rehabilitate the leader of the Phantom Troupe, then I owe it to him to try." Not to mention how pissed off Hannibal will be. He'll finally fall off that silver pedestal ever puts him on.

***

Will stilled. "Why are you smug? You went from righteously pissed off to smug. Chilton...what are you planning? I didn't consent to play guinea pig..."

He slowly raised his gaze and, for the first time in two months, considered looking the man in the eye. "Don't make me look at you to get the answer we're both thinking about. Tell me Hannibal isn't involved in this?"

***

"Heaven's no," Dr. Chilton exclaimed. "Why would I willingly work with him? I tolerate him
because everyone thinks the sun shines out of his ass. No, I'm not doing this for Dr. Lecter."

***

"No," Will said slowly, hearing the derision in Chilton's tone and feeling a momentary flash of anger shoot through his spine. "You're doing this to him. Oh, Frederick, you really do want to die, don't you? Hannibal's going to have you for breakfast when he finds out you've not only interfered with his patient, but that you've let him escape too."

_you stupid, stupid man. Where the hell am I going to go after Hannibal eats you? He'll be so mad. They can't let him in, but what if he says yes to taking over this place? No, think, Will, what the hell can you do?_

***

"I'm simply acting in the best interests of a vulnerable young man who needs a helping hand. The fact that Dr. Lecter seems to be neglecting his need for human contact is rather concerning to me," Frederick looked Will up and down with a slight frown. "Look I know you're afraid of him, it's natural to make our abusers into inhuman monsters. Hannibal is still human; he's not infallible. I happen to think he's made a mistake, and last time I checked, I had full autonomy over this place. So I am using it to help Mr. Lucifer. In the same way I exercised it to give you a sanctuary. You've been here two years now. You consented to the book being written. You won't take part in any of the social activities, or the focus groups. You're not exactly making it easy for me to help you."

***

"I've tried to prove that Nen is real over and over again!" Will insisted, throwing his hands up in the air. "It's not my fault that my brain's broken and I can't control it. Hell, the one thing that I'm sure of from my time with Hannibal is his diagnosis about my Nen. I was born with everything turned up to megawatt levels and fully open. Even he couldn't fix me," he added bitterly. "And he had a reason to want to teach me how to turn it off. I'd have never found out what he was if he'd managed that."

Sighing, he walked back over to his metal-framed, standard-issue bed and sat down. "You aren't going to prove him wrong, Frederick, you're going to prove him right. Hell, I wouldn't be surprised if he was counting on Chrollo pulling something like this. If Chrollo broke out and killed you all in one go, he'd be rid of a hell of a lot of problems, and," he sneered. "He'd get full access to me again."

***

Leaning on his cane, Dr. Chilton gave a frustrated sigh. "Why would Mr. Lucifer want to kill me? What would he honestly have to gain from that?" he asked pointedly. "As for proving Nen is real, I'm sorry if yours isn't exactly something easily proven. Who am I supposed to ask for confirmation? Dr. Lecter? You know he's not exactly a reliable witness when it comes to you."

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"I don't know, Frederick? How about Jack? Zeller, Miriam, hell, who knows, maybe Alan's sprouted the ability to freeze people with a glance?" Will grumbled. "This isn't a grand conspiracy, you idiot. It was on display every day in the Arena. Hannibal can literally control people's minds with his bands. It's not some kung-fu hypnosis."
He ran his hands over his face, feeling, rather than seeing the groan from his protector-come-executioner. "Look, I'm not going to win this argument. It's not my job to convince you of the blatantly obvious. It's my job to stay alive longer than Hannibal, and I'm going to do whatever it takes to do that," he warned. "If you don't listen to me then I will choose living over keeping you safe. I've done all I can from here. But if you want some free advice, don't stand between Chrollo and anything he wants. He will kill you without blinking."

*Time to make friends with another psychopath,* he thought bitterly. *Let's hope this one's a vegetarian.*

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"And what if he's being truthful? It must be a truly horrific world out there for you, but hopefully, with time we'll get to the bottom of what's going on with you and Hannibal. Although, with any luck, he might be finally moving on," Frederick said thoughtfully as he remembered how fixated Hannibal became on Hisoka. "To be honest with you though, Will, I think you'll be pleasantly surprised by Mr. Lucilfer. We're looking to move him in at the end of the week."

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*Oh, you deluded little Weasel. I hope Hannibal takes you apart slowly for this. You're gonna force me to befriend the leader of the Phantom Troupe just so that you can try and one up a cannibal. I can't believe I'm gonna have to make sure Chrollo doesn't kill you before he leaves. You utter shit.*

"Looking forward to it," Will said sarcastically. "Who knows, maybe he'll let me share his books, and we can end up writing poetry on a Sunday afternoon over high-tea."

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"Well if you think you manage to craft a masterpiece let me know, I'll talk to my publisher for you," Frederick replied mildly, refusing to rise to the provocation. "I've heard writing can be therapeutic, perhaps you should consider it?"

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"Why bother when I can get you to do it for me?" Will countered. "We've already got one bestseller under our belt. Why stop there? Will He, Won't He Two: The Phantom Troupe Years. Sounds good, doesn't it?"

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"We can even get a photo of your matching tattoos for the front cover," Chilton fired back without missing a beat. "I wanted to give you advance notice of your new neighbour, but you seem to be feeling awfully combative. Have you been skipping your medication again?"

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"It's almost like I just got some bad news," Will said, arching a brow. "After experiencing someone die right beside me, by Hannibal's hand. I mean, what did you think was going to happen, really? Have you been missing your meds recently?"

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"Maybe I should ask Mr. Lucilfer if he's stolen them?" Frederick quipped. "I mean he's famous for being a thief, right? Look, I didn't come here to antagonise you."
"No, you came here to get me to tell you what a clever boy you've been for out-playing Hannibal. It's not gonna happen. But it's not as if you can't just walk away. Carry on, if you like," he said, waving his arm and lying down. "Or go make sure the guys have put the bed in the correct way up. Why should I care? It's not like my life depends on you staying in charge of this place. Go ahead. It's your head that's going to end up on the barbeque, not mine.

When are you going to drop this delusion? It's been two years since you came here, and nothing has been found to back up your story. Can you really blame me for starting to doubt? "Alright, you're clearly not in the right mindset for my company. The cell's been fully fitted now, so I have no reason to stick around," Dr. Chilton explained patiently. "I'll be back later to drop off some books, so if you're in a less combative mood, we can talk more then. Don't forget to let the staff know if you need or want anything," he added before turning on his heel and walking down the corridor, wondering exactly how Hannibal had managed to leave such a lasting impression on a man who was usually so perceptive. Psychic driving, maybe?

Will closed his eyes and tried to think through the blind terror that was threatening to take hold. Focus, he told himself. You have to think. How can you make a good impression? You can't show fear, or weakness. A leader doesn't value weakness. Think! You're going to have to prove to him that you're more useful alive than dead. You have to show him your strength. Shit. I'm going to have to read him, aren't I? Oh, fuck. Chilton, I knew you were an idiot, but this is beyond the pale. Why are you so rallied up? Why do you care about Hisoka? Are you trying to get Hannibal to hand him over by discrediting him? You're beyond saving if you are. Shit. I really am going to need to figure out some better protection. Perhaps getting a tattoo won't be too painful? I'm sure the Troup could do with an empath?

He looked up at the concrete ceiling and swallowed. Have I really fallen so far? he wondered. Where the hell did everything go so wrong?
Hisoka’s Aura hit Hannibal like a sledgehammer to the face, and it was only his iron control that stopped him from grabbing hold of the wall to steady himself. Something had shifted. The man was twitchy in a way that he’d never been before.

*Did the party rattle you that much?* he thought. *Had you truly never experienced sub-space before? Was Lulu telling the truth? Oh, my dear boy, was I your first? Now I want you, even more, you beautiful, wicked man.*

He froze when he saw the lone rose sitting on the table and felt his heart skip a beat. *Oh, Hisoka, why do you insist on tempting me like this?*

“My cher,” he said softly. “Shall we?” The game was starting to become interesting.

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Without looking up, Hisoka tugged on the bungee gum holding his structure together. He chuckled quietly to himself as it collapsed to form a deck of cards and in one graceful movement, picked them up, putting it away in a pocket before standing.
"Of course Doctor," he replied in a carefully crafted carefree tone as he made his way over to the office and walked inside. As he entered the room, he caught himself looking towards the cupboard he knew held his cane. For a moment, his step faltered as he remembered the last time he’d been in the room. Pushing the memories away, he made his way to his usual chair, schooling his features into a playful smile as he sat down.

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Noticing the way Hisoka had paused as his eyes had landed on the cupboard, and pairing that with his choice of flat-bottomed shoes, Hannibal smirked. Ever hopeful, Hisoka, I approve, he thought as he carefully closed the door behind himself, sealing them off from the world outside.

The temperature had dipped overnight, and Hannibal had added sandalwood to his ever-crackling fire. The smell, sound and heat soothed him in a way nothing else could, and he had long ago found that a flame could chase away the demons of his past far more effectively than any other method that he’d ever tried. He may be a creature of darkness, but the light and heat had always drawn him in, like a moth. The challenge had always been not to allow himself to be burned. He’d failed with Will, but Hisoka...

Taking his seat, he asked, “How are you feeling today, mon cher?” and waited patiently to see how Hisoka was going to respond. Today, he knew, would change everything. He couldn’t allow himself to become distracted.

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Hisoka glanced at the band around his wrist. He knew outright lies would trigger a punishment, but he didn’t want to give everything away either.

“A little distracted,” he offered, hoping the vague response would contain enough truth to buy him some time. “I’ve had a lot to think about recently.”

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“Well, this is why I’m here,” Hannibal said evenly, making sure that his body language remained as open as possible. “The time we spend in this room together is entirely yours; tell me what’s been on your mind.”

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You, more than I care to admit, he thought, as he glanced over at the display of his origami sculptures and noticed his abandoned Rubik's cube. You kept that? Just how sentimental are you?

"Lulu, the dinner party, things like that,” Hisoka said with a sigh as he shifted to get more comfortable. “Teasing the guards gets boring after a while,” he added as he flexed his fingers in response to the mild jolt of pain that crept up his arm from his bracelet.

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“I can imagine it does, they aren’t the most nuanced of people,” Hannibal agreed. “Why don’t we start with Lulu? How has she been doing?” And hopefully, I can figure out what it was that felt so off about her at the party.

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So we’re leading with that, are we? Here's me thinking you would want to talk more about Dr.
"Lulu is doing fine. She enjoyed herself at the dinner party. I think she enjoyed winding Dr. Chilton up even more than I did," Hisoka replied with a fond smile. "He's so responsive, isn't he?"

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“Then what was it about Lulu that was playing on your mind, mon cher?” Hannibal asked, deliberately steering the conversation back to Hisoka’s girlfriend and away from the obvious distraction. *Why would you want to steer me away from her? What are you hiding, mon cher? You know that will make me more interested, so why do it? You know you will lose the game, so why play?*

***

“You noticed, didn’t you?” Hisoka asked resignedly. “Of course you did, she started off all demure and then abruptly changed to become much more extroverted?”

*You’re going to want to ask me about that, and I can’t afford to be too eager to discuss it, or you’ll smell a trap. If I can get you to think you’ve made me open up, then I can act all surprised and ever so grateful. You like power, surely you’d like it if I owed you.*

***

“She appeared to be a rather multi-faceted woman, yes,” Hannibal said calmly. “But without more information to go on, I’m afraid I can’t help you with whatever it is you are worried about, mon cher.”

***

*More than you'd think, what would you say if you knew who Lulu really was? *“Yes, she is, and I'm rather worried about her mental state. She's not really been herself since that night. Naturally, I'm concerned that I've done something to overstep the mark of our relationship," Hisoka explained as the pain faded away. *Or rather my relationship with...them.*

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“Them, mon cher?” Hannibal said, raising his brow. *Are you telling me that there’s more than one personality? Is that why you used such neutral pronouns before? Oh, you are a cunning man, aren’t you? *“She’s not been herself?” he asked, tilting his head. *“You know that you can say whatever you want to me; this, like my house, is a safe place for you.”*

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"I understand that," Hisoka said earnestly. "But well, I'm torn between obeying your band and respecting their wishes. Elijah didn't want me to discuss his existence with you, but I don't feel like I can honour his request anymore. I'm concerned I'm losing him."

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“Well, anything you say here must be kept confidential," Hannibal said, trying to keep his desire to no more from showing in his voice. “I can not tell anyone, not even the chairman, what you tell me in here.” *So she does have another personality. Oh, how wonderful.* “Please, was Elijah the personality that I was talking with at the start of the party, or the one that came out when we went into the playroom?”
"He was the personality in control when we arrived. He swapped out with Lulu later. I think it was just before we entered the playroom," Hisoka explained. "He's much more reserved than she is, and we have a very different dynamic to the one I have with Lulu."

“And what sort of dynamic is that, mon cher?” Hannibal asked gently. “He seemed perfectly charming when we talked. I'm guessing he was also in charge in the book store? The person I talked to there seemed rather more...territorial than the one at my dinner table.”

"It was," Hisoka agreed. "And that's a good word for it. He can be protective of me. With Lulu, I'm always Master, but Elijah and I do switch, depending on my needs at the time. I have allowed him to top me before, but I wouldn't say I ever really submitted to him." Not like you made me do, how did you do that?

“I would expect that he was not too pleased by what he saw in the playroom then?” Hannibal suggested, trying to prompt Hisoka to talk more and tell him exactly what his worry was.

“I think he might be...a little jealous? You managed to push me into a state of mind that nobody ever has before. But he's not confirmed or denied that's the issue,” Hisoka said thoughtfully looking over to the fireplace. “If anything he’s, stopped coming to the forefront as much. I’m not used to it, and I don’t know what it means for him. Will he disappear?”

You genuinely are worried about this, aren’t you? Hannibal thought and resisted the urge to reach out and comfort the man. Somehow, the pale blue jester outfit he’d chosen to wear today made him look more vulnerable than usual.

“For people with Multiple Personality Disorder, times of stress or change can be a trigger for a switch,” he said, putting all his desire to reassure Hisoka into sounding certain about what he was saying. What the man needed now was stability. He couldn’t be anything but a rock for him. “If I had known of his existence and the kind of relationship you had with him, I would have taken a different approach. In my experience, sulking is not the same as wishing to leave someone for good.”

“So he’s not going to just vanish? I mean, you think this will blow over when he’s had time to process what he saw between us?” Hisoka asked, trying to sound relieved. “I didn’t intend to upset him; I do care about him.”

“He won’t vanish, mon cher,” Hannibal assured. “He asked you to hide his existence, and you did just that. He has to live with the consequences of his choices now. You did nothing wrong. In my experience, personalities, whether dormant or not, are very hard to eradicate entirely. The kind of
therapy that’s currently available to treat MPD would look to integrate them into a whole, rather than eradicate one completely. Is he usually active?”

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“Yes, more so than he has been recently. At least when we're together, I can't really confirm if it's the same when I'm not with him. We don't tend to talk about that.” Hisoka admitted, trying to hide his surprise at how happy the reassurance made him. *I'm going to make this up to you Illu-chan. I want to see you smile again.*

***

“It sounds like your relationship with him is an intense one, mon cher,” Hannibal observed. “Perhaps seeing you connecting so intensely with someone else caused him to question some of his assumptions about who you are? Have you asked Lulu about it?”

You are capable of so much more, Hisoka. Don’t let old ideas hold you back. Elijah will adapt; he’s dating you. He’s chosen a force of nature; he has to desire change and motion. He wants you to challenge him.

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“Lulu just assures me that he’s fine and that Elijah wants me to be OK,” Hisoka replied as he repeated her words to him with a sigh. “He’s never seen me hit, subspace. He doesn’t see me as submissive. I think that you may be right about him reevaluating what he knew about me. I’m guessing the longer we’ve been together, the bigger that shock would be for him?”

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Hannibal nodded, keeping his eyes and posture gentle. “Yes, he has had longer to form his own ideas about who you are. But that does not mean that he can’t adapt. Hisoka, he chose you, always remember that. He chose a man who fights, fornicates and lives his life with abandon. Just as Lulu said: You are a fire, and he knows that. If she isn’t worried, then I see no reason for you to be either. Unless,” he paused and met Hisoka’s gaze. “You are also worried about what happened in the playroom? You said that he had never seen you like that, but from everything you have said and I have seen, you had never experienced it either.”

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“I haven't. It was a strange feeling. I'm not sure how I feel about it,” Hisoka confessed as he looked at his hands. "From what Lulu told me; she's familiar with it, and Elijah as well. I can't ever recall having an experience like it before. Everything was fuzzy, and it was almost like I was floating? I think the closest I've ever come to feeling something like it would be the high I get from a hard-fought battle.”

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“Our minds and our desires are complex and many-faceted things,” Hannibal explained. “You, like everyone on this planet, have needs that you desire to be fulfilled. You said before that Elijah dominates you when you feel the need arise within you, but by getting your submissive to perform that role, they are still serving you. I would suggest that I represent a safe way for you to hand over the reins entirely for a short time. I can not kill you or irreversibly hurt you without severe consequences, and I will not, on principle, give up my duty of care for you. You have been persistent with your pursuit of me, and I have made no secret of where my tastes lie. On some
level, you wanted to see what I was capable of, which also means that you wanted to find out more about yourself. So, tell me, what did you learn, mon cher?"

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"That you can make me feel something I've never felt before," Hisoka said plainly, smirking when another stab of pain followed the path of the first one. "I already knew you were a sadist, and well, I already suspected that you found me attractive. It was more a confirmation of things than a new discovery. If you'll forgive me for saying so."

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“I would never chastise you for testing a theory, mon cher,” Hannibal said with a smile. “But I would always ask you to look at your motivations. What made you want to provoke me into punishing you, instead of asking me directly?”

He already knew the answer: Asking him directly would mean that Hisoka would have to have confronted, and accepted his desire to submit, which he was still clearly reluctant to do. But there were some things that people had to conclude for themselves. Hisoka was shaken, but he was also not backing away. He was a fighter.

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“I wanted to see what you would do,” Hisoka confessed as he closed his eyes briefly to savour the stinging that the Nen’s activation had left behind. “I know you value honesty, but where is the fun in just asking you?”

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Hannibal chuckled. “Indeed. Did I live up to your expectations?” he asked, relaxing back into his chair.

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Hisoka looked back up at Hannibal feeling a little unsure of how to answer. "I don't know if I had any concrete expectations. I never expected to have that experience, but if I was honest...I thought I'd have needed to wear you down a little longer." Did you give in because I was in your territory? I felt your arousal; you can’t pretend you don’t desire me, we both know you do.

***

“I promised to be your dominant, Hisoka,” Hannibal said with a smile. “I never promised that it would only be the case within these walls. But there are still lines that I can not cross, no matter the level of attraction I may feel. I would be doing you a disservice, and you are worth far more than that. You deserve more than to be used as a way for people to vent their frustrations. I refuse to use you, mon cher.”

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You refuse? Does that mean that on some level you want to? Hisoka wondered as he took in what Dr. Lecter was saying, the residual tingles in his arm were becoming distracting. "You said you didn't want to leave me, but that you had to. Then you lied to cover up that I had provoked you," he started and paused with a frown. "So you weren't frustrated? I hadn't annoyed you?"

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“Not at all, mon cher,” Hannibal said kindly. “I wasn’t annoyed at you at all. I was impressed.” He smiled. “I will admit to being somewhat frustrated, but that was for other reasons. You were magnificent. Believe me when I say that you will know if I am annoyed at you, and you will be punished accordingly.”

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“That I managed to push you to go as far as you did?” Hisoka asked with growing curiosity. “If Lulu hadn’t been with me...would you have gone further?”

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Hannibal continued to smile, and said kindly, “No, mon cher, I wouldn’t have. As I said, I will not use you simply to sate a passing desire. The rules are there for a reason, and I would need to find myself in extremely exceptional circumstances to break them. I am a man of principle, Hisoka. You should know that by now.” 

You think that I don’t know that you’re trying to get me fired for misconduct? Do you believe that I would be so foolish?

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Humming thoughtfully Hisoka looked over Dr. Lecter’s shoulder. “Would you have stayed if I’d been on my own?” he asked quietly.

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“Yes,” Hannibal said sincerely. “I wanted nothing more than to stay with you, but my duty took me away.”

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“But you’re duty would still be pulling you away if I was on my own,” Hisoka countered as he tried to make sense of what he was feeling. “If you could make an excuse to stay with me if Lulu wasn’t there, then why didn’t you because she was? She’s not my dominant, you are.”

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“And I explained to you why I left,” Hannibal said. “If there were no one to take care of you, then I would have stayed. As it was, Lulu, who has known you and cares for you was more than equipped to do that. I was then able to set things up outside so that your absence would not have been questioned. I chose to allow you time to heal in comfort and with someone you cared about, then set up your return so that you would not have to worry. It was my duty to care for you and so I did, by allowing you time with your partner and making sure that you were not disturbed. I did make sure that your Lulu was OK with all of this before I left, mon cher. The reason I would stay if she were not there was that you would not have been safe.”

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That’s not the point, though; you said you were my dominant. I never agreed that you could leave me in someone else’s care. It shouldn’t matter if Lulu is my lover; you had a responsibility to me. I thought you were going to be different to him.

Hisoka opened his mouth to protest but closed it and crossed his arms over his chest as he looked back at the fireplace. I need to be careful. I can’t be too challenging. He thinks he was in the right. I’m not gonna change his mind by being argumentative. It’s not like I want him to be my Master for real. So it doesn’t matter, I shouldn’t be getting worked up over it.
“She kept fussing over me even after we got home,” he said eventually. “I think she took the request to heart. As much as she pushes the boundaries, she’s incredibly submissive, and I know she cares for me. If she believed it would make me happy, she’d do pretty much anything.”

***

“A rare gift, mon cher, from a rare and wondrous woman,” Hannibal agreed. “I like her a lot, but I do like Elijah too. He has...spirit. It’s clear that he would defend you to the end; they both would. You are a remarkable man; it seems only fitting that you would find such remarkable partners.”

***

“I don’t care about many people, but I do care about them. Even if I’ve given the opposite impression,” Hisoka said quietly. “They’ve never been afraid of me, even knowing the things I’ve done. If anything, it’s what attracts them to me, to begin with.”

***

“Being accepted for who and what we are is a rare gift. But they are not the only ones who have given it,” Hannibal pointed out. “I would imagine that they feel similarly about you. Not many would accept them both for who they are. You have given them the acceptance they need as well. It must have taken a great deal of courage for them to show you their alter, may I ask which of them it is? I know you chose to tell me Lulu’s name first but was that simply because their body is female, or was she always the dominant personality? It will help me to understand the nuance of your relationships if I know who came first.”

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“The personality I met first was Elijah, but I don’t know if he’s the alter as when I am with them, it’s usually just him and me. Or me and Lulu,” Hisoka advised. “We were friends before we became lovers. I had the overwhelming urge to claim him as mine. I’ve been their Master since, but their family can be a little on the overprotective side,” he added thinking of how fiercely Kikio tried to shelter Killua from the world.

***

“I see,” Hannibal said thoughtfully. “So, enlighten me, Hisoka, when did you first notice the change in their behaviour? Was it before or after your fight at the Arena?” he asked, trying to allow Hisoka to work out what the unexpected shift might mean for himself.

It was quite clear to Hannibal that both Elijah and Lulu loved him, and the thought of losing him had triggered a need to be close to him. Seeing him claim his Master had sent Elijah over the edge for a time and Hisoka needed to be able to recognise that.

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“After I came here,” Hisoka replied, not sure what Dr. Lecter was driving at. “It’s recent that Lulu has been out around me so much more than Elijah. And only since your party that he’s allowed her essentially free reign. They knew I was determined to fight Danchou; they never tried to stop me.”

***

Smiling still, Hannibal said, “But they still nearly lost you, mon cher. Have you ever talked to them about that fact?”
“It’s not come up,” Hisoka answered honestly. “The time I’ve been here in Yorknew, it’s the longest time we’ve been able to spend together. Usually, we’d get a night or two here and there...it’s not exactly conducive for serious conversations. Our time is precious, and we like to make the most of it. When we’re apart, we call when we can and text when we have a free moment.” He shrugged, feeling the soft pricking sensation on his arm climbing further until it started to spread over his chest. “It’s probably not the healthiest relationship, but it’s the only serious one I’ve had. There have been flings, but I’ve never considered them to be a real relationship I was just in it for the sex.”

“I would suggest that you consider that Elijah may be scared,” Hannibal said gently. “He has nearly lost you once, and whilst it was more than evident that Lulu enjoyed seeing you submit, watching me have such an effect on you may have shaken Elijah somewhat. He could well be worried that he may lose you, or that he has not fulfilled your needs in the way that he once believed he could. Shock affects us all in different ways, but talking to him will help. If you aren’t used to discussing things like that with him, then I can offer you some reading material. I have a few books on Multiple Personality Disorder too if you would be interested to learn more about it?”

*Can you not see that they love you? Oh, mon cher, I would happily rip your father in two for the damage he has done, but why have Elijah or Lulu never told you how they feel? Is it possible that they think you won’t believe them?*

“You’d do that for me? Let me borrow your books, I mean,” Hisoka hesitantly asked. “You’re not going to send me back to the bookstore?”

Stealing was Danchou’s thing, not mine.

“My books are for more than just show, mon cher,” Hannibal said warmly. *Let me prove to you that I trust you.* “You are under my care, and so it’s only fair that I provide you with what you will need to complete your therapy. I am more than happy to make some recommendations for you as far as the book shop is concerned, but they do not have the selection that is at my disposal.” He crossed his leg and rested his arm on it. “You know where I live; you can return them after you have finished with them.”

“Are you inviting me over?” Hisoka asked with an amused smile tugging at the corner of his mouth. “I’m grateful for the offer; I wouldn’t know where to start with this. All I know is that I want to be able to support them both. They need me.”

“My door is always open to you, mon cher,” Hannibal said. “As is my library. You can come to me for anything, but I will add that I may not be able to give you what you desire.” He thought of the rose outside the room. “The boundaries of my profession will still be respected, no matter how beautiful the gifts you give me may be. I will, however, always strive to give you what you need.”
“You liked my origami. It seemed a shame to destroy it when you appeared to value it. So I left that up to you. When I saw the display, I was surprised. The books would be helpful...I’m just a little unsure what to say,” Hisoka mumbled before he pulled out a large deck of cards from his pocket and began to absently shuffle them to disguise his twitchiness. Dr. Lecter’s Nen didn’t seem to be deactivating, and he could feel his focus slipping.

Why did you mention gifts? You barely looked out into the waiting room before asking me to come in. Were you watching me without me knowing? That’s certainly possible; you are a Nen Master after all. Watching the life fade from your eyes will be especially captivating, how will you feel as you realise you’re dying?

“That’s not something that happens often. Usually, I have an answer for everything.” He grinned as he riffle-shuffled the cards a few times. “It’s still rather flattering to see the paper menagerie each time I visit,” he added.

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“They deserve a chance to thrive and be appreciated, as do we all,” Hannibal said, watching Hisoka fiddle with his cards. “Does it make you uncomfortable that I value what you’ve made for me?”

***

Thrive? How can a paper animal thrive? “I said it was flattering,” Hisoka replied as he continued to shuffle, ignoring the subtle change from soft pin-pricks over his skin to a warm almost burning sensation. “Why should it make me uncomfortable? You told me quite plainly that you appreciate art in all forms. Origami is an art, so it makes sense that you’d like it. Now I’ve seen your home; I can see that you do have a broad taste.”

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“Why indeed, mon cher?” Hannibal asked, opening up his closed question and echoing Hisoka’s words back at him.

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“I don’t know, maybe because it’s not something I’m used to? People don’t tend to like unfamiliar things, and I’m no exception to that. Did it never make you feel odd when you were suddenly treated differently to what you’d come to expect?” Hisoka asked, taking a gamble and relaxing when the heat under his skin receded once again. You act like you know so much about me; either you’re bluffing, or you have something to compare my reactions to. Is it yourself, or somebody else you knew?.

***

“I am no stranger to upheaval or to changing perceptions,” Hannibal said, uncrossing his leg and allowing his body to consciously relax. “As a youth, I lived in what many would call a palace by today’s standards; then it was all taken from me. My life and home were destroyed, and I was left to flee into the wilderness with my sister. I made it to Meteor City and then had her taken as well. I have learned that people are far more than what they appear to be on the surface, and it is now my job to see beyond that and help people look at themselves from a fresh perspective. I am not superior to you in any way. We are both men, and we have both lived unique and interesting lives. Why should I treat you any differently to how I would expect to be treated myself?”

***
Hisoka stared for a brief moment as his hands came to a stop and he resisted the urge to sneer at the question. *Meteor City? That's certainly a step down from a palace, but it explains the pretentiousness, I suppose.* “Not everyone is as courteous as you,” he remarked once he regained control of his emotions and leant forward to offer his tarot deck to Dr. Lecter.

"Do you want to give them a quick shuffle? I'm curious about which card you would get." He kept his tone playful, grinning impishly as he waited for his Doctor’s reaction.

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Reaching forward and activating his Gyo, Hannibal noted that Hisoka hadn’t used his Nen on the cards, yet.

Nodding graciously, he accepted the pack and began to shuffle them as he observed his submissive’s reactions. “Of course,” he said. “I’d be happy to. I dislike hypocrisy, and so I practice what I preach. In my opinion, there is no excuse for discourtesy. The world is unfair but never rude. Humans gave each other that particular gift, and it’s one of the few things that I refuse to accept. I do not believe that a man as intelligent, insightful and skilled as you should be treated as anything less than my equal.”

Handing the cards back, he resisted the urge to brush the stray strands of red hair from Hisoka’s brow. “I’d be interested to hear what you think about the subject, mon cher.” *Are you going to try and avoid talking about it again, or will you step up and stop trying to run from your own mind. I know you have opinions, why are you trying to avoid voicing them today?*

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“Those from my original home would say that you’re a fool,” Hisoka countered. “Well, except for my mother, but she’s no longer around. In the Arena, I was valued for my prowess in the ring, but few of those fans would dare to approach me sober unless they were the sort to seek out danger for fun and wanted to seduce me. Still, it kept my libido satisfied, so I learnt to enjoy the game.”

Smiling, he relaxed back into his chair and drew the top card from the deck. *The Moon? How fascinating, hidden desires, indeed.*

"Do you know much about the meanings of tarot cards Doctor?” he asked innocently as he mentally recalled the meaning of the card.

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“Why don’t you enlighten me, mon cher?” Hannibal said, eyes sparkling with delight. There had been no Nen use so far. “And I’m still interested to hear what you think. You have told me about what everyone around you has said, but I’m not interested in them. I’m interested in you, Hisoka. Tell me, what does Hisoka Morow think about my principles?”

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“I find you interesting, the world chewed you up and spat you back out into Meteor City. Danchou was abandoned there by his parents; thrown away like the trash they built their homes from. But unlike him, you try to improve the world instead of punishing it. You seek to give people the chance that you didn’t get,” Hisoka replied coolly as he tapped the card against his chin, and crossed his legs to hide his reaction to the band. “Comedy and Tragedy, it strikes me that you’d consider wasting one’s gifts to be rude. I can see a similarity between us in that regard; except I don’t care enough about the weak to pay them much attention. Now, are you curious about the
card you got?” Is that enough for you? If you want me to take off my mask, you’ll have to take yours off first.

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“If you wish, mon cher,” Hannibal said and gestured for Hisoka to continue. He didn’t much care what came up, the cards weren’t important, but the insight they gave him into Hisoka’s mind was fascinating.

“And yes, I would say deliberately wasting your own potential, without thinking through the logic for your choices would be rude. But maybe not for the reason one would first think.

He crossed his leg again and got comfortable in his chair. “For me, the person whom you are being rude to, is yourself. Deliberately neglecting yourself in order to focus on others, for example, I would think of as hypocrisy in it’s most blindly masochistic, and selfish state. I could not care for you properly if I did not know myself. So, if I had neglected to look inside and not made peace with what I found, any ‘care’ I gave you, would instead, be selfish and harmful. I would be using you to feed my own ego and further neglect my self-reflection. I could cry foul when it didn’t work, and blame you for my inadequacies; saying that you didn’t put in enough effort, or that you weren’t listening to what I had to say, but that would all be in order to mask my neglect. A therapist who places their self-worth within a client and the outcome of their sessions, is a therapist to be avoided.”

He tilted his head and waited for Hisoka to absorb what he had said. “I have been chosen as your therapist because I understand darkness and I do not fear it. I can assure you that whatever lies within you that you do not want the world to see, will not deter me.”

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“You already know things about me that the vast majority don’t and never will,” Hisoka replied as he flipped over the card to reveal The Moon, one of the Major Arcana, and couldn’t help the smile that spread over his face.

“Well, this certainly is an interesting draw, considering what we’ve just been discussing. Traditionally, The Moon card is said to represent the subconscious, illusions and our hidden desires. If it is drawn reversed, then it represents confusion, even fear. I could draw more if you wanted, then the card would represent the past. The next would be the present and the third, the future,” he explained. “Or if you prefer, we could continue talking about your principles. I do find that they are ones that I can respect. I like to see people reach their full potential, and I intend to reach my own. Everyone thought that I was worthless, and part of me would enjoy seeing them realise that they were wrong. The rest of me doesn’t really think it matters as long as I know that they were wrong.”

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Did you not listen to what I was saying, mon cher, or are you still trying to deflect? Hannibal thought, biting back his annoyance.

“Hisoka, your time here is to talk about whatever you wish. I am not here to discuss myself. I am happy to answer your questions when they are appropriate, but I am not going to allow you to use me to avoid the problems that are clearly on your mind. I would advise you not to push your luck any more; you will find that it is close to breaking point.”

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“If it’s up to me what I talk about,” Hisoka said calmly. “Then, well, fortune telling is part of my heritage. Something I don’t share with many, and I’d like to share it with you. So I would like to continue with the reading. You liked my origami…where I am from this is considered an art in its own right.”

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“Then, mon cher, I would like to see you work,” Hannibal said, waving for Hisoka to continue. “Explain what else can the cards tell you about me?”

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“Of course, it would be my pleasure. Let’s see; your second card will represent the present.” Hisoka paused to regain his focus, pushing away his more lewd thoughts as his heart sped up after feeling the band fire. He drew the next card. “The Wheel of Fortune, how wonderful. This suggests positive changes are coming very soon. Typically, it’s regarded as good luck when asking about careers or health, even romance. Sometimes it can even hint at the start of a new relationship. Alongside The Moon card, it’s a most interesting draw.”

Placing the two revealed cards on the small table beside him, Hisoka hummed thoughtfully. Hidden desires and positive changes? It’s been a while since I’ve read the cards, but this is a little unsettling. There’s something in the way you look at me; I’m sure you want me. Once he was happy that Dr. Lecter could see them, he drew the final card and chuckled.

“It seems the cards like you,” he explained before flipping it around for his therapist to see. “Your future card is The Sun, one of the luckiest cards in the tarot. It seems that if you have been searching for something, that you are nearing the end of your quest.”

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A mysterious lover will appear to complete my search, really? You expect me to fall for that? he thought, but smiled enigmatically at his submissive.

“Romance, mystery and a quest,” he summarised. “I am leading quite the exciting life, aren’t I?” he said, wondering if Hisoka believed in anything he was telling him. There was always one way to make sure. Con artists rarely enjoyed it when the spotlight was shone on them.

“How about you, mon cher?” he asked. “I have let you see me, will you afford me the same insight?”

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Hisoka chuckled as he gathered up his cards and placed them back into the deck, then reshuffled them. “Sure, why not. It’s been a while since I read for myself,” he agreed readily and drew three cards face down on the side table.

“Let’s see what they have to say,” he mused as he flipped over the first card to reveal the five of cups. “Well, I can’t really say that’s unexpected. For my past, I have the five of cups, which represents loss and self-pity. I would agree that I used to feel rather sorry for myself in my youth, until the fateful day that I snapped. Bathing in father’s blood changed me in more ways than one,” he said thoughtfully as he revealed the next card and paused. Really? Why did it have to be that card? he wondered.

“My present is much more positive, and my cards would agree - the Ten of cups, a card of joy, achievement and dreams being fulfilled. What does the future hold?” he asked rhetorically, turning
over the final card. “The Ace of Pentacles, it would appear that a great opportunity for personal growth and prosperity will come my way soon. Well, that’s wonderful news, perhaps you’ll have a more positive influence on my life than I thought.”

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*So you do believe, interesting.* Everything Hisoka had told him was correct, as far as the meanings of the cards were concerned, Hannibal knew. What was interesting was the spin he’d put on it all.

“It would appear that we both have an interesting future ahead of us,” he agreed and quirked his mouth into a quick smirk. “Maybe my secret admirer is closer than I think?”

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“I’m afraid the cards can’t go into that much detail, it’s more advisory than anything. I learnt when I was fairly young, and I keep the cards for sentimental reasons mainly. But I wasn’t lying, it is part of my heritage,” Hisoka replied evenly as he gathered the cards back up once more.

***

“So you hail from Glam Gas?” Hannibal asked, taking an educated guess. The travellers of that land were highly superstitious people, and that would explain a lot about the bullying and ostracisation he’d talked about. They were one of the few cultures that still believed in the Iccantado and Hisoka’s eyes would have singled him out as ‘other’.

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Hisoka froze for a moment and closed his eyes. “The outskirts, a little to the east of the main city. A small farming community,” he mumbled before sighing and putting his cards away. “Not even my lover’s know that about me,” he pointed out, relaxing back into the chair as a warm, fuzzy feeling washed over him.

***

“Then I am flattered you chose to tell me. You are certainly making great strides towards your personal growth,” Hannibal said happily. “I myself hail from a town near the seaport of Kakin City called Lithu. Officially, I hail from the city itself,” he added and nodded at Hisoka. “We are even again.”

“Who taught you to read the cards?” he asked as he wondered about the likelihood of the travellers having a recessive gene that could produce that specific shade of gold within their population.

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“There was an old woman that mother used to visit once a week. As I didn’t really have any friends, she’d take me with her. She didn’t seem to mind me as much as the other adults,” Hisoka explained with a small smile. “She’d give me candy and talk to me for hours; she didn’t have any family left. I don’t know how my mother knew her.”

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“An example of acceptance like that can leave a lasting impression on us,” Hannibal said. “I can see why you keep her memory close. ‘Did she teach you anything else, mon cher”

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“Sewing,” Hisoka said, straight away. “It’s a handy skill when you don’t have much money.”

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“It is,” Hannibal agreed. “I had to rely on the magazines I would find on the dump. My inner child envies you that,” he added with a warm chuckle. “It’s strange what childhood gives us and what it takes away. We were both made to grow up quickly, but the people who truly matter will never leave us and shall forever stay in the land that that bright-eyed child saw them in. They never leave us, and it is nice that you honour her memory by using what she taught you.”

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“Nanna was kind to me, and to my family. I think she was just happy for somebody to talk to, but it meant a lot to a lonely child,” Hisoka said quietly. “They’re her cards. I took them after she passed on. She was my only friend before the circus.”

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“Companionship is something that is vital to us all. Humans are a social species, as are all the creatures we know of with a human level of intelligence,” Hannibal added, thinking of the pictures in the few academic texts he’d read about the Iccantado and comparing them against Hisoka. It can’t be you. No. You were cold-reading me. I gave you enough hints for you to put that together. You can’t be what I’ve been searching for. You’re nothing like the stories... “We all crave connection. I invited Pariston into my life for that exact reason. I was responsible for his father’s death, and so I could not allow myself to leave him as I had been, bereft of love and affection. I am sure your teacher looked forward to every visit, mon cher.”

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I know I did. “She probably did, I used to show her my shuffling. Nanna always seemed to enjoy watching me,” Hisoka sighed. “I didn’t realise you and Pariston were so close; I’m guessing you were a Blacklister when you met him?”

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“I was, yes,” Hannibal said gravely. “Our paths crossed when he was eleven years old. I remembered how it felt to be him. He was lost, and it was because of me. I had a choice to make, and I opted for the one that would give me what I lacked at the time. My life was changing, so was his. He believes it was destiny that brought us together, and he thanked me the other day for it. In his own way. He said that he was most grateful to have been in the right place, at the right time, to be able to see you make Dr. Chilton squirm the way you did.”

He gave Hisoka a wicked grin. “I must say, I understand the sentiment. You do enjoy your powerplay, don’t you, mon cher?”

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“He wanted to feel superior, so I let him. Building things up to destroy them is my thing, I’m sure you noticed,” Hisoka said with a smirk.

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“I had noticed,” Hannibal said knowingly. “Letting a man walk into a trap of his own desires is an old trick but one that works surprisingly well nonetheless.”
Who’s going to come out the winner in our case, I wonder. What do I want from you? The image of Hisoka panting below him, a collar around his neck and blood on both of their lips, flashed across his vision and he recrossed his legs. A man, obedient and supernaturally gifted for his own. The perfect partner; the Iccantado. But that’s not you, he thought bitterly. You want to kill me, not serve me. It’s all an act. It’s a wonderful one, and we’ll fight a fantastic battle, but you don’t really want to be mine. You want me more than you realise, though. What will I be able to teach you before you turn on me, I wonder?

“Is it a technique that you use outside combat as well?” he asked.

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“Of course, it’s a trick that’s ensured my survival on many occasions. If people underestimate me, then they overreach themselves and leave weak points open. The one person it never worked on would be Danchou. His Nen allowed him to plug any gaps in his abilities that I could potentially take advantage of,” Hisoka agreed readily. “It’s a large part of the attraction I felt. An opponent whose weapon was to use the Hatsu of others as his own, it was like fighting a one-man army. Pity he had to include an actual zombie legion.”

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“So it’s a defence mechanism?” Hannibal observed. “What threat could a man like Dr. Chilton pose to you?”

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“After I’ve met him and tested him, I can say none. Before your dinner party, he could have been both a threat and not. I just wanted to be certain before I completely wrote him off as not worth my time,” Hisoka explained. “He’s nenless, isn’t he?”

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Hannibal sighed sadly, “Alas, yes. He doesn’t believe that it exists. No matter how many times he sees my bracelets at work, he never believes that they are anything more than a hypnotic aid. He has asked everyone but me about them so far. He saw you fight and still doesn’t believe; it’s quite astounding the lengths that man will go to in order to prove me wrong. His ego could well be the death of him one day,” he said sadly, thinking of what Ayato had told him about Chilton’s renovations. “I was surprised to see how he reacted to you, though. He was like a moth to a flame. Please elaborate, is that something that often happens, mon cher?”

How many strangers are drawn to you? The Iccantados are supposed to be like magnets.

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“As I’ve gotten older,” Hisoka confessed, the warm woolly feeling was making him want to close his eyes and drift off. “It’s made keeping myself entertained at the hotel a little easier, but I have my lover’s with me now. It’s always a little, what’s the word? Surprising, when I come across people who think I’m exotic. Although it varies highly between countries. In Padokea and Jappon I get a lot of attention. In places like Kukan’yü, it can be anything from a warm reception to the fear and suspicion that I grew up with.” Are you saying he was acting differently around me than he would normally? Why would he do that, except in a pathetic attempt to impress me?

***

“Superstitions are interesting things,” Hannibal observed. “In Kakin, whilst I still lived there, I
have memories of the gardener chiding their wife for worrying over their child's freckles. The local townsfolk had suggested that they may be devil marks. Conformity has its place, but it is only through the other that anyone can ever find a norm. For the world to understand the light, darkness must also exist.

I wonder what it was about you that Dr. Chilton was drawn to, that the others were not? he thought. He can’t have been interested in taking you to bed. Margot and Pariston didn’t desire you either. That directly contradicts the tales. You are a mass of contradictions, aren’t you, Hisoka? he thought of the rose. You do like to escalate quickly though.

“But both need each other to balance them out,” he continued. “The world needs both its heroes and its villains. And the wonderful thing is that we get to choose which side of the line we belong to.”

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“What if I would prefer to dance on the line in defiance of society’s expectations?” Hisoka asked, intrigued to hear the answer. I could actually sleep right now, but I know I can’t. Showing weakness to you would be idiotic, think Hisoka. It’s his Nen, fight it.

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“Then I would say that you have an interesting life ahead of you, mon cher,” Hannibal said with a laugh. “And I would very much like to help you achieve that dream.”

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“It’s my personal opinion that love and hate are simply two sides of the same coin, so why shouldn’t good and bad be? Or hero and villain? I’m not overly fond of black and white,” Hisoka explained as he uncrossed his legs and glanced over at the bookcases for a moment. “For Meteor City, as an example, the Troupe would be heroes. They bring back resources and offer protection, but the outside world calls them criminals. It’s all perspective, don’t you agree?”

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“I couldn’t have said it better myself,” Hannibal said, impressed. “For every midnight, there is also a twilight and a dawn. It is the places in between where life begins to get interesting, and where we learn who we truly are.”

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“The places where the lines blur are where you find the most interesting people. At the Arena we all had a common goal,” Hisoka explained. “But it didn’t stop friendships forming, with the understanding that inside the ring, it was everyone for themselves. I’m going to miss it there; I doubt I’ll be allowed to return anytime soon.”

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“Friendships?” Hannibal asked. “They are rebuilding the tower. I see no reason for you not to be allowed to return if it is decided that you are innocent and stable. You had friends at the Arena?”

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Hisoka smirked a little, “I had rivals, rather than friends. I was known for killing everyone I went up against.”
“I see,” Hannibal said. “So what about Gon Freecss?”

“What about him?” Hisoka asked as he tilted his head. “I don’t know if he’d consider me a friend, and yes, I fought him at the arena. We had an agreement; he needed my badge to pass the exam. He managed to get it. It was actually very clever how he did it with his fishing pole. He lost it to another applicant; I just so happened to need theirs, which was rather amusing. So I gave him the badge, he earned it. However, he didn’t want to accept what he saw as charity, so I gave him a challenge. To keep the badge, and look after it until he could land a punch to my face. Then I would take it back. He met my challenge, but he hadn’t reached his potential, he wasn’t ripe.”

“So, their ultimate potential is only reached through fighting you? Or is it you who test your potential when you fight them? What did you learn by fighting Mr. Lucilfer, mon cher?”

“That Danchou is wonderfully creative,” Hisoka sighed happily at the memory. “I was enjoying myself immensely; it’s such a pity things didn’t work out between us. As for your other questions, I’m not sure how to answer that.”

“What’s holding you back?” Hannibal asked, observing Hisoka curiously.

Hisoka frowned. Every fight is a test of strength, but how do I explain how I just get a feel for a person’s potential? I just look at them, and I know.

“It’s not something I can easily explain, for me, fighting is as much about pleasure as it is about proving my strength. Some people I fight because I have to,” he paused to consider how he could make Dr. Lecter understand. “I wanted Gon to become a Hunter, so I made that deal with him. He’s rather unique. It was tough to stop myself from killing him. I wanted to...I know I could have done it easily. But it would have been a waste, and when I met him again on Greed Island, I knew I made the right choice. There’s just something I pick up on from people. I can’t really explain it. Even without Gyo active, I can easily pick out a Nen user from a crowd. I can’t explain it to you because I can’t explain it to myself. It just is, the world is full of strange and wonderful things, and I gave up trying to question it all a long time ago.”

“So you read Aura, that is very interesting,” Hannibal said curiously. “And it could explain your trouble reading me. I like to keep certain things private until they need to be revealed.”

“You’re skilled with the Nen technique of In,” Hisoka realised and groaned. “I really should have picked up on that sooner, once you revealed that you weren’t a Specialist. Users like ourselves more commonly practise it. Transmuters and Conjurers I mean. Well played Doctor.”
Hannibal smiled happily. “Those who hunt the Hunter’s must also be practised in their ways. I, like you, like only to reveal myself when it’s strictly necessary to do so.”

"Observant, logical, cautious to avoid walking into a trap. The more I think about it, the more you do fit my criteria. I guess your charisma blinded me,” Hisoka replied teasingly. You're also prone to being overly serious; I’m not sure if I can call you highly strung though.

“Flattery will get you everywhere,” Hannibal chuckled. “It would appear that I’m not the only one with charisma, mon cher.”

“Perhaps not, but you’ve yet to give me any sign of being bedazzled by my own. Then again, I could be wrong. You’re more skilful than most at concealment,” Hisoka purred as he ran his fingers over the Nen band around his wrist. And a most careful planner, I need to keep my wits about me. “I must confess, I find that rather alluring, it appeals to my natural inquisitiveness. It’s not meant out of any disrespect. I just like to know more about the people who catch my attention.”

Not even when I pressed myself against you at the party, mon cher? Do you not think of an erection as a sign of interest? Hannibal wondered, trying to imagine what Hisoka’s life must have been like if he assumed that only people who had sex with him were interested in him. What kind of disconnect do you have in your mind, Hisoka? What warped your perception of affection so strongly. It can’t just have been your father. Who else hurt you?

“Is it only in a sexual sense that I have caught your attention, mon cher?” Hannibal asked, straightening up. You have made it very clear that you find me attractive. Is that all you need to be able to desire a person’s company?”

“I’m a sexual creature at my core,” Hisoka replied and looked up at Hannibal through his lashes. “It’s been all I’ve needed in the past. Sometimes it’s just been a desire to fight; on other occasions, I’ve been drawn as if by instinct. And you’re a very attractive man, Dr. Lecter. I find it rather odd that you’re single. From the outside looking in, if you’ll permit me saying so, you appear to have it all. You’re a famous Hunter, a respected therapist, a skilled chef and an artist. At least I thought I spotted your name at the bottom of one of the larger drawings in your dining room. I’ve found myself thinking of that sky blue room, and the way you sent my mind soaring a few times since the party.”

So you were thrown by that. How much of what you’re telegraphing to me are you unaware of. Are you really so blind to your submissive desires?

“And what does it think of when it does revisit my house, mon cher?” Hannibal asked, mirroring Hisoka’s tone.
“That it doesn’t understand,” Hisoka said softly and lowered his gaze back to his bracelet.

“Well, for us to gain understanding, we must first ask questions,” Hannibal prompted gently.

“This is what you’ve been dancing around, isn’t it? You really don’t understand yourself, do you? What will you ask about first? Will it be your reaction or your motivations that you want to know more about?”

“But what if you don’t know what to ask?” Hisoka queried. “Surely, that doesn’t mean understanding is impossible?”

Hannibal smiled gently. “Then zoom your vision out, mon cher. Instead of focussing on finding the right words to describe a specific thing, pull back and ask about a group. Your motivations, for example. Explain to me what you were thinking about when you were trying to provoke me into punishing you. You said you simply wanted to find out what I would do earlier, but motivations are rarely that simple. Deep down, you knew I would punish you, so what was it that drove that desire?”

“I wanted to know how different you’d be in your own home compared to here, in the office. You interest me. I know you said you’d be my dominant, but there are limits to that. Because I’m your patient,” Hisoka started to say and paused. Why else would I do it? I’m not scared of a little pain, and I know you’re aware of that. “What else but curiosity and hedonism? You punished me with pain, even though we both know how much I get off on that. You left because your duty called you away. I understand what you said before. It was to protect me. You had to explain things. So why not come back if you didn’t want to leave? Unless you thought you’d interrupt something between Lulu and me, which could be considered rude, I suppose. The more I think about it; things don’t really add up to me at least. Pain doesn’t punish the masochistic; we both know that. You denied yourself more than you denied me,” he continued with a flirtatious smile. “If I weren’t your patient, would you have taken me?”

“If it were within our agreed limits, then yes, I would have,” Hannibal said frankly. “But I think you are missing one crucial piece to your puzzle, mon cher. What did you gain by inciting me into doing what I did?”

Hisoka frowned. “I got to see more of you. I know I can push you to hurt me and that you seem to have a room just for practising BDSM. That was my first experience of hitting subspace. You pushed me out of my comfort zone and into a submissive headspace far enough to give me that experience. I’m hoping it’ll allow me to take better care of Elijah and Lulu when I push them off that particular mental cliff.” He ran through the various things that came to mind and hoped that he’d hit the right answer. “You like the idea of me sexually submitting to you, and maybe…” he trailed off and closed his eyes. Do I want him to do it again? I’m not submissive, but you think I
am, don’t you, Hannibal? Sighing, he tilted his head back and looked up at the ceiling. And yet I keep thinking about how it felt when you took that cane to my feet, and then the one at your home, to my ass. “I saw a part of myself that I didn’t know about,” he mumbled shyly.

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“And how do you feel about seeing that part of yourself, mon cher?” Hannibal asked gently. He knew he couldn’t push Hisoka too fast, but that he most certainly needed the push. He was too afraid of what the pleasure he felt from submitting to him could mean. He couldn’t tell him, but he could help him reflect and realise that handing over control to him, and enjoying it, wasn’t a bad thing.

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“Conflicted, confused. Maybe a little bit anxious? I’m not sure how to feel about it. You know about my childhood,” Hisoka replied evenly but kept his gaze glued to the ceiling.

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“When reality challenges our expectations, it is often confusion, conflict and anxiety that well up within us first,” Hannibal explained. “Why don’t we work through them methodically? What was it about the experience that made you feel confused, mon cher?”

Slow and steady, he has to come to the conclusion himself. You can reward him when he reaches the right answer. Be patient, Hannibal. He has to come to you. You can’t make the first move, he reminded himself, subtly curling his fingers into his chair to stop him from going over to Hisoka and scooping him up into his arms so that he could show him over and over again that submission was what he craved.

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“I’ve taken the bottom role many times, with different people. It’s never been like that,” Hisoka replied mildly as he shifted his position and folded his arms over his chest again. “Yet I know I can get my lovers to that state easily. So why was it different with you? Is it just experience?”

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“I would suggest that it’s because you see me as your dominant,” Hannibal said calmly. “Elijah is still your submissive. No matter how much pain he puts you through or how he may use you, you can not see him as anything other than your property. You are essentially beating yourself when you request that Elijah top you. You did not have that option with me, mon cher, and you never will. You know that I am your dominant and that that is the end of the matter. By making that arrangement with me, you ensured that, whenever I am in charge, you can let yourself go.”

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But I trust Illu-chan, more than I trust you at least. “That can’t be all there is to it,” Hisoka insisted. You’re only in charge because I can’t kill you yet, and it’s going to be so much fun when that day arrives. “I’ve bottomed to people who weren’t my submissives too. Usually, so-called straight men who wanted to prove something and didn’t see the irony of having sex with me as their chosen method. It’s funny how they only seem to think it’s gay if you’re the one getting screwed.”

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“And are you angry that I did not follow that pattern?” Hannibal asked.
Why would I be angry? Hisoka blinked and opened his mouth to protest, but no sound came out, and he slumped in his chair. Am I angry? “I don’t know...maybe? Although I think I’d be more angry about the part that you did follow,” he retorted. I’m not weaker than you. I don’t care what you think. I’ll prove it to you, no matter how long it takes. You are going to die by my hand. “I don’t see myself as truly submissive, in case you hadn’t noticed. Even if I enjoy being on the bottom sometimes, I’ve only called one man Master before. Maybe I need a more hands-on approach to help me move on and untangle the crossed wires in my head? You clearly think I’m in denial; you showed me that there is an aspect in me that can submit to you. I could be good for you,” he said softly and fluttered his lashes. “I bet I could be the best you’ve ever had; you just need to put me to the test. Maybe I’ll even call you, Master, eventually.”

“Would you like to call me, Master?” Hannibal asked calmly. “Do you feel the need to prove yourself to me, Hisoka?”

“Why do I need to prove myself to you? You’re my dominant, but I haven’t given myself to you as property. That wasn’t in the agreement,” Hisoka hissed as he gripped the arms of the chair tightly. “We both know you desire me. I see it in your eyes. I’m not stupid; I just pretend to be because it’s easier to be underestimated. I was curious about you. There’s something...this strange feeling I get when I’m around you. It makes no sense; none of it makes any sense. You’re my dominant. I get that. I chose this, and I have to deal with the consequences, but that doesn’t explain what you’re doing to my head!” he snarled, unconsciously activating his Nen to hold himself in place. “Why do you remind me of him? I don’t understand; you don’t look like him. You say things that he would say...but you have Nen...he didn’t. Why can’t I stop thinking about you? I’m in the shower, and it’s always you! Every time I leave the hotel with Lulu or Elijah, something makes me think of you! And you make me think of him, and that night...the way the blood felt against my skin...I never felt so alive, so powerful.” He closed his eyes and laughed bitterly. “Is this some secondary ability of yours? To haunt my every waking moment? How long do I have before I’m going to be on my knees begging for you?”

So it’s not just me then. Are you feeling the pull too? Is this the key to unlocking you, mon cher? Do you need to submit in the same way that I need to dominate? Were you trying to tell me earlier when you offered to be my perfect partner? Was that your subconscious speaking to me? Hannibal wondered as he watched the man finally allowing himself to vent his frustrations.

“No, mon cher,” he said when Hisoka had finished. “That particular band can not manipulate; it merely reinforces my rules.” He leant forwards and allowed Hisoka time to calm in between his frustrated breaths, before continuing, “I hold a similar position to that of your father at present. I have a large amount of control over your life. Naturally, you would draw parallels. But unlike him, killing me will not earn you your freedom, and so - and it is quite understandable, I assure you - you are projecting your feelings of anger and frustration onto me. Sex is a release for you; a way of taking back control over a situation and you learned to use it in that way at a young age, when you used your father’s actions against him and made him pay the ultimate price. You used it to end a man you hated. Your problem is that your parallel stops there. You don’t hate me, Hisoka, and unlike your father, I am here to help. I am a source of stability, protection and care; all of which your father did not provide for you. I have not taken advantage of you sexually, whereas your father
did and I have only ever given you reassurance and positive feedback.”

He sat back in his chair. “Your father is the only archetype of an authority figure who sought to dominate you that you have, it is natural that you would draw comparisons; but, mon cher,” he said. “He was an example of everything that you should not do. I am here to be an example of a healthy way to go about things. I have told you from the start that there are certain lines that I will not cross, and that they are there for a reason. You are safe with me, Hisoka. I may hurt you, but I will never harm you. I understand your fear all too well. I would never do that to you. You have my word.”

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"I just wanted it to stop; he blamed me for so many things. When she left, he just got worse,” Hisoka muttered and shook his head sadly. "Father was a fool; he claimed I wasn't his kid. Mother insisted that I was, when she wasn't there to defend me, he stopped letting me call him that. He got what he deserved.”

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“That he did, mon cher,” Hannibal agreed. “Just as the people who hurt me as a child got what they deserved. Youth understands wickedness and injustice; it is only age that tries to rationalise it. You did the right thing, and thanks to you, the world is free of a true monster.”

He wanted to reach out; to comfort, but he knew that he couldn’t. Hisoka wouldn’t accept it, and it would be unprofessional. The show must go on, mon cher. I must keep up my performance. Will you ever get to see me, I wonder? Perhaps, at the end. I hope that's enough.

“I am not that kind of man,” he assured. “But you may use me to work through your pain. Killing the physical monster is only half the battle. I want to help you slay the beast that lives within your mind. I want to offer you peace.”

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I had peace before he was dug up by you! ”With your words?” Hisoka asked bluntly. "I don't hate him; I hated what he did and made me do. He's not worth the energy to hate."

***

“Words are powerful things, mon cher,” Hannibal observed. “A very great man once said that, ‘Words can be like X-rays if you use them properly - they’ll go through anything. You read, and you’re pierced.’ In your case, as well as mine, it is more what we hear that can cut us. But we both know one thing that many others don’t. Wounds heal. Yours was until the accident forced it back open. But the problem was that it had closed with the infection still inside. Given time, it would have spread to every part of you, and I, for one, can not stand to see that happen. Not to someone as strong as you. We are going to work together on this. You aren’t alone, Hisoka and we will lay his ghost to rest once and for all.”

I know you don’t see it yet, but you will. You will feel the pain he has caused you flowing from you soon enough. I will see you smile, and I will see you know peace. What will you be capable of without your ghosts holding you in their chains?

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"I didn't know you were an exorcist too,” Hisoka quipped before placing his hand over his face and sighing heavily. "Does seeing me worked up and frustrated press some hidden sadistic button for
you? He’s dead. I killed him. I’m not exactly in a rush to recreate that night, that’s taking catharsis a bit far even for me,” he growled.

***

“No, actually, it doesn’t, mon cher,” Hannibal said honestly, and reached for his sketch pad. It was half full of drawings that he had done over the past half-year. Faces he’d seen on the street, people and places from his past, a few landscapes and the image of Hisoka and Lulu staring lovingly into each other’s eyes at his house party were held within. He wondered what he would do and which half of the book he would choose.

“Here, Hisoka, take this. I want you to tear out five pages; they can be from anywhere in the book that you like. Then I want you to use the pages to create origami figures. They must all represent your father in some way. As you are doing that, I want you to tell me about your happiest memory. It can be from any time of your life and can be about any topic. Simply describe to me what you were doing, where you were and who, if anyone, you were with.”

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Hisoka gave Dr. Lecter a curious look before accepting the sketchbook. “Do you mean symbols of him? I’m not skilled enough to recreate a person,” he asked as he turned the book over in his hands. “What are you hoping to achieve? “It’s hard to decide what my happiest memory would be,” he mused, absently flipping through the book and noting that some of the pages had been used. “I can think of a few that seem rather obvious, but don’t quite feel like they should be it. Anything involving fighting seems like it’s too easy, and feeling powerful isn’t the same as feeling happy,” he mused as he tore out the first two blank pages he came across. “I have lots of happy memories which centre around sex, but again, if I’m being honest with myself it’s not the same either,” he sighed as he continued to flick through the book to keep himself busy until he reached the end and decided to take the last few pages to complete his set of five. “It depends what we mean by happy I suppose, what was yours? An example would help me.”

***

Hannibal allowed himself to think back to that day. Hisoka was clearly stalling, but it was OK, they had time. “I would have to say that it was when I was with Mischa. We were both outside in the garden. She was in the bathtub, and I was teasing her with her favourite colour. I was holding an aubergine out for her to try and grab, but she couldn’t reach it because she was too small.”

He smiled and felt the warmth of the summer sun on his back, the smell of freshly cut grass and pine needles from the nearby forest filled his nostrils, and Mischa’s happy laughter filled his ears. “She had such a captivating little laugh. She was what kept me from...turning entirely to the darkness. She was the good in my life. I will always remember her smile; the way she looked at me and challenged me to be better. She taught me what love was, and for that, I will be forever grateful. And, for the memory of the day, we played for hours with a bathtub and an aubergine on our front lawn.”

***

So you meant happiness in a pure and innocent sense? Do I have any memories like that? “Thank you,” Hisoka said quietly before looking down at the blank paper on his lap, he wasn’t sure what to make. “How do you make a sculpture to represent a man like him?” he wondered as he fiddled with the corner before deciding on his first sculpture, a small stylised frog. "I'm not sure if this is quite what you meant by happiest memory, but there was the time nanna pretended she was colourblind."
Hannibal smiled warmly. “That sounds interesting, please, go on.” He’d noted with interest that he hadn’t chosen to punish him by destroying his art. *You like me more than you’re letting yourself believe, but just how much do you like me, mon cher?*

"Mother used to only visit her once a month, but she was getting old and needed more help. So she started going every two weeks, and then once a week. Father complained about having to look after me," Hisoka continued as he placed the paper frog on the side table and started on his next piece by tearing the paper in half. "She decided to take me with her; I was nervous. People generally didn't like me," he sighed as he folded the first piece into a simple box and began working on the lid. "I was supposed to play in the back garden while she helped clean the house."

*And what was it that makes the memory happy for you, I wonder?* “I like your mother already,” Hannibal said, gently nodding and encouraging Hisoka to continue.

Smiling a little to himself, Hisoka fit the lid onto the box and sat the frog on top of it. "Nanna’s husband used to run an orchard, I was climbing the trees, but it upset her. She was worried that I was going to fall and hurt myself," he continued as he allowed himself to sink back into the memories. "She wouldn't settle until I came down and followed her back inside, it confused me. People normally didn't care about me, except for my mother," he paused to pick up his next sheet of paper. "She sat me down on this...very lumpy but comfortable sofa. It was very battered and said if I promised not to climb the trees, then I could have some candy. She had some leftover from something; I can't remember what it was."

“I can see why the memory would make you smile,” Hannibal said, watching Hisoka’s hands move in an almost hypnotic rhythm. “She sounds like a lovely lady. How did the candy taste?”

*So even back then you were shocked that people valued you. That explains the ingrained habit. I wonder what it would take to break you from it?*

"It's my earliest memory of having anything like that. I was so surprised. We never really had much money, so sweets weren't something I was used to. She thought it was endearing how I just sat there and stared at it," Hisoka chuckled to himself. "I was just as fascinated by the stickers as I was the chocolate. Once I got over the shock, I asked her why she wasn't afraid of me," he added softly as he twirled the small paper crab he'd made on his palm. "She smiled and asked what was there to be scared of? I was just a kid."

“A wise woman,” Hannibal said softly. He thought he knew where this story was heading, and it was something that had intrigued him ever since he’d read Hisoka’s file. One of the few things that the man was not secretive about, was his Hatsu.
"I asked her if my eyes really didn't bother her. She just smiled, patted me on the head and told me she was colourblind and that my eyes looked normal to her. Then she picked up her sewing kit and started repairing clothes," Hisoka recounted as he deftly folded a small boat out of the sketchbook paper. "I learnt from watching her. She didn't seem to mind me watching. Sometimes she'd tell me stories about her husband, she had a daughter, but she moved away a long time ago. She treated mother like her own child and me as her grandson." Placing the boat beside the other pieces, he hesitated to pick up the last sheet of paper. "When I asked if nanna really was colourblind, mother laughed and said she'd made it up to make me feel better. Nobody had ever wanted to spare my feelings before...I looked forward to the weekly visits after that."

***

“How wonderful. A woman who is worth the place you hold for her in your heart,” Hannibal said, smiling brightly at Hisoka. “She understood the value of dignity, and that, most importantly of all, we should treat our children with it. A beautiful soul.” For a beautiful man. “What will your last creation become?” he asked kindly, gesturing to the final piece of paper. “And if I may ask, what was the candy that she gave you called?”

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“It was called Texture Surprise,” Hisoka replied as he felt himself continuing to grow more content and let his fingers move to fold his last sculpture. “I found it rather difficult to think of symbols for him, father, I mean. But this last one just seems rather fitting, considering his end.” He hummed to himself as he worked, eventually holding up the finished piece. “It’s supposed to be a scorpion; I’ve never done it before...so I left it for last.”

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“How fitting,” Hannibal said, staring at the creation with open delight. “Poisonous, right to the end. It’s perfect, mon cher.”

He saw the glow of the bracelet around Hisoka’s wrist and wondered what sort of reward he was feeling right now. Nuance was everything; he knew it wouldn’t be sexual, but he wondered if it would be anything close to the peaceful glow he felt when he thought of his Mischa.

“I’d like you to select the one that reminds you most of your father and come with me,” he instructed, getting to his feet. “This particular process has two parts to it.”

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"I'll stick to the scorpion," Hisoka decided. The frog and the crab came out a little cuter than I planned. Why does he want me to get up? I'm comfy, why do I have to move? “Where are we going?” he asked once he forced himself to stand.

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“To the fireplace,” he said, striding around his desk and listening to the soft pad of Hisoka’s feet on his carpet as he followed. “Symbology is something that you instinctively seem to understand, and I know that you can appreciate its power, mon cher,” he explained, drawing to a halt beside the mantle. “Can you guess what I would like you to do?”

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"Are you suggesting I burn it?" Hisoka asked with a tilt of his head. "You want me to visualise his infection leaving me, am I on the right lines?"
“Precisely,” Hannibal said, gesturing towards the steadily burning flames. “In your own time. We can talk for as long as you like; you are my last patient of the day. Or, if you would prefer, I can leave you to your thoughts and simply wait in silence. This is for you. A way for you to, whenever you feel him polluting you, cleanse him from your system. Let the flames have him, mon cher.”

“I don't really want to waste time on him,” Hisoka said with a shrug looking at the small paper creature in his hand. "I don't feel polluted; I bathed in his blood to clean him from my soul. If we're laying him to rest together then shouldn't you have something to cast into the fire too?” he asked.

“If he’s not worth your time, mon cher, then why are you still so angry, and if he is not worth the effort, then holding onto that anger isn’t either,” Hannibal said gently, reaching up onto the mantelpiece and selecting the strip of cloth that he’d saved from Grutas’s collar.

“This is the last piece I have of the man who killed my sister. I keep it with me because I want to remind myself that there is a greater evil in the world than I will ever be.” He looked down at the faded brown cloth. “I will send this to the flame, along with your scorpion, but only if you take this seriously. That man is still hurting you, and it is precisely because you are refusing to acknowledge it, that he is able to wound you. No matter how small or large the cut is, it always needs cleansing. Are you willing to work with me, Hisoka? I do not do this lightly. This is the man that took the only thing that was good in my life from me.” He turned the cloth and saw the firelight turn it’s hughes to orange. “This would mark the end of an era.”

“Precisely,**” Hisoka wondered
and nodded, resisting the urge to crush his artwork. Father, you always were rather pathetic if I’m honest. But I wish she’d taken me with her.

Sighing, he closed his eyes and tried to focus on the idea of using his nen to turn his father into a tiny scorpion, smiling to himself as he imagined picking the creature up with his bungee gum. You can't hurt me or anyone else anymore. *I’m sending you where you belong*, he told the imagined creature. He fancied he could see dirty fingerprints where the man had touched him, that would be washed away, transforming into tendrils of smoke drifting away from him. The resulting peace surprised him, and he opened his eyes to stare at Hannibal.

"I think I am ready," he whispered.

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“Then together, mon cher,” Hannibal said, determined to follow through with his promise. “On the count of three, we let the men that chained us go. We start a new chapter.”

He let the sound of Grutas’s pathetic screams fill his ears as the scent of the stinking room aboard the boat surrounded him once more. So much blood. So much pain. He’d never thought that he’d allow himself to do this. “Three,” he said, and took a deep breath. “Two,” he brushed against Hisoka, feeling his heart speed up. “One,” he breathed, and let the cotton fly.

Grutas screamed again, and Hannibal had to force himself not to react. Hisoka had followed suit, throwing his scorpion into the fire straight after. This was about him, but Mischa’s fresh, and oh so innocent smell, had suddenly filled his nostrils. He felt a tear falling down his cheek.

It wasn’t Grutas that had been chained for all these years. It wasn’t him he had been holding onto. *Mischa*, he thought and closed his eyes. She was gone. He had set her free.

“Goodbye,” he said into the silence. "Goodbye, my Mischa.”

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Hisoka threw the sculpture into the fire in time with Hannibal's own offering. His lips curled as he saw the paper quickly catch fire and begin to turn into ash. He expected to feel triumphant, but instead, he felt lighter. He barely registered Dr. Lecter's goodbye but felt compelled to place his hand on the man's arm gently.

"A new blank page," he said softly. "For both of us, for my mother, nanna, and Mischa. They would want us to be free.” He hoped he hadn't crossed a line as he offered a small smile of reassurance.

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“Yes,” Hannibal said, composing himself and allowing Hisoka’s hand to remain in place on his arm. “Yes, they would. We held onto the worst of the world in the hopes that they would somehow keep the best with us.” He took a breath and flashed a smile at Hisoka. “I think we both forgot that the ones we love will never truly leave us, no matter how far apart we may be. Thank you, mon cher.”

He took another calming breath and was reassured when he smelled nothing but his office, the fire and Hisoka, free of all perfume and lotion. “How do you feel, mon cher?” he asked quietly.

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"Not like I expected, I thought I would feel powerful. Triumphant, I survived him. Instead, I feel lighter, maybe even a little empty?" Hisoka tried to explain as he realised he was still touching Hannibal and quickly pulled his hand back. "Sorry...I probably shouldn't have done that."

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“If I minded your touch, I would have said so, mon cher,” Hannibal assured, missing the warmth of his hand, despite the fire. “He was still within you, just as Grutas was within me. It is now up to us how we fill that void,” he explained, resisting the need to pull Hisoka to him.

Why do I want you? Why does this feel so intimate? What is it about you that is able to have such a strong impact? Not even Will affected me like this. “There is no rush. We are still whole; we’re simply free to choose who we let into ourselves now.” He turned back to the fire for a moment and felt the warmth on his face. “We are free.”

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Hisoka regarded Hannibal carefully. He felt awkward, and he wasn't sure why. "Why did you give me that sketchbook?" he asked, suddenly trying to break the silence.

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“Mainly to provide you with the paper that you would need, but also to give you a choice to hurt me if you wished to. You could have chosen to use one of my drawings to make your models, but you didn’t. Why was that?” Did it become clear to you that you were more angry with your father than you were with me? Have you realised that we’re different? That I’m nothing like him? I said plainly that you could choose whichever page you liked.

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"You didn't allow my creations to be damaged. So why would I damage yours? It wouldn't hurt you in any satisfactory way, and it would be rude, surely?" Hisoka replied with a frown.

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“I gave you permission, so, no, it wouldn’t have been rude. Petty, maybe, but not rude,” Hannibal said, patting Hisoka’s shoulder. “But it is good to hear that that kind of act would not satisfy you. It’s what sets you apart from most of the people I meet on a day to day basis, and reassures me that you are far more equipped than they are to make a positive change in your life.”

His bracelet’s glow had died down to barely a glint in the firelight, and he marvelled at how adept Hisoka was becoming at hiding his reaction to it. You do learn fast, don’t you, mon cher. Will it only ever be clear to me when you are receiving pain as your reward? What were you feeling just then? What did my Nen read in you?

“Would you like to bring the chairs closer to the fire? I think we have both earned a drink,” he said. “I have some lovely bottled water if you are still concerned that I may drug you without your permission,” he added, flashing Hisoka a teasing smile.

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“I just genuinely like to drink water. I like to take care of myself. I have a sweet tooth, so I try to balance it out. Drugging me would cross your boundaries into misconduct,” Hisoka answered with a chuckle. “Although, maybe it would be nice to have something different, why don’t you surprise me with something you think I’d enjoy? You seem to have a good idea of me now. I’m curious
what you’d pick.”

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Hannibal grinned and headed over to the cabinet. Reaching for two china cups, he called over his shoulder, “Could you bring the chairs over to the fireplace, mon cher? I find conversation is far more enjoyable when everyone involved can relax.”

Selecting two camomile and spiced apple tea bags from their jar, he dropped them into the cup and set the instant kettle to a lower temperature. The leaves never tasted right if they were over-cooked.

***

Shaking away the fuzzy contented feeling still clouding him, Hisoka quickly moved around the office to bring the chairs to sit facing the fireplace. With a cheeky grin, he deliberately pushed them closer together than they were during his therapy sessions. I’m sure he’ll notice, but he can always move his away if it’s an issue, he decided as he contemplated retaking his seat. Maybe I can brush up against his leg? He didn’t stop me from doing that over dinner. Am I really this happy, or is this his band? He said it couldn’t manipulate me, so maybe it’s just me? he wondered as he waited.

***

After filling the second cup, Hannibal picked it up and carried them both back to Hisoka, who was standing patiently by the fire. Noting the proximity of the chairs and the obedient way the man was waiting for him, he chuckled to himself.

“Please, take a seat,” he said gesturing for Hisoka to sit down as he took his own. “And I hope you like your drink,” he added, holding it out for him. “The sweet smell of herbal tea holds a special place in my heart. For a while, it was all Pariston would drink. It was quite charming if I’m being honest. He still brings me exotic collections when he comes to visit.”

***

“It sounds like you were both good for each other,” Hisoka remarked as he sat down before accepting the drink and giving it a sniff. It smells like apples, but faintly. “It smells nice; I’m not sure I’ve had this one before. What got him so hooked on tea? Does he just like it that much?” he asked while he waited for his cup to cool a little more before taking his first sip.

***

“The adults in his life all used to drink caffeine, and he somehow made the connection between that and pain,” Hannibal explained. “It’s easy enough to do. I once knew a man who, after the funeral of his wife, couldn’t hug people because he had associated the act with that day so strongly in his mind. I found that hypnotherapy helped in both cases. But for a while, each room of my house would smell of different flowers. He would hide the boxes in the rooms just to test if I would be able to find them. He became quite creative.”

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“I’m honestly curious what the strangest place he hid one was, please say he didn’t hide them anywhere that ruined them. I can imagine he tried to match the scents to the flowers?” Hisoka asked.

***
“That would be inside the head of a large bronze Elephant that he had commissioned for his bedroom,” Hannibal said, remembering the look of surprise on Pariston’s face when he realised that Hannibal had found his secret tea stash, yet again. “Most young boys hide pornography in their room. He hid Jasmine and sweetened Rose tea. We all have our particular quirks. Although I wasn’t impressed when he put a box in my oven. That particular piece of meat did not benefit from being set on fire and flavoured with red berries. He didn’t make that mistake twice.”

***

Hisoka laughed. He had to admit, it did sound absurd when Hannibal put it like that, and he decided against pointing out that he was hiding stage makeup at a similar age. Except it was in his bag that he was living out of with the circus. “He’s an interesting man,” he said eventually. “How did you get him to stop hiding tea bags?”

***

“I started leaving Haiku on postcards in all the places he’d put them in. After a while he would have had to repeat himself and predictability is something the boy despises,” Hannibal said fondly. “I expect that’s something you both have in common. Am I right?”

***

“So you basically kept track, until he’d run out of places to hide them. Simple but effective. I think you might be right about that being a common theme between us both,” Hisoka agreed. The tea was making him feel pleasantly warm alongside the fire, and he crossed his legs again to brush up against Hannibal’s as he did so. “Does he hate Haikus now?”

***

“Surprisingly, no,” Hannibal said, grinning at Hisoka. “He puts one in my Christmas card every year. “You will learn early on if you ever do decide to work within the Hunter Association, that saying no to Pariston is like trying to hold back the tide; it just doesn’t work. Reminding him that you are onto his game and that if he wants to win, he’s going to have to step it up a notch, will work, however, every time.”

He sipped his tea and let himself relax. “How about you and your Illu-chan? I bet they keep you on your toes.”

***

“That’s definitely one way of putting it; occasionally they’ll manage to surprise me with really thoughtful gestures. One time Elijah spotted bungee-gum in the hotel concession stand and got me some. It’s the small things like that, that I’ve learnt to appreciate,” Hisoka sighed happily. “Lulu is, well, if I’m a wildfire then she’s a monsoon.”

***

“And together, you make steam?” Hannibal joked, chuckling into his cup. “What would Elijah be?” he wondered. “From what I’ve seen of him, I’d say that he reminds me of an iceberg. Magnificent, but deceptively deadly.” And you’re afraid you’re melting him. Is he strong enough to withstand your intensity? It sounds like Lulu was the personality created to protect him. Does that mean that he’s transgender? How interesting. A transgender man, born into a woman’s body, who has created a hyper-feminine personality to shield himself from the world. I need to find a way to talk to him alone. He could make for a fascinating case study.
“A glacier,” Hisoka said confidently. “He’s generally cold and slow to change, but if you know him enough, you know where his softer aspects are. Of course, he’ll deny them to his dying breath, but I like to think I’m part of a privileged group who get to see that side of him.”

“That strong?” Hannibal asked curiously. “Glaciers have shaped the known world. Has he had that much of an impact on you, mon cher?”

Hisoka hummed thoughtfully. “I’d say Danchou is the iceberg, and as much as he can make my heart sing, well, it’s still Elijah who stole it,” he explained. “Elijah and Lulu, my Illu-chan/ They’re the eldest in their family. They have had a lot of responsibility thrust upon them from a young age. I honestly believe he would hunt me down all the way to the Dark Continent and even beyond if there’s anything further if I ever hurt his siblings. I also know, I’d be happy if he was the one to end my life. So yes, I’d say he has.”

“Does he know that he has your heart, mon cher?” Hannibal asked gently. It would explain his insecurities if he didn’t.

Slow to change, but when there is a shift, it’s irreversible. A glacier indeed. You don’t see how much he cares for you, nor how much you care for him, do you? Your idea of affection is being given a sweet, or a flogging, but you’ve missed everything in between. Why hasn’t Elijah said anything? Lulu avoided saying that she loved you, but it was obvious to everyone in the room. It can’t be commitment that you are scared of; you’re waiting for a boy to grow up simply to fight him. You don’t lack patience. Has no one ever courted you before, or have you always run away at the first sign that they might actually like you? What did Elijah do that was different because I can’t see Chrollo ever being anything other than clinical with you. It’s affection that you fear, isn’t it? That kind of connection risks your emotions being hurt. If you only date sociopaths, then that isn’t a problem. But Elijah isn’t a sociopath. He loves you. He would die for you. And Lulu certainly isn’t. Oh, mon cher, you are a mass of contradictions, aren’t you?

“I made him mine; I chased him. Surely he knows I desire him? Lulu doesn’t doubt my feelings, but you think Elijah might?” Hisoka asked uncertainty.

“He would die for you,” Hannibal said simply. “I saw it in his eyes that day in the book shop. We both know that he would kill, but I don’t think you have quite given yourself the time to think about what his staying right now means. He nearly lost you in that fight, but you have carried on as if nothing happened. If he is retreating to hide behind Lulu, then something has shaken him. He cares deeply for you. I don’t think that you are the only one who fears rejection. Have you ever told him how you feel?”

"It's never really come up, outside of declaring that we want each other. Or we missed each other. I can count my serious relationships on one hand," Hisoka advised as he peered into his cup as if
trying to read tea leaves that weren't there. "As for my conquests and one night stands, I stopped counting before he was mine."

***

“Well then,” Hannibal said, looking up at the clock above the fireplace. “Maybe you can find time before our next session?”

He took a long sip of his drink and let the idea sink in. “If nothing else, it could be interesting to see how he reacts and what he says. Would you like me to get you those books? You are welcome to have a look around if anything else captures your interest,” he added, wondering if Hisoka would bother. He’d had a lot of information thrown at him already, but any insight that he could gain into the man’s interests would help him for their next session. “You can return them after you have finished with them. My door is always open to you, mon cher.”

***

“If it’s not too much trouble,” Hisoka prompted with a thoughtful smile. "I promise I will bring them back, but I think I shouldn't take too many books with me. I didn't think to bring a bag. I wasn't expecting to borrow anything. You do have a wide selection; perhaps there might be something I could take next time?"

***

“Of course, mon cher,” Hannibal said, rising to his feet. “I shall leave you to your thoughts. Feel free to have a look around if you like, but as I said before, there is no rush. We’ve made great strides today, so as far as the session goes, I think we can leave it here. You are, of course, welcome to stay as my guest,” he added, wanting to make it clear that he wasn’t forcing Hisoka to leave.

Walking over to the ladder that replaced the staircase to his second level, he climbed up and let the quiet crackling of the fire fill him. Hisoka had to come to him. He couldn’t rush things. If he tried to hold too tightly, the man would slip through his fingers like a ghost. The thought felt like a lead weight in his stomach. *I will have him,* he reminded himself. Selecting the books he needed, he looked over the balcony at the man who was quickly becoming his latest obsession. *I will have you,* he repeated. *Whatever it takes. You’ll be mine.*

***

Characters played by Muffinmadness:

Hannibal

Characters played by themadnovelist:

Hisoka
Muffinmadness: My apologies for the late post. My birthday and the publication of my book combining disappeared my weekend!
Hisoka goes to visit Hannibal and gets more than he bargained for when things start heating up between the two of them.

"Illu-chan, I need the book back. Master will buy you another copy," Hisoka said with an exasperated tone, as he stood, staring at his lover as he read in the bed.

I still need to find my shoes and decide on my makeup. Maybe I should just wait a little longer? he sighed as he glanced around the room. Then again I was hoping to time things carefully with the guard change over. I suppose I could just bungee jump from the window.

***

“I’m nearly at the end of the chapter, Master,” Illumi said evenly, brushing his hair from his eyes. He hadn’t realised how used to short hair he’d become during his time as Lulu, but in the three days, since Hisoka-san had allowed him his own form, it had been one of the things he’d had to re-adjust to.

“He’s going to get mad soon...or is that what you want?” Lulu said in the back of his mind, and he cursed. He’d never had this happen before. The personalities that came along with his disguises had always left him when his body had reverted back in the past, and he was determined to find out why this one had not. “If You don’t want him to go to Lecter...you could always offer to let him play with us...”

Illumi swallowed but kept reading.

***

"Fine, finish the chapter, but then I really do need the book," Hisoka grumbled as he found his shoes, quickly slipping them on as he walked into the bathroom to check his appearance. I think minimal makeup would be best, he decided as he searched through his cosmetics bag for his eyeliner. Dr. Lecter keeps telling me to be myself, so I will.

"While I’m waiting, I’m going to put on a little bit of make-up. Nothing too crazy," he called out into the bedroom. "But this has to be the last chapter, don't make me take it from you."

***

“I appreciate the consideration, Master. I will be as fast as I can,” Illumi said whilst internally warning Lulu to be quiet. Concentrating had been particularly hard ever since she’d started to comment on his life. Apparently, he was boring and the fact that he didn’t petition their Master for sex every two minutes was the reason he was now seeking out Lecter.

“Shut up,” he grumbled and turned the next page.

***
Hisoka came back into the bedroom just in time to hear Illumi telling someone to shut up and arched a brow.

"Who needs to shut up, dear?" he asked in an amused tone.

***

Illumi realised he’d spoken aloud and thought quickly. “Sorry, Master, just a random thought.”

There was no way he’d be able to finish the book whilst Hisoka was watching him. Lulu was too intent on trying to convince him to drag the man to bed.

They’d already agreed upon the plan; Illumi had been the one to suggest that he send the flowers ahead of time. To his surprise, Lulu had only begun to dislike the idea once she’d realised that he would not be accompanying Hisoka-san on this particular mission. She’d enjoyed the playroom.

*I can’t come with him, I’m not disguised, and he has to get Lecter alone for this to work, now shut up.*

Sighing, he closed the book on Multiple Personality Disorder and handed it over. “I will research online, my apologies for keeping you for so long.” Looking at his Master’s outfit, he added, “You do look very...appealing. I would be surprised if Lecter could keep his hands off you for long.”

He didn’t let the knots that were forming in his stomach at the idea show.

***

Preening a little at the compliment, Hisoka smiled warmly at his lover and bent to kiss him on the top of his head.

*Illu-chan seems a little happier now he's back in his normal body. When it's just us here, it's rather selfish to insist he stay as a woman. Now the novelty's worn off I really should be more considerate, not that I don't like Lulu's form. Just that I don't want to risk triggering the bracelet, I was ordered to take care of them both.*

"Thank you, Illu-chan," he replied sweetly as he accepted the book. "As you know, that is the idea; he did say I could show up whenever I wanted. As tempted as I am to show up in the middle of the night and surprise him, I have to agree with you; this is the better plan."

Grabbing the other book from the nightstand, he stashed them both under his shirt using bungee-gum to keep them in place. "I don't know how long I'll be gone," he advised as he took a lightweight jacket from his wardrobe. "Although I am aiming to be invited to stay the night. So feel free to call room service if you or Lulu want anything, I'm sure you can think of a reason why it's you answering the door and not me. Oh, and be sure you don't lock the window before you go to sleep," he added as he opened it and looked down to assess his best way down. *If it wasn't for the guards I'd just go out through the door. You better make this visit worth my time Hannibal.* "I'll let you know when I'm heading back," he called over his shoulder before he gracefully leapt from the window using his Nen to catch his fall.

***

“Yes, OK, I will,” Illumi said, staring blankly at the window. “Have a good night, Master,” he told the empty room.

He felt Lulu’s confused indignation that he hadn’t given them a goodbye kiss and tried to control
his own worry.

“Happy hunting,” he whispered. “Stay safe. You aren’t allowed to lose this game.”

***

20 mins later

***

The walk over to Dr. Lecter’s didn’t take as long as Hisoka expected.

*Should I knock? Or sneak in and see how he reacts?* he wondered, staring up at the house from the garden gate. *I wonder how he’d react if I hid naked in his bed?*

Chuckling to himself, Hisoka hopped over the wall and headed towards the back of the house, in search of an open window or an easily accessible side door.

***

Hannibal had been on alert for Hisoka’s Nen bracelet approaching for the past three days, so when he sensed it getting closer, he closed his chest freezer and took off his apron.

Making his way up from his hidden basement, he felt the bracelet circling towards the back of his house. Closing the hidden door, he walked through the playroom towards the kitchen, to put the coffee on.

Remembering Hisoka’s preference for simple food and drink, he’d made sure to invest in a simple, but pleasant brand of bean and deliberately chose his plainest cups to put out on display. It was only seven in the evening, so he doubted Hisoka would object to his choice of drink.

The silhouette that appeared in the glass of his window didn’t match the mental image that he had of the man, but there was no mistaking his Nen.

***

As he approached the backdoor, Hisoka spotted Dr. Lecter standing in his kitchen as if he'd been expecting him. Smiling, he waved as he pushed aside the idea that Hannibal had predicted his arrival.

When Hannibal gestured for him to come in, he tried the door curiously and found that it was unlocked. He decided to use the books to distract from his surprise.

"My apologies for showing up unannounced, but I felt that it would be prudent to return these." He held up the books, offering them as an explanation for his visit.

***

“I am glad to hear it,” Hannibal said with a warm smile. “How did you find them?” he asked as he started to fill his coffee machine with the grounds he had made. It smelt good, if not a little plain for his tastes. Lighting the heater with a blowtorch for effect, he set it going and gestured to the breakfast bar.

“Please, take a seat,” he said. “Your drink will be ready soon.”

***
"Do you often get random visitors at your backdoor in the evening Dr. Lecter?" Hisoka couldn't help his growing curiosity. He had expected more of a reaction to his sudden visit than this.

Keeping his eye on Dr. Lecter, he took the offered seat and placed the books down on the countertop. Watching the coffee maker with interest, he worked out how to answer the question. “Elijah found them very informative. He’s decided to do more research.”

***

“I am glad to hear that, and alas, mon cher,” Hannibal said with mock sadness. “It is not an everyday occurrence. But I do like to be prepared for when the creatures that go bump in the night do stop by.” He remembered Adam’s shocked face and smiled. *That reminds me, I have to stock up my freezer.*

“Do you take sugar and milk?” he asked politely as the machine set to work. “And I hope that it wasn’t just Elijah that read the books. It would help you to understand your Illu-chan too.”

***

*You really do like to entertain don’t you, Dr. Lecter? That’s something I suppose we have in common. Although we have our preferences in how we do it. Hisoka thought as he waited. Although, Illu-chan was rather keen to read the books, how do I explain?*

"He found the books hard to put down, to be honest. So we ended up reading them together, he understood more about the subject material than I did," Hisoka admitted. "We got through them rather quickly, if I’d allowed him, he’d have re-read them over and over. I felt you’d want them back before he wore out the words. I’m hoping to get him his own copies so that he can make notes if he wants."

***

“I am delighted to hear that my books brought you closer together,” Hannibal said, ignoring the obvious elephant in the room of the man turning up at this hour.

He was dressed as if he’d come from a bar but didn’t smell like he had. His dark blue jeans and cream, form-fitting top were well made and clearly expensive, but there was a nervous energy about him that made Hannibal suspect that there was more to his arrival than he was willing to say just now.

As the water began to filter through the tubing of his coffee maker, he added, “Did your Illu-chan not want to join us? I have more books here; they could have had a look through my library for anything that caught their fancy.”

***

"Hmmm?" Hisoka paused from staring at the coffee machine. "He’s engrossed in his research," he added absently. “I didn’t think to ask, I was a bit too focused on returning your property and you said I was welcome to come anytime I wanted."

*Will that be enough to trigger the bracelet? I don't want to lie too much.* Mentally, Hisoka braced himself for the negative feedback. Closing his eyes, he wasn’t disappointed when he felt the Nen activate and his heart quicken.

*Your move Dr. Lecter, will you force me to open up?*
“Hisoka,” Hannibal said, raising his brow and walking around the island as the coffee percolated. Placing his hand on his arm, he firmly but gently brought the man’s wrist up to his eyeline. “I thought we’d talked about my objection to lies? I do not wish to compel you to tell me why you chose this hour to visit, but I would advise you not to put yourself through unnecessary discomfort. You are welcome in my home, and I am here to help.”

Squeezing Hisoka’s shoulder, he smiled at him before turning his attention to the coffee machine.

It’s your choice, Hisoka, he thought as he began to fill the first cup. How long are you going to wait before you tell me why you really left your Illu-chan behind?

Looking down at the band, Hisoka sighed. “Illu-chan has been talking about returning home,” he mumbled. “I don’t know how I feel about it. I’ll be alone again.”

He felt the effects of the bracelet lessen slightly.

Hannibal watched the light behind the golden Obey fade, but not entirely dim.

“You will not be alone, mon cher,” he said gently, allowing the second cup to fill and passing the first to Hisoka. “I will always be here for you if you need a place to stay,” he explained, pushing the milk and sugar towards him. “You are safe here. No creature of the night has bested me yet.”

Accepting the cup, Hisoka offered Hannibal a small grateful smile even though he avoided making eye contact.

“If I lose them, then you would be the only person who’d care about me, I’m sure. I have nowhere to go other than the hotel.” He felt a wave of relief wash over him as the Nen rewarded his honesty. “I know you just offered me a room, but wouldn’t that cause you problems? I’m your patient.”

“It is precisely because you are my patient that this will not be a problem,” Hannibal explained, dropping a dash of milk into his cup and taking a sip.

“I have an understanding with the Hunter Association. They are aware that people who live as Hunters, are...unique. The normal rules of society do not apply to them, and so, as a therapist, I argued for greater freedoms when it came to treating them as well. Eventually, the Association agreed to give me a trial run. When they saw the results,” he smiled. “Well, let’s just say they have not regretted their decision. My successes speak for themselves. Please, do not worry about me.”

Holding the cup in his hands, he focussed on Hisoka. There was something he wasn’t telling him; he could see it in the ever so slightly tense set of his muscles and the way he was studiously avoiding looking at him.

He’d received the man’s flowers earlier that day and had placed them in an old family vase in the lounge. His aunt would have been proud.
Are you here to court me, mon cher? he wondered. Please tell me that you don’t have chocolate hidden about your person. He forced himself not to smile at the mental image. “I am here for you, how can I help?” he said, wondering what his guest would do next.

***

Considering his options, Hisoka turned the cup in his hands. The warmth was wonderful after his walk. Do I have your attention? Is Illu-chan right and this is the right time to actually push things further?

There was some amount of truth in what he had said. Soon Illumi would need to take on more assignments, and then he would be alone. It usually wouldn't bother him.

“I didn’t think that far ahead, just that I wanted to clear my head. So much of my life is being decided for me by others. I can’t say I’m happy about it. With Elijah, well, I normally don’t care about him coming and going," he started to say. "This time…it feels different."

***

“And what do you think has changed?” Hannibal asked gently.

***

You? I let you put your own leash on me. “I don’t want him to leave; normally, it doesn’t bother me. We’re not really an overly attached couple, but we try to make the most of the brief times we have together.” Pausing, he picked up the sugar and added a spoonful followed by a splash of the milk. “Maybe having them here for so long has disturbed that equilibrium?”

Shaking his head, he frowned slightly. "Then again, I find myself thinking about another person a lot these days. I think I might like them too."

Mentally he braced for the usual anxiety or itchiness from the band. He was taken by surprise when a warmth spread through his body instead.

You can’t be fucking serious? he thought, bewildered at being rewarded.

***

Hannibal’s stomach clenched with anticipation. Clearly, Hisoka had chosen to finally confront the growing tension that had been rising steadily between them, but hearing him admit his attraction, and seeing the surprise on his face, was exhilarating.

Have you been in denial all this time? Is that why you came here? Were my books the excuse you needed to get me alone? Oh, Hisoka, you are quite the mass of contradictions, aren’t you? Did you honestly believe your own lies? Did you not see how drawn to me you were, or were you pretending that this was all part of your plan? Yes, that would be it. You would delude yourself that you were doing this simply to get me fired. I wonder if seeing Pariston at my party made you stop and take stock of who you are up against? Did you think that I would fawn over you and fall at your feet?

“The unfamiliar is often confusing, mon cher,” Hannibal said, maintaining his soft tone. “Have you talked with Illu-chan and this other person about your changing feelings?”

***

In a vain attempt to buy a few extra moments to process what had just happened, Hisoka shrugged.
and sipped at his coffee. I do actually like you, after all. It doesn’t change anything. I can still carry out the plan. I had feelings for Danchou, and we both know how that turned out.

“Yes and no,” he mumbled into his cup. “I’ve mentioned the person in question to Illu-chan, and they’ve not given any objections to me pursuing them. If anything they’ve been, encouraging. I haven’t told the object of my interest about their position though, yet.”

To Hisoka’s annoyance, the metal band activated once again, and he stared at it accusingly.

***

“Well, if your Illu-chan has no objections, then maybe it is you who are reticent? I can be your sounding board, mon cher, if you like? We can work through this together,” Hannibal offered.

“How about we move through into the living room?”

I would love to see how you react to how I’ve arranged your flowers.

***

Hisoka nodded and stood up, cradling his drink in his hand. He watched as his therapist walked out of the kitchen, and thought, Me? I’ve been throwing myself at you, and you think I’m the one who’s reticent? Why can’t you just say hesitant? Are you always such a pompous ass?

Now the man had his back to him, Hisoka allowed his eyes to roam. In his own home, Dr. Lecter appeared to still dress smartly, currently wearing black tailored trousers and a grey shirt with rolled-up sleeves. Catching himself staring, he sneered. Well, I suppose it’s better to be an ass with a nice ass, but why am I comparing you now to how you look in your suits made from curtains?

***

Hannibal pushed open the door to his front room and walked inside. He could hear Hisoka’s footsteps as he followed and was glad that he’d lit his fire earlier on in the night.

Walking past his leather suite, and across the large fur rug to select more logs to feed the flames, he gestured to the room. “Sit wherever you like, mon cher,” he said and threw a few applewood logs into the fire.

***

Following his host, Hisoka glanced around the living room, taking in large bookcases and harpsichord he’d missed the last time he was in here. He began to wonder if he should sit on the sofa, but the crackle and pop of the fresh logs being added to the fire pulled his attention back to Hannibal.

Why am I drawn to you? he wondered as another log was thrown into the flames. Not wanting to get caught staring, he slipped off his shoes and shrugged out of his jacket. Taking care not to drop his cup, he made his decision and settled down on the rug.

***

Hannibal smirked at Hisoka’s idea of more comfortable seating but made no comment. It was clear that the man wanted to provoke him.

Are you really so uncomfortable in my house, or is it me that is making you nervous, I wonder?
With the practised ease of a dancer, he bent down and joined his guest on the rug, offering him a toast with his coffee cup. “To warm fires and good company,” he said unironically and gave Hisoka a happy smile.

***

"It's nice," Hisoka said quietly. He hadn't expected to be joined on the rug, but he wasn't going to complain. It would make his plan slightly easier if only he could just pull himself together. "And comfortable rugs," he added, raising his cup.

***

“I find that they do help in situations like these,” Hannibal agreed.

Looking at Hisoka, he couldn’t quite decide if this had been the result that he was hoping for, but decided that it wouldn’t matter in the long run.

“Mon cher,” he said kindly. “I can understand your aversion to talking about your feelings, but I assure you, it will help.” He offered him another warm smile. “Why don’t you tell me about what has been happening with Illu-chan,” he suggested, knowing that he wouldn’t want to talk about how he felt about him just yet. That was a subject they’d have to ease into.

***

Hoping to delay for a brief moment, Hisoka sipped at his drink thoughtfully. We’re planning your death, that’s the gist of it. “There’s not that much to tell,” he said. "I don't want them to go, but there isn't anything I can do about it. Family comes first where they’re from. Even over me."

He trailed his free hand over the rug; it was unbelievably soft. "It's just the way things are for us."

***

“Are you worried that he is pushing you towards this other person so that he can feel more comfortable about having to go?” Hannibal asked, tilting his head and leaning comfortably against his hand. “Does he not usually encourage you to pursue other partners?”

***

"He normally doesn't comment on it one way or the other. Except that my lifestyle makes keeping our relationship secret easier," Hisoka replied. "It's certainly possible, though."

***

Hannibal sipped his coffee and listened carefully to Hisoka’s non-committal answer. You really are worried about them leaving, aren’t you? What’s changed? Are you concerned that they may not come back? They would go to war for you; surely you know that?

Keeping his even tone, Hannibal said, “It could be that Lulu is affecting him. It can’t be easy for a man who was born into a woman’s body, to discover that they do have a woman inside them after all, don’t you think?”

***

"I can't imagine it's easy, no...but neither of us are strangers to stressful situations. They both care for me; they both see me as Master," Hisoka sighed. "I can't help wondering if they want me
because I know what it's like. Growing up different, I don't know when they split, but I know the 
pain of being pushed aside - being unwanted by nearly everyone. Their family don't really 
appreciate them or value them. Even though they're the eldest, they aren't going to be the heir. 
We're rejects, who chose each other."

***

“Maybe he is picking up on your unease. I can’t imagine it is easy for him to see you distressed? 
Maybe talking to me about your other concerns would help set your mind to rest? Hannibal 
suggested. “I am happy to talk about your relationship with Illu-chan if you like, but it is you I am 
here for, mon cher. So, I will listen whenever you are ready to talk.”

***

"About my relationship, my feelings, or would you prefer me to talk about myself? " Hisoka asked, 
adding a hint of playfulness to the last word.

*I'm not here to talk about them, this is about me and you.*

"I do recall you were saying that you wanted to get to know me," he continued with a slight smirk. 
"I was rather adamant that I didn't want you to, and you asked if you could possibly change my 
mind. Do you still want to know me better?"

***

“Of course,” Hannibal said honestly. “But have you changed your mind, mon cher?” he asked, 
curious about Hisoka’s answer.

Usually, he wouldn’t have been so forthcoming about offering personal information. So either 
something had severely shaken him, or he’d made a decision.

Hannibal was hopeful that it was the second.

***

*Can I entice you? *"You've already got me to open up about some pretty big things," Hisoka replied 
with a tilt of his head. "I'd say the no, is now a, maybe I could be persuaded." Flashing a shy smile, 
he looked away as he took another slow drink from his cup and watched the flames dancing over 
the logs.

***

Hannibal smirked, raising an eyebrow. “And what form would this, *persuasion* take, Hisoka?”

***

"Nothing that would risk your job," Hisoka replied nonchalantly.

*Did you think I would just outright ask you for sex on the rug? I'm promiscuous, but even I am not 
that easy.*

"But before I make the decision, I was hoping you would answer a couple of my questions first. 
Give and take, quid pro quo, as it were."
“I am extremely pleased to hear that, mon cher,” Hannibal said. “I am glad to hear that you are willing to respect my boundaries.”

He cupped his coffee in his hands and inhaled it’s rich scent happily. “I will, of course, respect yours. What is it that you would like to know?”

***

"I'd like to ask three questions, but I only want you to answer two of them. The one that you don't want to answer, I won't ask again," Hisoka replied as he continued to watch the flames. He finished his drink before he moved so that he was facing Hannibal.

"Here's my first question, those suits of yours do you actually buy them or do you look for curtains and ask for them to be converted?" he asked as he held up his palm with one finger raised. "My second question would be about our little fireside ritual, did it actually make you feel any different?" he paused to hold up another finger. "And my third question is that I would like to know how you really see me. You told Elijah you were a renaissance man, so, if we'd met differently perhaps in a bar or at the Arena would you have pursued me?"

***

An interesting game, mon cher. Will you be surprised by my answers? Hannibal thought, nodding his acceptance of the conditions.

“Well, both of my answers would be yes, but I suspect you wish me to elaborate?” he said, smirking to let Hisoka know that he, too, could play at stalling if he wanted.

“The ritual made a huge difference to me; I feel freer now than I have since I was a child,” he said truthfully. “A weight has been shifted from me and possibilities for a future I had never dreamed possible are emerging.”

Finishing off his drink, he thought about how he was going to answer the second question. He wasn’t intending to encourage Hisoka to live so dangerously close to being rude in a hurry.

“I would have pursued you, yes. I have made no secret about the fact that I find you attractive and few people have ever been able to hold my interest the way you do,” he admitted and watched curiously to find out what would come next.

***

Hisoka listened as he continued to cradle his empty cup in his hands. So you avoided the question I hoped you would? I suppose I should let you ask me something now. In the interest of fairness.

"Thank you for humouring me," he said eventually. "I find I often get to know others in a rather, back to front sort of way. Jumping into bed first, asking questions later," he chuckled. "I'm trying to make more effort to get to know people and to trust more. It's just, rather difficult."

***

“Entirely understandable,” Hannibal said, nodding his head. “Given your past. I am curious though, did I pass?”

***

"I think so," Hisoka said thoughtfully. "I'm starting to lose my unease when I'm around you -
knowing little things about you as a person helps. I do understand that you want to help me, but, as you said, given my past, I don't accept that from people easily. I'm happy that burning the cloth had such a positive influence on you; it was quite satisfying for me as well."

Looking up, he spotted the vase of roses and paused before glancing around the rest of the room. *You put my flowers on display? How cute.* "It seems as if you have a secret admirer," he added playfully.

***

"It would seem that I do," Hannibal said, smiling warmly at Hisoka before turning to look at the roses by the window. "They added a wonderful variety of flowers. It's flattering when someone takes the time to pay attention to the little things that a man likes. It would seem that whoever it was has taken the time to observe me quite closely indeed. They centred the bouquet with the yellow rose that has the red tip. Not many people would choose a flower with such significance. Less still would surround it with coral roses."

He turned back to Hisoka and grinned. "A forthright individual indeed, but subtle about it. A can appreciate a mind that works like that. Such a person would suit me quite well, don't you think?"

***

*Well, the lady in the shop was quite insistent those would get the message across when I asked for a bouquet to say 'I want you to let me take you bed.'*

"From what I know about you, yeah, I think they would. Did they leave you any clue as to who they are?" Hisoka asked. "The colours do work well together; they had a good eye."

***

"Alas, mon cher, they did not," Hannibal said mournfully. "I shall forever be left to wonder who desires my affections so ardently that they would send such a glorious collection. But," he said, sitting up straighter. "I do not want to monopolise your time. "You have your own romantic issues. How do you think you should tackle them?"

***

"Maybe I should consider sending them flowers?" Hisoka suggested. "Although I'd feel better about it if I knew they would act on any interest they had in me," he looked into his empty cup and sighed. "It's complicated, I have Illu-chan, and not everyone is accepting of my lifestyle. Plus there's just, something about them that reminds me of somebody I'd rather forget about. So maybe it's just a subconscious desire for catharsis? That wouldn't really be fair to them if that's all it is, I need to be certain it's not."

***

Hannibal reached forward and gently took Hisoka’s cup, brushing his fingers across his as he did so.

"Well," he said as he rose to his feet. "I would suggest that you make him aware of that possibility before you plunge in headfirst. If he does not pull away from you, then maybe you could remain open to the possibility that he is free to say no at any time. If he does not turn you down, then he likely shares your interest."

He held up the cups and gestured towards the kitchen. "I shall be right back with something more..."
appropriate for the time of evening. Please, excuse me.”

***

Hisoka didn't outwardly react to the touch and simply nodded when Dr. Lecter excused himself. Surely you know who I was referring to? Doesn't it bother you? he wondered as he maintained his silent vigil by the fire. You seem somewhat open about the possibility, but you're going to say wait until therapy is over. Could I convince you it'd help my recovery if you take me to bed?

***

Hannibal walked into his kitchen and reached for his homemade beer. He took out the simplest but most well made half pint glasses that he owned and decanted the beer into them. They had both known who he reminded Hisoka of for a while, but hearing it put like that had been interesting. He wondered if his submissive had actually been starting to consider his feelings or if he was merely paying lip service to him as a form of flattery. Either way, his band hadn’t gone off, so he wasn’t lying.

Turning back to the living room, Hannibal braced himself for the stab of desire that seeing Hisoka sat by his fire would produce, and pushed through the door.

***

Hisoka had continued to watch the fire as he waited and when he heard the door open again, he didn't move. It was only when Dr. Lecter sat back down that he reacted. “It seems that you have a way of getting things out of me,” he said mildly. “But can I get what I want out of you? “I think I’ve talked more about myself in the short time I’ve known you than I have in my entire life before the Arena explosion. Is that a good sign for my therapy?”

***

“It is, mon cher, a very good sign. Here,” Hannibal said, holding out the glass to him. “It’s homemade; I thought the occasion warranted something a little less likely to keep us both awake tonight.” He paused and thought about the way the woman who had been rounding up the neighbourhood cats had screamed as he’d drained her blood. “Consider it a gift; something from me to you.”

***

Smiling up at Dr. Lecter, Hisoka accepted the offered glass. Not wanting to risk pushing the boundaries of what would be considered rude, he resisted his urge to sniff the drink. Beer? It’s fine. He’s trying to be nice. He doesn’t know the whole story.

"Thank you, Doctor, may I ask what it is? I’m guessing it’s alcoholic,” he enquired. “Did my reputation for drinking other hotel guests under the table precede me?”

***

“I have heard rumours, but no,” Hannibal laughed. “I remembered what you said at the dinner party, and this has recently finished brewing. It’s beer but brewed in the Kakin style. Think of it as a cross between mead and what Yorknew would consider beer to be. Have a taste, see what you
think. If you don’t like it, I have a fine selection of whiskeys too, but I didn’t want you to think that I was trying to get you drunk.”

He took a sip from his own glass and savoured the taste. Rich in body, and ever so slightly sweet in the after taste, he grinned; the woman had, at least, proved useful for something.

Turning his glass in his hand, he watched the way the rich red-brown liquid glistened in the firelight. “You were saying you were having misgivings that your feelings would be returned?” he prompted and waited patiently for the response.

***

“I’ve not seen much of Kakin, and I’m not sure you’d want me drunk. I get rather, incorrigible,” Hisoka teased as he remembered last time Miriam had lectured him about causing another guest to need carrying to their room.

He looked at the glass; it had a simple but elegant design. Do you feel as out of place here as I do? he wondered before dismissing the thought. Of course not, you’re a glass. You don’t have feelings.

“To answer your question, I don’t see how they’d be able to act on their feelings. If they returned them, to begin with,” he added.

***

“I can’t see a man like you not valuing ingenuity. Perhaps you need to trust that the man you like can manoeuvre within his restraints? I trust that he is not currently out of your reach?” Hannibal said, thinking of Chrollo. “You pursued Mr. Lucilfer across the known world. Perhaps it is time to look closer to home?” he suggested, sipping at his drink. “Has he given you any indication that he’s interested in you?”

***

“I think he could, if he wanted to,” Hisoka replied airily. He was surprised by the mention of Chrollo. “Danchou is a bit different. We were lovers before that. I’ve not shared a bed with my current interest, but I do believe that he’s attracted to me.” Pausing, he decided to take the plunge and try the beer. It was sweeter and more pleasant on his tongue than he’d expected. “This doesn’t taste like any beer-based drink I’ve had before,” he admitted as he held the glass up to look at it closer. “Is this a family tradition?”

***

“No,” Hannibal said easily. “It’s one that I have spent many years refining. I’m sure you wouldn’t have enjoyed my first few batches, but it made me think of you.” He held up his glass and examined the way the colours filtered through it. “Rich, complex and with a sweet undercurrent that you wouldn’t expect. Deadly if taken in too high of a quantity, but if respected, and admired, it will prove itself to be a trusted and loyal companion.”

He took another sip and asked, “How did you know that your Illu-chan wanted to pursue a relationship with you? Maybe you could find some similarities between the two situations?”

***

“We ended up in bed together; it was pretty clear I was their first,” Hisoka explained. “Afterwards we just went back to being friends, then a few months later we ended up repeating the process. That time, it became the start of a regular thing for us,” he continued, remembering the way they’d
meet up after their kill and had fallen into each other’s arms.

Sighing, he took a small drink from his glass. “I can’t quite recall how long it took, but eventually they asked if we were what would be considered dating. In some ways, they had a sheltered childhood; they never got the chance to properly make friends, nevermind find a partner. We both agreed we wouldn’t mind it being something more. I’d say it just grew on its own into what we have now.”

***

“So, they asked you, I see,” Hannibal said thoughtfully. “And was it the same with Chrollo?”

***

“Danchou? No, not quite the same. I was very enamoured with him, and he knew about my interest. He more gave in out of curiosity than anything else, I think. Out of anyone I’ve been with, he was the closest to getting me to actually be submissive. I’m assuming he’s your patient and that you’ve met him,” Hisoka explained with a laugh. “He’s charming when he wants to be, and doesn’t value his life as much as he really should. There’s a quiet strength to him that drew me in, though, and well, I didn’t take the break up well...let’s leave it at that?”

***

Hannibal smiled, and nodded his understanding. “Very well, mon cher. As you wish. So both serious relationships of your life have revolved more around the physical side of things, rather than the emotional? Is that what’s bothering you about the man that you like? Has he not shown any physical interest in you?”

***

“I’m a physically affectionate sort of man, Doctor. I still remember the genuine look of surprise on Danchou’s face when I wanted to cuddle up with him. People always seem rather surprised,” Hisoka replied in a slightly deadpan tone. “I don’t show that side often, and not in public. Danchou was the only one in the spider who knew I could be like that; I didn’t get on that well with the others.”

***

“Intimacy is the key to any relationship,” Hannibal agreed. “Be it friendship or more; we should all feel that we are safe to be ourselves with those we choose to be close to. Are you worried that you will be rejected for showing a softer side of yourself, mon cher?”

***

Hisoka frowned a little at the question. *But you know about my past, and I never get to see that side of most people. Only Mother and Nanna were ever soft with me.*

“You don’t think that my reputation as a hardened killer would colour people’s views of me? I’ve had flings, and countless one night stands. People generally seem surprised I can be gentle.” Hisoka asked, feeling a little puzzled.

***
“I am a hardened killer too, mon cher,” Hannibal said matter of factly. “I have likely killed more people than you in my lifetime, and yet most of them appeared genuinely shocked that I was capable of such violence.”

He sipped at his drink, thoughtfully. “Maybe we both have the same problem?” he mused. “But are approaching it from different sides of the coin. You fear that your softer side will be rejected and I, my violence.” He glanced at the roses. “What would happen if my admirer saw me Hunting, I wonder? Would they still want me, knowing what I am capable of and where my proclivities lie?”

***

“Well, my violent tendencies are public knowledge, and I have no issues finding people to share my bed with. It only hampers a more serious relationship, if they are also a Hunter I’d imagine they’d share some of that blood lust. Most of the time at Heaven’s Arena, it was easy to charm a fan who wanted me to sign a photo,” Hisoka chuckled. “I lost count of the number of selfies I’ve posed for.”

***

“I see,” Hannibal said, staring into the flames to distract from his desire to smirk. “Perhaps your problem is that you are conflicted? On the one hand, you tell me that you are feeling romantic desires towards this man, and on the other, you say that you are used to charming your fans into bed. My guess is that he is presenting you with a new kind of challenge. Each of us wants to be seen for who we are, but opening up is a risk.”

He turned to Hisoka and softened his gaze. “We find ourselves at quite the crossroads, don’t we?” he said quietly. “Two killers, wondering whether to take a leap of faith and trust that our interest is returned. Let’s hope that we are in safe hands.”

***

Is this you playing hard to get? You haven’t once commented on the lack of a guard accompanying me. Only you and Illu-chan know I’m here.

“Perhaps the objects of our interest are wondering the same things, about us. They might feel that there are things holding us back from showing our hand?” He paused and leaned closer before continuing. "In my case, you could say, the man I’m lusting after, well he’s a bit caught up in red tape."

Hisoka leant back to his original position with a quiet chuckle and waited for Dr. Lecter's response.

***

“Then, mon cher, maybe he wants this as much as you do, but finds himself bound by professional constraints?” Hannibal said sadly. You have no idea how much I want you, no idea at all.

Looking him in the eye, he continued, “I have no doubt that you’re worth the risk, but a man in that situation, would have to be certain before he broke his bondage.”

Seeing that Hisoka had finished his drink, he followed suit and leaned forwards to collect the empty glass. Moving close enough to whisper in his ear, he once again allowed his fingers to brush against Hisoka’s hands, before saying softly, “And, mon cher, if you are not even certain about your own feelings, why would he risk expressing his?”

The scent surrounding him was intoxicating, and it took all of Hannibal’s willpower to force
himself to stand. “I will get us a refill, but, perhaps, we should drink the next a little slower?” he suggested. He only allowed the look of longing to cross his face after he’d turned away and started to walk towards the kitchen. It wasn’t only Hisoka who needed time to process his thoughts.

***

*Worth the risk? I can work with that, but you already suspect me of wanting to get you fired.* He eyed the bracelet now adorning his left wrist.

*Can I use his Nen to give him that certainty? In the kitchen it rewarded me, so I must have some feelings towards him. The bracelet would confirm for both of us if I get him to ask the right question. I know the plan was to get him into bed tonight, but where do I go once I get him to sleep with me? How do I prove his misconduct? It’s my word against his.*

Hisoka waited patiently. He had to be careful not to push too fast. Of that he was certain, he just had to work out which buttons to press. Then which order to push them in.

***

Hannibal took a little longer than he had before to refill the drinks, giving Hisoka time to formulate his next move and himself time to calm down. He was in danger of doing something impulsive, and he knew, that where Hisoka was concerned, that could go badly wrong.

*Dance, Hannibal,* he told himself. *This is a tango; you have to move with him. You can’t be uncertain of your footing. He’s counting on you to lead him. You can’t give in yet. He has to come to you.*

This time, he placed the glasses on the tray and added a selection of cheese and biscuits to compliment. He would not allow Hisoka to hide behind the excuse of being drunk. They both knew that the beer would have had little effect on him, but appearances must be maintained.

Carrying his offerings through into the lounge, he saw that Hisoka hadn’t moved and chuckled quietly to himself. “Mon cher,” he said gently. “I thought I should include something to eat as well as drink. The cheese should complement the beer nicely.”

***

Hisoka listened out for the tell-tale sound of the door opening and closing to know that Dr. Lecter had returned. Looking up, he smiled. “Cheese? It has been a while since I’ve eaten today,” he admitted.

***

Hannibal walked back to his place on the rug and held the tray out for Hisoka to take his drink.

“Then I am glad that I can provide for you,” he said, lowering himself to the rug and placing the tray to their side, away from the fire.

“Have you had time to think about what I said, mon cher?” he asked as he picked up his drink. “It is OK if you wish for more. You are welcome to stay as long as you like, although,” he added. “If you do intend to spend the night here, then I will have to inform your guards where they can meet you in the morning. Did you wait until they changed shifts, or did you go out of the window?”

***
“The window,” Hisoka replied cheerfully. “I was wondering when you were going to bring that up. Although you certainly don’t seem to be adverse to the idea of me staying over. I suppose my guards won’t be in too much trouble? If my room had been on a higher floor, it would have been harder for me to get out undetected.”

***

“As I said before, Hisoka,” Hannibal said patiently. “I embrace the unconventional and quite frankly, if they didn’t see fit to placing you in a room with escape-proof windows, then,” he smiled. “More fool them.”

He allowed the silence to settle between them and cut both of them some cheese. Neatly arranging the slices on the crackers, he left them for Hisoka to take if he wanted. Biting into his, he savoured the burst of flavour on his tongue and let the moment settle around him. Hisoka would talk when he was ready. There was no rush.

***

Chuckling, Hisoka glanced at the tray and decided to try one of the crackers before sipping at his glass.

“I did have something to ask about our earlier topic. You said I need to be certain about my feelings before I can approach my mystery man,” he said. “It occurred to me that you could help me with that. I can’t lie to you, so you could ask me a direct question and the band would punish me if I’m lying or reward me for being honest. Then I could tell him I liked him, and see what happens.”

***

“I can do that, yes,” Hannibal said, watching Hisoka closely for any sign of deception. “If you wish me to, I will. But I need you to know that under normal circumstances, I would not take advantage of you like that.”

He could not afford Hisoka to feel as if he were setting a precedent. “I will do this because you are asking me to and not because I am looking to force your hand. Are we clear about that?” I won’t have you saying that I forced you. I am not your father.

***

“It’s a risk I’m going to have to take; I need to know. If I’m just craving catharsis then I shouldn’t pursue them, shouldn’t I? I would be so cruel as to toy with their affections any more than I have,” Hisoka sighed. “Just because you can, doesn’t mean you will. I understand that, but the question will always be there regardless. Because you do have the means to do it.”

Looking away submissively, he added, “I want to trust you, it’s difficult. I know you understand. I have tried to open up with you.” Should I go for extra pitiful? No, you’d smell a trap, I’m too proud for you to buy into that. Humming softly, he picked up another cracker. I have to play this carefully, I can’t push my luck too much.

"I would be grateful for a small gesture to alleviate my concerns, but I don’t see how you could. So I have to decide if he’s worth the risk." He took a sip of his drink and waited.

Your move, I don’t like the idea of being completely open with you. Not yet, and if you’re as smart
as you seem. You won’t want that openness under these circumstances, because I will find a way to use it to my advantage. I’m willing to live with the fallout, are you?

***

Hannibal watched the worry cross Hisoka’s face and listened to his concerns. There was one thing he could do to alleviate them, but it bordered on recklessness, and, he reminded himself, he had to be sure.

“I usually wouldn’t do this, mon cher, but I understand your concerns,” he said, looking over at Hisoka. “I can alleviate them if you answer one question. Do not lie to me. Are you genuinely worried that I will use my bracelet to force you to reveal things to me, simply to satisfy my own curiosity?”

***

Hisoka continued to avoid looking at Dr. Lecter, tensing up a little. “I don’t want to, but I do worry about it,” he whispered. “I want to trust you.” He paused as the band triggered in its effort to soothe his sudden anxiety. “But I can’t, not yet.”

***

Hannibal watched Hisoka’s discomfort and had to take a deep breath. He looked so beautiful at that moment that the urge to take him into his arms and taste every inch of his skin was almost overwhelming.

Now, it was his move.

“Mon Cher, look at me,” he ordered as he held up his own left wrist. “I’m going to give you what you need.”

It wasn’t reckless, no. It was entirely necessary. The pull he had been fighting all evening was threatening to tear him in two. No, it most certainly wasn’t reckless. It was a necessity.

***

Deliberately hesitating for a brief moment, Hisoka looked over at Dr. Lecter. He was curious to see how Hannibal would meet his challenge. The band triggered again, and he suppressed his urge to shudder in response to the soothing Nen flowing into him.

***

“You wanted reassurance,” Hannibal said and wrapped his hand around his own wrist.

He concentrated on what he needed; now was not the time to make a mistake. He felt the cool sensation of metal forming against his skin and closed his eyes, allowing himself to fully embrace the moment, committing it entirely to memory. Hisoka’s face, the heat of the fire and the way the light danced across his skin.

It had been years since he’d last done this and the oddly strange sensation of his own Nen collecting at his wrist brought back long-buried memories; a man with dark curls and open, reflective eyes, staring up at him...Hannibal pushed the thoughts aside.

Opening his hand, he looked down at the thin, flat band of gold with the words *Protect, Care* and *Cherish* etched in blood-red around it.
Holding it out for Hisoka to inspect, he took a deep breath and said, “For you, mon cher. Now we are even. I am bound to you, just as you are bound to me.”

***

Feeling more than a little dumbfounded, Hisoka stared, wide-eyed for a moment before he reached out to touch the new bracelet. *It feels real; it feels like mine.* His mouth had fallen open as he tried to find the words to say something witty, but his voice died in his throat.

You did this, to assure me that I can trust you? Does that mean you’ll be punished for taking advantage of me? I really didn’t think that through did I? Fuck, still I can work around this. I’ll figure something out, you can’t take advantage, but you can still breach the code of conduct without that.

***

Hannibal allowed Hisoka to feel his way around the band and relished the feel of his warm fingers against his skin. After a short while, he said softly, “Did you have a question in mind that you wished me to ask? I do not wish to assume.”

***

"I do...yes." Hisoka blinked and withdrew his hand from the bracelet but continued to stare at it for a few moments longer. “Those words, you choose different ones for each one you make? Sorry, it’s just, I didn’t think...can you tell me what your terms are? So I know what you’ve done for me? I’ll give you the question after, I promise.”

***

“For as long as this band is active, I am bound to Protect, Care for and Cherish you,” Hannibal said evenly and stopped himself from reaching out to Hisoka to take his hand back. “I can not take advantage of you, and I will feel if I have caused you unnecessary distress. He allowed a small smirk to play at the corner of his mouth as he added, “Don’t worry, mon cher, I have taken your particular...proclivities into account.”

***

Hisoka felt his heart skip as he listened to the terms of Dr. Lecter’s bracelet and swallowed. He’d given his word; he had to come up with a suitable question for his gambit to pay off.

"Well I was thinking, I use Illu-chan as a nickname to refer to both Elijah and Lulu. So the question can be simplified to ask about them together. Something like, ‘Do I have feelings for somebody other than Illu-chan?’ should get the result we want. Do you agree, Dr. Lecter?"

***

Hannibal listened carefully to Hisoka’s question and nodded when he asked if he agreed. It was well worded to allow him plausible deniability if this all backfired.

“Very well,” he said and took a fresh sip of his drink, allowing his band to come into full view. “Hisoka Morow, do you have romantic feelings for anyone other than your Illu-chan?”

***

You were supposed to ask it exactly how I worded it. Hisoka growled inside his mind before
closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. *It’s fine, just stick to the plan. See how his stupid Nen reacts and then go from there.*

Once he felt ready, he opened his eyes and smiled before he said, “Yes, I do.”

Instinctively, he grabbed at his wrist and fought back a moan of pleasure in response to the sudden jolt of delightful pain that shot up his arm. *I do actually have feelings for him? Romantic feelings?*

***

Hannibal grinned smugly. “I think you have your answer, mon cher,” he said. “Hopefully you have the clarity that you sought. His eyes danced with mirth as he added, “All that is left for you to do now is confront your mystery man.”

***

"Yes, I suppose I do,” Hisoka agreed, rubbing his arm gently. "Just a matter of finding the right time, and way to bring it up. I don't really think he'd go for my usual pick up lines."

*This is fine, if anything it might just make this whole thing easier. Illu-chan suggested seduction; he knows what I am like. He's bound to have expected me to get attracted.*

***

Hannibal feigned looking thoughtful. “Well, perhaps a romantic evening by an open fire would be a good place to start. You could send him flowers, and leave him thoughtful little gifts too, if you were so inclined. Romance isn’t always about pick-up lines, but perhaps you could test a few out to see what kind of effect they would have.”

***

"Oh, I am fairly sure they’re a bit on the vulgar side, and I doubt he would laugh off my methods of seducing Danchou," Hisoka shrugged nonchalantly. "My mystery man is, a bit more refined than my usual conquests."

***

Hannibal chuckled. “I’m sure you’ll find a way. Gestures of affection, hidden jokes that are only known to the two of you...pictures of cute animals, rabbits, for example,” he said, smirking affectionately at Hisoka. “They’re all effective, refined ways of demonstrating your feelings.”

***

"Do drawing pictures, and performing little rituals count too?” Hisoka asked curiously.

***

“They can, yes,” Hannibal said with an impish smile.

*You really are oddly charming, aren’t you, mon cher? Hannibal thought. I wonder when you will say it? How long will we dance before you take that leap?*

***

"Good to know. Maybe I could possibly try taking him out, maybe to a restaurant. But, I’m limited in where I can go, and the guard patrol does rather ruin the mood. Then there's also the fact that I
don’t really know what sort of restaurant he’d frequent,” Hisoka mused aloud. Give me something to work with; if I know you are going to respond favourably, I’ll let you have me on the floor.

"Maybe I should do some magic tricks?"

***

“Mon cher,” Hannibal said kindly, leaning forward and placing his hand over Hisoka’s. “It is OK. Be yourself. I’d be proud to be seen standing next to the man in front of me right now. If your mystery man is half the man I am, then he would be too.” He rubbed his thumb over Hisoka’s palm and squeezed reassuringly. “You’re worth it, Hisoka.”

***

"You would?” Hisoka asked dumbly, staring at Hannibal in surprise. "You really mean that too. Lying’s rude...and you already said you're attracted to me." Just kiss him. He's going to get the message. Look at him; he's got it bad. He keeps smiling, and he used his Nen on himself. He really likes me. So why am I so hesitant? "You keep being so nice to me, and going out of your way for me. I don't really understand why. You confuse me so much, you know," he rambled. "I wanted to hate you. Really wanted to. But I can’t. Because you just keep being so damn nice."

***

Hannibal chuckled and squeezed Hisoka’s hand again before sitting back. “Mon cher, you are many things, but subtle is not one of them.” He gave the nervous man a reassuring smile. “I am kind because I am choosing to be. I go out of my way for you because I see value in doing so. I like you, and so, for me, there is no downside to going that extra mile.” He smirked. “Especially when I get to see the bewilderment on your face when I do. You are a special man. I would not bind myself for just anyone."

He trailed off and turned to the fire as if thinking. “I know you wanted to dislike me; it comes with the job. But I take some pride in the fact that you don’t.” He flashed Hisoka a quick smile. “It proves that I’m doing something right. I hope the man you chose knows exactly how precious you are.” He ran his index finger over the words Protect, Care and Cherish. “Because if he doesn’t, he will have to answer to me.”

***

Silently, Hisoka sat and listened to what Dr. Lecter had to say, and found his gaze kept drifting back to the newly created band. Are you saying that you have feelings for me too? Or do you just want me to think that you do?

"Saying things like that, makes me sound like a kid. Surely you're not that much older than me?" he asked to break the silence. "I know Nen can slow ageing, but I really didn't think you were 'old-old' if you know what I mean?" Shifting on the rug he sighed and contemplated crushing the glass in his hand, wondering how it would feel to smash it into Hannibal's smug smiling face, before the image of them both kissing in front of the fireplace drifted across his mind, and he shook the thoughts away.

So what if I like him that way? I've never let it stop me before. True, I usually try to fuck them first, but I still killed them. In the end. Pull yourself together. You're not a teen with a crush. He let out a quiet growl and tried to use drinking to cover it. The plan was to seduce him, then either get him struck off or kill him. The game had just become more interesting, that's all, he told himself. Maybe I can convince him to cut my therapy short? Once I'm not his patient, he can have me. I just
need to convince him, without outright lying.

***

Hannibal shook his head. “No, mon cher, I am not ‘old-old’,” he said. “I simply care for you. It was meant as a gesture of affection. My apologies if it did not come across as such.”

He took a sip of his drink and gestured to the food. “Feel free to eat as much as you like. I wouldn’t want you to go hungry.”

***

What if cheese and crackers aren’t what I want you to put in my mouth right now? Hisoka thought cheekily as he did his best to look grateful and picked up another snack from the tray.

"You already remind me of, you know...please be patient with me. I know you're not him, but the mind likes to play its tricks," he said softly. "I'm sorry if I was a little rude with my comment about your age."

***

He expressed the desire for people to care for and cherish you? Hannibal thought, raising his brow momentarily. Because he most certainly didn’t protect you. Does Illu-chan not wish to see you happy? What are you trying to achieve here, mon cher?

“After a certain point, I find that age proves to be an irrelevant factor when it comes to the company that people keep,” Hannibal said politely. “Some may appear old, but have the mind of a teenager; others quite the reverse. You are a grown man, and you are free to make your own choices.”

***

"Well, I have exercised that particular freedom to come and see you," Hisoka said playfully. "I have to say the outcome of that choice has been rather enjoyable so far."

***

Hannibal nodded and smiled politely. “It’s good to know that you’re not regretting your decision. I am glad that I could help you, mon cher.”

***

Take it slow; knee jerk comments are just ruining the mood. I need to get him back to how he was, earlier.

"You have been wonderfully helpful, you've helped more for me then anyone else ever has. Even my mentor was trying to live vicariously through me, but you? Everything you've done, you just wanted to. You never seem to want anything back," Hisoka said earnestly. "It was very unnerving at first, but it's becoming much easier to accept. The more time I spend around you, the more interesting I find you and the more I want to know about you."

Putting down his half-empty glass on the tray, he decided to risk reaching out to put his hand on Hannibal's. "Lots of people try to be mysterious, but you? You're an enigma to me. I can't read you; it's actually rather exciting being around you."
Hannibal’s smile softened, and he stroked Hisoka’s hand with his thumb. “I do not ask for nothing, mon cher,” he said quietly. “I ask that you be happy and that you learn what makes your soul truly sing. I have not set you an easy task, but nothing that is ever worth having is gained without a fight. All I will ever ask of you is that I see an honest smile cross your lips before we part ways.”

"An honest smile?" Hisoka asked. "I feel most alive when I'm in battle, but that's not quite what you mean is it?" he added as he shifted a little closer.

“I want you to experience peace, mon cher,” Hannibal said. “I want you to know bone-deep contentment and for you to feel the exquisite stillness that accompanies it. I want you to find the side of you that compliments your warrior; a calling that allows you to know fulfilment and that would never detract, only add to your life. I want you to know who you are and where you belong.”

"That will take a while. I don't tend to be happy if I'm not in the middle of some sort of mischief. Generally speaking," Hisoka replied with a grin. "So you'll probably be stuck with me for a while, but somehow I don't think you'd mind that." He paused to look at his hand as it rested on top of Hannibal’s. It felt warm against his own. "I wouldn't even know where to start. I can be still. I can be patient, but it's not bone-deep contentment,” he continued to babble as he tried to work out why it felt so nice to hold hands by the fire. "I don't know if I've ever felt that, not even with Illu-chan.”

“And that’s why I’m here,” Hannibal said gently. “I intend to help you find it, but I can’t do that unless you are honest with me, mon cher. And in order for you to do that, you must first be honest with yourself. Do you think you can do that for me?”

Hisoka frowned slightly. "I am trying to be honest," he replied. "Your band does make it hard not to be. Why do you think I’m lying to myself?"

“You’re defensive,” Hannibal said gently. “Which means that you feel that there is something you need to protect. It is not a bad thing, mon cher,” he explained. “It simply means that there are parts of yourself that you have not yet faced. I don’t want you to do it alone.” He looked down at his wrist. “I can’t let you do it alone.”

"So where do you suggest I start? Should I make plans to confront my mystery man?" Hisoka enquired. "What would you do if I just leaned closer and kissed you? Would you get angry? Or would you kiss me back? "This isn't one of those meditating in waterfalls things, is it?"

Turning Hisoka’s hand in his, Hannibal didn’t take his eyes off the man’s face as he started to
gently massage the pad of his thumb, adding just enough Nen to his touch to fully penetrate the
delicate muscles. “Plans can always help, mon cher, yes. I promise you; there will be no waterfalls
unless you want them,” he said with a quiet chuckle.

***

"Would you be joining me?" Hisoka teased as he closed his eyes and allowed himself to focus on
Hanibal’s touch. "I have been considering how he might react if I were to suddenly kiss him,
though. It’s strange, but I keep finding myself thinking about it, would he push me away? Be angry
with me? Or would he reciprocate, I’m honestly not sure."

***

Hannibal paused for a second as he thought about how he would react to Hisoka kissing him and
bit back a moan. Starting up his massage again, with the same, even pressure, he said, “I doubt
he’d complain.” He heard the desire in his voice and hoped that it wasn’t as evident to his
submissive. “But he would likely have to end it before you wanted, even if he did want you to
continue.”

***

“I’m sure his reaction would be worth it,” Hisoka chuckled. “However short-lived, and then we’d
both know that my interest was real. The ball would be in his court, to manoeuvre in those
restraints of his.”

***

Pressing harder against Hisoka’s palm, Hannibal felt his heart quicken. When are you going to give
in? he wondered. This doesn’t feel like a wind-up, and your bracelet hasn’t gone off...nor mine.
You want to. What’s stopping you?

“As I said, mon cher, I doubt he’d complain,” he said quietly. “I’m sure he would delight in
showing you what he was capable of doing for you as well.”

***

Lowering his voice to practically a purr, Hisoka replied, “Maybe we should find out?”

Not waiting for an answer, he closed the gap between them to place a chaste kiss on Hannibal’s
lips.

***

Hannibal barely registered his hand moving to the back of Hisoka’s head, or the growl that ripped
from low in his throat when the man started to pull away. It wasn’t nearly enough.

Tightening his grip in Hisoka’s hair, Hannibal kissed back, pouring every ounce of passion he had
into forcing Hisoka to face his feelings and kissing back.

You will not do this to me, he growled, nipping at Hisoka’s bottom lip with his teeth. You will not
expose me without showing yourself too.

***

Moaning in response to the hand in his hair, Hisoka continued to kiss back more enthusiastically
now Hannibal was reciprocating.

*So much for stopping before I wanted you to, you don’t want to stop. I know you don’t. You can have me right here if you’re willing to give in to your desire.*

***

Hannibal allowed himself a few short minutes to explore Hisoka’s mouth, but when he felt the growing desire to *bite* threatening to take over, he pulled back.

Everything in his body protested, but he knew where the line was. He couldn’t cross it yet.

“Mon cher,” he said, and heard his voice crack with awe. Sliding his hand from Hisoka’s hair, he cupped the side of his face, feeling for the faint traces of makeup under his fingers that he’d smelled during their kiss.

You came prepared, he mused but found that he didn’t mind.

“Thank you,” he said, still slightly breathless. “You are magnificent.”

***

*Why are you thanking me? It was just a kiss.* Hisoka wondered as he grinned at Hannibal.

He stared silently for a moment as he felt the hand move to cup his cheek. The pull on his hair combined with the feeling of the kiss had been pleasant, and he found himself resisting the urge to whine at the loss of contact.

***

Hannibal ran a finger over Hisoka’s slightly reddened lips as he saw the confused look the man was giving him.

“I am flattered, that a man such as yourself would consider me worthy of your attention,” he said kindly.

Running his hand back around to the nape of Hisoka’s neck, he tugged slightly at his hair and watched closely as he said, “I can give you more, mon cher if you want, but it would have to be like it was before. I can not kiss you like that again, not whilst you’re my patient.”

***

You want to cane me again? You want me, we both know it, why are you resisting your desire? Nobody who could cause problems knows that I’m here.

Although he was enjoying the gentle touch, Hisoka found himself craving something harsher; he liked it rough. Gentle wasn’t what he was hoping for. Opening his mouth, he tried to utter some sort of witty remark but frowned when he couldn’t get the words out.

*What’s going on?* he wondered trying to talk again and failing. He looked away shyly. *My band isn’t going off; I don’t understand. I don’t feel that different; it was just a kiss. Surely he can’t be affecting me this badly?*

***

Hannibal found himself wondering if Hisoka’s muteness was as a result of his past, or if it was part...
of his act? Either way, he knew that he could work with it. It wouldn’t be a problem, but it would be something to hopefully fix in the future.

He most certainly hadn’t been quiet in the playroom, but then again; he’d also been performing for an audience. Taking in Hisoka’s posture and thinking back to the kiss, Hannibal found himself hoping that this was, truly, Hisoka’s submissive side beginning to shine. Old lessons were clearly coming back to him, but this was Hannibal’s opportunity to re-write them for his submissive. To show him that he only ever wanted to bring him pleasure. He wanted to give, not take from this wondrous man.

Tightening his grip in Hisoka’s hair, he asked a simple yes/no question. “Do you want me to give you pleasure, Hisoka?”

***

Feeling the renewed tugging on his hair, Hisoka let out a quiet whine in response and felt his heart speed up. You want to give me pleasure, but you won’t give in to your desire? Is this a test? You want my submission; you want to be my Master, don’t you? Why are you nor just taking what you want?

Tensing up slightly, he snuck a look at Hannibal trying to get a read on what he was expected to do. Closing his eyes as another keening noise escaped his lips, he still couldn’t force words to come out.

What’s going on? This doesn’t happen with Elijah and Lulu. Why is this happening with you? You’re not that much like father; he’d have hit me for whimpering. I wouldn’t be considering this if you were too alike, I couldn’t.

***

Hannibal watched Hisoka’s reticence and felt his bracelet trigger for the first time. He held his arm up as pain spiked through his wrist, the words Protect and Care were glowing brightly.

“Mon cher,” he said evenly, moving so that he could look up into his eyes, and allowing the hand in his hair to slide onto his shoulder. “It’s OK; you are safe, the choice is yours. You may speak if you want, but you don’t have to.” He let him see the bracelet again before taking hold of Hisoka’s hand and adding, “Squeeze my fingers if you would prefer to remain silent. I will understand. It’s OK.”

***

Hisoka shook his head slightly before looking at the bracelet and noting that it was active. It’s reacting to my frustration? But you don’t know yet; it’s not your fault I’m like this. How do I tell you?

Wanting to reassure Hannibal he put his other hand over the bracelet and smiled weakly before swallowing the lump in his throat.

I don’t understand why he’s having such a strong influence on me just from one kiss. Yeah, it’s nice to see the bracelet works the same on you as it does on me. But causing you pain right now is really not my goal.

***

“You do not wish to remain silent?” Hannibal asked, seeking to clarify the point Hisoka was trying
to make. He squeezed his shoulder and smiled, trying to reassure his submissive as hot spikes stabbed up his arm. It was going to be an interesting night.

***

You’re getting it, aren’t you? I’d be disappointed in you if you weren’t. How hard is it to learn sign language? Maybe I should get lessons? Hisoka thought as he nodded.

***

“But you will, regardless?” Hannibal asked, for the sake of making it explicit.

So your father didn’t like you to make noise; we really will have to work on that in the future.

***

Hisoka nodded again as he started to relax. Yes, you get it, don’t you? Now, do you see why I don’t like to visit the past?

***

“I understand,” Hannibal said gently. He knew that he wouldn’t be able to push Hisoka too far, but he wanted to give him a positive experience. An idea came to mind when he felt the tension in his submissive’s shoulders. Hisoka wouldn’t need to talk.

“I’m going to take care of you, mon cher,” he explained. “I would like to give you a massage, but only if it’s OK with you?”

***

Massage? That wasn’t what I was expecting, but it can’t be that bad, right? He said he wanted to give pleasure.

Feeling daring, Hisoka pulled Hannibal’s hand over to the hem of his t-shirt and waited to see what he would do. Will you take that as consent? Or will I have to strip for you?

***

Hannibal raised his brow as he felt the pain ebb away from his wrist. Hisoka didn’t look or feel abashed anymore.

“Very well,” he said, and lifted the man’s top-up, pulling it over his head to reveal his gloriously muscular body.

“I’d like you to clear the food off the rug, mon cher. Put it on the table just there.” He pointed to the small coffee table nestled between the sofa and chair. “And then lie down on the rug.” He stood up. “I’ll be right back with what I need,” he explained and headed for the kitchen.

***

That’s simple enough, I can do that. Then I just need to wait, in the position he told me to, Hisoka thought waiting for the door to close behind Hannibal before moving to start clearing the tray. Did I get it wrong just now? Should I have just stripped myself? I need this to go right, should I take off my jeans?

As soon as he felt himself starting to grow anxious, it was washed away by a sudden feeling of
calm. Looking down at his wrist, he spotted Obey glowing faintly as he gathered everything up onto the tray, and placed it on the small table.

It’s fine, he has a bracelet now. He has to be careful about overstepping my boundaries now. I just wish I could read him better, and I want my voice to come back, he grumbled internally as he removed his jeans, and placed them with his shirt and shoes by the side of the rug. The subtle heat from the fireplace felt wonderful as it danced over his skin, and he lay down, getting comfortable on the rug. Let’s just see what happens next, he told himself. It’s his move now.

***

Hannibal walked directly to his cupboards and selected his highest quality Olive Oil. Quickly pouring it out into a small decorative milk jug, he took a deep breath and reminded himself that he was doing this to build trust. Hisoka was testing him, and he couldn’t let his temper get the better of him, not now.

Returning to the front room, he was amazed to find the man lying, nearly naked on his rug and had to take a moment to admire the sight. Well that certainly makes up for the cheek, he thought, and licked his lips.

“You look good enough to eat, mon cher,” he said and took his time walking over to his submissive. Maybe you realised your mistake? Is this your way of apologising? he wondered. Kneeling beside him, he leant over and placed the jug in front of the fire, to let the oil warm. “Are you comfortable?” he asked, making sure to warm his hands before he touched Hisoka again.

***

I’ve heard stranger things I suppose, as long as you’re enjoying the view that’s what matters, right?

When Hisoka heard the door open, he did his best to stay as relaxed as possible, the Nen from his bracelet alongside the warm fire helped. Hisoka nodded when he heard Hannibal’s question and waited to see what would happen next. You’re not touching me yet, is this part of your insistence on informed consent? I can’t talk right now, so it would be easy to accidentally end up taking advantage. Your bracelet really will punish you if you overstep, won’t it? That’s interesting.

***

“Good,” Hannibal said, still warming his hands. “I want the oil to warm, mon cher, so I’m going to massage you using my Nen first. Nod if you agree to that.”

He had to show that he wasn’t going to take what he wanted. Breaking Hisoka’s negative connection to submission was far too important to risk giving in to his short term desires. He intended to keep Hisoka with him for a very long time, and if it meant participating in a few sexually charged massage sessions, then that is what he would do.

***

Not sure how else to respond, Hisoka nodded to confirm his consent.

***

Smiling, Hannibal said, “I’m going to touch you now,” and placed his warmed hands onto Hisoka’s upper back.
Once again, he pooled his Nen into his palms and pushed it into Hisoka’s muscles, but this time he fully concentrated, allowing his aura to tell him where to focus and how deep he needed to send it. He moved slowly, pushing his Nen carefully into the deeper tissues and, where required, realigning his spine to allow the tension to flow out of him. He was curious as to whether Hisoka would remain entirely silent, or if, as his body relaxed, his mind would as well?

***

As he felt hands against his skin, Hisoka's first instinct was to tense up for a brief moment before forcing himself to relax. *He can't take advantage, remember, he has a band now.* The Nen flowing into him felt strange; it wasn't quite the same as the aura that came from the bracelet. It felt like it had a purpose, and he smiled despite himself.

*You really are getting attached to me, aren't you?* he thought and felt his breath hitch when Hannibal worked on a particularly hard knot in his lower back. *Fuck, you would be fucking good at this, wouldn't you? No wonder you're so dammed smug. You're not arrogant. You just know you are actually that good, don't you?*

***

Hearing the gasp from Hisoka was far more gratifying than he’d expected, and Hannibal realised that he was smiling despite his earlier annoyance. The oil was warming nicely by the fire, and he couldn’t fight his urge to keep talking to the man below him, despite his muteness. There was something strangely compelling to the way he responded to his touch. He wanted more.

“I want to make you feel good, mon cher,” he said as he gradually moved his hands further up his back. “Nod your head if you would like me to continue,” he added, praying silently that he would.

*You like this, I know you do. Give in, mon cher; relax. Let me show you how good it can be.*

***

Not sure how else he could respond Hisoka nodded vigorously and bit his bottom lip to stifle the keening noise that was threatening to come out.

***

“Thank you, mon cher,” Hannibal chuckled and paused when he reached Hisoka’s shoulder blade to allow his Nen to soak deeper into the muscle. “I’m very glad that you’re enjoying yourself, now, shall we add to the fun?” Not waiting for a response, he instructed, “Tap your hand three times on the floor, Hisoka.”

***

Confused by the instruction, Hisoka hesitated before reaching out to tap the floor with his left hand so that he could see if the bracelet reacted. He wasn't disappointed when *Obey* lit up faintly, and a sharp stab of pain shot through his arm when he tapped for the third time. He twitched in response.

*Fuck, are you going to try and make me cum like this?*
When he reached the top of Hisoka’s now far more relaxed shoulders, Hannibal said, “Again, mon cher,” and sank his Nen into the base of his neck. Watching Hisoka’s reactions was mesmerising.

***

You actually are, aren't you? Hisoka thought as he repeated the tapping and was rewarded with another jolt from his bracelet. Closing his eyes, a barely audible gasp managed to escape his lips.

***

Hannibal allowed his Nen to search out every tense muscle and strained tendon in Hisoka’s neck before beginning his move back down. “Three more taps, Hisoka,” he ordered and was curious to see what would happen this time. Slowly, the silence was breaking. It was delightful.

He eyed the olive oil happily. It was giving off a lovely scent now that it was beginning to warm, and he licked his lips as he imagined what it would feel like to sink his teeth into Hisoka’s skin. No, not yet. Now is not the time. Wait. Patience. You’ll taste him soon enough. He’ll be yours before long.

***

Hisoka braced himself for the band to trigger once more as he complied with the instruction. As soon as he brought his hand down for the third tap, he held his breath in anticipation of the pain. When it didn't come, he stared at the bracelet before shuddering and arching underneath Hannibal's hands as a wave of soothing warmth flowed over him instead.

What's going on? Why didn't it hurt me? I don't understand?

***

Moving down to Hisoka’s lower back, Hannibal ordered, “Again,” and left his hands in place, sniffing and delighting in the scent of arousal that was filling the air. It mixed with the oil perfectly.

***

As his mind started to fog over, Hisoka almost missed the order, reacting on instinct as he tapped the rug again. Why am I so relaxed? I feel a little strange, but it'll feel even better when the endorphins kick in. He closed his eyes and focused on the scratchy prickling sensation that had started crawling up his arm.

I'm so warm; the rug is really soft. Why does he have such a soft rug? he wondered as he pressed his cheek to the material with a small smile. Is he going to keep going until I cum? I think I'm getting there.

***

Hisoka was fully pliant under his hands now, and Hannibal reached over to pick up the oil, testing its heat by pouring a small amount onto the back of his hand. He was pleased to find that it was pleasantly warm.

Pouring a small amount onto his hands, he replaced the jug and rubbed them together to coat them thoroughly before settling back down and saying, “I’m going to massage you with the oil now, mon cher. When you feel my hands touch you, you will tap four times.”
Let’s see if you can still pay attention. Your reward will be greater if you can.

***

Nodding, Hisoka waited for the feeling of Hannibal's hands to return and slowly lifted his hand to tap the floor when they did. On the fourth tap, he arched off the rug and covered his mouth with his hand in a desperate attempt to stay quiet.

*Dammit, you're trying to take me apart with pleasure,* he groaned internally as he felt oil coated fingers continuing to work his muscles and allowed himself to flop back onto the floor. *I need to stay focused, but it feels too good.*

***

Hannibal allowed his hands to explore the entirety of Hisoka’s back, adding more oil as needed. He’d delighted when the man had moved underneath him and knew that keeping the instructions coming would be the key to allowing him the high that he needed.

“Again, mon cher, three times,” watching the way Hisoka bit into his hand. *Mon cher, why do you tempt me so? You’re glorious. Let go. Let me see you fall apart.*

***

Hisoka felt like he was teetering on the edge as he tapped the floor again; he was starting to feel the buzz of endorphins and the building tightness in his belly. *I’m gonna cum, I can't hold on much longer.* He bit down harder to muffle back his moan as he made the second tap. *Just one more.* Quickly following it with the third, as he tasted his own blood and shivered in delight.

***

Hannibal felt the increase in Hisoka’s muscle tension as he shook under him and knew he must be close to the edge. He’d worked him enough, that after he came, his body would enter a state of deep relaxation and he was looking forward to seeing what would happen then.

“Turn over, mon cher,” he said. He wanted to see his face as he came. “And pull your boxers down. We can’t have you staining them.” *Let me taste you. Let me see you gasping as you cum for me.*

***

*Turn over? Pull down my boxers? Are you going to suck me off?* Hisoka blinked in surprise as he moved to position himself on his back and looked up at Hannibal curiously. *Is this you giving in to your desire?* he wondered as he tugged at his underwear and let his hard cock flop against his stomach.

He closed his eyes briefly as another sharp jolt spread through him, and he bucked his hips, tilting his head back and biting his lip. As the pain faded away, he collapsed back onto the rug beneath him and shuddered as his orgasm overtook him. Determined to keep his silence, he covered his mouth again and stared at Hannibal in wonder.

***

Watching Hisoka orgasm in almost complete silence was an experience Hannibal wouldn’t forget in a hurry.
He met the man’s gaze and licked his lips. “Mon cher,” he gasped. “You’re spectacular.” He ran a hand down his arm and smiled adoringly at him. He’d previously promised him he wouldn’t leave him after he’d sent him over the edge and, despite the almost painful tightness in his own pants, he couldn’t imagine ever doing so again.

“There are no words,” he said and dipped his finger into the cum pooling on the man’s chest before sweeping it into his mouth. He let out an audible groan of delight at the taste. “Mon cher,” he moaned. “Tu es exquis*.”

*You’re exquisite

Hisoka blinked before he continued to stare, he wasn’t quite sure he believed what he’d just seen. Shaking his head to try and clear some of the fog, he shuddered with the aftershock of his climax. *Why are you looking at me like that?*

“May I clean you, Hisoka?” Hannibal asked. The desire to taste more was close to becoming overwhelming. “You can nod your head if you agree,” he added, making sure not to phrase it as an instruction. He couldn’t afford to overload him now.

Dumbstruck, Hisoka nodded. He didn’t want to move. If Hannibal was willing to get a cloth to clean him, then he wasn’t going to complain.

Letting out a sigh of relief, Hannibal bent forward and licked a strip up Hisoka’s chest. He moaned when the delicious salty taste of his cum burst over his tongue, and he had to force himself to go slow. This was a moment to be savoured.

Moving so that he had a better angle, he licked him again and grinned. “Mon cher, you are delicious.”

I’m dreaming, right? There’s no way you’d do that. Did I actually leave the hotel?

Hisoka let out a breathy moan as Hannibal continued cleaning him with his tongue. Everything felt surreal.

Lapping up the last of the cum from Hisoka’s chest, Hannibal looked down at his cock with longing but decided against taking it into his mouth.

Not yet, he told himself. I can’t yet.

Pulling out a handkerchief from his pocket, he made quick work of cleaning the rest of Hisoka’s body before pulling his boxers back up.
Looking down at the man and enjoying the lingering taste of him on his tongue, he asked, “How are you feeling, mon cher?” as he settled back down beside him.

***

As he laid on the rug, Hisoka felt conflicted between his desire for movement and his desire not to ever leave the rug again. When Hannibal sat back down, he waited, half expecting more instructions and rolled onto his side when none came. He tried to figure out how to say that he was OK when his words still froze in his throat, and he frowned, pawing at the rug between them. The softness of its surface felt delightful as it brushed against his skin, and he nuzzled his cheek against it with a quiet purr of contentment.

***

Hannibal laughed quietly in delight as he watched Hisoka’s silent display and grinned down at him. “Well,” he said as he wondered if the purring sound was really coming from the man or if it were some sort of Nen effect. “I’m going to assume that you’re happy and that I know what I will be buying you for Christmas, at the very least.”

***

Hisoka paused to nod before he resumed his lazy exploration of the rug. He was still coming down from his climax, and if Hannibal wasn’t in a rush to get up, then neither was he.

***

Hannibal chuckled to himself as Hisoka stretched and he decided to see what would happen if he stroked his hand down his side. Unsurprisingly, the purring increased, and he tried to work out how the man was making the sound. *It has to be some form of Nen, maybe a subtle glamour?* He activated his Gyo but saw nothing out of the ordinary. *Interesting.*

Looking down at Hisoka and smiling again, he said, “So wonderful, mon cher,” and experimentally gave his cheek a gentle stroke, “Si belle*.”

*So beautiful.

***

Pausing, Hisoka blinked before leaning into the hand, touching his cheek, and continuing to languorously stretch over the rug. The light from the fire behind him cast Hannibal in an almost angelic light, he was smiling down at him, and he did his best to smile back.

***

Hisoka was like a drug; he now understood why his Illu-chan had held him the way they had at the party; he wanted more contact, and once he’d settled into a comfortable sitting position, he pulled his hand slowly towards his lap, hoping that Hisoka would follow.

***

Feeling confused by the sudden loss of contact, Hisoka stared at Dr. Lecter for a moment and growled quietly. His fog ridden mind couldn’t understand why he’d stopped stroking him, only that he wanted more. Hoping to get the other man to continue petting him, he edged closer to the slowly
moving hand.

***

“Oh, mon cher, you’ll be the death of me,” Hannibal crooned as Hisoka curled into his hand once again. “You’re perfect.” Rewarding the man he ran his thumb along his jawline and grinned down at him. If he moved once more, he’d have his head resting in his lap. “Come to me, mon cher,” he said gently, guiding the man with his hand. “You can lie in my lap.”

***

Pleased with himself for getting the stroking to resume, Hisoka purred again briefly. When he felt the hand leading him again, he looked up at Hannibal quizzically, before following and laying his head on the man’s lap, curling his body around him.

***

The purring was driving Hannibal slowly and blissfully insane. It was too good. Now that Hisoka was lying on top of him, he could feel the soft vibrations coming from his throat, and he realised that the man really was purring. “Oh, Monsieur,” he groaned. The scent coming from his skin was maddening. What are you? “You’re perfection. What am I to do with you?”

***

Curious about Hannibal’s question, Hisoka rolled over to look up at him. From this position, the flicker of the flames highlighted his jawline, and he thought about kissing along it and down his neck before biting him. Smirking to himself, he nuzzled Hannibal’s hand again, before giving it a playful lick.

Waiting a moment for Hannibal to react, Hisoka reached up and pushed him back onto the rug. Quickly draping himself over his stomach, and nuzzling into his shirt, purring with satisfaction.

***

Hannibal was mildly surprised when Hisoka licked him, but when he sprang at him, pushing him back onto the rug and began to rub himself into his stomach, he couldn’t hold back his startled laugh. He’d moved with him, allowing his submissive to enjoy himself and did his best to ignore the painfully tight tent in his trousers.

“I’m going to assume that you’re enjoying yourself, mon cher?” he chuckled, not expecting an answer and bracing himself on his elbow as Hisoka nuzzled at his shirt, losing half his makeup in the process. Hannibal didn’t even care. The man looked so happy. I’m never letting you go. Don’t ever stop smiling.

***

Hisoka’s only response to the question was a cheerful hum, shifting his weight to cuddle Hannibal as they both laid on the rug. The hand had stopped exploring him, and he pouted a little, trying to work out how to get it back. Experimentally he ran his own hand up Hannibal’s side as he’d done to him earlier, and waited to see how he’d respond.

***

“Oh, mon cher,” Hannibal moaned. “Tu seras réellement ma mort*.” He moved with the touch and instinctively reached out to feel Hisoka’s now buttery soft skin. The oil had been absorbed, and it
was all Hannibal could do to stop himself from rolling them over, and pinning his submissive beneath him. He longed to sink his teeth into his flesh, to bury his straining cock inside his ass and to hear him cry out his name.

But the silent smile, and kitten-like pats of the man’s hands over his body, reminded him that now was not the time. Hisoka had regressed to a far more innocent time in his life, and Hannibal couldn’t bring himself to shatter the man’s quiet contentment.

Stroking his arm, Hannibal pushed his own desire to the side and focussed on Hisoka. “I can unbutton my top if you’d like, mon cher?” he suggested, knowing the comfort that skin contact brought. “Or you can if you’d prefer. We can stay here as long as you like.”

*You will actually be my death.

***

Unbutton? Hisoka wondered. I'm allowed to unbutton your shirt?

He paused his exploratory touching as he tried to decide what he wanted to do. Hannibal hadn't left him; he'd kept his promise. Stay, like this. Warm here, it's nice. Testing the waters, he hesitantly reached up to undo the topmost button, chuckling to himself when Hannibal let him.

Feeling bolder, he moved to position his mouth over the next button and expertly undid it with his teeth and tongue working in tandem. He flashed a proud grin before quickly moving his way down Hannibal’s chest and stomach. Curling back up when he’d finished, and draping himself over Hannibal. He purred softly at the feel of his skin and lay there contentedly until his curiosity got the better of him, and he decided to chance stroking the man's leg.

***

“Mon cher,” Hannibal gasped. “Be careful.”

He stroked his hand down Hisoka’s back, not wanting to discourage his exploration, but making sure he’d have control, should Hisoka try to take things too far. When he’d begun to unbutton his top with his mouth, Hannibal had almost snapped and rolled them over to pin Hisoka to the rug, but the happy purring coming from deep within the man had stopped him. He couldn’t reinforce his old experiences. He had to be strong for him. He couldn’t give in; no matter how much he wanted to.

***

Frowning at the warning, Hisoka growled in reply. Curious to see what would happen if he pushed his luck a little, he switched his attention to Hannibal's bare chest - carding his fingers through the hair there before briefly stroking his thumb over his nipple.

Do you want me to stop? You sound like you're enjoying this, why tell me to be careful?

***

Hannibal moaned and momentarily allowed his head to rock back at the feel of Hisoka’s hands moving across his chest. “I can’t let you return the favour, mon cher,” he said sadly. “But you can touch my chest. We can stay here as long as you like.”
Why not? You want me, why aren't you taking me? Hisoka wondered as he continued playing with Hannibal's chest hair. He'd been surprised by the quiet moaning and wanted to see if he could get more noises out of him. How do I show you that you can have me? That's why I came here; I wanted to get fucked by you.

Continuing to push the boundaries, he lowered his head and licked Hannibal's nipple.

“Hisoka, mon cher,” Hannibal groaned. He was driving him crazy. He was grateful for the band around his wrist: It reminded him that he couldn’t follow through with the dark urges that were surfacing within him.

“Just your hands, we can’t...no more than this,” he gasped. “I can’t.”

You can't? The band is stopping you?

Hisoka pouted before settling back down beside Hannibal and resting his head on his chest. Not wanting to stop, he continued lazily running his hand over Hannibal's skin. When no further admonishments came, he started to purr again.

Hannibal let out a sigh of relief and lay back, allowing Hisoka to explore him. This was like nothing he'd ever felt before, and he closed his eyes, trying to make sense of what was happening to him.

“C'est tellement bon*,” he moaned, risking that Hisoka wouldn't understand French. Remembering how the man reacted to verbal praise, HE let his hand stroke over his bare shoulder as he spoke, hoping the meaning would be understood, even if the sound was foreign.

*That feels so good

Hannibal's words sounded strange, but Hisoka ignored them in favour of the hand stroking his shoulder. The gentle touching felt good and, with a quiet mewling sound, he let himself melt a little more against Hannibal's body, increasing his purring.

Like this, want to stay just like this.

“Yes, mon cher,” Hannibal sighed as he relaxed. “Yes, like this.”

His pants were beyond painfully tight, but he found that he could resist the pull now that Hisoka had settled. He wanted nothing more than to keep him in his arms. “Tout à l'heure, mon cher. Tout à l'heure*,” he said and started to stroke circles into the man’s back.

*All in good time, my dear. All in good time.
Enjoying the moment, Hisoka sighed and nuzzled Hannibal's chest; he couldn't quite recall the last time he'd been so content to just be still.

*But I came here to do something, didn't I*? he thought as he yawned. The fire's warmth, combined with the gentle stroking, was lulling him to sleep. *It can wait,* he decided. *Not moving, too comfortable.*

“Let’s stay here,” Hannibal said, feeling Hisoka relax. “This is enough.” He closed his eyes, repeating the words in his own head. “This is what I wanted you to feel. Sleep, mon cher. Relax. I have you; you’re safe with me.”

Hisoka yawned again. *Safe?* he thought as he closed his eyes and squeezed Hannibal gently, shifting his weight to see if he could get even more comfortable on the rug. *Sleep, then I’ll remember. Came here to do something, but it can wait.*

30 mins later

Opening his eyes, Hisoka blinked groggily as he tried to figure out where he was. *When did I go to sleep? I was at Dr. Lecter’s house, wasn’t I?*

Rolling onto his back, he looked up at the ceiling and froze when he caught the sight of Hannibal out of the corner of his eye. *I’m half-naked?*

Shaking his head, he sat up and tried to remember what he’d been doing. *Massage, he mentioned wanting to help me relax. I guess he must have managed it. Everything’s kinda blurry. Hope I didn’t do anything to ruin the plan.*

Sighing softly, he stretched, waiting for his memories to return, and turned to look at Dr. Lecter, who was lying on the rug beside him. It felt as if he’d only recently stopped stroking his back.

“Sorry, for falling asleep on you...hope I didn’t snore,” he said, feeling a little unsure of himself as the memory of going mute flashed through his head.

“You are a surprisingly snore-free sleeper, mon cher,” Hannibal assured him. “I was happy to see the smile on your face. You rolled off me about ten minutes ago. You said something about a plan that Illu-chan had been talking to you about, but didn’t elaborate.” He tilted his head curiously *Why were you dreaming about plans?* “You didn’t seem upset. Did your plan work out?”

*I was talking in my sleep? Illu-chan never mentioned me doing that before.*
"I'm not sure. I don't remember. To be honest, my head is a little fuzzy; nobody has ever commented on me talking in my sleep before. I can only assume I was dreaming," Hisoka replied thoughtfully before looking away shyly. "I tend to dream about Illu-chan a lot when we're apart. Elijah is genuinely convinced his father would have me killed. Sometimes I wish he'd just run away with me and forget about them. They care, I'm sure, but they just have such a weird way of showing it. Lulu would say yes in a heartbeat; she loves adventure. It probably sounds childish, two adults running away together." *Although it’s been a while since I had that dream, why did it come back now?* "I’ve never told anyone else about that, I know it’s not a session, but I trust you’ll keep my confidence, right?’’

***

“Of course, mon cher,” Hannibal said, reaching forward and brushing hair from Hisoka’s eyes. “You seemed shocked to see me. I am sorry that I am not your Illu-chan, but,” he held out his wrist and smiled. “I will always protect you. You are in my care, and that brings with it certain responsibilities. I will keep your secrets. What you say now is confidential, just as what happened before your nap was too. Have no fear.”

***

"I didn't expect to have fallen asleep in my underwear in front of the fire, so yes. I was a little surprised," Hisoka chuckled. "I'm not sure why I started acting like that, but you didn't seem to mind. If my mind isn't playing more tricks on me, that is?’’

***

“I didn’t mind at all, mon cher,” Hannibal said happily. “As I said, it was wonderful to see you so content. I’m glad you experienced that kind of peace. Now you know what to aim for when those kinds of urges arise within you again. So no, Hisoka, your mind wasn’t playing tricks on you.” He chuckled. “I hope that we both gained insight from what happened.”

***

"Yes, I think we did,” Hisoka agreed playfully looking at Hannibal's bare chest. "I definitely got to learn about some things."

***

Hannibal grinned and couldn’t resist teasing back. “I can take it off if you like?” he said, chuckling. “You were quite determined before the lethargy took hold. You have a gift for making yourself understood, no matter the situation. Unbuttoning it with your mouth was an impressive trick.”

***

"I can undo trousers too,” Hisoka added with a smirk. "Although, I doubt you'd have allowed me to, not today anyway.”

***

Still chuckling quietly, Hannibal shook his head. “No,” he said. “I wouldn’t have. The top was enough for now.” He remembered the feeling of Hisoka’s teeth grazing against his skin and swallowed. “But I appreciate the offer.”

***
"I think I understand," Hisoka replied as he stretched out on the rug, propping himself up on one arm. "You were talking to me, but it didn't sound like words. Even though I knew they had to be. Were you talking in another language? Like you always call me 'mon cher'?

***

Hannibal smiled and allowed his shirt to slide off his shoulder as he propped himself up on his side. "I have a bad habit of speaking French when situations become intimate, and I had also noticed how you reacted to verbal compliments, mon cher. I was saying how good your touches felt, please forgive me if I confused you," he said, hoping that the answer would satisfy Hisoka.

Looking him up and down, he decided a distraction was needed. Apart from anything else, he couldn’t afford to become that aroused again. "I think you could do with a shower."

***

"That might help me clear the cobwebs," Hisoka agreed. *No doubt you're not going to join me though.* "Were you thinking of getting one yourself? I appear to have covered you in my makeup."

He grinned cheekily letting his gaze rake over Hannibal’s body, stopping at his crotch before looking back up into his eyes. "I could offer to clean you up, but you seemed rather insistent that I couldn't return the favour. Red tape, and everything," he said with disappointment. "Another time."

***

“All things have their time and place,” Hannibal agreed and allowed his face to mirror Hisoka’s sad tone. “I’m yet to meet someone who is a fan of red tape, mon cher, but, we all have our boundaries that we must enforce.”

Slowly, he pushed himself to his feet and looked down before offering Hisoka his hand. “I have an ensuite that I can use. I’ll happily show you to the main bathroom if you would like.”

***

"That sounds good," Hisoka conceded as he allowed Hannibal to help him to his feet. *I like to dry off in just a towel after, should I warn you? Or spring that on you? Would it be considered rude not to mention it?* "I’m curious to see what your bathroom looks like, after seeing the downstairs. You have an interesting taste in decor."

***

Smirking, Hannibal set off for the door to the hallway. “Well, I hope that I don’t disappoint you. You will have to let me know what you think once you’ve tested the facilities,” he teased. “Hopefully I’ll get that five-star rating I’ve always dreamed of.”

***

"Maybe, but I warn you I had an exceptionally lovely suite at the Arena. So you've got stiff competition," Hisoka replied, playing along and chuckling to himself.

***

“Well, I expect a thorough review then,” Hannibal joked, leading Hisoka up the stairs. When they reached the top, he paused dramatically and gestured towards the white double-doors. “Enjoy.”
30 Minutes Later

Hannibal was sitting in the kitchen when Hisoka returned. He’d had a quick shower and had changed into a more relaxed grey top and dark trousers, anticipating another attempt from Hisoka to get him to sleep with him. He wasn’t disappointed.

Looking up from his honey tea, he was faced with the sight of Hisoka, dressed in nothing more than a towel and a smile. Hiding the stab of sudden gut-wrenching desire he felt, he had to admit, at least to himself, that he didn’t think he’d ever get bored of looking at the man’s body.

“How was it?” he asked, willing his growing erection to subside. “I hope I didn’t lose points for my lack of sacrificial victims hanging from the walls.”

"As wonderful as that image is, perhaps a wetroom with a suitably coloured floor to hide the blood would be better for that kind of thing? Or are you thinking more of an Elizabeth Bathory style bathing experience?” Hisoka asked with an arched brow as he made his way over to one of the barstools. "Don't worry, the shower was wonderful. I'm feeling much better, and it's interesting to see you in something other than a button-up shirt." Are you worried that I've not given up my attempt to seduce you? "I was starting to wonder if you owned any casual clothes."

"Perhaps you’re right, I’ll have to think about getting one installed,” Hannibal joked, flashing Hisoka a warm smile. “But I am interested to hear what you have against my suits, mon cher. Perhaps you can explain over a warm drink?” He gestured to the teapot. “I find this particular blend helps to relieve any lingering tensions that I have left before I retire for the night. If you aren’t a fan of herbal, then I have some decaffeinated stored away for when Pariston comes to call.”

It's the fact that you're in them, they rather get in the way of you fucking me, Hisoka grumbled to himself.

"Don't get me wrong, you do pull them off very well, it's just, where I'm from, people tend to not trust the men in suits. And Herbal tea would be fine. Nanna used to let me have it as a special treat. Although, she made her own blend, and I don't know what was in it," Hisoka replied wistfully. "I think you and her would have had interesting conversations; not necessarily about me. Just, generally."

“She sounds like a lovely woman,” Hannibal said, picking up the teapot and pouring Hisoka a cup. “I am glad that you both had each other. People like that are a gift that we treasure forever.” When he saw the nostalgic look on Hisoka’s face, he smiled and changed the subject. “This particular blend is from Jappon; I sweeten it with local honey.” He pushed the bowl forward. “Feel free to add as much as you like.”
"She was," Hisoka agreed, plastering on a smile as he switched his focus to the obvious distraction on offer. "Jappon is a wonderful place; maybe when everything blows over, I'll go back for a visit. I do love the hot springs, have you been to any yourself?"

***

“This particular blend is from the Kagoshima region,” Hannibal said. “My Lady Murasaki was from the Hiroshima prefecture. I went there in my early thirties and am happy to say that I agree with your summary. It is indeed a place full of wonders.”

He eyed Hisoka's clear lack of clothing and smirked. “I take it you’re staying the night, mon cher?” he asked, inwardly kicking himself when he felt his stomach tighten with anticipation.

***

"Would you like a review of your guest room as well as the bathroom?” Hisoka asked playfully. "I realised when I got out of the shower that I'd left my clothes by the rug. So I figured a towel would cover the essentials, although I would appreciate the chance to process things away from Illu-chan. You did say earlier that you ensured there was a provision for such things, when you're patients are Hunters.”

_We both know where you'd prefer me to sleep, and it's in your bed. How do I get you to allow that, I wonder? You insist on denying yourself, and I don't understand why._

***

“Of course, mon cher,” Hannibal said easily. “I keep a selection of nightclothes in the draws, and there is an en-suite, should you find that you need the bathroom in the night. You are not the first to have stayed in that room, but I assure you all the garments are fresh. I am afraid that the complimentary mint will have to wait until tomorrow.” He winked. “If you have any other questions, please feel free to ask. For tonight, at least, this house is your home.”

***

"Maybe I could put on something a little sexy to sleep in," Hisoka joked. "I do quite like negligee. I find I look rather fetching in pastel colours."

***

Hannibal stilled as the image of Hisoka in lace underwear crossed his mind. _Well, at least that’s solved the tenting problem_, he thought.

“I am afraid that I am all out of female underwear. My apologies,” he said with a bow of his head. “I have not had the occasion to entertain female guests in quite a while.”

***

“It’s fine. I prefer to sleep naked if I’m being honest. Although I’m not averse to dressing up for a lover if they like that sort of thing. If you would prefer I didn’t then I’ll happily wear some pyjama bottoms,” Hisoka replied cheerfully before adding some honey to his tea. “I am curious about something though, if I may change the subject?”

***

“I’m sure my sheets would be fine if you slept within them however you liked,” Hannibal said
breezily before sipping at his drink and nodding at Hisoka. “What is it that you would like to know?”

***

“Your bracelet,” Hisoka said gesturing towards the band on Hannibal’s wrist. “Have you ever done that for a patient before? I didn’t realise that you could bind yourself, but I would imagine that it could come in handy, depending upon the clauses you gave yourself.”

***

Hannibal listened to Hisoka’s question and did his best not to react. I was wondering when you’d bring that up, he thought. So, we’re still avoiding the real issues of Illu-chan and feelings.

“I have used it this way on a number of occasions, yes, but only ever once for a patient, other than yourself,” he said evenly. He thought, for a moment, that he could smell Will’s aftershave on the air. Focusing on his breathing, he remained calm and waited to see what Hisoka would ask next.

***

So I’m not the first? Interesting, I wonder if you’ve ever used it in the field to add to a disguise? Just how much can your bracelets affect?

“I didn't expect it would be something you'd have done that often,” Hisoka hummed. "Although I think it's a deceptively simple ability, and rather elegant in its design. You can I'm, guessing here, use any three words? Does it have to be in the wearer's language or just a language that you can understand?"

***

“I am glad that you approve,” Hannibal said, allowing Hisoka a pleased smile. “They serve their purpose well, yes.” He recalled the look on Will’s face when he’d realised what Hannibal had done and grinned before returning his focus to Hisoka. “And both the language and the words are customisable, yes. As long as both myself and the recipient can understand them, they will do their job.”

He drank his tea as he waited for his next question. He could see them behind his eyes, but he was curious to know what he would ask.

***

"So in theory, if a magical beast could understand the language you speak, you could put a band on them?” Hisoka asked with growing curiosity. "For example, a Kiriko? They can understand our languages, so in theory, you could use it on them?"

***

“In theory, yes, although I have never had cause to do it,” Hannibal said, wondering why Hisoka had asked the question. What are you trying to tell me? Are you not human? No...you don’t fit the criteria for an Iccantado...Your guards are hardly falling at your feet. And you didn’t turn Margot’s head once, nor Pariston. Iccantado’s are supposed to draw you in regardless of your preferences. You can’t be...

“I have found that talking to them with the respect that they deserve has always achieved the desired result,” he concluded and tilted his head. “Why did you ask?”
"Because I'd have tested it out," Hisoka replied simply. "I can be a bit of a scientist when the fancy strikes me, and I'm extremely interested in the limitations of Nen. As for talking to the Kiriko, well, they won't talk to me. If anything, they'll actively avoid interaction with me unless they are unable to do so. I honestly don't know why."

"And how many of them have you killed," Hannibal said, raising his brow knowingly to try to cover his shock. "Calm down, it's likely his reputation. Don't jump to conclusions."

"None, they don't hold my interest. Except to find out why they don't like me," Hisoka replied before taking a drink of his tea. "I've always put it down to my infamy, but when they can shapeshift; it's hard to know how many I've been around. I'm pretty sure if you killed one who was under glamour as a human they'd revert and I've always been under the impression they'd hunt you down for vengeance? Or am I mistaken?"

Sighing, he looked down into the cup in his hands. "Part of me, a small part mind, thinks it's because they were right about me. Of course, I have no evidence for that, to my knowledge, I'm human and seem to have some rare recessive genes. It's not unheard of."

Hannibal stilled as the word Care lit up on his wrist and a painful prickling sensation began to creep up his arm. You've never killed one, and they still won't talk to you? he thought, putting his cup down and reaching for Hisoka's arm. Squeezing it reassuringly, he said, "I am sure that you are human, mon cher, but have you ever had your genetics tested? I'm sure we could arrange it if it were a genuine concern of yours. And I'll have my answer. Say yes, Hisoka, say yes."

"Thank you, but no. People can think what they like, and so can the Kiriko. I still made it to the Exam without their help," Hisoka sniffed. "And I passed, even if that Gourmet woman nearly forced me to have to make a third attempt. Thankfully Netero intervened on everyone's behalf."

He looked down at Hannibal's hand and put his own on top. "If I'm sure I'm human, and you're sure I'm human, then why should I worry? It's a hang-up from my past, and until the legal status of my humanity becomes important in regards to my incarceration or execution, I see no need to be tested. You've given me the impression that I'm responding well to therapy and have no need to fear the gallows, with you in my corner, I mean."

I wonder if the hospital still has any blood samples left over? Hannibal thought but smiled warmly at his submissive. "Unless something drastic happens, I would suggest that you concentrate on yourself and let me take care of the politics. I do not believe that you are anything other than human, and, quite frankly, it would not matter to me either way. Your treatment would remain the same."

***
Hisoka looked at Hannibal pointedly for a moment before smiling and rubbing his thumb over the man's hand. "Well, it's more your area of expertise than mine," he said softly before leaning forward slightly. "I think the Association chose wisely to send me to you; I can only imagine the fun I'd have had with Dr. Chilton before he became ultimately boring. You, on the other hand. You're much more interesting; there's something about you that makes me want to dig deeper. You keep much of yourself hidden, don't you?"

***

"I am an open book, mon cher," Hannibal said honestly. All you need to do is know how to translate it. No one has managed yet, will you? "I assure you, there is nothing mysterious about me. But I am flattered; I feel the same about you. Although, as you correctly pointed out, it is my job. I just happen to be one of the fortunate few who love what they do."

He refilled his teacup and added, “I am not so sure that Dr Chilton would have appreciated you turning up in his kitchen dressed only in a towel. He lacks the capacity to appreciate what is right in front of him. He lives in the future; it’s a kind of escapism, but one that I have no doubt you could have capitalised on.”

***

"I can think of several people who would, and well, I got the impression you liked looking at my body. So I didn't feel the need to cover up," Hisoka countered. "Surely it's better for a therapist to live in the present? That way, you can more easily guide those stuck in the past as well as those avoiding the now by living in the future?" he chuckled.

"Why haven't you killed him? You don't like him; you wouldn't have let me toy with him at your party if you did."

"So I take it that you appreciate the view?" he asked playfully as he repositioned himself to give Hannibal a clearer view of his chest and abs.

***

Hannibal allowed his eyes to drink in the view, allowing Hisoka his performance. That's it, mon cher, show off for me. Let yourself enjoy how good it feels when I approve of you.

“I do, yes,” he said and swallowed as a wave of pleasure swept into him from his bracelet. “I have always believed that if we are to expect honesty from others, then we should demonstrate it in our own lives. Alas, the same rule applies to boundaries.”

***

"I'm not used to being allowed to set them myself," Hisoka replied thoughtfully. "Perhaps that's why I take such delight in ignoring them and pushing against them? Illu-chan can be the same, although I think Lulu is more likely to push her luck than Elijah."

Sighing, he picked up his cup and finished the now cold drink. "I don't want to be alone again, but I can't stop them from leaving if they have to go," he added feeling despondent.

***

“The only person we can control, is ourselves,” Hannibal said softly. “What Illu-chan does is, ultimately, up to them. But, equally, you have the power to choose your own future as well. The past is behind us, and the future has not happened yet. Why don’t you join me in the present, mon
“cher?” He took in the fatigue behind the man’s eyes. “You look tired. I do not wish to order you to bed, and I am more than happy to stay here with you for as long as you wish me to, but, perhaps a night’s sleep would help?”

***

"Why not order me to your bed?” Hisoka teased. "I could curl up on you again; you seemed to like that earlier."

I’m sure you’re going to refuse me, but I have to try.

***

Hannibal raised his brow. “Do you want me to?” he challenged. Two can play at this game, mon cher. You’ll break before I will, I can guarantee you that.

***

Hisoka opened his mouth to make a witty remark about preferring an invitation but closed it silently. I need to be careful, antagonising you now would undo all my hard work. Plus, I really don’t want to be alone right now and you like honesty, don’t you?

Fiddling with the empty cup, he sighed softly.

"I don't want to be alone,” he confessed quietly. "You said you'd stay with me, here, but we both need to rest. I'll be quiet, just please, don't leave me alone?"

***

You do have a way with words when you want to, don’t you, mon cher? Hannibal thought.

Holding up his wrist, he said, “I will stay for as long as you need me, mon cher.”

That’s going to fulfil all three clauses. What will you do when you see how powerful my binding is? Will you take advantage? Have you been masking your desire to harm me by emphasising your attraction?

***

"You mean I can stay with you?” Hisoka asked in surprise.

***

“Of course. I allowed you to sleep on me in the living room,” Hannibal said. “I’m sure that I can cope with having you beside me in a bed. I’m sorry to disappoint you, but you aren’t a monster to me.” He chuckled and patted Hisoka’s shoulder. “Follow me, mon cher,” he said quietly. “You will stay with me for the night. I won’t leave you alone.”

Standing slowly, he placed his cup on the side and walked quietly towards the door, turning and waiting for Hisoka to follow. Let the games begin, he thought, and braced himself for what was to come.

***

Character played by Muffinamdnness in this chapter was:
Hannibal, Illumi

Character played by themadnovelist in this chapter was:

Hisoka

Stay safe out there everyone <3 Look after those around you and we'll keep on writing.
As the night progresses into the next day, Hisoka starts to unravel Hannibal’s mystery, and he finds himself wondering about the future.

We hope that you are all keeping well <3

Before we start, I’d like to say that this chapter does contain content warnings for:

Discussion of child abuse, torture, rape, murder, minor character death and blood-play.

This scene starts from where the last left off. Stay safe out there, folks.

***

Why would I be disappointed by that? Hisoka wondered as he registered that his gambit had paid off. I hope I'm not going to have to be so vulnerable every time I want to get closer. For now, I'm just going to be happy to have someone beside me.

Wordlessly, he got up from his stool and followed Hannibal, ensuring his towel hadn't come loose while he was sitting down and felt his heart skip a beat as they approached the stairs.

***

Hannibal led Hisoka up the stairs and towards his bedroom. The man had gone silent again, and that wasn’t something that he particularly wanted to happen right now.

As tempted as he was to assure him that he wouldn’t take advantage, he knew that Hisoka wouldn’t appreciate the concern, so instead, whilst he walked, he said, “You seemed surprised that I agreed, mon cher, why was that?”

***

"I thought you'd have said no, because of the infamous red tape. I'm still your patient," Hisoka mumbled. Even if you do want to fuck me senseless, we both know that's true.

***

Hannibal paused as he opened his bedroom door, and, looking at Hisoka, he said soothingly, “Yes, you are still my patient, but I am bound to protect, cherish and care for you. If my company is required, then that is what you shall receive.”

***

"I know, and I understand first hand what your Nen can do. I’m still going to need a little time to
adjust, though," Hisoka replied mildly. "I'll adapt, you know I will."

*How long that takes, well that's anyone's guess. Why did I feel content enough to sleep on you? Am I going to end up falling asleep on you again?*

***

“Time, we will always have, mon cher, please, come in,” Hannibal said gently and opened his bedroom door to allow Hisoka to pass by him. *I won’t force you. You’re free to turn back. This is the fastest way for you to see that I’m not like him.*

***

Nodding, Hisoka hesitated for a brief moment before he crossed the threshold and looked around. *So, this is your bedroom. I’m actually going to spend the night in your bed?*

Taking in his new surroundings, he noticed another door. Guessing it was the ensuite, he turned his focus onto the bed. One of the side tables appeared rather empty, compared to the other. *That must be his side of the bed; it's more normal than I expected. Considering the way the downstairs is full of macabre trinkets, I'd expected it to be more gloomy. He clearly has a thing for darker colours, but I like it; it feels like him.*

"The bed looks comfortable," he said eventually to break the silence as he eyed the dark blue bedspread.

***

"Thank you, mon cher," Hannibal said. "I apologise if the room is slightly warmer than you're used to. After growing up in Meteor City, I have come to dislike sleeping in the cold."

He gestured over to a chest of draws. "My pyjamas are kept in the bottom drawer; you may wear them if you wish. Or, of course, you are free to take some from the guest room if you would prefer. I wouldn’t want you to feel as if you had to stay in just a bath towel all night, but if that is what you would prefer, then," he turned to the right side of the bed. "It’s all yours."

***

*If I leave now; I don't know if I'd come back in. I'd feel so awkward, why do I feel like a nervous teenager around you?*

"Thank you," Hisoka mumbled as he moved towards the chest of drawers and pulled out a pair of navy blue pyjama bottoms with a small smile. *I'm almost disappointed that these are plain.*

Standing with his back to Hannibal, he decided to drop the towel; it wasn't as if the man hadn't seen his ass before. "I don't mind the cold, but it's nice to sleep in the warm," he said conversationally as he pulled on the pants and picked up the damp towel. "Should I put this somewhere?"

***

“If you like. My en-suite is through that door; there is a washing basket in there. Or you can leave it on the chair for the night,” Hannibal said calmly as he took off his shirt, deliberately paying no mind to the nervous tone that had crept into Hisoka’s voice.

***

*En suite is good; I can do that. Hopefully, I’ll calm down while I'm in there.*
"I'll be a moment then, if you'll excuse me," Hisoka replied before taking the towel into the bathroom and after a couple of deep breaths to calm himself, he emerged a few moments later feeling a lot more relaxed and with a grin firmly in place.

***

Hannibal had stripped down to his black boxer briefs whilst Hisoka was changing, and when he came out of the bathroom wearing Hannibal’s own plain navy blue pyjama bottoms and a grin, he couldn’t help the small smile of appreciation that crossed his lips.

“I may have to concede those to you, mon cher. They look far better on you than they ever did on me,” he said happily, walking over to make his way into the bathroom.

“Please,” he added. “Make yourself at home. If you need to let Illu-chan know where you are, feel free to call them whilst I’m in the bathroom.”

***

Hisoka looked pensive for a few moments. I could tell him, but Illu-chan is expecting me to stay out tonight...it'll just confuse him. Besides, that means going back downstairs. I never moved my clothes from the rug. Plus, my boxers are in the bathroom. Maybe I’ll leave them as a memento for Hannibal?

"I'd rather not if that's okay with you?" Hisoka eventually replied.

***

“Of course,” Hannibal said. “I understand. I’ll only be a few minutes. Feel free to have a look around.”

As he turned away from Hisoka and walked into the bathroom, he allowed his face to split into the triumphant grin he’d been denying the whole night. His wrist was already a source of pleasant contentment. Hisoka was safe, and as he picked up his toothbrush, he saw that Cherish was beginning to glow too. Nearly there, he thought, breathing deeply to ride out the high. What are you going to do, Hisoka? How are you going to react? Will you strike whilst I’m vulnerable? The fact that the waves of pleasure were more potent than usual was mildly unnerving, but he’d handled far worse before.

He began to brush his teeth. If he were going to die tonight, then he’d at least make sure that he was a presentable corpse.

***

Taking a few moments to take a closer look at the room, Hisoka quickly found himself gravitating towards the bed. It looks so inviting; I'm sure he won't mind if I get in and get comfortable? I mean he doesn't like the cold so I should make sure I'm nice and warm. Then maybe I can entice him to do more than cuddle?

Grinning to himself, he quickly climbed under the covers. Sighing with contentment as he quickly settled in the large bed.

***

When Hannibal emerged from the bathroom, he was feeling more than a little light-headed and seeing Hisoka already in his bed did nothing to help the situation. Yes, he thought as he moved to
his side of the bed. *This is where you belong.*

He smiled as he climbed into bed, and the thick down blanket felt glorious against his hypersensitive skin. He let out a small sigh of contentment before turning his head to face Hisoka.

“I know that you don’t need to hear this,” he said gently. “But I do need to say it. Nothing will happen to you in this room that you do not wish to happen. You are safe here. Always.”

He knew what would happen when Hisoka finally calmed, but he wasn’t foolish enough to fight the inevitable. He brought his arm from under the cover and let it lie between them. Closing his eyes, he smiled as another surge of pleasure filled him. Hisoka was happy.

***

Rolling onto his side, Hisoka scooted a little closer and ran his fingers over Hannibal's arm gently. "This bed is really comfortable," he said softly. *You weren't kidding about not liking the cold, were you? "And warm, it's nicer than the beds at the hotel. Not that I'm complaining; it's better than a cot in a cage at the hospital. But I might never want to leave; how do you ever get out of this bed?"

***

Hannibal felt the soft, extremely pleasurable sensation of feather-light fingers stroking up his arm, and along his chest, and had to take a breath to calm himself. Opening his eyes, he realised that it wasn’t Hisoka, as his arm was now resting on his bicep.

He’d been asked a question. Blinking twice, he pieced together what he’d just heard and said, “I wouldn’t complain if you didn’t, but, generally speaking, I find that life has a,” he sucked in a breath. “A way of getting us to where we need to be.”

The feedback was growing stronger. “Mon cher,” he gasped. “The band. All three...I have fulfilled the clauses. Please, do not panic. It will pass.” He tightened his grip in the sheet as the full force of the feedback hit him. “Oh, mon Dieu!” he moaned. “I will be fine.” He wasn’t sure who he was reassuring, but whatever happened, he knew, was now in Hisoka’s hands.

***

*All three? I've only ever had two, what's it going to do to you?*

"Do you need me to do anything?" Hisoka asked curiously, not sure if his words would reach through the fog. *Don't ask me to go.* "I'm feeling pretty content, so I’m guessing it's a good trigger. I'll just stay here unless you tell me otherwise."

*I want to see what happens to you, is this what I could expect to happen if I managed to fulfil all three of the conditions you gave me?*

***

“I am OK, Hisoka,” Hannibal moaned as another wave of bone-deep satisfaction soaked through him. “The feedback, is...intense, that’s all.” Doing his best to calm his breathing, he added. “You have nothing to worry about. Don’t...do anything. I’m,” he arched when he felt a hand moving up his thigh. “Fine.”

***
"I'll stay put, and just wait it out with you," Hisoka replied as he continued to watch. Hearing Hannibal moaning was making certain parts of his body wake up again, but he didn't want to leave to relieve himself in the bathroom.

You look rather captivating when you writhe and groan like that, although I wish it were because I was fucking you. Would you have me moving like that under you? He wondered as his cock twitched in response and he sighed. Now is really not the time to be getting horny.

***

“Thank you,” Hannibal said, trying to work out which hand was Hisoka’s and which was his Nen. Why’s it so intense? It shouldn’t be so strong...I can’t think... He blinked and stared at the face of the most captivating creature he’d ever seen. “So beautiful,” he gasped. “Want...” he tried to reach out to touch it, but couldn’t quite manage to move. “Stronger...” he frowned and decided to close his eyes instead of dealing with the growing yearning to reach out and take. “Have to...can’t touch,” he reminded himself. “Protect. Can’t. Not allowed.”

***

"What do you want?" Hisoka asked gently. You want me? I'm here; I'm not moving. "Why aren't you allowed?"

***

Hannibal was floating now. There was a voice...it spoke to his soul. What do I want? he thought. “Mon cher,” he answered. “So...” he screwed his eyes tightly shut. Why am I not allowed? “Can not harm. Want to give...don’t want to hurt. Too precious. Can’t hurt.”

***

"You think that you might accidentally hurt me?" Hisoka asked, feeling a little confused. "Why do you think that? Unless you wanted to hurt me, why would you?"

I'm not a china doll, I don't break that easily. He growled internally.

***

“Oh, mon Dieu!” Hannibal cried, feeling hands sliding up his legs. “Be careful...not...can’t...I must not...stay still!” he cried, holding tightly to the covers to stop himself from reaching out.

***

"I'm not moving," Hisoka protested. "I think your bracelet is making you hallucinate, something, maybe someone...but I'm not touching you," he insisted as he withdrew his hand from Hannibal's arm.

You said these bands don't manipulate? But you appear to be under some sort of manipulation, however minor. What should I do?

"Talk to me," Hisoka prompted. "What's happening to you?"

***

"I'm not moving...I'm not touching you...What's happening to you?"

Not touching?
"I think your bracelet is making you hallucinate."

Bracelet? The binding? Hisoka?

“Mon cher!” he yelled as the hands moved further up his leg. “Don’t let me! Powerful! Mustn’t...Oh, feels...want...too good...must, not,” he clenched his jaw, grinding his teeth in a vain attempt to fight his arousal.

***

"I'm not going to let you hurt me," Hisoka said firmly as he continued to watch Hannibal's reaction to him, his own Nen flooding his mind.

What are you feeling? Why do you think I couldn't stop you?

***

Why is it getting stronger? Hannibal tried to think. His mind was so fogged over with desire. The pleasure was still building, and he knew that soon, he’d lose control. If he did...

“Tie me!” he cried, hoping that the voice he was hearing was real. “Stop me!”

***

Tie you? Oh, I thought you'd never ask; I can definitely do that. I'm sure not even you can get out of my bungee-gum.

"Certainly," Hisoka replied gleefully, activating his Nen to attach strands of sticky aura to Hannibal's hands and quickly pulling so that they'd become stuck to the headboard. "Don't worry if you can feel a sticky coating on the back of your hands and covering your wrists," he added as he continued to add more gum to securely hold Hannibal in place. "I told you, I won't let you harm me."

***

The voice sounded heavenly. He wanted to sing to it, to touch it, to hold it in his arms. “Yes,” he gasped. “Yes, so beautiful.”

He reached forward, but his hands weren’t moving. Someone was touching him. A hesitant hand cupped his balls, and he moaned. “Mon cher...Mais c'est si bon*...Je ne peux pas te laisser me voir. Vous partirez si vous me voyez. Je ne peux pas te perdre.**”

*But it feels so good...

**I can't let you see me. You'll leave if you see me. I can't lose you.

***

Hisoka sighed and rolled over onto his back to look up at the ceiling, listening to Hannibal's groans and moans of pleasure. What am I going to do? He's completely vulnerable right now. I could just end this, but it would be obvious that it was me, wouldn't it? Besides, it wouldn't be a satisfying kill.

Fiddling with the blanket, he closed his eyes and tried to block out Hannibal's voice. Growling to
himself as his dick continued to twitch in his pants.

What’s that thing doing to you? You’re completely out of it, aren’t you? Did you do this on purpose? He wondered as his lips pulled back into a sneer. Did you want to see if I’d try to harm you while you were so helpless? How much of this is an act, and how much is really your Nen?

***

“Oh mon Dieu, s’il vous plaît ne vous arrêtez pas,” he moaned, trying to reach out to find whoever was making him feel so good. “Will? Will, don’t stop...so good...”

He tried again to reach for his hands and force them to where he needed them to touch. But they weren’t moving?

“Monsieur, détachez moi!” he demanded, arching as the tentative touches drove him silently insane. “Will, untie me. I don’t want...don’t leave me...”

All of a sudden, a mouth closed around his cock, and he groaned with satisfaction. “William...”

* Oh God, please don’t stop

** Sir, untie me

***

William? So you do like men other than me, or was William, the other patient?

Hisoka wondered, looking back at Hannibal, who appeared to be straining against his bonds before melting back into the mattress and groaning loudly. Shaking his head, Hisoka decided to add more gum to the Nen-made restraints and secured the bed in place as a precaution. I still don’t know just how strong you are, but I’m not releasing you while you’re like this. Maybe I should leave? No, he kept his promise, I can’t walk off now. That would ruin everything.

Not sure what to do, he rolled over onto his side and looked out into the large room. Why do I feel so uncomfortable? It feels like I’m an uninvited audience to a private moment. Who’s Will? I wish I could understand French; then I’d know what to do. Should I pretend to be Will? Can he even hear me through the hallucinations?

***

Hannibal yanked at the bindings in frustration when the mouth pulled off and didn’t return. “Will, where did you go?” he snarled, lashing out with his legs, and trying to find where the man had gone. “Will! Come back! You weren’t supposed to see. I’m sorry! I wouldn’t have...Will!” He opened his eyes, but nothing made sense. “Will! Untie me!”

***

Feeling the increase of movement behind him, Hisoka instinctively rolled out of bed and stood up to stare at Hannibal. He was tugging at the gum holding his hands in place and trying to find, he presumed, Will, with his feet. Sighing, he grabbed the covers and pulled them back, activating his Hatsu once again.

"I'm not going to let you kick me," he told Hannibal, even though he didn't know if his words
would be understood as he bound both legs together and then stuck them to the mattress. "I told you, I'm not going to allow you to harm me. I don't know who Will is, but he is definitely not here. You're hallucinating," he continued as he replaced the covers and sat on the edge of the bed.

*What am I supposed to do? Illu-chan would just kill him, maybe I should call him? Get him to stage a break-in? But then they'll put me in that hospital with Chilton. He groaned inwardly. That's why you keep him around, isn't it? He's your insurance policy against patients like me. Well played, Dr. Lecter, I need to congratulate you. When you're back to normal.*

***

"William, no one ever saw me...no one but you..." he whined as his legs were stuck together out of seemingly nowhere. "Why?" he gasped, but a new wave of sensation swept any trace of thought from his mind. He was so close.

***

"Will isn't here," Hisoka said, trying again to get through to Hannibal, and ran his hand through his hair in exasperation. "I keep trying to tell you; you're having a hallucination. You need to come back; you said you wouldn't leave me."

***

"You said you wouldn't leave me."

"Mon cher?" Hannibal gasped. *Why are you here? I have to protect...can't let anyone hurt you... Where's Will?" He blinked, looking around the room and freezing when his eyes fell on the most captivating creature he'd ever seen. It had shining golden eyes and was surrounded in a sheath of amber flame. "Hikari? So bright...you're so beautiful. So perfect..." The fire danced along its skin and played with its hair as it stared at him with confusion.

"You're having a hallucination. You need to come back."

"I...I need...show me the way. My Hikari."

***

*Are you hallucinating about somebody else now?*

"Stay with me," Hisoka replied firmly. "You said you wouldn't leave me alone; I don't know who Will is. I don't know where he is...or who your Hikari is either. You asked me to restrain you, so I did, but you need to come down now. We're in your bedroom, and you're in bed. You bound yourself, and your bracelet went off."

***

"You are," Hannibal gasped, bucking his hips, trying again to touch the beautiful creature. "So bright...so...my bedroom? Bracelet?"

Something was wrong, the flames were dying away, and the light from the golden lights was dimming. It dulled until all that was left were a set of concerned, but angry eyes.

"Hisoka?" he asked, trying to understand why he was sitting on his bed. He shifted and felt the cover move against his erection. *Oh, no. This can't be good.*
The Aura wasn’t Will’s, but there had been lips around his cock, and it had felt so good. *Please, tell me you didn’t.* He shifted again and felt his underwear, still firmly in place, and sighed in relief. “Mon cher...so close...” He closed his eyes in shame, but he couldn’t stop the pleasure. It wasn’t going to end, not until... “Touch my leg, please. I need to feel something real.”

***

"Alright, I can do that," Hisoka replied as he reached out to pull back the covers slightly and rested his hand on Hannibal's leg. "I'm real, I'm here, and I'm real."

***

“Hisoka,” Hannibal moaned as he felt the man’s hand touching his leg at the same time as a wave of Nen crashed through him. The combined high swept him over the edge, and he shook as the orgasm ripped through him. All he knew was pure, unadulterated bliss.

***

Watching Hannibal climax with his name on his lips, wasn't a sight Hisoka thought he would forget anytime soon. *Did touching you push you over? Or were you about to cum anyway?* he wondered as he watched him arching in his bonds.

*You weren't able to break out of my Nen; I suppose that's useful to know. But what happens now? There's no way I'm going to be able to entice you to fuck me tonight.*

***

There was one constant. One thing Hannibal could cling to. The hand on his leg that had the Nen. His wrist pulsed, but the pleasure was finally fading.

He realised that he could understand, that he could think, that...he opened his eyes, blinking in the light, and trying to find the face again. He’d thought that Will had been there, but...his eyes found the cunning smile and knowing stare. “Hisoka,” he said gratefully. “Thank you. I...It’s dying down. I’m fine.”

***

Hisoka nodded and withdrew his hand as he looked at Hannibal thoughtfully.

"I suppose I should untie you," he said quietly. "But if you start flailing about again, I will tie you up again," he added as he clicked his fingers and deactivated his Nen.

***

“I understand,” Hannibal said as calmly as he could manage. “May I ask one thing?” When he saw Hisoka raise an eyebrow and nodd, he asked, “Why was I tied up?” as he rubbed at his wrists.

***

"You told me to; I wasn't sure if it was a command or not. So I didn't wait for the band to punish me, I just did as you said. You seemed rather insistent that you weren't allowed to...do something. Then you started to hallucinate," Hisoka explained patiently. "I tried to leave you to work through it, but then you started lashing out with your feet. I tied your feet as an act of self-defence."
“You have my sincerest gratitude,” Hannibal said, moving aside and allowing Hisoka back into the bed. “I have a memory of Will...being here. But I can conclude from what you said that that was not the case. Am I correct?”

***

"It was just the two of us; I don't know who Will is. Or who Hikari is, but you seemed to think they were me. I didn't realise your band could do that to you," Hisoka mumbled as he climbed back under the covers. "I felt like I was intruding on a private moment; you kept calling out for this other person. Forgive me if this is impertinent, but I thought you were single? The way you were acting was like your lover was here."

***

“I am single, you surmised correctly,” Hannibal said. “Will was my last partner. I haven’t physically seen him in over a year and,” he frowned. “Hikari is the Japponese word for light. I remember seeing...” he turned to Hisoka and tried to find a diplomatic way of describing the haunting flames that had surrounded him. “You were sheathed in light. It was captivating. You were my burning Angel. Righteous. Unforgiving and uncompromising. You were breathtaking. My apologies if I disturbed you. I have never...I don’t know why my reaction was so strong."

***

Well, you were hallucinating, so I can't say I'm surprised and I know what Hikari means.

"I see, so you've never hallucinated like that because of your Nen before?" Hisoka asked tentatively, placing his hand on Hannibal’s arm. "It did seem to be rather intense. Even before that."

***

Hannibal reached over and patted Hisoka’s hand, smiling fondly at him before feeling the fresh wet patch in his boxers for the third time. “It was extremely intense, yes. I have never experienced anything like that before.” And as soon as I get into the bathroom, I’m going to ensure I can’t again. Every other time there’s only been twenty minutes or so of extreme pleasure, but I’ve never hallucinated before. How did that happen?

“Thank you for not leaving,” he said quietly. “You handled the situation admirably, as far as I can remember,” he said and flexed his arms and legs experimentally before slowly climbing out of the bed. Smiling apologetically down at Hisoka, he added, “Please excuse me for one moment, mon cher,” and bowed, before walking over to the dresser and selecting a new pair of boxers.

***

"I'll be here," Hisoka replied, not sure what he could say as he curled up in the large bed and waited.

He saw light? Around me? He must have seen my Nen but in that mental state, not realised what he was seeing. No wonder he called me ‘Hikari’, but I'm not an angel, and I'm not a demon either.

***

“And you have my eternal gratitude for that, mon cher,” Hannibal said and walked into his en-suite, pushing the door too, but not entirely closed, behind him.
You didn’t kill me, he thought as he cleaned himself. Even though I was so far gone that I was hallucinating, that doesn’t make sense. From everything I’ve seen, and everything you’ve told me, you despise weakness. Why did you let me live when I was so clearly vulnerable? Did I read you correctly? Were you standing vigil? But you want me dead; you don’t want to protect me, do you? He looked down at the band and, unbidden, remembered Hisoka’s words.

“You said that you wouldn’t leave me.”

You believe that I can keep you safe. There’s still a lost child inside of you, who’s looking for a home, isn’t there?

Pulling on his new underwear, he quickly dismissed and re-summoned his binding. This time, he made sure that it was the weakest version of the gold band that it was possible to create. He had made his point; Hisoka most certainly had no doubts that it was real, and he couldn’t afford to let anything like that happen again.

Looking at the door, he straightened his posture and took a deep breath. When he stepped out into the bedroom, he was, at least on the surface, entirely calm.

***

Hisoka hadn’t moved while he’d been alone for the few brief moments it took Hannibal to get cleaned up, and he heard the door open but didn’t look up when he entered the room again. Instead, he listened to the footsteps making their way back to the bed and sighed, asking quietly, "Are you surprised that I stayed?"

***

“No, mon cher,” Hannibal said easily, slipping back into his bed and lying to face his submissive. “But I am curious about why you didn’t kill me. I did not expect such a strong reaction, as I said, and I know you are not the kind of man who takes well to seeing another so vulnerable. You don’t have to answer me, but I would like to know what stayed your hand?”

***

“I have reasons, some I’m going to keep to myself, but you are right I don’t exactly appreciate weakness. That being said, I also don’t like to deny myself,” Hisoka explained with a smile. "Killing you in that state? It would deprive me of the pleasure of fighting you at full strength. I’m a hedonist and a killer. I was curious about what was happening; I did act in my own defence. When I weighed up the options, killing you wasn't really worth it. Not like that." *I’m not going to end up in Chilton's cage, but I'm not going to show my hand completely. Not yet.* “I did think about it, killing you, I mean. As well as just leaving and going back to the hotel, but you said you weren’t going to leave me. Downstairs, you stayed. So I stayed.”

***

“I see,” Hannibal said, smiling softly at Hisoka. “I am most grateful that you did. It was your voice that brought me back to my senses. The last time all three clauses fired at once, I was able to ride it out. I don’t know what was different this time, but I will be prepared should the occasion arise again. I would not have held it against you, had you killed me, and arrangements would have been made for another Doctor to take my place. I would like to think that Bellinda would have stepped up, or perhaps Alana.” He reached out and stroked Hisoka’s arm. “I would not want to see you caged, not in any lifetime. I will make sure to stipulate that it is my preference that, should you best me in a consensual fight to the death, then you will not be locked away.” *Chilton’s never going to
touch you. Never. You will never have him bumbling around in your mind, not if I can help it.

***

"You think they'd be able to handle me?" Hisoka said jokingly as he tried not to resist his urge to curl up on Hannibal again. Why does it feel so nice when you touch me? "I'm not exactly an easy patient; I'm sure you'd agree."

***

Hannibal chuckled. “Neither am I, but Bellinda manages just fine with me,” he said. “And Alana...I think you would enjoy her. She’s Margot’s wife, and not easy to manipulate. It would be a dance, but you would learn a lot from each other.”

He stroked his thumb over Hisoka’s muscular bicep and allowed himself a moment to enjoy the feeling of lying beside him like this before squeezing him again and letting go. Rolling onto his back, he let his arm fall to his side in an open invitation to join him and said, “I only hope that my ghost would stay around long enough to watch the battles unfold. You would all bring such delightful nuance and style into the Arena. It would be magnificent.”

***

"Wait, you have a therapist? You?" Hisoka asked dumbly as he tried to imagine anyone trying to give therapy to Hannibal. "And you’d ask her to take me on as a patient if I killed you? Why would she agree to that? Have you mentioned me to her?"

***

Grinning, Hannibal allowed himself to relax. “Ever since I decided to become a Therapist, mon cher,” he explained. “It is a vital aspect of my profession, and no, I have not mentioned you to her, not by name. I will take your confidences with me to the grave, as would she. Bellinda is a fine woman, who most certainly understands the mindset of a Hunter. She would be my first choice; should anything ever happen to me. She would be more likely to congratulate you on your kill than to hold it against you,” he explained, seeing the stunned look on Hisoka’s face. “She’s like me. She has the capacity to see beauty, where others would see ruin and despair.”

***

So on some level, she wants you dead? Isn’t that counterproductive? Or have you both got some understanding like Illu-chan and me?

"I see, but I can’t help wondering why you’d tell me this. Surely Chilton was your best insurance against me killing you?" Hisoka asked curiously. "Although, I’m not actually sure that he’d be able to do much other than locking me in a cage; I’d run rings around him."

***

“Not at all, mon cher,” Hannibal said mildly. “My best insurance against you not killing me, is myself. If you think you could do it, then I would happily set a time and a place to fight you right now. Violence is an inherent part of both of our natures, and so denying it would only ever result in uncontrolled outbursts,” he explained.

“I would, however, suggest that there is another way,” he added. “Just as I have found an outlet for my need to kill, so can you. And,” he smiled. “This way, we can both enjoy the delightful experience that is living.” He reached out and stroked Hisoka’s arm again. “I assure you, I am
more than happy to accommodate your needs, mon cher. I would simply prefer not to have to kill you.”

***

"Well I would request that neither of us has our Nen bracelets," Hisoka replied. "Trying to kill me would break your clauses, and you'd have an unfair advantage if you can order me to stop. I want a fair fight, both of us at full strength. If I lose, then I lose but don't insult me by not making it fair. Every time I go into battle with a strong opponent, I am prepared to die, it's not fun otherwise."

***

“I entirely agree,” Hannibal said happily. “I am the same. So, we are agreed that you will continue your therapy through to the end, mon cher? That is when the bracelets will come off. After that, I am happy to negotiate with you should you still desire your fight.”

***

"Alright, I suppose I left myself open to that one, didn’t I?" Hisoka said with a small smile. "While we're both bound, then I won't fight you to the death."

That still leaves Illu-chan free to end your life on my behalf though.

***

“Thank you, Hisoka,” Hannibal said, flashing him a pleased smile. “I find honesty is always the best way forward. You never have to hide from me, mon cher. I will be as open with you as I can be, and I am flattered that you believe me to be a worthy opponent. I understand violence and pain in the same way that I can understand a lover’s embrace and a gentle kiss. We are all more than a simple summary on a score-board tagline. You are not just the Grim Reaper of the Arena, and I am not only the Association's Bloodhound. We are people; we have nuance, and it is only through expressing that, that we can grow. I will be prepared if all three clauses should fire again. It is OK; you can relax.”

***

“I’m many things to different people, as are you, I would presume,” Hisoka agreed, moving closer before settling his head on Hannibal’s chest with a content sigh. “As we’re being honest with each other, is Will, the same person that you mentioned at the party? When talking to Chilton before the meal, I mean. You said you hadn’t seen him in over a year, is that because he’s in the hospital?”

***

“Yes, he is,” Hannibal said as kindly as he could. “Will’s ability allows him to empathise with anyone,” he explained. “He worked for the Association, alongside me, tracking down Hunter’s who’d gone rogue.”

He let his voice crack a little, putting on a show of grief for Hisoka and went on, “After a while, he could not separate the minds of those he hunted from his own. One night, he looked into my eyes and saw a monster staring back at him.” His throat tightened. “He ran to Chilton after the case against me was dropped for lack of evidence. I agreed to allow him to place a restraining order against me; something that Chilton can not understand. He does not believe in the existence of Nen, and I have never seen the need to dissuade him of his delusions. After all, peace of mind is something we all crave.”
Hisoka closed his eyes as he felt himself tense up for a brief moment; he knew what it was like to be looked at like a monster.

"That must have been hard," he whispered numbly. "Especially if you were in love. Chilton is a fool, but at least you know where Will is."

*I don't know where Mother disappeared to; nobody would talk about it. Not even to Nanna.*

“Before it all went wrong, Will was the only one who had ever accepted me,” Hannibal said sadly. “His loss...” He closed his eyes and let the pain of that night resurface. “It broke my heart. But,” he added, taking a deep breath and looking down at Hisoka, allowing himself to feel his warm weight and curling his arm around his back to hold him. “As you say, I know where he is. I know that he is safe.” *I know where to find him when I do decide to end him for what he did.*

Hisoka didn't move as he listened, keeping his eyes closed as he worked through what was being shared with him.

“I think I understand,” he mumbled, relaxing into Hannibal’s hold. “It sounds like a difficult time. I don’t know what I’d do if I lost Illu-chan.”

“We never quite know until it happens, mon cher,” Hannibal said honestly. “I thought that Will would be able to understand me. He is a man who can appreciate the subtleties of the darkness that resides within me; just as your Illu-chan can appreciate yours. But I can see a difference in the way they look at you, when compared against how Will looked at me. Your Illu-chan loves you, mon cher. They will always find a way to come back to you. Of that, I am certain.”

“They have a unique view of the world; they've never seen me as anything other than me. Nothing I've done bothers them; they just accept it's who I am. It's nice to have somebody look at me without seeing a monster, or worse,” Hisoka sighed and idly traced random shapes across Hannibal's stomach. "I know what rejection feels like; we're old friends at this point. For what it's worth, I can sympathise with the loss of your lover's affection. Even if I can't quite fully understand it."

“What would you like to know about, mon cher?” Hannibal asked curiously. “I can’t promise that I will be able to answer you, but I will always be honest. What have you been wondering about?”

"Why do you keep denying yourself," Hisoka said without missing a beat. "The guards don't know I'm here. I can easily get back into the hotel room, if I left before daybreak, without them knowing. It would be my word against yours, and well, your band means I'd have to admit it was consensual if asked. Plus that I chased you; I'd have let you downstairs, on the rug. Was it my muteness that made you hold back? Or something else?"
“Because I’m not him, mon cher,” Hannibal said quietly, stroking Hisoka’s back. “I do not wish to take from you. I have no,” he caught himself before he outright lied and swallowed as the image of him sinking his teeth into Hisoka’s skin blossomed in his mind’s eye. “I have no desire to be seen as anyone other than myself, either. If we were to escalate this, then I would want you to come to me because you want me, and not simply because you want to get off. Or,” he added with a quiet smirk. “Because you wish for me to lose my job.”

"But you could have me transferred to another therapist if you really wanted," Hisoka countered before he could stop himself. "I know you want me; I just don't understand why you’d want me. People act as if they like me, that they want to be around me, but it's mostly because I'm famous. They want to brag." He shook his head. "They want my autograph. It's tiresome after a while. If you really wanted me, then you'd find a way," he continued, unable to stop himself.

Hannibal felt the prickle of his band as Care began to glow in the low light of the room.

“Mon cher,” he said gently, bringing his hand up to stroke at the back of Hisoka’s head. “It is precisely because I want you, that I want you to want me too. I will not take from you.”

He traced the shell of Hisoka’s ear and breathed evenly, thinking about the best way to phrase what he wanted to say next. “Intimacy is about more than simply the physical act of relieving tension. I am not saying that it will never happen, but I am saying that I would have to know that you wanted more than that from me before it does.”

"Other than a fight, or to kill you, you mean?” Hisoka asked. "All this cuddling, is this part of it for you? Relationships aren't my forte; I don't tend to stick around long enough to practice. Illu-chan and Danchou were my exceptions. You could be waiting for a long time."

"Luckily, I am an exceptionally patient man, mon cher,” he said, holding Hisoka tightly against himself. “If I want something badly enough, I will always find a way,” he echoed. “I have no doubt that you will be worth it.”

"Is that why you keep being so nice to me?” Hisoka asked as he surrendered to the hug. Would he let go if I licked him again? It does feel nice to be held for once, but I'm not supposed to be developing feelings for him. Attraction is one thing, emotions are another. "I keep trying to work out why, but I just can't quite figure it out," he added forlornly.

“I did explain downstairs before, mon cher,” Hannibal said, smiling to himself. “I happen to enjoy seeing you happy. I am being nice to you, because I want to, Hisoka. I have no ulterior motive.”
"I wasn't exactly myself downstairs," Hisoka retorted. "Well, I was a different me, but you know what I mean."

*You're being nice because you want to be? That's rather simplistic, isn't it? Bordering on tautological. I like being nice, and it's nice to be nice. So I'm going to be nice?*

***

Hannibal smiled. “I do, yes,” he said. “Quite intimately. We have both seen what the other is like when we are...not ourselves.”

He loosened his grip and began to stroke gentle circles into Hisoka’s skin. “And I dare say we both learned a lot.”

***

"As long as we both understand that I am not in the habit of falling asleep on just anyone, in front of a fire on a cosy rug. Which I'm sure we are," Hisoka mumbled sleepily. "You're just an...especially soothing pillow."

*I'm not getting attached, I'm just doing this for the plan .*

***

“Then this pillow is happy to be of service,” Hannibal said and smiled when inspiration struck. “Sleep now, mon cher. The morning will no doubt, bring fresh secrets and new delights for us both to discover.”

***

**5 a.m.**

***

Hannibal had watched Roy for a while before making his final decision to act. When Hisoka had begun leaving him gifts outside his waiting room, he’d wondered, at first, how he could return the favour. It had taken the man stepping up his flirting, for inspiration to strike and for the answer to finally come to him.

He’d taken Roy the night after he’d bound Hisoka with his Nen, and had been training him for his ‘big day’ ever since. He’d spent the first week making sure that he had fully recovered from the amputation of his right forearm, and the second making sure that he’d fully adjusted to his new role in life. He had to be perfect.

He hadn’t taken kindly to being slapped after he’d prevented Roy taking a third child, but he’d put the arm to good use, at least. Roy had to keep his strength up, and the added protein helped with the recovery process.

As he put the finishing touches to the ropework, he stood up and looked down at the man, now bent forward, tied over a stool, and smiled.
“I’m going to leave you now, Roy,” he said to the blonde as he made sure that the red ribbon around his waist was perfectly positioned. The red silk rope he’d used to bind the man in place had been expensive, but it was worth it for the effect that it had when contrasted against the man’s pale skin. Hannibal had enjoyed watching as Roy’s strong muscles had flexed, trying to find a weak spot in his kinbaku. Unfortunately for him, there wasn’t one, and Hannibal had locked the stool into place on the floor before they’d begun.

“I will be back later,” he said kindly. “Depending on how the morning progresses, I may or may not have my special guest with me.” He felt Roy shudder under his hand, but, after a careful correction, he nodded. “Good boy.”

He remembered watching the man celebrating his 25th birthday by kidnapping a local schoolgirl and taking her into the woods to ‘play’. Only Roy had come back out.

“He’s going to love you, I’m sure,” he said as he made sure that his blindfold was securely fastened, and stuffed the noise-cancelling earplugs into place. He patted him twice on the back to let him know that he was going back upstairs and chuckled to himself when he heard the quiet whimper that escaped Roy’s rosy lips.

“See you in a few hours,” he said, and strode out of the playroom, allowing the door to click closed behind him. *You’re going to make the perfect gift. Hisoka needs to know that affection can come in more forms than simple intercourse. He needs to know that I understand him; and you’re my key, Roy. You’re going to help me open that door. You’re going to get him to want to come back.*

***

2 Hours Later

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Hisoka was vaguely aware of someone lying beside him as he started to come too. Rolling over to lay his arm across them, he hummed sleepily, snuggling closer. “Warm,” he mumbled, burrowing into the blankets and squeezing his bedmate. “Don't want to get up, stay. Keep me warm.”

***

“Yes, mon cher,” Hannibal agreed, blinking the sleep out of his eyes and turning to look at his clock. It was seven in the morning. “I couldn’t agree more. Let’s stay here.”

***

*Mon cher? Not Illu-chan?* Hisoka opened an eye, looked up at Hannibal and yawned before humming again contently. *I stayed in his bed as we planned, but now I don’t want to leave. It’s so soft and comfortable.*

“Good,” he said softly. “Still sleeping, not waking up yet,” he insisted.

***

“That’s nice,” Hannibal said, rolling onto his side and ignoring the clock in favour of facing
Hisoka. “Because I am too. I’m glad that we’ve reached this understanding,” he declared. “Sleep is highly underrated.”

***

"Less talking, more sleeping," Hisoka complained as he pulled Hannibal closer. "You're warm, it's nice."

I wonder what time it is, and if the guards have realised that I escaped yet. Ah well, I'll no doubt get shouted at, but it's been worth it.

***

Chuckling, Hannibal allowed himself to be manhandled into position and ended up with an entirely pliant Hisoka curled against him.

Well, this is undoubtedly one way to wake up, he thought, even as his eyes began to close. I wonder what he’s going to do next.

“Your wish is my command, mon cher,” he said and moved his arm so that it nestled more comfortably in the crook of Hisoka’s neck.

***

I wonder how long I can keep you here? Hisoka wondered after he spent a few glorious moments dozing on top of Hannibal. You're not going to let me play with you before I go home, you made that pretty clear last night, but you're happy for me to curl up on you.

Realising that he needed to get up to use the bathroom, he groaned quietly and disentangled himself from Hannibal and the blankets. I guess I'll use the en suite then; I'm sure he won't mind, he thought and grumbled to himself. There goes that idea to keep him in bed for as long as possible.

***

Hannibal smiled and watched Hisoka grumpily making his way into his bathroom. Waking up at five in the morning had had one advantage, at least, and he ran his tongue over his recently brushed teeth as he thought about what to do next.

He would have to build up to revealing Roy, but he was glad that Hisoka seemed to be in a more open and affectionate mood than the night before. Perhaps breakfast? he wondered as he sat up and shuffled the pillows so that they’d support his back. Yes, I could cook for him and then bring up the topic of presents. Let's hope that he doesn’t want to stay in here for the rest of the day.

***

When he came back out into the bedroom, Hisoka was a little disappointed that Hannibal appeared to have woken up. At least he's waiting in the bed for me, so maybe I can keep him here a little longer? Smiling, he quickly got back into the bed and eagerly curled back against Hannibal's side. Your move, Doctor, he thought smugly as he put his arm around his waist and resumed using him as the world's most comfortable pillow.

"Morning," he said, softly nuzzling Hannibal's chest. "I hope I didn't disturb your sleep too much."

***
“Not at all,” Hannibal said truthfully. “I had the most pleasant night’s sleep.” He smiled to himself as he thought of a way to entice Hisoka away from the warm covers. “Although,” he admitted. “I did find myself awakening earlier than usual. It would appear that, now that my secret admirer has revealed himself, that I had the sudden urge to repay him for all the fantastic gifts he’s given me.”

***

"You did? I mean, you do?” Hisoka asked hesitantly. *What could you have possibly gotten for me? Somehow I doubt it's gonna involve getting to play with your cock; that's too crass for you. "I wasn't expecting anything, but I guess neither were you...I'm not used to surprises."

***

“It has been a while since anyone surprised me too, Hisoka,” Hannibal said, stroking the hair away from the back of the man’s neck and massaging away the tension he found there. “You inspired me, but,” he said innocently. “You don’t have to move until you want to. My gift is waiting downstairs. We can take our time. I assure you, it’s not going anywhere.”

***

Hisoka looked up at Hannibal curiously as he took in the new information. *It's downstairs? So we have to get up if I want to see it, and I inspired it?* Humming thoughtfully, he settled back against Hannibal's chest, as he worked out what he wanted to do.

"No doubt you're not going to give me any sort of clue, are you?” Hisoka asked teasingly. "Not until I get out of this stupidly comfortable thing you call a bed. Using my curiosity against me is cheating, you know because now I really want to know what you thought I'd like; see how well you understand me."

***

“I am innocent of all charges,” Hannibal said, chuckling as he raised his free arm in surrender. “I was merely acting on a whim. I wanted to see you smile and to repay you for your thoughtful gifts. It is important for everyone to feel appreciated, after all.”

***

*Thoughtful? Well, I suppose I did put some thought into them, but they aren't anything that special. I guess the flowers were, but I don't want to ruin it by admitting that I didn't choose them. The florist did. Something else to learn, I suppose.*

"And do you feel appreciated?” Hisoka asked playfully, grinning up at Hannibal. "If not, then I'm sure I could correct that.”

***

“How could I not feel appreciated after all your gifts, mon cher?” Hannibal said happily. “Would you place me further into your debt before you have even looked at what I got for you?”

***

"I suppose that would be unfair when you put it that way,” Hisoka sighed and looked mournfully at the bedroom door. "Plus, it's rather rude to refuse a gift, especially when you've accepted all of mine so readily. I just wish I didn't have to leave the bed. I am ruined for other beds, the ones at the hotel are nice, but this is heavenly."
“Well, you are welcome in it at any time, mon cher,” Hannibal reminded him. “I assure you, there are no limits to the number of uses per day that it has.”

Hisoka didn't move when he heard the voice from behind him, as he waited for the sense of dread to wash over him - confused when it never came.

Get it together, Hisoka! It's just Dr. Lecter, that man is dead, you killed him remember?

"Do you need me to move just to talk to me?" he asked.

Do you actually care, or is this just your next move in the game?

“I would like it if you came here, Hisoka,” Hannibal said quietly. “This will not be easy for me, but I think it is something that you need to understand.”

"Don't give me ideas; I doubt you'd like me randomly turning up just to lie in your bed," Hisoka chuckled and sat up to stretch. "I should get up. If I'm being honest, I'm feeling a little hungry. You could repay some of that gift-giving-debt with breakfast? Or am I pushing my luck?"

“It would be my honour to cook for you,” Hannibal said, bowing his head graciously before turning his smile into a smirk. “And I would caution against assuming that you know what I want, mon cher. I can guarantee that seeing you, smiling up at me from my bed when I come home would not be an unwelcome sight.”

Maybe I should get you to move me in here instead of the hotel? But that would make things awkward with Illu-chan.

"Would you wake me up if you found me asleep? Or would you just get in and go to sleep next to me?" Hisoka asked, suddenly curious. "Although I could imagine you drawing me, as I sleep. Anyway, I'm wondering what sort of things you make for breakfast. If it's anything like the dinner party, I bet it's going to be wonderful."

“I would do my best not to disturb you unless it was urgent,” Hannibal said, thoroughly amused. “And that would depend upon what you wanted me to make, mon cher. I have mastered most dishes. Did you have anything in particular in mind?”

"What do I want? Well, I like to include protein, so I like to have something with eggs. Unfortunately, the hotel's food is pretty good, but they just seem to ruin those. Illu-chan usually goes out to get me bagels from this little shop nearby," Hisoka explained cheerfully. "They do wonderful breakfast sandwiches too, but I think I'd like something different than bacon and
sausages. It's nice, but not exactly that healthy. My apologies, I'm rambling, could we have something with eggs? I miss a decently cooked egg."

***

“I think,” Hannibal said dramatically. “That could be arranged. I may even find a way to include some toast. Alas, I am afraid that in order for us to do that, we must first leave the bed. Would you wish to see my gift before, or after your morning meal, mon cher?”

***

"Maybe a little peek wouldn't hurt...before breakfast?” Hisoka suggested. "And I know we have to leave the bed, but you said I could come back to it. Or was that a clever ploy to get me to get up?"

***

“Would I lie to you, mon cher?” Hannibal said, holding his hand over his heart and looking as innocent as it was possible for him to be. “This is your safe place, and it shall remain that for as long as it remains in existence. Now, so far, you haven’t moved. Am I to take it that you are waiting for me to give you an order? Or are you wanting to remain here, after all?”

***

"I'm torn, lying in bed with you, it's peaceful. But breakfast sounds good too; I'd rather not be ordered around. Last night was nice, please don't ruin it?” Hisoka asked gently.

***

“I was teasing, mon cher,” Hannibal said gently. “I will not be offended by whatever you chose.”

***

"Oh, I see. Well, I did say I was open to seeing the surprise you have for me. I can't remember the last time I got a gift that wasn't a book. Illu-chan can't really get me things and most of the presents I get him, end up staying with me. Secret relationships can be complicated,” Hisoka sighed and looked over at Hannibal. “What happens after today? You're still my therapist and my dominant. We're bound to each other now, so I guess you're stuck with me,” he added with a playful smile.

_I've never had a dominant partner who truly cared, Danchou couldn't, and everyone else was one night stands. Your bracelet thinks I have feelings for you; I don't know if I do._

***

“Then, mon cher, let us venture forth and discover what your secret admirer has decided to surprise you with,” Hannibal said softly. “And I can think of far worse things than being stuck with you. We can discuss any questions you may have about our arrangement on the way if you wish.”

***

"I wouldn't know what to ask, well there's one thing. Although I don't know if I should ask it,” Hisoka admitted as he climbed out of bed and began doing some morning stretching. "Is there something you think I should ask?"

***

Hannibal grinned widely and climbed out of bed. “I think you should ask whatever it is that you
aren't asking me,” he said, walking around the bed and joining Hisoka to gently guide him towards the door. “I can assure you that no topic is off-limits within these walls, although you may not get the answers you are looking for if you try to push your luck too far. It is a lesson that Pariston learned a long time ago, but one that I hope you will not have to.”

***

"I was, well I was wondering if you have been developing feelings for me? It's just, you're so gentle with me, but I know you're capable of the opposite? When we met, I know I got a lot of my first impressions wrong, but I didn't peg you for gentleness," Hisoka confessed as he was led towards the door.

***

“I don’t let just anyone into my house, mon cher,” Hannibal said sincerely. “Never mind into my bed.” He led Hisoka along the landing and towards the stairs, placing his hand in the small of his back as he said, “And, I have only ever bound myself to one other individual before. So I would say that the answer to your question, is yes. Now, my question to you is what do you intend to do with that knowledge?”

***

"I don't know; I honestly didn't think you'd answer. Although I was rather expecting you to say yes if you did," Hisoka admitted as they descended the stairs together. "Until you bound yourself, I wasn't sure, but yeah...sorry if it was a stupid question. I wanted to see if you'd deny it or not, considering that lying is rude and all."

***

Hannibal turned and flashed Hisoka a lightning-fast smile. “There are no stupid questions, I assure you. The fools are those who fail to learn the lessons that the answers teach them,” he said calmly, directing them away from the kitchen and towards the playroom. “And neither of us are fools; you learn fast, so I am happy to answer whatever questions you wish to ask.”

***

So we're going into the playroom? No, there's no way you'd buy me a sex toy. I can't even imagine you going into a sex shop; you'd use some fancy mail order service. One known for its discretion. As they neared the playroom door, Hisoka felt his heart speeding up in anticipation of what was waiting on the other side. Is it too much to hope that it's some new dungeon furniture he wants to test out with me? he wondered as Hannibal pushed open the door.

The sight that greeted him left Hisoka speechless, and his eyes widened in shock as his mouth fell open. He blinked a few times to make sure that he wasn't imagining things; each time the sight of the naked man decorated in an intricate web of red rope remained. The finishing touch of a bright red ribbon tied around the stool and the captive's waist made his heart skip. **You're trying to court me; you must be.** Silently, he let his instinct take over, and he quietly padded across the room to get a closer look at his 'gift'.

As he approached, he took in the prisoner's build and allowed his eyes to pause on a stump that had been sealed shut at his elbow. **Missing arm? Did Dr. Lecter do that?** Sweeping his gaze over the naked man, he mentally noted the dirty blonde hair and his lack of muscle tone. **Even in one piece, you wouldn't have been that interesting to fight, and you don't seem to have Nen.** Continuing his assessment, he hummed when he spotted the blindfold, and wondered if Hannibal had blocked his
hearing with earplugs.

Coming to the end of his slow circle, he paused when he saw a handle poking out between the man's ass cheeks and grinned. A butt plug? Was that purely for torture or were you hoping that I'd let you watch me fuck him? Chuckling, he turned his attention back to Hannibal with a mischievous smirk.

"Is the butt plug for easy access?" he asked, tilting his head slightly. "I can't help but wonder if you intend this man to be my present?"

***

Revelling, in his observation of Hisoka as he appraised his gift, Hannibal almost missed his question. "It is, and...it is," he answered, looking down at the man dispassionately. Deciding that the time was right, he explained, "I found him escorting some young girls into the woods."

He leaned down and tugged at Roy's hair, jerking his head up and startling him enough that he let out a small scream. "Five children have been reported missing recently, and, after my party the other week, I found myself wandering around the area." He unbuckled the blindfold and smiled down at the terrified man. Pulling out his earplugs, he said, "Roy, here, was promising two young girls a private tour of his secret puppy village."

***

"I...I..." Roy stammered. "I'm so sorry...is," his voice cracked. "Is this your...friend?" he asked, seeing flashes of a topless man in his peripheral vision.

***

Hisoka felt his desire to spill blood rising as he listened to Hannibal's retelling of Roy's crimes. To keep himself in check, he slipped into Zetsu. Are you offering him to me because of Father? he wondered as he listened to the bound man's panicked breathing. Did you take his arm for Mischa? I would have preferred an unbroken toy, but I'm sure he can still be fun.

Deliberately standing just on the edge of Roy's peripheral vision, he looked between Hannibal and his gift. You liked to hurt children, and not even children with exceptional skills like Gon. Just ordinary, nenless kids. He heard a growl and was surprised when he realised that it was his own voice that he could hear. I want him to scream; I want him to beg for freedom. No doubt those little girls wanted to go home.

***

“What do you think, Roy?” Hannibal asked wryly, kneeling down until he was at eye level with the man and adding, “Maybe I’m filming this for later? Maybe I want something to remember you by?”

***

“Please,” Roy begged. “Please let me go; I won’t tell anyone. I’ll say I fell in the woods and you found me...I’ll tell them you fixed my arm...please."

***

“But that’s a lie, Roy,” Hannibal said seriously. “You were rude to me. You slapped me with that arm. We both agreed that it was best that I remove the temptation for you to do it again.”
“Yes,” Roy agreed quickly. “Yes, we did, and...thank you. Thank you...I...I am grateful. I am...”

“But?” Hannibal asked.

“I, I have a family. They, they’ll be wondering what’s happened to me...” Roy trailed off when he saw the blank look on Hannibal’s face. Why me? Why did you have to pick me? It’s not my fault. I’m sick. I couldn’t help myself.

“Don’t worry, Roy,” Hannibal reassured him. “I have ensured that your family knows that you aren’t coming back. They believe that you have absconded.” At the look of horror on Roy’s face, he added, “Isn’t it better that they think that you are safe and well, Roy? The families of all those children don’t have that peace of mind.”

Roy began to shake. “Y-yes, D-Doctor. Th-thank you.”

Hisoka sneered as he listened to Roy, talk about his family. You didn’t give that consideration to the parents of the children, why should we give you that consideration? Your family is better off without you.

Taking a step closer, he could almost smell the man’s fear, and he bit back a moan of delight.

No, I need to move carefully. This is a gift, one to be savoured but perhaps I can make it into more?

Reaching out Hisoka let his fingertips ghost over the ropes decorating Roy’s back, and felt the man shudder beneath him. He grinned and took a moment to admire the intricacy of the design. Let’s play, Doctor. Can you keep up with me? You’ve gotten me riled up with this little display, so you have to deal with the consequence. Just as I did at the party when you caned me and left me aching for more. Allowing a devilish smirk to spread across his face, he looked up at Hannibal and asked, "So this is the man you wanted me to judge?"

Let the game begin, how good are your improvisational skills? Show me everything.

“What?” Roy squeaked looking between the two of them. “J-judged?”

Hannibal raised an eyebrow and looked imperiously up at Hisoka. “It is. You asked for tribute, and so I provided. I assure you, he meets all your criteria.”

“Criteria? Are you...” Roy felt a spark of hope blossom inside his chest. If he was being judged, then there was a chance that he could be found not guilty. “A Judge? You have to help me! He’s a monster! Don’t believe a word of what he tells you! I’m innocent!”
"He's a monster?" Hisoka asked mockingly. "You don't know who I am, or what I look like, Roy. If my host is a monster, then I am most curious to know what you think you are? Are you denying that you kidnapped those children? If I go into the woods, will I find a puppy farm and several happy little girls playing with the dogs?"

"I...I never hurt them," Roy tried to explain. "I...I loved them...I..." He saw the Doctor’s stony face and closed his eyes. "I’m sick. I can’t help it. But I...I promise. I never hurt them."

"Roy, I didn't ask if you loved them," he sighed. The words felt wrong in his mouth, and he resisted the urge to backhand the man. "I asked if they are happy and alive in this puppy farm in the woods, because if they are, then I can go and get them. I'll send them home, and they can all play happy families again. I mean you said you're innocent, right? So surely they're alive?"

"I," Roy started to say, clenching his eyes shut and determinedly ignoring the glare that he knew would be coming his way from the Doctor. "I couldn’t let them go," he whimpered. "They...they were too precious. I..." He felt tears falling down his cheeks. No one could understand. "They had to be kept safe. Just as they were. I helped them fall asleep. I didn’t hurt them. They’re safe now."

Asleep? So you poisoned them. Did they know they were going to go to sleep and never be able to wake up? Were they mentally old enough to understand? Hisoka growled internally, tightening his grip on Roy's hair subconsciously. "Where are they? Where did you leave them so that they could be safe?" he asked with a patience he didn't feel. "Surely they'd have been safe with their families?"

"But you couldn't keep them safe from you," Hisoka countered letting go of Roy's hair. "You took them from their families; you lied to them. Did they understand what you were doing? Do you think their families will thank you?" he challenged as he moved to stand behind Hannibal and placed his hand on his shoulder, giving it an affectionate squeeze.

"How do you know he wasn't hired by the children's parents to punish you?" he asked curiously. "You say he's a monster because he brought you here and he took your arm. I have to say it's a wonderfully precise cut, it's healing beautifully. Should you survive, you'll barely scar."

Hannibal looked up at Hisoka and nodded graciously. “Thank you, that means a lot coming from some...” he allowed the pause to stretch and saw Roy open an eye. “One as powerful as you. I am a surgeon,” he said in the same self-important tones. The warmth seeping through into his shoulder from Hisoka’s hand was amazingly distracting, but he forced himself to focus.
“Once I explained the situation to him, Roy was kind enough to donate his arm by way of the scalpel and bone saw. He assisted in his own operation, didn’t you?” he asked him.

***

Roy could feel his teeth beginning to chatter. He could see the man standing behind Dr. Lecter. He looked strangely familiar, but he couldn’t risk saying the wrong thing, so he focussed on making sure he didn’t lose a second arm to his kidnapper.

“Y-yes, th-the Doctor, is, is good. He, he, has been h-helping, m-me learn,” he stuttered, hating how pathetic he sounded.

***

“And you have been an excellent student, Roy, really you have,” Hannibal said, patting the man’s cheek encouragingly. “You really have. You will make a wonderful gift for my Grim Reaper,” he improvised. You said you were here to judge, mon cher. Let’s see how well you can embrace your title, shall we? “The Reapers are fascinating. I count myself honoured that one believed me to be worthy enough to visit. You won’t let me down, will you Roy?”

***

“N-no!” Roy stammered as instinct took control of his tongue. “No, I, I won’t, S-sir.” Grim Reaper? It can’t be. No. I can’t die here. “I’ll be good.” Don’t kill me.

***

"Well, how could I resist such an intriguing invitation?” Hisoka chuckled. Yes, the Grim Reaper. My Floormaster title. How wonderful. "It's not often that anyone from this part of the world pays tribute to us anymore, so it’s a most welcome surprise. You should be grateful, Roy, few people get to see a Reaper. Fewer still live to tell the tale, you will likely die here but please me, and maybe I'll spare your soul."

***

“No! N-no, you c-can’t!” Roy spluttered as his eyes shot wide with the sudden jolt of fear that ran through him. He saw the Doctor’s face turn cold and backtracked as quickly as he could.

“I...I mean...t-thank you. I...I h-hope t-to prove wor...” his voice caught in his throat and he no longer cared that his eyes and nose were streaming. “Worthy,” he finished, dropping his head and giving in to the despair that he’d been fighting for the past two weeks.

***

"Well, we'll find out soon enough, won't we Roy? I can call you Roy, right? No doubt you preferred those kids to call you something different, but I'm not one of your precious treasures. I'm here to balance out the karmic scales,” Hisoka explained. “Now, I would think very carefully about how you answer anything else we ask. I will know if you lie,” he added with a wicked smile.

Turning his attention back to Hannibal, he squeezed his shoulder again. "Now then, I'm sure you're eager to continue the ritual. Do you have a wish that you want to be fulfilled by the Reapers in return for your tribute? I'm feeling generous today, let's allow Roy to know what his death will be paying for."

Will you actually make a wish? Or will you take the easy way out and say that you want justice for
Hannibal tilted his head, observing Roy’s dismal performance and waited until the man raised it, trying to see what was going on, before he said, “Yes.” He poured all the emotion and love that he held within him into the word.

“My Mischa,” he explained, allowing his voice to crack. “Take care of her for me. I couldn’t. I failed. I punished the men who took her from this world, but I would like...no, I need to know that she is happy now. Tell her...tell her that her didysis brolis* is sorry and that he hopes that she can forgive him someday.”

*big brother

Your sister? Of course, you loved her when she was alive, and you still love her now. Even though she’s gone.

"I understand, and we’ll take care of her soul and her memory. In return for this one's penance,” Hisoka replied kindly. "Please, why don't you make yourself more comfortable? There's no need for your discomfort; it's not your day to suffer after all," he flashed Roy a wicked grin. "It's time for Roy to pay the piper, and to that end, I would be most grateful if I could borrow a scalpel? You did say that you were a surgeon; it would be a fitting tool of your trade."

“Of course,” Hannibal said, rising to his feet and flashing Hisoka a secret, intrigued smile. “I shall be back in a moment,” he explained and strode over to the cupboard. “Please, make yourself at home,” he added as he opened the doors and opened the hidden draw that held his blades. “May I ask if you have a name?” he said, selecting a bone-handled scalpel that he had personally engraved.

"My name? Certainly," Hisoka replied and gave a bow as he added. "You may call me Hisoka. May I know the name of the man who called on me?"

Are you enjoying yourself, Doctor? The best is yet to come.

Striding back to the group, Hannibal held out the scalpel, handle first, to Hisoka and tested the syllables on his lips. “Hi-so-ka,” he said as the man took the blade, pretending to pronounce them for the first time. “Fitting for a creature such as yourself. Secret; I like it.”

He stared down at Roy and grinned. “My name is Doctor Hannibal Lecter, and this is Roy. Roy, please meet my new friend, Hisoka.”

Roy gazed up at the two monsters in front of him and managed to make out a set of golden eyes staring back at him. For a brief moment, he contemplated trying to fight against his bonds as the
horror of what was about to happen sunk in, but his body wouldn’t move. He could hear the sounds of someone gasping for air, and in his terror, he thought of Chrissy as she lay in her new, custom made bed. He had stroked her hair and wiped away her tears until she’d finally fallen asleep. She was his. He could use her; however, he wanted now. He couldn’t hurt her tiny body if she were already dead. He could preserve her. She would be perfect forever.

The gasping continued. He was feeling light-headed.

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“Roy,” Hannibal warned, forcing the man to focus on him so that he wouldn’t pass out from hyperventilation. “It is rude not to greet a guest,” he reminded him. “You know how I feel about that.” Stay with us. Talk. Calm your breathing. Hisoka has to be able to have fun with you. I’m not going to let you escape that easily.

***

Roy stared, glassy-eyed, between the Doctor and the Reaper, Hisoka, trying to decide who he feared the most. The Reaper had a scalpel in his hand...but the Doctor. He swallowed. He knew what he could do.

“P-leased to m-meet you, H-Hisoka,” he whispered, praying that he’d made the right choice.

***

Twirling the scalpel in his long fingers, Hisoka hummed in satisfaction before moving to kneel in front of Roy.

"It's a pleasure," he purred as, with glee, he drank in the terror in Roy's eyes. "Now, I have a question for you. Remember what I told you earlier? You need to be honest with me. I can't give the correct judgement if you're not honest, and lying counts against you, so it's in your best interest, to tell the truth. These precious kids you were saving, do you remember their names? You said you loved them, so surely you remember?"

***

Roy nodded his head. “Yes, S-sir,” he stuttered, turning away from the golden eyes that felt as if they were staring into his soul.

***

“Answer him properly, Roy,” Hannibal instructed, laying his hand on the base of Hisoka’s neck, stroking it possessively. “I may have called him, but Hisoka has come here willingly. I would recommend that you give him the details that he was clearly asking for. You do not want to anger the Grim Reaper.”

***

“C-Chrissy, M-Mia, Hi-Hinata, Rin-na and Sandy,” Roy recited as fresh tears began to fall. “Th-those w-were their n-names. They’re s-safe. I p-promise.”

***

"Thank you, Roy, that wasn't so hard, was it?" Hisoka teased as he leant into Hannibal's touch. It felt heavenly, but he knew he had to focus on the man on the stool. Reaching up with his free hand,
he cupped the man's cheek. "And you loved those girls, didn't you?" he cooed. "Did you tell them how precious they were? How important and special they were as they went to sleep in your arms? Did they feel loved, Roy?"

*Why do you never let me join you on your missions, Illu-chan? We had fun when you wanted me to help track down your brother. Dr. Lecter brought me a sacrifice, and he admitted to having feelings. Will you change your mind if I tell you how much fun I've had once this is over?*

***

"Yes!" Roy said, nodding as much as he could. The Reaper was terrifyingly strong, but at least he understood. "Yes, I l-loved them," he cried. "I s-still do. I n-never h-hurt them. Th-ey w-went to sl-sleep. I m-made s-sure th-that no one c-could hurt them a-again."

***

"I know that you sent them to sleep so that you couldn’t hurt them, but it’s not the same, is it? They can’t look at you, or smile at you. They can’t tell you they love you back. Not while they’re asleep.” Hisoka said with mock sadness as he stroked his thumb over Roy’s cheek. “Don’t you miss their smiles? The way they laughed when they were happy? Wouldn’t you want to see them like that again? I can make that happen.”

***

"N-no," Roy stammered. "N-no, p-please. They’re p-perfect now. I-I have t-to k-keep them s-safe. Th-hey t-tell me they l-love me all th-e t-time. All I h-have to do i-is c-close my eyes. P-please. T-the w-world will hurt them. Y-you c-can’t. N-no. Please, S-sir, Mr. Reaper. Please don’t hurt m-my girls."

***

Hisoka sighed and closed his eyes. The man was beginning to irritate him, but he’d not fulfilled his purpose yet. “I don’t want to hurt them; I want them to be safe. For their souls to be free and happy, surely you want that for your girls? I was called here to pass judgement on you. Chrissy, Mia, Rina, Hinata and Sandy are all innocent. I give you my word; I won’t hurt them.”

*But I’m going to hurt you. Are you stupid or just delusional? You **killed** them. Did you kill them before or after you used their bodies for your sick fantasies?*

Standing up, he moved to Roy’s side and ran his hand over the bare skin between the ropes thoughtfully. “I can’t let you leave this room, but I’m going to mark you with a symbol of your love for your special girls,” he said ignoring the way his stomach twisted at the idea. *They were children, and you killed them. How is that love? You don’t actually know what love is, do you, Roy? “Tell me their surnames; I need their full names.”*

***

“I- I don’t k-know them,” Roy whimpered, desperately trying to twist to see where the Reaper had gone. He shivered whenever he felt it’s hands-on his skin. “Th-they never said!”

***

“The five girls are, Chrissy Lawrence, Mia Berks, Rina Thornton, Hinata Sato and Sandy Tanaka,” Hannibal said calmly. “The girls he was trying to lure into the woods when I found him were called Rosey and Fern Parks, they were sisters.”
"Thank you, Doctor, I trust the Parks sisters were able to return home to their family?" Hisoka asked sweetly. When Hannibal nodded, he gave Roy a harsh kick in the side. "You should be thanking the good Doctor; most of my siblings aren't as considerate as me. I'm going to bind you to your girls so that you'll be watching over their souls. So make sure you say it like you mean it."

"Thank you!" Roy screamed, feeling as if he'd been hit by a truck. "Thank you, Doctor," he gasped, trying to catch his breath.

The pain was beyond words, but something settled in his soul. I’ll be with them forever. They’ll always be mine. You do understand.

He looked up at Hannibal and blinked. "Thank you," he said again, feeling a fresh knot of fear twisting inside his stomach. "I- I do mean it."

Such a simple idea, mon cher. And yet, it yields such powerful results. Impressive. “Of course,” Hannibal said, staring down at the snivelling man beneath him. “Don’t move around too much; you remember what happens when you make things awkward?”

He watched Roy quiver and quickly nod his head. “Good. You don’t want my Reaper to carve the wrong sigils into your skin. We wouldn’t want something bad to happen to you, Roy.”

Hisoka chuckled darkly. "No, we definitely wouldn't want that. So you mustn't break my concentration by wriggling in your bonds or making too much noise. I'd have to have to take your tongue or an eye as punishment," he told the shaking man. "Now hold still for me Roy, the more you struggle, the longer this will take. So be good and try to relax," he added playfully as he got into position and picked out the spots he wanted to carve into his flesh. "I can't wait to taste you," Hisoka lied, inwardly shuddering at the idea of polluting his body with a man like Roy. “I do so love the way human blood feels on my tongue. It’s so sweet but bitter at the same time."

Hopefully, my lie about the magic will keep him believing that I'm a monster, just like everyone thought I was. Still, I can't do anything for the girls, except make an example out of Roy. He hummed thoughtfully as he worked out where to start cutting. Such a pathetic creature, you do realise I'm going to kill you, don't you, Roy? Are you so stuck inside your own delusion about being a loving protector that you'd cling to the false hope of an afterlife with them? Will you really be able to endure being carved up?

"Y-yes, Sir," Roy stuttered and braced himself for the pain he knew would come. It couldn’t be worse than having his arm removed. The feeling of the saw cutting through his bone was something he was never going to forget.

"Good boy, now this will likely hurt a bit," Hisoka teased as he lowered the sharp blade to the skin on Roy's shoulder he licked his lips and groaned quietly as he carved a set of initials before adding some more decorative marks around them.
Roy gripped the legs of the stool so tightly that he was afraid they would break as he felt the cold blade slicing through his skin. He screwed his eyes shut and bit his lip, holding onto the words of the Reaper to stop him from crying out or flinching away from the brands.

*I need this,* he told himself. *I need the marks. My girls; they’ll be with me forever. I have to stay still. I have to be quiet; I have to prove that I love them. He understands; he’s doing this for me. Fuck the Doctor; Hisoka gets me. He’s going to send me to them. I have to stay quiet.*

Hannibal was impressed at Roy’s determination; he’d expected him to cry out right away. He’d screamed at the sight of the scalpel when he’d taken his arm. Hisoka had found the perfect recipe to keep the man compliant.

He moved one of his larger and more comfortable chairs over and sat down, folding his legs and taking his time to appreciate the view. Seeing Hisoka lick his lips as blood swelled from the first set of initials caused a spark of hope to ignite within him that he’d thought had died with Will’s betrayal.

*I can’t be so lucky,* he thought and forced himself to calm his breathing. *It’s the thrill of having someone to kill, nothing more. Do not jump to conclusions. You can’t risk it again.*

Roy arched when Hisoka sliced another line into his skin. He couldn’t help it. It was so close to his spine. *I’m sorry,* he thought, screwing his eyes shut when he remembered the Reaper’s threat to cut one out if he moved too much or screamed. He wanted to cry out, but he remembered Mia’s smile when he’d showed her her new bed and concentrated on the way her dark hair had curled around her as she’d been placed into her box, to stay his tongue. *I love them. You understand. Thank you.*

Hisoka paused when Roy twitched and arched; he’d expected the man to move when he’d got close to the middle of his back, and he hadn’t disappointed. Chuckling, he resumed his carvings; his cock was hardening in his trousers as he worked. *His blood smells so tempting; I want a taste. But I don’t want to pollute myself with such a filthy animal.* Finishing his current signal, he sighed contently and moved on to the next, with a happy hum.

"You're doing well, that's three sigils down, we're halfway there. Do you think you can keep up the good work?" he asked, hoping to throw off the man's focus. "As a reward for making it this far, if I do have to take an eye, I'll let you choose which one."

*This scalpel is gliding through his skin like butter, it's wonderful. Still, I'd prefer my cards, but he's Dr. Lecter's pick for a victim, and I need to make it a good show. I'd have prefered just to snap his neck.*

Hannibal’s hands tightened on the arms of his chair when he heard a quiet whine escape Roy’s throat and the man nodded his consent.

In a slightly strained voice, he said, “Roy, look at me.” When the man didn’t immediately comply, he growled and thrilled when his eyes flew open. “If you can stay completely silent, I’ll make sure
to give you the send-off you deserve.”

He watched as Roy glared at him and he revelled in the hatred burning in his eyes. If it wouldn’t spoil Hisoka’s fun, he would have happily carved them out of his head and presented them to his submissive on a platter.

*What would you do with them, mon cher?* he wondered as his cock swelled. *Would you be curious about their taste, or would you make him eat them? Would you keep him alive to suffer, or will he die in a climax of terror and blood? Oh, Hisoka, I can’t wait to find out what you will do with him. Show me your darkness. Let me see why you got your name.*

***

"Such a good boy," Hisoka praised with growing amusement, walking around to Roy's other side to continue his design. "Remember, your girls. You want to be reunited with them, don't you?" he chided when the man shuddered as he started the next sigil. Sneaking a glance at Hannibal, he smirked at the sight of his hands digging into the arms of the chair.

*Are you enjoying the show?* He wondered as he put the final touches on the fourth symbol and moved to start the fifth. *I've got more planned for him Doctor, keep watching. Let me show you how I play with my prey.*

***

Roy nodded again, biting his tongue to stop the sound escaping. He hated the Doctor more than anyone he’d ever known, but as he felt the blade slicing into him again, he knew that there was nothing he could do to stop what was going to happen. All he could do now was control how he reacted. The bastard wasn’t going to hear him scream. He was going to his girls. He had to focus on them.

***

Hisoka continued to hum as he worked on the last set of initials for Roy’s girls, and turned his attention to the base of his spine. *Now for the last carving, this should be for Mischa. Can I do a simple rabbit? Would Dr. Lecter appreciate that? He made her his wish.*

“Last one now, Roy, this one is the most important. We have to finish the spell, after all, we need to fulfil the Doctor’s wish,” he explained as he lowered the scalpel and carefully carved the symbols for ‘Chīsana usagi’* and straightened up to admire his handiwork.

*Little rabbit*

***

Hannibal watched as the lines for ‘little rabbit’ were carved into the base of Roy’s spine and saw blood begin to drip from his mouth; he had bitten his tongue.

“*Mon cher,*” he gasped, getting to his feet and reaching out to trace around the kanji with his fingers. “*Je vous remercie*. It’s beautiful.” He heard the man beginning to cough but ignored it in favour of cupping Hisoka’s face. “You’re magnificent. Mischa would adore you.”

Leaning forward, he placed a kiss on his thin lips, saying with actions what he couldn’t with words. “*Tu es magnifique***.”
Hisoka blinked in surprise as he registered the kiss and smiled. "You flatter me, Doctor," he purred. "But we're not finished with him just yet, after all, he needs to ensure his karmic retribution. You called on me to judge him; he needs to understand what he's being punished for before we allow his soul to pass over. I would like to deflower him, would you want to watch, or perhaps you'd prefer to join me? Although, I would advise you to use a gag that would keep his mouth open," he added as he reached out to gently stroke his hand down Hannibal's chest.

"It would be my pleasure," Hannibal rumbled, glorying in the feel of Hisoka’s hand against his chest. The smell of Roy’s blood was mixing with the arousal and fear in the air, and he didn't even try to hide his erection as he grinned wickedly at his submissive. “Your wish is my command.” he said, seeing Roy’s silently shaking head, out of the corner of his eye. “It will help to prevent him from choking on his tongue.”

Returning to the cupboard, he selected a round mouth spreader with a black leather strap, and walked back over to Roy, smirking when he saw Hisoka’s golden eyes focusing on his erection.

“Open wide,” he said to Roy. “It’s time for your reward. It seems that you will get a last meal after all.”

Next time it's going to be me you fuck, not our prey. But I'm not going to let the chance to see you in action slip by me. Let me know what to expect when you do finally give in to your desire.

"Be good Roy; this is part of your trial. Endure this, and the spell will be complete," Hisoka told the quivering man as he watched Hannibal fit the gag and licked his lips. I want to suck on you until you cum down my throat, but such pleasures will have to wait for another time. "We're nearing the end, think of your girls," he added as he toyed with the handle of the plug. "You must endure for them."

Roy closed his eyes, openly weeping but no longer caring what he looked like. The gag was forcing his mouth as wide as it would go, and he wanted to scream. He could feel the plug being moved inside his ass, and he shook his head.

I can’t...no, not that. Please, not that. I never hurt them! I waited until they were asleep! You should know that! You should know!

Blinking, he froze when he saw the Doctor stripping out of his boxers. No! You can’t put that in me! No! I won’t be able to breathe! Stop! I NEVER HURT THEM! He shook his head more vigorously, panicking as the erection turned his way.
"I have faith that you can endure," Hisoka told Roy as he pulled the plug from his ass and watched Hannibal strip before he followed suit. "You won't enjoy this bit, but it's just as important as the rest. Surely your precious girls are worth it? You do love them, don't you? You'd do anything for them?"

Not waiting for Roy to try and answer, Hisoka lined himself up with his prey's loosened hole and pushed inside, letting out a loud moan and closing his eyes as he savoured the moment.

*Join me, Doctor, help me punish him.*

***

Hannibal looked down at Roy and let his mask of humanity fall away. The man had cried out as Hisoka had pushed into him, but had managed to just hold onto his composure; however, when he looked up into Hannibal's hungry eyes, he screamed. He knew exactly what was coming for him. It was the creature that had tortured him for days until all fight had left him. It was the creature that had forced him to thank it for feeding him his own flesh, and it was the creature that promised him every last piece of him would be devoured; including his soul.

That was what he needed. Grabbing the man roughly by his hair, he thrust into him, silencing his cries with his cock and replacing them with the intoxicating grasp of panic. Roy's throat was so tight, and he moaned, knowing that Hisoka would be feeling the same.

“So perfect,” he gasped. “Hisoka...”

***

Hisoka opened his eyes when he heard Roy's screams cut short, and looked over at Hannibal, feeling his stomach tighten. *Fuck, you really are a sadist, aren't you, Doctor? Would you look at me like that while you give me a beating? Would you hurt me until I came?* he wondered, growling low with his arousal. *I'm not, gonna last long. Is this why you were denying yourself? You thought I wouldn't like this side of you?*

"You've been so good, so far Roy, you're doing wonderfully. You feel fantastic," he groaned as he dug his fingers tightly into the man's hips for leverage. Speeding up slightly, he continued to watch Hannibal fucking the man's mouth. *Is this what it would be like? If we were actually to have a relationship? Maybe I could have feelings for you, after all.*

***

“Yes, Hisoka, use him, he's yours,” Hannibal growled, feeling Roy being forced to take him deeper as Hisoka thrust into him. “How will you do it?” he gasped. “Mon cher, how will you end him? He should understand their fear.” He tightened his grip and moaned when the man tried to scream again. “I want to hear. What will you do?”

***

"I was hoping to recreate one of my favourite kills for you," Hisoka replied breathily as he continued to piston his hips into Roy's unwilling body. Chuckling at the man's continued attempts to scream and beg for mercy, he said, "Is that something you would enjoy? I would need to use my cards and my Nen, but it would be spectacular."

***

“Yes,” Hannibal moaned, staring at Hisoka greedily. “Show me everything. I want to see The Grim
Reaper. I want to feel him die.”

***

"Well, how can I refuse?" Hisoka replied playfully, letting go of Roy with one hand and materialising a playing card with a wave of it. "Let me show you, what I can do, Hannibal," he added with a purr and flicked his wrist to send the card up into the air, clicking his fingers when it reached its peak and split into a full pack that rained down on the floor around them.

_You really do want to court me don’t you?_ he thought as he quickly mapped out the best places for his cards to slice into Roy's body without damaging the rope of the kanji. The rest was of little consequence; he wanted to see red. Licking his lips, he let his killing intent trickle out into the room.

_I'm not gonna last, but I can set up the trick. Just got to hold on a little longer._ Slamming into Roy again, he let go with his other hand to create an intricate web of bungee gum.

With one tug his cards would cut through Roy's body with ease, and if he'd calculated correctly, the cuts would be superficial. Until the final card, which would slice his throat and shower, Hannibal, in his victim's blood.

He felt his dick pulse inside Roy's ass and gasped as the familiar coiling grew ever tighter. "I’m going to cum," he moaned. "Are you ready for me to end him for you? Just give the word," he hissed.

***

“Do it!” Hannibal commanded, bucking into Roy with abandon. “Make him scream, Hisoka!”

***

"You really are trying to seduce me, aren't you?" Hisoka moaned, enjoying Roy’s futile struggling as his panic really began to set in. “See me, this is the Grim Reaper as he savours his kill,” he growled, feeling himself fall over the edge and tugging on his bungee gum to send the first few cards flying.

Closing his eyes, he savoured the way Roy’s body tightened around him as he went rigid with fear. “This is my tribute,” he declared, pulling on the next strands and sending cards soaring across the room. Each graceful movement was followed by more blood oozing from fresh shallow cuts that now littered their prey’s body as Hisoka rode out the high of his orgasm. _Soon, it’ll be the finale. I want to see you painted red, Doctor, even if it’s not your blood just yet._

“And now, my dear Doctor,” Hisoka purred. “I believe this is the moment that you’ve been waiting for. Scream for us Roy; it’s time to send you to the underworld!” Pulling on the final strand of gum, he chuckled in delight as the last pair of cards headed straight for Roy’s neck. The man, true to form, did indeed try to scream. His muscles were tight with adrenaline and fear. Smiling triumphantly, Hisoka watched as his cards simultaneously cut both of the major blood vessels on either side and showered Hannibal with a thick spray of fresh arterial blood.

***

Hannibal couldn’t hold on any longer. Feeling the warmth of Roy’s blood showering his legs and the rush as it filled the man’s mouth, was all that he needed. Thrusting, one last time, he came, never letting his eyes drift from Hisoka’s victorious face.
“Mon cher,” he moaned when he could find the words to voice how he felt. “You’re...” he glanced down and watched the man’s toy in its final moments. “Spectacular”

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Slipping out of the dying man’s body, Hisoka pulled up his pants before taking a step back and bowing gracefully. Giving Hannibal an appreciative once over, he quipped, “I have to say, red really is your colour.”

***

Hannibal smirked and walked over to Hisoka, reaching out to dip a finger in the blood oozing from the wounds across Roy’s back. Bringing his finger up to his mouth, he tasted it and grinned. He’d seen the way Hisoka had reacted when he’d been slicing into his skin, and he wanted to let him know that he’d be welcome to indulge at any time. They were both soaked and spent, but Hannibal had never felt so alive.

“I don’t think I’ve ever enjoyed such a magnificent performance before, Hisoka,” he declared, watching the way the man’s eyes had followed his finger. “You elevated him to art, mon cher. It was wonderful.”

***

Hisoka chuckled. “Well, I am certainly pleased to hear that you enjoyed yourself as much as you seemed to,” he replied cheerfully as he looked over at the corpse that had once been Roy. “Although I do seem to have made quite a mess, but, then again, I am a rather messy artist, I’m afraid.”

Allowing his gaze to return to Hannibal, he smirked as he lowered his eyes to his blood-stained lower half. A pity he was such a disgusting man, I’d have enjoyed licking you clean. “Perhaps a shower would be in order? I should at least help to clean you up. To show my appreciation for your most thoughtful present.”

***

“I think a shower would indeed be in order,” Hannibal agreed and allowed his Aura to pulse out of him to fill the room. It highlighted four hidden doors along the back wall and one larger one to their left, directly opposite Roy’s corpse.

Gesturing to it, he said, “Shall we, mon cher?” and waited for Hisoka’s reply.

***

“Yes,” Hisoka replied with a groan. You’re so powerful, why did I promise not to fight you? “I am curious about the hidden doors; I’ve not seen Nen used like that before. Are they all hidden rooms? Or are there some decoys?”

The feeling of Hannibal’s Aura was intoxicating, and Hisoka closed his eyes to fully savour it.

“I do believe I offered to clean you up,” he added as he made his way to the door with a playful smile. “Let me show you what else I can do with my hands.”

***

“Nen locks are a dying art,” Hannibal explained, ignoring Hisoka’s offer to wash him down for
now. There was no way he’d be able to get hard again so soon, something Hisoka would be well aware of. Besides, he reminded himself. I’m not going to take him. Not until he comes to me.

“I was fortunate enough, in my youth, to have been trained by a Master. Amongst many things, she helped me understand that the weakest point in a system like this, is the Nen User themselves; as long as they are in control, no one will find what they have hidden.” Hannibal pushed open the door to reveal a fully tiled walk-in shower room, complete with double shower head and stocked shelves of toiletries at the back. He pressed a combination of buttons on the wall, and a cascade of water began to fall.

Turning back to Hisoka, he held out his hand. “Shall we find out what you can do together, mon cher?” he said, allowing a truly wicked grin to spread across his face. Give me all you have, Hisoka. I’m strong enough. I can resist you. Let me show you what a challenge really looks like. Roy was the foreplay. Now, the game has finally started.

***

Characters played by Muffinmadness:

Hannibal, Roy

Characters played by themadnovelest:

Hisoka
Hisoka hummed to himself as he ignored his guards and waited for the elevator doors to open. He had his carry-bags containing the breakfast he’d bought for Illu-chan on his way home nestled in his hand. He’d been rather irritated when Hannibal had insisted on making him wait to be collected, but the chance to see Miriam give Dr. Lecter a lecture had been worth the delay in getting home.

At least it meant I was able to get something for Illu-chan, although I won’t be surprised if Miriam suddenly gets reassigned. The plan’s working. Dr. Lecter’s interested. I just have to keep working on him until he gives in.

When the elevator doors opened, Hisoka strode out into the hallway, smirking when his guards immediately sprung to attention to keep up with him.

Hmm, I’m sure you’re the one who ran off when I invited you inside my room. Hisoka thought, sneaking a look at the man walking on his left. Although I can’t for the life of me remember your name. Ah well, you seem to prefer blending into the background. Miriam’s much more interesting.

“Well, this is my stop,” he said playfully as they came to his door. “Thank you for the pleasant company. We really must do lunch sometime,” he added winking at Miriam as he walked into his room without waiting for a reply.

Allowing the door to close behind him, Hisoka sighed and slipped out of his shoes and jacket. “Illu-chan?” he called as he made his way to the bedroom. “Master’s home and he brought you breakfast.”

Illumi looked up from his computer at the sound of Hisoka-san’s return. He sniffed as his Master walked into the room with what smelt like bagels from the nearby shop. He’d brought breakfast. And come in through the main door.

Sliding his crumb-filled plate over the edge of the desk to hide it on the top of the smaller set of drawers next to it, he got up to close the window and said, “Welcome back, Master. You look happy. I assume you have had an entertaining night?”

“Of course he has,” Lulu snarled. “He’s been fucking Lecter all night. Why did you even let him go there! He’s becoming his little bitch, and you know it!”

“I did, and quite an eventful morning. Dr. Lecter was rather insistent on arranging for my guard to collect me, but he was amused that I left by the window. I don’t think he was too impressed when
Miriam tried to scold him,” Hisoka explained with a chuckle. “She’s a brave woman.”

Sitting down on the bed, he put his carry-bags beside him so that he could pull everything out.

“I wasn’t sure if you’d have eaten, so I decided to go to the bagel shop. We have a wide selection, and I even managed to grab some of their doughnuts fresh from the oven. They smelt too good not to buy some,” he said as he searched for the salmon and cheese-filled bagel he’d picked up especially for his lover.

***

“I am glad,” Illumi said, accepting the bagel from his Master graciously as Lulu continued to snarl, “Why does he always buy you those? You know you prefer Mackerel.”

*I told him they were my favourites on our first date, now shut up!* he snapped at her.

He’d stopped by the shop at half-past seven this morning when he’d realised that he’d been up all night researching, but his Master had brought him the gift. It didn’t matter that he was full; he would accept it.

“Thank you for thinking of me,” he said, making a show of getting both of them a fresh plate from the cupboard. “What kind of fun did you get up to with the Doctor?”

***

“It was an interesting evening, things did escalate, but he’s still resisting my charms. Although, I think I am making good progress there,” Hisoka replied as he picked up a sandwich to nibble on.

“The flowers went down well. The florist you recommended did a wonderful job with the bouquet. We mostly talked, although I did get him to kiss me; he’s reluctant to take things too far as he suspects I want to get him fired.”

Pausing to look over at the laptop he asked, “Have you had much luck with your research?”

***

Illumi swallowed his bite of bagel and tilted his head. “Yes, I have come across a lot of interesting things, but have not yet found the answer to my question.”

He stopped to look at his Master properly for the first time. He was...extremely happy.

“Sure, yeah, things escalated alright...he fucked him, you know he did,” Lulu hissed.

*He said he didn’t and he has no reason to lie to me. Shut up!*

“Did you have sex with one of the guards?” Illumi asked, trying to work out what could have happened to cause Hisoka-san to appear so satisfied.

***

“No, I didn’t. Although Dr. Lecter did present me with a gift, he brought me a victim to play with. I did fuck him before I killed him. Then we showered, and he made me some breakfast and summoned the guards to fetch me,” Hisoka replied with a tilt of his head. “Is everything alright, sweetheart?”

***
“He did?” Illumi said, ignoring his Master’s question. “That must have been an interesting experience. I wonder why he would bring you someone to kill? Surely that goes against the point of your therapy?”

“The couple that kills together, thrills together,” Lulu sneered. “He’s doing what you don’t. He’s trying to replace you. Why are you letting him!”

Master wouldn’t do that! Illumi snarled, twitching as he tried to keep Lulu’s anger from his face. He always comes back to me!

“Yeah, because he’s never found anyone who’ll do what you will. Now he has Lecter.”

***

“Catharsis I think,” Hisoka replied thoughtfully before finishing his bagel. “The man was a child murderer and sex offender. Considering my childhood, I think he was offering me another way to face the ghost of my Father. He tied him up with a bow before presenting him to me; it was an interesting experience.”

He sighed and picked up one of the doughnuts as he remembered Roy’s deluded idea that his victims could love him after they were dead.

“I got to show off, and Dr. Lecter confessed that he’s developing feelings for me,” he added. “He’s trying to court me by appealing to the lowest common denominator. We both enjoy murder.”

***

“That sounds like a very enjoyable experience; I wish I could have seen it,” Illumi admitted and closed his eyes when Lulu began to rage at his lack of condemnation.

Taking a deep breath, he calmed his body and looked at his Master. “I apologise, Hisoka-san, please, continue. You sound as if you have learned a great deal.”

***

“Yes, it was definitely an enlightening, even if my primary goal went unfulfilled. He refused to do more than kiss me, but I did manage to spend the night in his bed. I also know his Nen works on him, and he has an ex-boyfriend called Will,” Hisoka said cheerfully as he moved to lie down on the bed. “He’s the same Will that is under Dr. Chilton’s care; I think his surname is Graham? Might be worth looking him up.”

***

“And Lecter’s wanting our Master as a replacement,” Lulu snarled. “He’s ours. You can’t let Lecter have him! Why are you just sitting there! Tell him how we feel!”

“I-I see. I will certainly do that for you. Thank you, Master.” Illumi pressed his hand into his eye to try and focus around Lulu’s anger. “You did a very good job. Do you know why Will is in the asylum?”

“We were told at the party, you idiot! He thinks Lecter wants to kill him! Stop being so weird and tell Master that he can’t leave us!”

***
“I’m sure it came up,” Hisoka said with a frown as he tried to remember. “Oh, yes. Will thinks Dr. Lecter is out to kill him. There was a trial; he talked to me about it after we killed the victim he gave me. He still has feelings for him if you ask me, Will broke his heart.”

*He said he wouldn’t bind himself for just anyone, and Will was the only other person.*

"I would like to talk to him, but I fear that won’t be possible with my entourage. Perhaps you could visit?" he asked hopefully. “I don’t want to ignore a possible source of information to help us fulfil our mission.”

***

*Then why is Master letting him use you to get him out of his system?* Lulu demanded, and Illumi screwed his eyes shut.

“‘Yes, I can do that,’” he said as evenly as he could manage. “If Lecter is not over him, then he is emotionally vulnerable. We can...” he flinched. “We can use Will against him. He has made a catalogue of...mistakes.” Lulu was becoming unbearable. He tried to think around her constant commentary. “You should...you should record the dates and times. For the future. As evidence.”

***

“‘You want me to record every time he’s beaten me for sexual pleasure? There’s been a few now,’” Hisoka mused. “Still, it’s my word against his, and I really need to be sure his Nen will go with him. I don’t want to be stuck with this for the rest of my life.”

*I chose you, not him to be my reaper. You’re going to be the one who ends me. I don’t want him to interfere with that.*

Sighing, he got up from the bed and grabbed the notepad and pen that was beside the room’s phone. Quickly scribbling down any event he could recall that could count as evidence and handed the paper to Illumi.

“This would probably be safer with you,” he advised. “There’s apparently a cave in the woods, where Roy took the children. He’s the man he gifted me. He preserved the kids he took...their bodies are still there. Could you maybe arrange for an anonymous tip so the bodies can be found? I’d like them to make it home. Dr. Lecter already made arrangements for Roy to disappear.”

***

“‘If-if that is what you wish to do, Master. We- I, I will do as you ask,’” Illumi said, forcing his voice to stay calm as he listened to Lulu insisting that he stop him from getting further embroiled in Lecter’s world. “And I was there. We- I would be a reliable witness.”

***

"I’d like it if you could, and I’m bowing to your expertise on that. It’s out of my radius, and it’s less suspicious if a cave explorer found them than if I suddenly know about it. I don’t need them treating me as a suspect in that animal’s disappearance,” Hisoka said. “Also, yes you would be witness to the event at the party, that’s true.”

*Are you really OK, Illu-chan? You seem a little strange. You don’t usually get jealous, so what’s going on?*

“Do you need something for your head? You’ve been holding it for a while,” he commented as he
tidied away the food wrappers and remaining sandwiches. “I could run you a bath if you’re feeling a bit tense from sitting at the computer?”

***

“I believe I have a headache. We- I,” Illumi shook his head, trying to clear it. “Concentration is hard.” He looked at the computer. “I have been awake for a while. I was seeking clarification.”

“Oh, so you’re going to tell him about me now, are you? Huh? You’re going to tell him that you’re broken. You’re going to let him kill you?” she sneered. “You know that’s what he does to toys that aren’t up to scratch anymore. You coward. You’re going to leave him when he needs us? I thought you understood sacrifice.”

“I should get some water,” Illumi gasped, getting to his feet and hurrying to the mini-fridge in the corner of the room so that Hisoka-san wouldn’t see his face.

It’s not cowardly if it’s what’s best for him. He has to know that something went wrong. It’s not for me to decide whether I live or die. I surrendered that choice in Jappon. I’m not a coward.

***

Silently, Hisoka watched Illumi make his way over to the fridge with a frown. It can’t be that simple; you can stay awake for days at a time. You trained since you were a child, all of your siblings did.

"Illu-chan," he said firmly. "A simple headache wouldn’t be enough to stop Kalluto, so it’s certainly not enough to phase you like this. Tell me what’s wrong so that I can help.”

***

“Yeah, Illumi...what’s wrong?” Lulu sneered.

“I believe I am fatigued,” Illumi said flatly, taking his time to select his drink. “It will pass.”

“So you don’t trust him then, Mr. Duty? What happened to telling the truth? Perhaps you don’t want to fall on your sword after all?”

Shut up!

***

"Come and lie down with me? Master missed you last night," Hisoka suggested patting the bed. "I know you can go longer than most without sleep, but you have been changing shape a lot. Maybe you’ve been pushing on your Nen reserves a bit too much recently? It’s nothing a quick lie down won’t help if you go into Zetsu. Unless there’s something else, you’re not telling me?"

***

“Ohh, does the big baby need a lie-down?” Lulu mocked.

“Shut up!” Illumi snapped to himself as he reached into the fridge blindly and grabbed the first bottle he could. “I will join you shortly, Master,” he said in between breaths to calm his nerves. “Please, tell me more about your time with Lecter. Don’t let me interfere. You enjoyed yourself.”

***
"You keep doing that; I’m starting to wonder who it is you’re talking to. I doubt you’d talk to me that way. Now come here and get into bed," Hisoka ordered, narrowing his eyes slightly. "You’re clearly not OK. I have to take care of you, remember? The bracelet will punish me if I don’t."

Removing his shirt and jeans, and grabbing a clean pair of underwear, Hisoka climbed into the bed and pulled back the covers for his lover. "Master will tell you whatever you want, but you have to come here first. Then once we’ve talked about that, we’re talking about what’s going on with you."

Uncertainty, he glanced at his bracelet, it hadn't gone off yet, and if he had any say in the matter, it wouldn’t.

***

“Busted,” Lulu sang as Illumi stared at the folded back sheet as if it were a bear trap. “What’s gonna happen when he finds out you don’t want to get in there with him? Are you gonna let our Master be punished because you don’t want to say no to him? Your precious little rules are fucking this up for you now, aren’t they? What’re you gonna do this time, huh?”

Illumi swallowed, realising that his mouth had gone dry and opened the bottle of water. Taking a long drink, he forced his feet to move and decided to compromise by sitting down on the edge of the bed instead. “There is nothing to concern yourself with, Master. I will be fine,” he said quietly. His back was to him, but he could feel his disapproving stare. “What happened at the Doctors house?” he asked, hoping to change the topic.

***

“Sweetheart, please. I need to take care of you,” Hisoka insisted as he moved to sit behind Illumi and gently placed his hands on his shoulders, seeking out any knots in the man’s muscles. “If you don’t want me to care for you, then I will stop once his Nen is removed from my body. As for what happened at the Doctor’s house, we had some fancy tea. We talked about the books, he asked after you and Lulu. I didn’t want to get distracted, so I enticed him to sit by the fire, and we talked more, we kissed after he massaged me. I’m pretty sure he used olive oil? It smelt like olive oil anyway; I took a shower to get it off my skin. Then I persuaded him to let me stay in his bed. This morning we killed Roy after which he made me breakfast, and the guards picked me up.”

Sighing, he moved to rest his head on Illumi’s shoulder and kissed his cheek as he put his arms around him. “Now, tell me. What’s going on?”

***

“Oh dear, Illumi, you’re stuck now...he was too quick for you, if you ask for more details then he’ll know that you’re putting off your execution,” Lulu hissed. “What’re you gonna do?”

“I...” Illumi started to say and stopped. Hisoka-san’s touch felt as if it were sinking into him.
“Where did you learn that? It is...pleasing.”

***

"The massage?" Hisoka asked innocently. "Well I've known the basics for a while, but I never thought to add Nen to my fingertips before. He did it to me, and it felt wonderful, and I thought maybe it would help the fatigue? You know because you've been using so much aura recently."

I'll allow you a little distraction; I know how distracting this is. It was hard to focus through it last night, but you're going to tell me what's bothering you, he thought as he moved back to resume the
massage from moments ago. "Is it helping? I've only focused a little bit into my fingers. I wasn't sure I was doing it right," he asked.

***

"Oh...he isn’t...he’s not touching us like Lecter touches him?" Lulu screeched, and Illumi covered his mouth, trying to hold back her urge to vomit.

"He taught it to you?" he asked through his fingers, trying to focus. “It feels,” he swallowed. “Good.”

***

"Illu-chan, please can you stop pretending that you're OK?" Hisoka asked sternly as he paused his ministrations. You're aura shifted again, what's going on? "He didn't actually tell me what he was doing; I could just feel it. It was obvious that he was using Nen; it felt really relaxing last night. That's all; I'm a mimic. You know that."

***

"My apologies," Illumi said through gritted teeth.

He got to his feet. Lulu’s disgust was too overwhelming. He was going to be sick. “Apologies,” he repeated before running into the bathroom and vomiting into the toilet.

***

Hisoka blinked as his mind tried to catch up with what had just happened. But you're immune to poison? There’s no way you’d be sick, right? Shaking away the shock, he got up and followed his boyfriend into the bathroom.

"You’re actually throwing up?" he deadpanned as he came to a standstill in the doorway. “Now I know something’s wrong, and you’re beginning to worry me,” he added as he moved to hold Illumi’s hair out of the way for him.

***

He’s observant today, isn’t he? Lecter really fucked him over good, didn’t he? Lulu sneered.

“I am fine,” Illumi said in between breaths as he regurgitated his last few meals and silently begged Lulu to stop. “I’m not sick. I’ll be OK. Don’t worry.”

***

"No, you're just throwing up. Which is possibly a historical event," Hisoka said, trying to inject some humour into the situation. "Look, you need to tell me what's going on. I can't take care of you if you don't talk to me, now tell me, what's wrong? Why do you keep talking to yourself? Don't think I haven't noticed."

***

Illumi flinched as Hisoka-san scolded him. He hadn’t felt like this in years. Not since Father...

“I wonder if he’ll whip you just like he did too? Umm, maybe that’ll get you to talk? How conflicted would you become then?”
Illumi shuddered and wiped at his mouth with a tissue. “I...there is nothing that you can do to help me. This is not something that you need to concern yourself with.” He reached for the mouth wash and shook the bottle. “We should be focusing on you. I...I am not the important one here.”

***

"Illumi," Hisoka groaned. "You gave me your word that you were going to help me. I need you. He ordered me to take care of you, and right now something has you off-kilter enough to vomit. You want to focus on me, fine. I need to know why you're throwing up," he added. "Seeing as we're focusing on me, and my needs. You can tell me now."

***

“I am trying to help you!” Illumi snarled. “I am not laying my mistakes upon your doorstep!”

***

"Mistakes? What mistakes?" Hisoka asked not caring about the anger in Illumi's voice. "Sweetheart, I'm the one who got myself into this mess. Why do you think you've made a mistake?"

***

Illumi clutched at the side of his head and fell to his knees as Lulu raged.

The anger he’d felt moments before had been washed away by his Master’s words, and he stared hopelessly at the base of the sink. “I don’t understand it. No one can explain...she should have gone...” he whispered.

***

"She should have gone?" Hisoka asked, not sure he’d heard correctly and paused. "You mean, Lulu? She’s still in your head? That’s who you've been shouting at?"

***

Illumi just nodded, entirely defeated. He closed his eyes and waited for his Master to strike.

“Let’s see who’s right, shall we?” Lulu hissed. “I’m going to make you pay for hiding me from him.”

***

Hisoka sighed, feeling relieved that Illumi had finally told him and ran his hand through his hair. What am I going to do with you? he thought fondly as he moved to pull his boyfriend into a tight hug.

"She’s not a mistake," he said softly. "I asked you to make a disguise, but I didn't realise this could happen. It was my mistake that led to this, and I'll help you figure it out once we've dealt with Dr. Lecter. You're mine, Illu-chan. With or without Lulu, now please, come to bed? Your body needs rest, and right now, what Master needs is for you to listen to him. You don't have to sleep, just rest."

***

Illumi stared in confusion. “Why aren’t you trying to kill me?” he whispered, trying to keep his
breath out of Hisoka-san’s face. “Why are you hugging me? I don’t understand.”

He’d made a mistake and jeopardised the mission. He was weak. The only possible outcome for that eventuality was death.

***

"Because I want to hold you," Hisoka said simply, remembering the conversation he’d had yesterday, about not wanting to be alone again. "I like Lulu, and I like you. Right now I see no reason to kill you, but you can ask me again after we’ve dealt with the Doctor. Now, are you coming to bed? Or do I have to carry you?"

***

“May I wash-,” Illumi started to ask, doing his best to keep Lulu under control. Now that he had told Hisoka-san about her and he’d admitted that he liked her, she felt stronger.

“I don’t think that I can stop her, Master. She’s too...” he gritted his teeth. “She’s...angry at me.”

***

"I'm sure I can handle her," Hisoka replied but didn't let go. "You wouldn't call me, Master if I couldn't. I care for you both, and I just need to have you close to me. I don't know why," he continued with a slight frown. "One way or another, I'm getting you into that bed," he added with a chuckle.

***

“Oh, believe me ,” Lulu purred. “I’m not going to stop you. But I am going to insist that you let go so that I can wash my mouth out, and that you don’t touch me like that again. I'm not Lecter’s pet,” she sneered.

***

"Go ahead," Hisoka replied calmly as he let go and took a step back. "I was just trying to help, but you’ve made your feelings clear. I won't use nen when giving you or Illu-chan any sort of massage," he added with a smile.

Why are you angry with Illu-chan? Is it because he liked it?

***

No! Illumi moaned. No, don’t do that...

“Good,” Lulu said with satisfaction and pushed herself to her feet, noting the way this body moved.

She swilled her new mouth out and stared at Illumi in the mirror. “You’re going to pay for keeping me away from him. He’s my Master too, you coward .”

Turning to face Hisoka-san, she grinned. “So...how do you want me, Master.”

***

“Come to bed? Your body really does need rest, and I did miss you both last night. I do just want to have you close and hold you in my arms,” Hisoka said gently gesturing to the door. “I’d rather not have to drag you or throw you over my shoulder. I don’t know why you’re angry with Illumi, or
why what I did upset you so much, but you can tell me when we’re under some warm blankets. There’s still some bagels and doughnuts left if you’re peckish too. So are you coming willingly?” he asked, holding out his hand for her to take.

***

Lulu sneered but took his hand. “He thinks he deserves to die. He thinks I’m a mistake. How about you? You made me for Lecter, after all. Is my existence his biggest failure? Have I broken your toy?”

***

"No, I’m afraid you're mistaken there. You see Illu-chan asked me to protect his identity, I wasn't trying to create anyone,” Hisoka gently corrected as he led her out of the bathroom. "Creating you isn’t a mistake because we weren't trying to create somebody other than you. Besides you’re just as exquisitely deadly as he is, aren't you? Now that I think about it, I'd be most curious to see if you can use his Hatsu. I don't see you as a mistake, but if you're anyone's mistake, then you’re mine.” He paused as he sat down on the bed. "I'm not going to kill him because you exist, or because I don't quite understand how you came into existence. You weren't planned for, but that doesn't mean that I'm going to give up on Illumi, and I won't give up on you either. I'm afraid it's not that easy to get rid of me."

***

Lulu laughed, feeling Illumi’s confusion and denial, and revelling in both. “Oh, he really does not understand,” she giggled. “You’re breaking his brain, the poor thing,” she said triumphantly. “I’m a mistake as far as he’s concerned; something to be ashamed of. His psyche has split apart, and he can’t understand how or why because I’m not like anything in the textbooks or the articles he’s read online. He can’t wrap his head around why you would accept me so easily. I keep telling him that a good shag helps in 99% of situations, but he refuses to run it through his processing chip.”

She grinned at her Master and shook her head, feeling Illumi’s long hair tickle the base of her spine. “More fool him,” she purred, striding over to the bed and laying languorously upon it. “We both know that two is always more fun than one, don’t we?”

***

"Well I guess we're two sides of the same coin, I don't understand why I shouldn't accept you. In all honesty, I expected he would reject me when he learnt about my childhood," Hisoka countered with a sigh. 

Why would I kill him? I really don't understand. Having Lulu doesn't make him weaker. If anything, it would make him a far more interesting opponent. I’d have to learn her moves as well as his to stand a chance against him.

Shaking away his thoughts, he forced himself to smile as he shifted to lie down beside Lulu and held his arm out in invitation. "You're rather fascinating, you know," he added thoughtfully. "You're both alike but also so very different."

***

Lulu watched Hisoka-san carefully. “Variety is the spice of life,” she teased, lazily stroking her fingers up Hisoka-san’s arm. “I’m here to please. What would you like to know, Master?”

***
“Why were you angry with Illu-chan?” Hisoka asked, smiling up at her. “He said you were angry.”

***

Her eyes narrowed. “He was keeping me from you,” she sneered. “You’re my Master too. I was made for you. He was too cowardly to admit his mistake and too fearful of losing you to even talk about it. Wouldn’t you be angry if you were in my shoes?”

***

“I think I can understand; it’s just going to take some adjustment for the three of us. We’ll make it work,” Hisoka said gently. You actually get scared about the idea of losing me, Illu-chan? “I don’t know exactly what it must be like for you, or for Illu-chan when you’re the one in control. But I think I’d be angry if I’d been in that position.

***

Lulu’s stomach clenched, and she gasped as an overwhelming sense of shame filled her. “Well, fuck,” she grumbled. “Now he’s going all death before dishonour on me. Get over yourself; you utter idiot. There’s worse things in life than making a mistake. Yes,” she preempted, already knowing that Illumi would counter with all the lessons from his childhood that proved otherwise. “I know you had a fucked up life. I was there too. Move the fuck on, for pity’s sake. Hisoka-san is not your Father, or your Mother, thank the Gods. He actually has the capacity to empathise...slightly. Pull your thumb out of your mouth, put your big boy pants on and accept that he wants you to fucking live, you utter moron!”

Shaking herself, she looked over to her Master and plastered on a polite smile. “Sorry about that. He’s...processing.”

***

“I always felt Illu-chan was under-appreciated by his family,” Hisoka remarked. “And I do want him to live. If I’m to be the one to take his life, then I want it to be in battle, not in a hotel bathroom. It’s not a death worthy of him.”

***

“Oh, I know that, Master,” Lulu said, waving away the worry. “But he’s all up himself. He doesn’t like not understanding, and I’m a mystery with no clear solution, so he’s beating himself up about it. The fact that you aren’t punishing him is driving him over the deep end. Surely you’ve noticed how much he needs rules, boundaries and limitations? You and I thrive on freedom, but he hates it.”

She grinned and moved closer. “Honestly, you’ve done a fantastic job of confusing him beyond all belief. It’s brilliant. He’s so upset.”

***

“I hadn’t noticed it quite as much. We don’t normally spend this long together, so I didn’t realise how deep it went. As for punishing him, well, if I can think of something suitable that doesn’t involve death or permanent injury, then I am happy to do that for him. It’s necessary for some submissives,” Hisoka explained as he watched Lulu carefully. “I’m surprised I missed it for so long, but it explains a lot.”

***
“Master,” Lulu said, patting his arm. “I love you to bits, but you are aware that I have his memories, right? I know everything that he does about your relationship. You don’t have to explain how long you’ve been with him to me, but just an FYI, if you’re going to punish him, I’m outta here. You can have him in control for that. I’m not gonna be sliced up because he has self-esteem issues.”

***

“It can wait,” Hisoka reassured her, a little surprised by what Lulu had said. You love me? Does that mean Illumi loves me? Does it work like that? “I wanted to ask you at least one more thing. At the party, you seemed to enjoy watching me get punished by Dr. Lecter, but today...you seem rather jealous about my spending time with him? I was just curious why the sudden change?”

***

“There’s no change,” Lulu said, puzzled by the question. “At the party, I was involved. Wouldn’t you want to be included if Lecter decided to have some fun time with Illumi?”

***

“I suppose I can understand that. It’s just that last night was something that I had to do alone. If I could have taken you with me, I would have. I wasn’t trying to exclude you,” Hisoka replied as he reached out to cup Lulu’s face. “I just wish I could get this bangle off me, sooner rather than later. Part of me is hopeful that I can persuade him to sign me off sooner than the full twelve sessions. Dr. Lecter’s falling for me, faster than I expected and he’s holding back because I’m a patient. Once this has been dealt with, I’d be delighted to whisk us off somewhere to a private resort, and you can both have me to yourselves for a while.”

***

“I like the sound of that, although,” Lulu said, rolling her eyes. “Illumi thinks that I’ll be gone by then. Do you think they assembled him with the delusion chip pre-installed, or do you think it was a later addition to his model?”

I’m not a robot. Why would you say that to Hisoka-san? You’re going to confuse him, Illumi warned. Just because I don’t think like you, doesn’t mean that I am not human.

“So deluded,” she chuckled. “So fantastically broken.”

***

“I don’t think he’s a robot; machines don’t have Nen. Anyway, why did me trying out that massage trick upset you? Was it because I had to leave you behind?” Hisoka asked, trying to ignore the apprehension he felt about Lulu going away.

I don’t know how I feel about her staying, but I don’t know if I want her to go either. Would it really be that bad if she stayed?

***

“Because I don’t want him ,” Lulu sneered. “I want you. Unlike Illumi, I do care about what you do to me, and I don’t want you thinking about him when you’re touching me.”

She met his eye and ignored Illumi’s frantic warnings to hold her tongue. “You look different. Happier. You’re more settled than Illumi or I have ever seen you. Lecter may be falling for you,
but he’s also affecting you as well. I don’t like it, and Illumi’s worried. If he ever had to leave for an urgent mission, what would he come back to?"

***

"I was just...I thought it would help. Dr. Lecter unnerves me, and until last night I couldn't quite put my finger on why. When I was in his house, alone, and nobody but you and Illu-chan knew I was there, I got anxious in a way that I've never gotten around him, and it clicked. He reminds me of my Father," Hisoka admitted as he rolled onto his back to look at the ceiling with a frown. "I don't want him to change me," he sighed quietly.

"He surprised me; he asked if I was genuinely concerned that he was going to use his band to take advantage. I agreed that I was. His band said that I was being truthful," he continued. "I can't lie to him, and I have to do what he orders me to do. Why wouldn't I be worried? As you said, I do better with freedom than being confined. So imagine my surprise when he gave himself a band. Only, his says, Protect, Care and Cherish. At first, I thought it was a placebo, to placate me, but I saw it trigger. It hurts him, and when he managed to get me to relax, he ended up triggering all three clauses and began to full-on hallucinate. He thought that I was his ex-lover."

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"He hallucinated?" Lulu asked. "Who was it? How old are they? Are they alive? Please tell me that he killed them and we can pin him for it."

Now, who’s being stupid? Illumi accused. We were told at the party. Will Graham. And we need to be careful; if he’s bound like Hisoka, then we need to know what the triggers are. We can’t afford to be flippant about this. Stop thinking with your reproductive organs for a moment and use your brain.

“Oh shut up, you stick in the mud,” she said to Illumi. “Master, you said it caused him pain as well, can we make him hurt?”

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Hisoka smiled and reached out to pull Lulu close. "He didn't explain the terms, but he let me see him make it. Apparently, he bound himself to Will, before he went and hid in the asylum. If he fails to protect me, then I'd imagine he'd be severely punished," he said thoughtfully. "But they are rather vague terms, and I don't know if he'd come running here in response to the band going off."

***

“Oh, this is gonna be fu-” Lulu started to say.

“Master, I am so sorry, I tried to stop her, I-” Illumi held Hisoka-san’s shoulders desperately. “Please do not allow her to persuade you into doing anything reckless. You can not give Lecter any reason to allow you to be executed. And if he let Will end up in an asylum...I can not lose you like that. If you wish to die, then I will do that for you. You can not let him take you from...this world. Do not be reckless. Please. You can not...I can not lose you... Please, don’t listen to her.”

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"My Illu-chan," Hisoka sighed happily as he lifted his hand to stroke his boyfriend’s hair. "I haven't forgotten our arrangement; my death belongs to you. I'm not going to let them send me to an asylum or the gallows, and I don’t think Dr. Lecter would allow it either. But that’s just a hunch,
considering the efforts he's gone to already. He seems to believe Hunters are deserving of special rules; it's no wonder he thrived under the late Chairman within the Association. I digress,” he paused to kiss Illumi’s cheek. "I think it might be worth asking Will about the situation with Lulu. Something that the Doctor said about him makes me think that he's got Nen. Apparently, Will was the only person to really see or understand him? Sadly, though, he didn't elaborate about that particular topic."

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Illumi closed his eyes, thinking about everything that had been said.

_I don't want you to die._

He stilled and tried to work out who’s thought it had been. It had to have been Lulu, surely?

“Assuming that Will was his boyfriend,” he said instead. “Then I can not imagine that Lecter is happy about him being under Chilton’s care. The man was a buffoon.” He ran his hand down his Master’s arm and touched his Master’s bracelet. “As I have already said, I will speak to Will, but I think that this is the more pressing matter. You say he is bound to protect, care and cherish you…and that he experiences pain when those terms are broken? Do you know what happens when they are singularly fulfilled?”

***

"On their own, I'd imagine it would make him feel good; he's not into pain so it would probably be some sort of other pleasurable sensation. He didn't really react much to it except when it triggered negatively.” Hisoka explained, looking at Illumi's hand on his wrist with a small smile. "The biggest reaction was when all the clauses triggered because I didn't want to be alone and asked him to stay with me? So he let me share his bed, and he ended up hallucinating. He orgasmed from what the band was doing, but I don't have the details. I had to stick him down to the bed; he got upset when the sensations went away...started shouting for Will to come back. He said that he was sorry that Will wasn't supposed to see something that he did. I should have asked about it,” he shrugged. "But in the moment, I didn't want to. It didn't seem right. We were having a moment, and I was worried that if I pushed, it would ruin the plan. I mean we know where Will is, and we can just ask him what caused him to leave, right?"

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Illumi looked up. “His binding is strong. He's powerful. We can’t risk the possibility that you might lose yourself like that,” he said. “I will make Will my priority. He will be able to tell me things about Lecter that you can not ask right now. We can corroborate the story later. Did he tell you why he chose those terms, for his binding, I mean? Why would he risk being so vulnerable around someone like you?”

***

"He's probably able to adjust how strong the effects are," Hisoka suggested. "I mean, he's too calculating, and only he knows exactly how it works. As for the words he chose, well that was most likely a reaction to me telling him, that he reminded me of Father. Maybe he felt that it would give me definitive proof that he's not my Dad? I mean, I know that he's not, but he still triggers certain instincts in me. He even went as far as designating his bedroom as my safe space and said that I'm allowed in there anytime I want. He's interested in me, but only if I'm actually interested in him and not just doing it to get him fired."
“He knows about the plan?” Lulu wondered.

“The fact that he’s aware that you are consciously seducing him will add to the challenge, but will not detract from the results. Unless he can circumnavigate his own rules and lie to you, in which case I would advise that he is likely attempting to manipulate you back. Do you think he triggered his bracelet on purpose?” Illumi asked. “He is the only one that understands how they work, after all.”

“And don’t forget that he got Master to commit a crime with him. It’s mutually assured destruction. Fuck, he’s trapping him, isn’t he?”

“Actually think he's trying to court me,” Hisoka admitted reluctantly. “The man we killed, he was a child abuser, and he knows about my childhood. There's more to it though, watching me torture him...he got aroused. So it wouldn't surprise me if he did set it off on purpose, and he wasn't exactly shy about being a murderer. Before we went to bed, he made the claim that he's killed more people than I have. I mean, I know he's a highly rated blacklister, but if he's actually telling me the truth, then there's no way Roy was his first time taking somebody. He even tied him up in shibari and put a ribbon on him.”

Illumi maintained his passive expression as he listened to Lulu raging again about being left out.

“He isn’t lying,” he said eventually. “My family has known him for years, and he was close with both my Grandfather and the late Nettero. I suspect that he took this Roy person for two reasons. The first, I agree, was as a kind of courtship. It’s the kind of thing Lulu would do; right down to the bow although she would have made it pink and added some glitter. The second is as mutually assured destruction. You have broken one of the rules of your contract. You were not allowed to kill anyone. If you go to the authorities claiming that he has acted inappropriately, then he will simply say that he saw you kill someone. Your life would be forfeit. Surely you have realised this? Why are you not more upset?”

“He’s falling for him too. He likes Lecter,” Lulu warned.

Master does not love. He is not falling for him. That doesn’t make any sense, Illumi replied.

“My God, you really are so stupid sometimes.”

Hisoka chuckled. "He doesn't know one crucial thing though,” he replied cheerfully. "That I have you and Lulu on my side. He made me promise not to fight him until the band was off. Which I had already decided upon; after all, he can make me surrender with an order so it wouldn't be fun. But, I only promised that I wouldn't personally harm him. That doesn't stop me hiring you to take him out, which I'm growing more and more tempted to do. There's just some things to plan for first. I'd need the exorcist who freed Danchou in case the band doesn't leave. Plus, we need to know more about his Nen. A user of his calibre will have more than one ability. So I need to work out how to get him to show me the others.”

Danchou would have been a handy ally to have for this, ah well. We'll manage without him.
“Please be careful, Master,” Illumi said, finding it hard to keep the worry he was feeling from his voice. “My parents never told me what he could do; only that he has never lost a fight. Even Grandfather has lost two. He was a kind of boogeyman that my parents would threaten us with whenever we misbehaved. They said that he would eat us if we continued to be rude, but I doubt that particular aspect of the story was real. But do not underestimate the man that always comes back. Father has been offered numerous contracts to take him down and refused everyone. When I asked him why, he simply said that he didn’t want to boil. I’ve never been able to find out what he meant by that, but if his binding can make you itch, then maybe it can induce other feelings?”

Now you tell me these things? After I’m already stuck with him? It’s fine. I survived Danchou’s dam book, and zombie army, I’ll survive the real-life boogeyman.

"Of course I’ll be careful, and I’ll take seriously any warnings Will passes on. He's certainly impressive, but there must be a reason Will is hiding behind Dr. Chilton. The man's an idiot, and I concluded that he's a sort of insurance policy. If I killed Dr. Lecter I would end up with him as my replacement," Hisoka said thoughtfully as he rolled them onto their side so that he could run his hand down Illumi's body. "He said that I was mistaken, that he is his own insurance against me. The interesting part was that he said that he would arrange for a different therapist to take over from him, should I kill him. In fact, he has two in mind. I found that to be a rather strange thing for him to do."

“It’s a show of confidence,” Illumi said, experimentally leaning into the touch. “Don’t mistake it as arrogance until you are sure that you can beat him. I will take the contract if you set it for me, but I would like the names of the people that he said would replace him. I can research them with you. We should use the time in between your sessions for more than just sex. As much as Lulu dislikes the idea, I do not believe that we will beat Lecter solely through seduction any more. He is countering your moves with his own, and if you can not lie to him, then he will ask you why you want to have intercourse with him every time you try. You would have to have genuine feelings for him before he gave in, and we both know that you can not have those. It’s why we work well together.”

"He said he'd ask his own therapist first, Dr. Bedelia Du Maurier, and Dr. Bloom as the alternative. I thought it was funny that he had his own therapist, but he said that it's standard practise and assured me that he hadn't told her anything too personal about me," Hisoka advised, trying to avoid the subject of feelings. "He's pretty convinced that I just want him to get fired or that I just want to cum. When he shot me down last night, he made it very clear that he's only going to sleep with me if I am certain that I have feelings for him because he thinks that he has them for me."

“If he doesn’t, then he’s doing a good job of making you think that he does,” Illumi mused. Letting what his Master had said sink in, he added the new information to the picture that was forming in his mind. “And how do you feel about him?” he asked evenly. “I do not mind either way, but I need to know where we stand so that we can plan accordingly,” he added, feeling the slight tensing of his Master’s muscles at his question. “We can not account for the likely outcomes if we do not have a full picture of how things are proceeding. I assure you, that no matter what Lulu might say, I
do not mind. I know who you are, and I do not wish to change that. You are my Master; I am not yours. That is how this works."

***

"The band thinks that I do," Hisoka mumbled. He felt like he was confessing. "I don't know if I do. I don't really pay that much attention to feelings. Danchou was the only person that I'd had a long term relationship with, and I've been with you for longer. It’s just that I find myself thinking about him, Dr. Lecter, I mean. There is just, something about him that was unnerving and I wanted to know what it was, but I figured that out now. Although he doesn't look like Father, he still reminds me of him. I mentioned it to him, and he thinks the reason is that he's an authority figure in my life at the moment. I'm not so sure."

***

"I see," Illumi said evenly. "I had suspected that you were developing feelings for him." He winced. "No, Lulu had suspected," he corrected. "She thinks that you are attracted to him on more than a physical level. I would advise that you start to pay attention to how you feel, what you think about, and how those thoughts make you respond from this moment forward. Feelings make us react irrationally, and we can not afford for that to happen. Not now. Lecter is a killer, and it sounds like the act excites him as much as it does you. Do not allow yourself to become lost within that bloodlust and mistake it for a different kind of desire. You have to seduce him in order to be signed off as safe, sane and fit for release. That is your goal. That is your mission. Never lose sight of that, Master. He is a killer" he repeated. "He will not hesitate. Not even for you."

***

"I should have done it last night, but I didn't want to be stuck with the band. He confuses me; I don't understand why he keeps denying himself. It's obvious that he wants me," Hisoka sighed. "I also didn't want to end up in a cage, with the buffoon in charge of my fate. As for the things I think about; I like imagining how I'd kill him, but it never feels satisfying? He's not particularly expressive; I can't picture him screaming or begging for mercy. The way he looks at me, though, it can be a little unsettling. I can make him smile, and even get him to laugh...but it never reaches his eyes. It's like he's wearing a mask, you know? Father was the same, but he was always angry. He had that same strange thing with his eyes, but unlike Lecter, he was always scowling. Unless he was drunk, and then well, you can probably guess what that meant for me." Pausing, he shuddered as he fought back the unwanted memories. "I know we're planning to kill him. I haven't forgotten. Still, isn't it at least a little interesting, that the band indicated I have feelings, but he still doubts that I do?"

***

"That depends, Master," Illumi said curiously, watching the emotions wash over Hisoka-san’s face as if he were water. He was so expressive; so easy to read if you knew what to look for. But, it occurred to him that if you didn’t, then you could easily mistake his thoughtful expressions for hesitance or his moments of mirth for inappropriate desire. “What did he ask you? I am assuming that he asked you a question to gauge how you felt? Please, correct me if I am wrong.”

***

"I asked him to help me work out if I had feelings for somebody, he said he would, but he wasn't sure how he could help. That was when I pointed out that he could ask me as a yes or no question, and that the bracelet's activation would confirm it for me. He was impressed with my idea, but concerned I'd think he was going to use that as a way to take advantage of me," Hisoka explained
quietly as he recalled the previous evening. "It's how I got him to bind himself, it was after that, that he asked me. I said yes, and the band rewarded me."

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"Yes," Illumi said patiently. "But what, exactly, did he ask you, Master? What was his yes/no question?"

"He’s avoiding answering your question because he likes Lecter, isn’t he? He’s trying to protect him."

***

"Did I have feelings for anyone other than my Illu-chan," Hisoka replied. "Sorry, it's just been a lot to take in."

***

"I see, did he not clarify what kind of feelings?" Illumi asked. "I know that you desire me, but you desire a lot of people. That question seems rather redundant to me."

"You are so simple sometimes. Isn’t it obvious that he’s talking about romance?" Lulu scoffed. "But Master doesn’t have romantic feelings for me? Illumi thought, completely confused by Lulu’s remark.

"Wow...just, wow. Maybe you need to go see Lecter. You need serious therapy."

***

"Clarify? Oh, I almost forgot. He modified my question to be 'romantic feelings'," Hisoka advised sheepishly. "I'd tried to leave it vague on purpose; he caught me out."

***

"But you don’t hav-" Illumi began.

"Ignore him, Master," Lulu said, pushing to the surface of their mind and pressing close to Hisokasan in an attempt to distract him. "Romance is always relative. How would you like to celebrate this momentous occasion? We could both go out of the window and jump Lecter while he sleeps? I’m sure he’d adore the two of us together."

But you’re female? Illumi pointed out.

"Not in this body, I’m not," Lulu replied.

No, you still are. You don’t move like a man. Or talk like one. You are still a female. Lecter won’t want you.

"We’ll see about that. I’ll make him mine if it’s the last thing I ever do. No one says no to me."

Illumi rolled his eyes. Prepare to be disappointed.

***

"Both of us? I'm not sure that we should wake him up like that," Hisoka replied as he felt Lulu's
aura come to the front. *He didn't seem too happy that I tied him up until I explained that he'd ordered me to do it.* "I just have a feeling that would...undo our progress. But I'm open to other ideas?"

***

“But I even *look* like a man now...” Lulu teased. “I could slide Illumi’s big, hard dick right into his ass and you’d be able to feel him moan as you shoved yours into his mouth...” She licked her lips seductively. “Are you *sure* you wouldn’t want to give it a try? Wouldn’t you want to watch as he gave in to the pleasure of being filled in every hole, Master?”

*It won’t work,* Illumi insisted. *You’re delusional.*

“*Pot, kettle, black,*” Lulu huffed.

***

"He's not submissive, and he'd probably order me to stop. I can't disobey him, even if that idea is tempting,” Hisoka pointed out as calmly as he could.

***

Lulu sat up and pouted. “You’re just as stuck in the mud as Illumi. You both need to learn how to have fun.”

***

"Lulu, it's not about that. You've seen what the band can do to me; I know you don't want it to drive me insane, which is what would happen if I continued to ignore his commands," Hisoka protested. *He didn't take advantage of me, he could, but he stopped himself. Is that why I'm so hesitant? Or is just the bracelet making me hold back?* "I do want to fuck him, but I don't know the extent of his Nen. I don't want him to put a band on you, and he probably would in self-defence. He could order me to hurt you or even kill you for all we know, and I'm not willing to risk you like that. Either of you...please, don't be upset with me?"

***

Lulu did her best not to roll her eyes. “Master, I was talking dirty to you. I’m not actually stupid, don’t worry. I’m from Illumi’s brain, remember. I have the capacity to reason. Lecter’s really removed your sense of humour, hasn’t he? So much for trying to seduce you while we’re in bed.”

*I told you it wouldn’t work.*

“*Shut up,*”

***

Hisoka blinked with the realisation that he’d completely misunderstood and groaned in frustration. “I need this stupid bangle off me,” he complained. “I’m sorry, Lulu, you’re right. I know you’re not stupid, but apparently, I’m overthinking everything.”

***

Illumi snarled and pushed Lulu aside in order to stop her from commenting on their Master’s deductive reasoning.
“You did nothing wrong,” he said, reaching forward and patting Hisoka-san on his shoulder. “She was the one who was speaking nonsense. If you can tell us apart, then I am sure that the Doctor will be able to. She’s delusional if she thinks that she would stand a chance at having a sexual relationship with him. Apart from anything else, I do not desire him, and, despite what she may think, I happen to be the one in charge of this body. I will figure out why this has happened, but until then, I’d suggest that you adopt the default position of assuming that everything she says is done in order to get you into bed with her. She has a one-track mind. It’s...tedious. I do very much enjoy having sex with you, but I need more than just that in my life. I know you do too.”

“Oh, my. God. You sound like a textbook. How can you make talking about fucking sound dull? How?”

“She believes that I am dull. Is that a position that you would agree with too?” he asked, tilting his head curiously. “I have never heard you say anything that would lead me to believe that you agree with her, but I am learning a lot of things about you that I did not know before. If you are finding me boring, then please do not hesitate to tell me.”

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"Sweetheart, if I were bored with you then you wouldn't be here. I know you've seen new sides to me, but that’s something you can hold on to. I don't stick around when I'm bored," Hisoka said, trying to sound reassuring.

***

“I thought so,” Illumi said, nodding his head. “You are an endless source of fascination for me. When I am around you, I feel things that I have never experienced before. Is that what you meant by romantic interest? Do you feel different around me too?”

***

"That's a good way of putting it, yes. You inspire sensations in me that most people don't, when I spend enough time with you, I feel much more possessive than I normally do. It's like an instinct clawing at the back of my mind telling me to grab hold and never let go," Hisoka said, doing his best to explain. "It's not something I can easily put into words for you. Just that I feel elated when you come back to me, and there's always a small sense of loss when you have to go. But I trust you to come back, and every time you do, the feeling gets stronger."

***

“You wish to possess me?” Illumi said, feeling a spark of hope ignite within him. “I feel...” he tried to put words to the unnamable emotions that swirled around his mind whenever his Master was near. “I always know where you are, if you are close by - I...feel drawn to you. I can not imagine a life that didn’t involve serving you. You are everything to me. Even after being with you for a few days, it is physically painful for me to part from you. Even though I know that you are coming back, whenever you depart for your therapy sessions, my insides tense, my heart races and I feel an overwhelming sense of dread that you may never return. I feel ashamed; as if I am not good enough for you. I have an irrational fear that you will find someone more suited to you; who will serve you better and who will fulfil desires within you that I can not.”

He cocked his head to the other side. “Is it like that for you too? I have never had a relationship before. I do not know what is normal. I have never been aroused by anyone enough to wish to learn these things. Until now. The books have been helpful, but they can not tell me what you are thinking.” He frowned in annoyance. “And they advise against making assumptions.”
"I'm not sure that you'd want to see what I'm thinking all of the time," Hisoka chuckled. "I do feel apprehensive around Dr. Lecter, but now that he's bound himself, I think that might lessen. I know that his bracelet will punish him if he oversteps and we can use that."

Smiling, he reached over to cup Illumi's cheek. "I like knowing that I can come back here to you. Last night, knowing that you were here...waiting for me. It was comforting, even when he managed to derail my plans. I thought of you; that you'd look wonderful with his blood covering your skin and I just went with it. After all, I'm not alone in this fight. I know that with you beside me, I can get through this."

***

I didn’t want to know how you felt around Dr. Lecter, Illumi thought bitterly. I wanted to know how you felt around me. He frowned. Why do I even care? Emotions aren’t important. This kind of attachment will only get us killed. Why am I upset by the fact that he was talking about him instead of me? Lulu, what are you doing to me?

“Shut up, I’m not doing anything. This is all your crazy. You don’t get to blame me for this one,” Lulu sneered.

“I see. Thank you,” Illumi said politely. “That is...good to know.” A sad knot was tightening in his stomach, but he did his best to ignore it, along with the clawing rejection that was causing him to want to pull away from his Master’s hand.

He still wants me by his side, he reminded himself. It was a mistake to open up. All I need to do is not do it again. That’s all. He said that he thought of me. Just because he didn’t say that I was good enough...

He swallowed and fought the resentment that was eating at his insides.

He said that I wasn’t boring...

***

"I feel better having you here with me, even if it's hard when you go. I remind myself that you're a Zoldyck and that you'll come back to me. After all, you always do," Hisoka advised sensing a shift in the mood. "I trust you to survive and that you'll come back to me. Sometimes, I wish that I could go with you. To get to see you kill, see you covered in blood, my wonderful Angel of Death."

***

“I can not allow you to do that,” Illumi said curtly. “We have had this talk four times now, Master. You are not a Zoldyck. I can not allow you to accompany me when I work. I hired you that one time because it was a personal mission, and you were the only one that I could count on to not worry about the age of those involved. I know that you see power and skill, rather than maturity or fragility of body, it’s one thing that we both have in common, but I can not bring you with me, so please, stop saying that. I can not change my family's rules.”

***

"I remember,” Hisoka replied patiently. But you could just disappear with me after we deal with Dr. Lecter. Is that what I want? I had the dream again when I fell asleep on him. "I didn't mean to upset you; I know it's not up to you. I won't mention it again."
“Thank you,” Illumi said and got to his feet. He was angrier than he’d been in years, and he didn’t understand why. “I need to stretch my legs,” he declared. “I will return before sundown.”

Why is this happening?

“Because you’re a coward and repress things instead of facing them. Your brother’s more emotionally mature than you are,”

“I am not a coward!” Illumi roared.

“Yes, you are! And you can’t leave here without changing form! Or had you forgotten that as well?”

***

“I never said you were a coward, I’ve never thought that about you,” Hisoka replied, sitting up in the bed and watching his boyfriend go to leave as his heart sped up. ”I didn't mean to upset you; I can't change how I feel anymore then you can change your family. If you need space, I'll give it to you, but please don't leave like this,” he pleaded as the anxious feeling gave way to an unpleasant itching and he held up the bracelet. "Please? He ordered me to take care of you."

***

“Now look what you’ve done. This is what you get for not learning how to deal with your emotions! You’ve failed! You’ve upset him!”

“It's not you, Master,” Illumi said, gripping his head and trying to think through Lulu’s outrage. “I know you don’t think...she’s saying...she knows what I’m thinking...she...I can’t be around you when I’m so irrational. I’m not used to feeling like this. It’s too much. I said too much. You...were not wrong. I was...” he glanced at the window in the mirror and cursed himself for closing it. “I am irrational. You should leave me.”

***

“What? Why would I leave you? I knew when I pursued this that you’re not the most emotive person. If that were an issue, I wouldn't have made you mine,” Hisoka insisted as he tried to think around the irritation that was climbing up his arm. "You're an individual; you have your quirks. I have mine," he winced as he realised that his skin was starting to redden around his bracelet. I need to make it stop, how do I get it to stop? "But I still chased you, didn't I? I still want you, and you still want me too. Don't you?"

***

Illumi spun around, hair spiralling around him as he momentarily lost control of his Nen from the shock of what his Master had said. “Of course, I do! I would rather die than- How could you even suggest such a thing? I don’t want to lose control! I don’t want to fight! This is utterly irrational! I don’t understand what is happening inside my own mind, and you assume that I want to break up with you? I was saying that you should leave the room!”

***

Zeller rolled his eyes and banged on the door. “Hey, whatever the fuck you and whoever you smuggled in there are up to, you might wanna keep it down before Miriam gets back. That or just record a soundtrack of you fucking and play it while you work out whatever craziness is happening. Don’t make me have to come in there,” he suggested. “I really don’t wanna see any
"But you said...I thought...Illu-chan please," Hisoka mumbled defeatedly as he cradled his increasingly sore arm. "You said I should leave you after you were going to leave the room. I thought," he paused to take a deep breath as the irritation began to feel warm. Is it going to burn me? Is this why Silva said what he did about boiling? "Everyone leaves," he muttered sadly. "Except you, you come back. You always come back to me. If I have to leave the room to take care of you, then I'll do that, but it'll take me a while to get dressed. The bracelet, it's making my skin feel hot...I think it's going to start burning."

“What?” Illumi hissed, snapping out of his self-pity when he realised what his Master had said. He activated his Gyo and stared in horror at the countless red tendrils encircling Hisoka-san’s arm. “I’m going to kill him,” he growled, dropping to his knees and taking the arm into his hands, carefully avoiding the red lines. “What do I need to do? Tell me how to stop it? How can I fix this?”

Hisoka bit back a whimper, he could see Obey glowing brightly now that Illumi was holding him. "Tell me, why are you upset? What happened before you started to feel angry? I need to take care of you; I need to know what's wrong. So that I can help," he gasped. "Then I can care for you, and that should stop it. I'd like it if you killed him. I think I'd like that a lot."

Illumi’s eyes widened. “You don’t understand either? You didn’t intend to cause me pain?”

He felt a knot of anxiety loosen in his stomach and saw some of the tendrils recede back into the bracelet. “I asked you if you felt the same about me, and you replied by explaining how you felt about Dr. Lecter. Your words caused an explosion of resentment and inadequacy within me that was so strong that I could not stand being near to you. I have never felt anything like that before, and I do not understand it. I did not wish to be close to you because I knew that if I stayed near you for too long, I would try to kill you. But that has not happened. Now that my mind has re-focussed I find that I am calming. I do not understand that, either. Emotions make no sense.”

“God, you’re so stupid. Killua was more emotionally literate when he was seven.”

“Holy crap, it worked,” Zeller said to the spider on the wall beside him. “I think I have super-powers. I actually got them to shut up. Fuck, Miriam is so never gonna believe me. You're a witness! You have to back me up on this!”

"I'm sorry, I really wasn't trying to upset you. I fear I misunderstood your question," Hisoka sighed and reached out to touch Illumi’s shoulder with his free hand. "I don't like it when you go away, but I trust you to come back. Surely you remember how irrational, I'd get at the start of our relationship when you'd tell me you had to leave? Then, for a while, it was me who always had something to leave to do because I didn't want to watch you leave. Yet you kept coming back, again and again, and I calmed down. I trust you to return to me, that's why I won't let you say goodbye. It's why I
say I'll see you soon because I know you're going to come back to me. If anyone stole you from me, well, I'd have to kill them. You should only submit to me because it's what you want because it makes you happy and feel fulfilled.

***

Illumi noted the way his heart slowed as his Master kept talking, and by the end of his speech, he saw that almost all the tendrils had gone.

“But all that makes sense,” Illumi said, trying to work out why the words had calmed him. “You disliked me leaving because people have done that to you in the past and you needed to learn that I would come back. It’s a basic premise of any kind of training or teaching method. Repetition. I am not afraid of you leaving me.”

“Yes, you are.”

“I was...hurt. Yes, I think that is the best word for it. It felt like you had stabbed me when you began to talk about him instead of me. I tried to resist the urge to retaliate, but I believe I made a mistake with that interaction. How should I correct that in the future?”

***

Hisoka smiled as he gave Illumi's shoulder an affectionate squeeze. "If I hurt you, then I can't make it up to you if I don't know what I've done wrong. Relationships aren't my strong point either, but we can learn together. The bracelet rather complicates things," he mused. "Still, this is my longest relationship; we've managed it so far. This isn't going to beat us, all I'd ask is that if I'm clearly being an idiot, you tell me. I've had a lot to process and take in recently, and as a result, I might be more prone to stupid mistakes than I would normally be."

***

Illumi frowned. “But you are very rarely an idiot. Admittedly, I believe that your obsession with Gon Freecs is somewhat shortsighted, but I don’t believe that I have ever witnessed you being an idiot before.”

He winced as Lulu somehow made it feel as if she were banging her head against his skull.

“Lulu, however, believes that I am being one right now. She understands emotions in a way that I do not. If it weren’t for that bracelet, we would never have had this conversation. You and she may not appreciate it, but at this moment, I am glad that it intervened. I am conflicted. I despise Lecter for trying to control a man like you, but I can not deny its usefulness. You said before that you did not think that I would like what I saw if I looked into your mind. I fear that the same would likely be true if you saw mine. You already have enough to deal with. You can not have my burdens piled upon you as well.”

***

You're not an idiot, just sheltered. How do I explain without insulting you?

"I can admire the deceptive simplicity of the bracelets, even if I don't like wearing it. They work with any words from any language that both the target and Lecter can understand. If you were clever about the words you used, I'd imagine they'd be handy in the field," Hisoka replied with a grin. "Or they can be useful for clearing the air. I really don't like feeling indebted to him, but it's not like he has to know it helped us. Should we look over your research together?" he suggested thoughtfully. "We both have rather unique outlooks, so maybe together we'd spot something we'd
miss on our own?"

***

“The research papers are…” Illumi began to say before he caught himself and corrected. “You described the books that Lecter gave you as dull. The research papers are far more detailed than those, although I did run across one that Dr. Lecter wrote about social exclusion. I have yet to read it. You have not found any of the material he has given you interesting so far, though. So I warn you that if you are doing this as some kind of bonding exercise with me, then it will have the opposite result. I can tell when you are pretending to be interested. Your stare turns glassy, and you fidget.”

He looked at his Master hopefully. “Did I do that right? You instructed me to verbalise my thoughts to aid communication. That’s the impression I gained from listening to you, in any case. Did I verbalise correctly?”

“Someone let me out of here, this is painful,” Lulu groaned. “Send help. And chocolate. Lots of chocolate.”

***

"Perfect," Hisoka crooned. "You're right; I'll probably get bored and end up being a distraction. It's not that I don't want to help, it's just, so dry? I can enjoy science, but usually when I'm actively doing the experimenting," he chuckled. "Maybe we could do a different kind of research?"

***

“What do you mean?” Illumi asked, dreading the spark of interest that came from Lulu at their Master’s words.

“Yes! Let me out of here! Don’t make me read all that bull-crap with him! We all know it’s just a split in his psyche and his Nen’s made him react differently. It’s not rocket science. I’ve been in here all along! Have you any idea how boring it’s been? Have you? Let me have some fun!"

***

"Well, we don't often get the chance to spend so much time together. The Doctor’s going to be a tricky opponent, so we might be here for a while, and I was trying to find a way to bring this subject up anyway. Now's as good a time as any," Hisoka replied silkily. "How would you feel about Master buying some toys to try?"

***

Illumi’s eyes widened in shock. “Confused. And very conflicted. Extremely conflicted.”

“Oh, for fuck's sake. Just let me answer, you android. That is so not what he wanted to hear.”

***

“That’s alright, I know that neither of us are really in that mood, but in the interest of being open, I just wanted to bring it up. You don’t have to say yes or no right now, just know it’s something that I would be interested in doing with you,” Hisoka said gently. “But I’m glad you’re telling me how you feel, I do need your honesty. Now, do you still want to have some time to yourself? I’m thinking that I might take a soak in the tub, but you’re welcome to join me if you want.”
“I...don’t know,” Illumi admitted. “I’m rather-”

“Oh, for pity’s sake,” Lulu interrupted. “Yes, he would adore it if you used toys on him. He wants that more than anything in the world. It’s an almost pathological obsession when he’s around you. It manages to send me over the deep end sometimes. He craves being used by you like normal people crave chocolate. He would love to accompany you to the bathroom, but Mr. Stuck-in-the-mud here is too confused by all these scary ‘emotions’ that are floating around to be able to compute. How the hell do you cope with him? He switches from sad to happy and his whole operating system freezes.”

*Why are you telling him this? It’s private!*

“Because he fucking asked. That’s how this deal works. Grow up. If you don’t ask for what you want, then you’re going to have to find a way to break Will out of the asylum and have him read your mind, because Hisoka-san can’t!”

***

“I was wondering,” Hisoka admitted, absently playing with Lulu’s hair. “I also accept that Illu-chan isn’t the best at expressing himself, but I have faith in his ability to learn. As for why he doesn’t express his emotions, I’d think you’d possibly know more then I would. You’re sharing his head, you can know him in a way I can’t,” he sighed wistfully. “I am feeling a little stiff; I think a nice soak in the tub would help. As always, your company would be appreciated,” he added as he stood up and offered Lulu his hand.

***

“You have had a long day, haven’t you?” Lulu said, taking his hand and leading him through to the bathroom.

*It’s still morning,* Illumi pointed out.

“I asked how you put up with him, not why he didn’t express himself. Did you not sleep at Lecters?” she asked, flicking the switch to set the bath to fill. “You...haven’t been yourself since you’ve come back from there. What’s bothering you? Illumi might not get how feelings work, but I do. Talk to me. And don’t worry about upsetting me, please. I’m a big girl; I can take it. In any hole you like. But if you’re gonna tell Illumi to open up, then you damn well have to as well. So spill. I’ll fuck your brains out after, and we can plan Illumi’s not-so-little surprises after that. But you’ve gotta talk first. I know seventeen ways to kill you with my little finger. Don’t test me.”

***

"I got plenty of sleep; I even fell asleep on him in the lounge. He makes me feel strange," Hisoka admitted. "Dr. Lecter is just so confusing, he...I don't think he did it on purpose, but I went mute. He said he wouldn't leave me, and he let me sleep, and he was there when I woke up...apparently, I was dreaming of you and Illu-chan."

***

“That’s because we’re fabulous,” Lulu said, starting to strip. “And, well, it’s OK. We both know why you likely went mute; you’ve done it with us before. At least he’s a therapist. And the bastard stayed.”
She smiled. “Looks like we’ll just have to enjoy killing him for sport, won’t we?” Stroking his arm, she added, “By the way, you keep saying that he makes you feel strange, but you never say what those feelings are like for you. Strange in what way?”

Why did you ask that? Strange is just strange, isn’t it? I feel strange all the time, Illumi thought.

“That’s because you are strange. Trust me. He likes him. I’ll put money on ‘strange’ meaning happy to be around him. We’re going to have to have a back-up plan for when this goes sideways on us, and this is my way of gathering intel. Let me work.”

***

“I’m not really sure how to explain it,” Hisoka confessed as he sat on the edge of the bath. “He makes me uncomfortable one minute, but then the next I’m thinking about how nice his body is? I want to kill him, I think about it quite a lot, but it’s never satisfying. Mainly because I can’t picture him screaming. He’d probably just look at me with that weird not-quite-a-smile of his,” he continued as he watched the water rise. “He said he wanted me to find bone-deep contentment, whatever that means.” And apparently he makes me act like a cat, but surely that was just part of the dream? “I’m attracted to him, but I’ve killed a lot of people I was attracted to. So I don’t think it’s that simple, it’s more like...there’s a rope? And one end is attached to me and the other to him. It’s as if it’s made from elastic, but not? I’m not explaining this very well.”

***

“I understand,” Lulu said, delighting in the low, rich sound of Illumi’s voice when she made it sound soothing. “We both feel like we have that rope as well. It pulls us to you. Do you feel a pull towards him? Illumi would happily drop to his knees and let you tie that rope around him, but I’m more...I want to be pressed up against you so that you can bind us together. How about you with the Doctor?”

“See, he likes him a hell of a lot more than he’s willing to admit. You both may be emotionally dense, but I’m not, and I’m not going to let you both break us even more than we already are. I’m going to sort out that back up plan, and it has to start with Will. We have to figure out what kind of games Lecter plays.”

***

"If I’m near to him then yes," Hisoka conceded. "Right now I don’t feel it, probably because he’s not here. I feel a similar thing with you and Illu-chan, but it’s more...primal? I want to bind you both to me and never let go?"

***

“Then what’s stopping you?” Lulu whispered, stopping the bath and stepping closer to her Master. “You know that we would let you.”

“It’s not complete without him now, is it? Did he lie about his band not manipulating?” she thought.

If it does, then he’s manipulating himself. He could be manufacturing feelings for Hisoka-san in order not to have to lie to him. It’s quite clever actually. I need to remember that for future missions.

“Prioritise, Illumi! He’s falling for Lecter!”
Yes, but we can’t stop that, so we have to adapt. We can not change his feelings. All we can do is work to keep him safe.

“Why do you have to talk sense now?”

Quiet, Master’s going to talk.

***

Hisoka swallowed as he mentally scrambled for a suitable answer. It’s not that I don’t want to, it’s just how can you give yourself to me? I’m not a Zoldyck; I’ll always be second place.

“I didn’t know if Illu-chan wanted that level of commitment when we have to hide our relationship. I didn’t think,” he paused, his mouth felt dry as he imagined Illumi’s long neck encircled by a collar. “Family comes first,” he mumbled. “You’d have to hide whatever token I gave, that’s why I got him the beads. They’d be less likely to arouse suspicion. Your parents can’t find out about me; I know you have his memories, surely you remember that conversation?”

***

“Yes, but he’s-” Lulu began.


“But you’re here when you should be helping Killua find his friend. He’s texted you four times now. He’s worried. Hisoka-san is your family. Why aren’t you telling him?”

Because he’s not ready to hear it yet, that’s why Little Miss Emotionally-Literate. Didn’t you see his eyes? Illumi challenged.

“Yes, I did, but that’s because he’s having to face the fact that he likes Lecter. If you don’t tell him now, then we’ll lose him to the shrink. This is you running away from your issues again! What is it with your ability to choose the exact wrong thing to do every time? It’s amazing. It really is.”

***

“I’m glad, should we get in before the water goes cold?” Hisoka prompted brightening up a little. “I can wash your hair? You know I enjoy that, maybe I could braid it again?”

***

“If you like,” Illumi said, offering his Master a warm smile. “I’m yours for the rest of the day. Do what you will with me.”

***

Characters played by Muffinmadness:
Illumi, Lulu

Characters played by themadnovelest:
Hisoka
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