Fate & Circumstance

by Therru

Summary

It's no one's fault. Hannibal and Abigail plan to make people suffer for it anyway.

Notes

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03, @weesprigofzest on tumblr), who is staying with me for the month of June because I'm the luckiest bitch alive.

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Chapter Summary

Modern medicine is amazing. Hospital food is… less so.
Not a doctor. Shh.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: hospital stuff

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Abigail Hobbs has never been angrier in her life than when Hannibal Lecter orders her to stay hidden and wait for him to call her from the hospital. She flares her nostrils and says, fine, but only so she can stay with Will right up until the sirens stop outside the house. Then, from the shadows of the stairway, she watches the paramedics carry Will out on a stretcher, Hannibal following. He looks in her direction briefly, but his face is expressionless when he closes the door behind him.

She waits an hour, then grabs Will’s abandoned cell phone and car keys and drives to Wolf Trap. She texts Hannibal, but not to ask permission.

She lets herself into the house and the dogs snuffle and yip, but don’t get up. “Hi guys. Anyone feed you today?” She turns on the light and sees a note on Will’s desk.

April 29th, 2015

At Muskrat Farm tonight. Dogs fed. Walked in the AM.

– J & M

Judy’s handwriting is simple and neat, but she has a habit of pressing down too hard with the pen, and Abigail can feel the bumps of words through the sheet when she turns the paper over.

She takes a moment to assess why she’s here. She could have just called Margot to ask about the dogs. She certainly didn’t need to drive all the way out to Wolf Trap to check for herself. Sitting in the parked car outside Hannibal’s house, though, it had seemed logical to go to Will’s house instead. She turns the lamp back off and moves down the darkened hall. It’s easy, even before her eyes adjust.

She checks Will’s phone. No message from Hannibal. It’s now almost 2am.

She tries to imagine how long it should take him to call her. In her mind she is in the ambulance with them.

Hannibal is answering the paramedics’ questions. At the hospital, they barrage through the emergency room to the trauma center, where they are joined by others. She pictures a doctor, a
nurse, and… a resident maybe? One of them looks flustered.

The paramedics fill in the doctor. “Suspected hemorrhagic stroke. Unknown family history, treated for encephalitis six months ago – no aneurysms detected on the scans then. No known allergies. Prone to panic attacks. May need to be sedated.”

The doctor turns to the resident. “Radiology right away, please.” She imagines his candor to be the same as Hannibal’s.

The paramedic clips his notes to the blank chart at the foot of the bed and the nurse and resident wheel Will away. Hannibal is instructed to return to admitting and answer more questions about insurance and whatever else they ask about.

Abigail doesn’t have a working knowledge of hospital procedures, but she thinks Hannibal should definitely have found time to call by now. She kicks at the wall in helpless frustration.

Upstairs, she sits on her bed, and it is as comforting as a slab of granite. Still, a yawn escapes her. She shakes herself angrily. Checks Will’s phone again. Trudges back down the stairs. Wanders the main floor aimlessly. She still doesn’t know why she’s here besides driving giving her something to do.

She finds herself curling up on the couch around the pillow Will uses when he stays in Wolf Trap instead of Baltimore. The blanket is folded neatly on top of it. She pulls it over herself. She falls asleep imagining that the comforting smell of Will surrounds her because he’s sitting and typing on his laptop while she sprawls lazily over the remainder of the couch, reading. It’s an amalgam of so many of their shared afternoons, back when she mostly stayed with Will.

What actually happens is quite close to Abigail’s reconstruction. The paramedics radio the hospital from the ambulance so they bypass triage, but Hannibal goes with Will when he’s wheeled to the radiology department. Will has not regained consciousness. Hannibal holds his hand anyway.

During the actual scans, he hovers behind the radiologist, composed and exuding an air that he absolutely has the right to be there, looking over the woman’s shoulder. He had fantasized immediately about splitting her face open a la Dr. Sutcliffe. Perhaps she senses that it would be better not to find out what this man is capable of, because she doesn’t protest his presence.

After confirming the hemorrhage, Will is taken to the comprehensive stroke unit. He is undressed and intubated, and electrodes are slapped onto his chest with the calm but hurried efficiency Hannibal remembers exercising years ago, in situations where something simply had to be done right away and there was no time for uncertainty. When he had the ability to ignore the layers and layers of hospital stench: blood, sterilants, body odour, necrosis, urine and stool samples, bile – all of which he could pick apart individually if he cared to. Iron, rubbing alcohol, ethylene oxide, fetid sores… He would like to be able to ignore them now.

The neurologist approaches and looks over Will’s chart. “You have no idea when the bleeding may have started? When the headaches became particularly painful?”

“I could only estimate. At least twenty-four hours ago. Will is unfortunately stoic about these things. He has suffered migraines for as long as I’ve known him – more frequently when he is working on a case.”

“Right. FBI. Well that’s no good. How much aspirin did he take? Or how much does he usually
“Take?”

“At least four 500mg tablets a day. More, probably, if no one’s looking.”

“Okay. Dr. Lecter, right?”

“Yes.”

“What is your relationship to Will Graham?”

“I am his partner.”

“Any family we should contact?”

Hannibal had long ago ensured, via an easily-charmed administrator, that he was the only emergency contact on file. It had been a good measure to take. Hannibal could be sure that no Jack, no Alana, would be receiving calls from the hospital. Only him. He places a possessive hand on Will’s shoulder, terminating the introductory questioning with his icy tone. “I am his family.”

The doctor looks at him with the same caution the radiologist had exhibited. “Then I have to consider you his proxy. I’m sure I don’t need to tell you much given your background. I’m told you were a surgeon.”

“Many years ago. Still, psychiatry and neurology often overlap,” Hannibal agrees.

The doctor nods and continues. “So you know already that operating immediately would be extremely risky.”

Hannibal inclines his head and allows the doctor to further his assertions.

“Given that we aren’t sure when the bleeding started or when the stroke itself actually occurred, I recommend we wait at least a week before operating. That being said, I’ve paged the surgeon. He should be here to consult shortly.”

Hannibal nods in acknowledgment. When the doctor leaves, he looks down. The beeping of monitors and whispering of ventilators make the equipment in the room seem more lifelike than Will. He takes in Will’s appearance with ostensible calm and detachment. Perhaps the mask is donned out of habit, or reflexively in response to his environment. Looking at him, one might think Hannibal a member of the staff, but for the suit and the hand on Will’s shoulder. His gaze is so blank, the contact looks awkward.

While waiting for the surgeon, Hannibal speaks with the ward nurse about restricting visitors and alerting him if Jack Crawford shows up.

“Say no more. We’ve had angry bosses come in and demand all sorts of things. Some people are unbelievable.”

Abigail doesn’t sleep for more than an hour, but she feels calmed when she wakes up. More than calmed; she feels like she has no nerves to soothe. She checks Will’s phone, though she knows she would have woken in an instant had there been any incoming calls or messages. Nothing. She makes a neat little pile of the blanket and pillow. She puts her coat back on and flattens her hair over the
right side of her head. Doing this makes her realize she’s not wearing a scarf, so she mechanically goes and retrieves one from her bedroom. She sits by the fireplace with the phone in her lap, on maximum volume. She pets the nearest dog absently and waits.

When Hannibal does call, a wayward tendril of hope will sneak past her defensive numbness and she will grab the wildlife encyclopedia off the shelf on her way out the door.

If he believed that the universe observes some grand design, Hannibal would say that Will Graham was put on this earth to test every aspect of his strength. That they were fated to visit every extreme, and never rest. Stretching out behind the here-and-now Hannibal lies a serene, solitary, autocratic life. In front of him is a life riddled with uncertainty, the only sure thing being that returning to his past life would be difficult, if not impossible. The serenity at least would be sacrificed in the escape from whatever his life is becoming.

Hannibal’s belief system does not include life beyond death, but if there is a creator, he will gladly do battle with him for Will’s soul. He will relish it. In fact, he wishes a god existed for this very purpose.

The risks are almost equivalent, and the number of variables is large enough that either choice could prove to be the wrong one. An extremely risky surgery versus the risk of a potentially fatal re-bleed.

He fingers the coin in his pocket.

So much of his relationship with Will is a dance on the brink of an inevitable fall. Hannibal can’t help but feel that the fall has already happened, and he’s trying to dance in midair, pretending that it hasn’t. He had not planned for Will to be subjected to any influence but his own. Not even nature’s. He had been foolish.

He pulls the coin out of his pocket and stares at it in his hand.

Leaving it to chance would make Hannibal no less culpable if Will died. This is different.

Anyone watching could have seen the glint in his eyes as he shoves the coin back into his pocket. No one would have interpreted it as fear.

“Hello?” Abigail’s voice is steady.

“Abigail. You may come to the hospital now. We are at the University of Maryland.”

“Okay.”

“I told the ward nurse you’re his daughter, Sarah Graham.”

“Is Will okay?”

“He is still unconscious.” Hannibal sounds distracted.

“Are you okay?”

There is a significant pause. “Yes.”

“I’ll be there soon.”
Abigail finds Hannibal in Will’s darkened room on the sixth floor of the Cowley Shock Trauma Center, sitting with his face hidden behind steepled fingers. She appraises Will: the various tubes in his nose, mouth, arm; the terribly regular hiss and swish of the ventilator. She’s afraid to touch him, so she goes and stands by Hannibal.

“He doesn’t look so bad...” she tries.

Hannibal sighs and sits back in his chair the way Will does.

She puts a hand on his shoulder tentatively, feeling sorry that she was so angry with him just a few hours ago. “What are you thinking?”

“I’m reflecting on the decision I had to make and hoping it was the right one.”

“What decision?”

He stands and motions to the couch. When they are seated, he takes her hand and folds it between his. It feels like he’s coddling her. She is in no mood for it.

“Don’t sugar-coat it,” she says before he can open his mouth.

Hannibal looks at her sharply, displeased at her brashness, but, after a moment, he nods. “Will has had a subarachnoid hemorrhage, which is what caused the stroke. Essentially, he’s been bleeding into his skull, putting pressure on his brain. They did a CT scan and found a number of other aneurysms that are in danger of rupturing.”

“So… what are they going to do?”

“Operate. But it’s too risky at the moment.”

“Why?”

“He has too much aspirin in his system. He could bleed out. Also, there is an optimal time frame within which to perform this kind of surgery. We are now likely outside that time frame.”

“How do you know? Will has headaches all the time…”

“We don’t know for sure, but not knowing is part of the problem. It’s difficult to say when the headaches started being attributable to pressure from the bleeding.”

Abigail says nothing.

“Waiting until next week will make the surgery itself less risky.”

“But?”

“There is the risk of a fatal re-bleed in the meantime.” Hannibal sounds like he is still weighing both choices, though the decision has already been made.

“I trust you.”

“Thank you.” He doesn’t look at her.

“What happens until then?”
“We wait for him to wake up, keep his blood pressure low, and make sure fluid doesn’t build up and cause more damage.”

Seven days feels like a long time. She doesn’t say this out loud.

“Abigail, we won’t be able to–”

“I know,” she says softly. She’s already tossed out any ideas of them making their getaway as planned. “I’ll start making calls.”

“Yes. I will as well. And Abigail, I’m sorry. I hope you will not regard this as a broken promise.”

She looks up at him and pulls her hand away with a frown. “Of course not,” she says shortly, angry at him again, for not knowing her any better than he did six months ago. She stands and pulls a chair over to the right side of the bed. She sits with her back to Hannibal, no longer feeling tentative or afraid. If anything, she’s afraid of herself.

When she’s pushed the anger down far enough to speak civilly, she asks, “There’s no chance of him waking up and just… being okay? It won’t repair itself?”

“I’m afraid not.”

Abigail grinds her teeth at that, and finally looks back to Hannibal. “I want to kill Jack,” she says flatly.

“As do I.”

Hannibal calls Jack at 9am to cancel their dinner. Jack sounds simultaneously furious, relieved, and suspicious.

“It’s not like you to abandon a plan.”

In that instant, Hannibal decides there is no need to feign friendship a moment longer. Civility is all Jack will get from now on. “I apologize, Jack. I assure you it’s an important matter I have to attend to.”

Jack must have heard the shift in Hannibal’s tone, because he scrambles back on board the charade. “I had a rough night. Of course it’s important.”

Hannibal feels the beginning of a sneer lift his upper lip at Jack’s fumbling. Jack is still trying to have it both ways. At this point, it’s nothing more than pathetic. He considers telling Jack that Will is in the hospital to see how he will react, but decides Jack doesn’t deserve to hear the news first-hand, and his outrage, when he does find out, will be much more satisfying if delayed.

“I hope everything’s alright,” Jack says when Hannibal doesn’t reply. “We can reschedule.”

“Have a good day, Jack,” is all Hannibal says before hanging up.
He immediately calls HR at the Academy, and explains Will’s condition in vivid detail.

The woman on the other end of the line actually groans, saying, “This is not what I needed to hear first thing in the morning.” But she thanks Hannibal for not waiting until Monday to call. “At least this way I have two days to find a replacement,” she adds. She sounds apologetic, and overworked. Hannibal forgives her.

Abigail feels Will’s phone buzz in her coat pocket while Hannibal is still on the phone with HR. Jack is trying to call Will. Even before Hannibal makes eye contact with her and shakes his head, she’s decided Jack can stew in as much uncertainty as they can provide. She imagines the verbal battery that Will would have received had he been awake and accepted the call.

A few times, Will’s anger at Jack had triumphed over his exhaustion, staying with him after work until he’d reached home and ranted about all of it to an exceptionally unforgiving Abigail. She’d put up with Jack grilling her relentlessly about her father and Nick Boyle, but, since sacrificing an ear along with pints of blood to his obsession, she’s considered Jack responsible for everything bad that happens – especially when it comes to Will.

It’s a well-known fact that Jack tends to funnel his unease or discomfort into very personal, overly hostile tirades directed at whomever is unfortunate enough to be nearby – usually Will. He prefers to deliver them with a healthy dose of glowering, but on the phone he has to settle for being extra vitriolic in his word choice.

Abigail imagines how sidetracked Jack would have gotten, losing his point in all the underhandedness, when probably all he would have wanted to know is if this last minute cancellation was part of Will’s plan.

Listening to Will and Hannibal go back and forth in their coded poetry of supposed banter can be infuriating at times, but at least it’s a two-way conversation. Jack, it’s always seemed to her, just yells and storms in or out of rooms. She can’t wait until she can pay him back for the way he’d treated her, the way he still treats Will, and the way he can’t decide how to treat Hannibal. She can’t wait to show him that they are a family now, despite his best efforts – for him to know, before he dies, that he’d failed.

She hopes Will will let her gut Jack with her hunting knife.

The rest of the day passes in uncomfortable silence. Nurses check on Will regularly, and often, and the doctor visits twice that day. Will doesn’t wake up. Abigail and Hannibal sit or pace, tense and mute, the quiet only barely interrupted by alternating bathroom and food runs.

Abigail has the sense to call Margot before driving back to Wolf Trap that evening, but she’s already subconsciously made up her mind to make the trip. Margot says that for the next week she or Judy can stop by and feed the dogs each day, but they probably won’t be staying at Will’s anymore, and they are scheduled to fly some place or another next Saturday. Her voice sounds strained, but Abigail can’t recall if that’s just the way she talks. Margot awkwardly asks why Will is in the hospital and, just as awkwardly, if Abigail is okay.

“He had a stroke. I’m fine.” Abigail can practically hear Margot chewing on the next question, so
she adds, “I think he’ll be okay. We’re just kind of… waiting.”

“Would he… want visitors?”

“Don’t think he cares right now,” she says tersely, looking across the room at the still-unconscious Will with a renewed numbness after the long, silent day. “He hasn’t woken up yet.”

There are at least twenty seconds of quiet before Margot asks if Abigail is sure she’s okay, and then hurriedly says she’ll make sure someone looks in on the dogs and the house while she and Judy are away. Finally, Margot’s trademark abrupt, bye, and the call ended tone.

Abigail is desperate to get out of the hospital by the time darkness falls, but she’s suddenly reluctant when she pulls her coat on. She lingers at Will’s bedside. “It would be really cool if you woke up soon,” she whispers. To Hannibal, she manages a quick see you tomorrow before rushing away, ambushed by the threat of tears.

Chapter End Notes

Beta’d by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr).

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Chapter Summary

Abigail is unhappy that they are not out kicking ass as a family. Will takes a turn for the worse.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: hospital stuff, fucked up nightmares, panic attacks

The next day, she takes the dogs for a long walk ending down by the water. It’s late morning, bright but cool, when she wades into the quiet of the stream. She balls up her windbreaker and buries her face it. After a few good throat-rasping screams, she says to herself, “Okay. Be fine now.” She stands still and breathes in the fresh air for a while. Some of the trees have new leaves, and she inhales deeply, imagining that she’s standing thigh-deep in the lightest, sweetest wine, and they are adding to the bouquet.

She feels better. As she makes her way back to the embankment, she takes in the seven curious, innocent faces turned to her. The dogs are tuckered out and probably ready to be fed. When she steps onto the grass she takes in her own ridiculous appearance: rubber boots, waders that are far too big for her, and an offensively vibrant windbreaker, all topped off with Will’s worn brown baseball cap – the one that looks small on him and fits Abigail almost perfectly.

She laughs out loud thinking how she must look, walking back to the house in her getup amidst the pack of former strays. Suddenly, she feels absurdly capable. She feeds the dogs, and then washes the sheets on Will’s bed, since Margot and Judy have pretty much moved back to Muskrat Farm. Energized, she goes through the house top to bottom, throwing open windows and freshening up the rooms, armed with a dust cloth and broom.

She calls Hannibal every hour to ask if anything’s changed. Nothing has, but she remains driven. She doesn’t know if she believes in anything besides their family. She hasn’t tackled the god concept in a while, and she’s not sure she’s ever believed in fate, but she believes this: We have to be together, all three of us, whether or not fate exists. As soon as it’s dark out, she locks everything up, pets each of the dogs goodbye, and drives back to UMD.

When Hannibal hangs up after his last check-in with Abigail, he turns back to Will to find that Will’s eyes are open, though heavy-lidded. He moves his head, trying to take in the room between lengthy blinks. To the left, he turns his head so far his face is pressed right into the pillow.

Visual neglect.

When Will’s eyes land on him, he moves back to the bedside and lays a hand on Will’s forehead,
smiling as he strokes back his curls.

There is a question in Will’s eyes every time he manages to lift his lids.

“Close your eyes, Will. It’s alright.” He rests his hand on Will’s chest over the hospital gown. “You had a stroke.”

Eyes closed, Will winces.

“You’ll be alright. But they are going to have to operate in about a week. For now, I’m afraid you are simply to rest, though I know you dislike that immensely.”

Will smiles around the endotracheal tube, then opens his eyes, still drowsy, and plucks at it questioningly.

“That will likely be removed tomorrow. Try to sleep until then. You will be more comfortable without it, and less drowsy. I can explain everything then if you like.”

Will nods and lets his eyes drift shut again. He tries to lift his hand to cover Hannibal’s, but it only translates into a feeble twitch of his arm.

Hannibal pulls the chair closer to the bed and sits down, then takes Will’s weakened hand in both of his. When he thinks Will is sleeping, he lifts it to his mouth and, caressing his wrist, presses a kiss into the palm of his hand.

He sits and listens to the ventilator for a minute, then goes to update the ward nurse. She is neutral and professional on receiving the information that Will has had about five minutes of consciousness. She looks like she wants to give him an encouraging smile, but they both know that it’s no indication he will make it through the week, or the surgery following it.

A few hours later, Abigail shows up and gives both Hannibal and Will a determined kiss on the cheek before curling up on the couch. Will wakes again in the night, but only for a moment.

In the morning, a different neurologist introduces herself as Dr. Whitney. She orders an MRI for Will, after which they decide not to remove the breathing tube, and to increase the frequency of their checkups. Abigail is alarmed. Hannibal, of course, is unreadable. Dr. Whitney assures them that she’s just being cautious. Abigail nervously jokes, “People haven’t been standing around talking in hushed tones, so that has to be good right?” Dr. Whitney smiles at them both before leaving the room.

As expected, Jack calls Hannibal directly on Monday evening, and, as expected, he is livid. “Where is he?”

“Hello, Jack. What is your concern?” Hannibal drawls, letting Jack know that he is already bored with this conversation.

Jack’s incredulity is audible. His next words are gritted out as though with the last ounce of his relative calm. “I found out today from his substitute that he had a stroke. I want to see him.”

“Will is in no state to be receiving visitors.”
“Will is my responsibility, Hannibal. I’ll find out which hospital he’s in with or without your help.”

Jack is lucky in this moment, that he and Hannibal are only disembodied voices to each other. His making the absurd assertion that he is important enough to claim anything, even responsibility, over Will Graham – it is not even ignorance. It is sheer insolence. “I have no desire to test your willingness to abuse FBI resources, Jack.” It takes almost too much effort for Hannibal to maintain his tone. “I’d hoped,” he continues coldly, “that you would have taken my withholding information as the message it was meant to be.”

“What message is that?” Jack spits.

“You are not welcome here, Jack. If you want Will to recover, I suggest you stay away.” He lets Jack interpret that however he likes.

The tube comes out mid-morning on Tuesday, after Will wakes up for the second time. Will gulps down several flimsy paper cups worth of water while Dr. Whitney fills him in on what happened, and explains the operation he will be having in a few days. Will looks half asleep, but seems to absorb some of the information and nods his head at the most important bits.

When she’s done, she gives him an easy smile. “You don’t look like you want to do much more than go back to sleep, but do you have any questions right now, Mr. Graham?”

“Why do I feel so weird?”

“We have to keep your blood pressure lowered, so you’ve been hyperventilated. Are you dizzy?”

“A little.”

“You should feel better in a little bit, but if you’re nauseated we can give you something.”

“That’s okay.” He drifts off again quickly.

Dr. Whitney turns to Hannibal. “I have a couple questions, and I’d like to talk through some things with you. No hushed tones, I promise,” she adds to Abigail.

Hannibal and Abigail take a seat on the couch, and Dr. Whitney perches in the nearby chair, chart balanced on her knees. “It says here that when you did a FAST test, he didn’t lift his left arm, and Nurse Tate reported that you suspected left side visual neglect. I know he hasn’t been conscious much, but have you noticed any more incidences of Mr. Graham favouring his right side?”

“I have not, no. Sarah?”

“Me neither. You should call him Will. He doesn’t like being called Mr. Graham.”

Dr. Whitney looks taken aback, as does Hannibal, though his change of expression is barely noticeable.

After an awkward pause, Dr. Whitney says, “Okay. Well, just make note of anything. I’ll do some tests later to determine the extent of neurological damage.”
While waiting for Dr. Whitney to return and for Will to wake up, Abigail goes out into the hall and calls Margot on impulse.

“Hi Abigail. You okay? How’s Will?”

“A little better I think. I don’t know. He woke up, anyway.”

“That’s good to hear. I found someone to look after the dogs while we’re away.”

“Who?”

“Judy has a sister in Reston.”

“Okay. Thanks.” Abigail hesitates.

“Is that what you were calling about?” Margot asks after a few seconds.

“Nope. I just didn’t really think how to ask before I picked up the phone.”

“That’s kind of your thing, isn’t it?”

“Yeah…”

“Listen, Abigail, if you need someone to talk to, it shouldn’t be me. I’m useless. Judy is better, and, you know… nicer. I can ask her to call you later if you want.”

“I don’t need someone to talk to!” Abigail protests, a little too forcefully. It makes Margot laugh. “Okay, I should have known better.”

“I do need a favour though. Or a something.”

“From me specifically?”

“Could you tutor me?”

Margot is quiet on the other end of the line. Then, “In what?”

“I don’t know. Actually, yes I do. If I wanted to do what you do, I’d have to learn calculus right?”

“Yes.”

“Could you tutor me in calculus?”

“I’m a really shitty teacher, Abigail,” Margot says painfully.

“Doesn’t matter. You can just tell me if I’m doing something wrong and show me how you would do it.” Abigail takes Margot’s words as an invitation to convince her. “And I can pay you back by being your assistant. I can file stuff for you, or bring you coffee or drive you around or whatever.”

Margot huffs a small laugh. “Having a PA sounds wonderful right about now.”

“Busy?”

“The next two weeks are going to be hellish. Can I… think about this tutoring idea of yours? We can talk about it when I get back.”
“Yes, please,” Abigail says, and her voice is bright and hopeful.

Instead of coming back later that day, Dr. Whitney does her assessment the next morning. Will is immediately irritated when she asks him to draw a clock. Dr. Whitney glances at Hannibal and Abigail, who do nothing to help her.

“Okay. Forget the clock.” She draws several horizontal lines on a pad of paper and sets it on his lap. “I’d like you to mark the center of each of these lines.” When he’s finished, she takes back her pen and draws two more sets horizontal lines. “Now, same thing, but I’m going to cover left eye, and then your right.” Afterwards, she tucks the pad under his chart without looking at them, perhaps not confident she’ll be able to remain unreadable under Will’s suspicious gaze.

She asks him to bend his right knee, then his left knee, wiggle his toes, and so on. “Raise your right arm, please, and make a fist. Good. And the other arm please.”

“What?”

“Raise your other arm,” Dr. Whitney repeats. When Will continues to look at her with tired annoyance and confusion, she places a hand on his left wrist and, again, prompts. “This arm.”

“It’s not mine,” Will says simply, and yawns.

“What do you mean, Will?” Dr. Whitney probes.

Will shrugs the way he does whenever someone asks him a question he thinks is inane or that he doesn’t feel like responding to.

“What whose arm is it?” she tries.

“Ask Miriam Lass.”

Dr. Whitney attempts a few more questions, but Will’s explanation descends into gibberish and his eyes close while he’s still talking.

Dr. Whitney and Hannibal sit at the small table together to look over Will’s tests. Abigail stays seated on the couch, completely lost. She can see that for the first two sets of horizontal lines, Will has bisected all the ones on the right half of the page at their midpoints, and for the third set, all the lines on the left half.

Dr. Whitney looks pleased. Hannibal looks like he might be pleased, but Abigail hasn’t been able to read him properly since the night of Will’s stroke. “What?” she asks.

“He’s exhibiting signs of egocentric extinction, rather than full-on visual neglect. This should gradually diminish in the course of his recovery.”

“What—”

Dr. Whitney cuts her off in her enthusiasm. “It means his vision isn’t actually damaged, and processing information from the left eye is still possible. But when the right eye is stimulated at the same time, processing of the left side of his field of vision stops.”

Abigail is quiet. Hannibal sits with his mouth in a hard line.
“So, if he spends time each day with his right eye covered, he can strengthen his processing of left side stimuli. He should be able to see properly again within months.”

No one responds to her excitement. “That sounds good,” Abigail says eventually, rescuing the doctor from their intimidating silence. “What’s all that other stuff you wrote down?”

“Just confirming Dr. Lecter’s suspicions. There is weakness on his left side, and distinct hemiplegia of the left arm. Now, Will seems capable of adjusting quite quickly to these disabilities, which may or may not be a good thing.”

“What do you mean?”

“If Will is mostly unaware of having a disability, he may adjust his behaviour subconsciously.”

“Isn’t that a good thing?”

“Adapting new behaviours too quickly can impede progress in regaining certain skills. He could become reliant on work-arounds, rather than encouraging the brain to set alternative pathways to compensate for the damage.”

Abigail bites back the words, So what?

“What I find more concerning, however, is his delusion about it. There may be some permanent damage to the cortex.”

“Will isn’t delusional,” Abigail objects, immediately, though the doctor is now clearly addressing Hannibal.

Dr. Whitney looks back to her and says, kindly, “Thinking a part of your body doesn’t belong to you against all logic and reason is known as somatoparaphrenia. It is a delusion, but a very isolated and specific one. It doesn’t mean that he’s delusional about anything else.” Dr. Whitney’s tone suggests she should be relieved by this.

Abigail tries to decide whether or not this woman is likeable. Maybe five years into her career, she’s still fresh and optimistic and obviously excitable. She clearly sees Will’s condition as promising, so Abigail decides to forgive her. Still, she’s in the mood to argue, so she points out, “But you didn’t use logic and reason.”

“Pardon me?”

“When you were talking about his arm, you didn’t reason with him. You just kept asking him questions.”

Dr. Whitney’s cheeks flush a delicate pink. She looks both embarrassed and annoyed at being questioned by a teenager. “When Mr. G–“ Dr. Whitney stops and clears her throat. “When Will is more awake, I will have a longer discussion with him. In the meantime, it’s best to be prepared. If it’s a case of somatoparaphrenia, the problem is both psychological and physical, and regaining use of his arm will be more difficult, and likely more frustrating for all of you.”

“We can take care of him,” Abigail says, defensive, though probably needlessly.

“Of course you can.” Dr. Whitney is visibly unsettled by the unpredictable fluctuation in Abigail’s behaviour. “I just want to make sure that, as his caregivers, you’re aware of how he may deal with this. Some people find it disturbing to see the affected limb, and some don’t mind at all. It seems to depend on the patient’s initial mindset.”
“Will is accustomed to adopting many different mindsets,” Hannibal puts in, speaking for the first time in several minutes.

“Yes, I’ve heard.”

Hannibal frowns at her, but she’s jotting something down in her progress notes and doesn’t see it. Abigail decides she doesn’t like her after all.

Hannibal concludes, his tone slightly clipped, “I’m sure one of those mindsets will make him capable of wanting to recover.”

With this abrupt ending of the conversation, Dr. Whitney seems to sense that she’s said something wrong. She doesn’t ask, though, and, instead, excuses herself, saying she’ll check on Will later.

“What day is it?” Will asks that afternoon. He is much more cognizant than yesterday, and has already been awake for longer than ten minutes three separate times.

Abigail goes to sit by the bed. Where she thinks he should be relaxing, if he’s relieved, or pacing, if he’s anxious, Hannibal stands perfectly still at the window. At the sound of Will’s voice, he turns. “Wednesday.”

Will gives Hannibal a pained look. “We were supposed to leave five days ago.”

“You would have died if we had,” Hannibal replies. He joins them at the bed and goes on to explain that Will won’t be able to fly for at least three months after the surgery. “You may not feel up to it, even then.”

Will looks over at Abigail and catches her transforming her sad frown into a warm smile for him. He manages to halfway return it before he stops, to cut off the tremble it allows in his bottom lip. “What now?” he asks, dropping his gaze to her hands so he doesn’t have to see whether or not there’s resentment or, worse, pity in her eyes.

Hannibal answers, “You heal. We wait.”

To Abigail, Will looks unbearably disappointed. She snuggles her face into his shoulder and lets the hospital gown soak up the hot, angry tears she’s crying for both of them.

“Abigail, you need some fresh air. I’d like you to spend tonight and tomorrow in Wolf Trap.”

Abigail shakes her head and doesn’t look at Hannibal. “Margot’s feeding the dogs,” she says blandly.

Hannibal’s voice sharpens. “It’s not the dogs I’m worried about.”

“You’re not worried about me.” She sounds irritated, and she is. Hannibal makes her feel young and stupid for allowing herself to cry about Will. It seems like any time she shows emotion, she becomes a child all over again in Hannibal’s eyes. She usually ends up acting childish in response.

Hannibal doesn’t bother to look at her. “What do you mean, Abigail?”

She wipes her eyes and stands. “You just don’t want me around anymore.” She picks up her coat and keys, and leaves.
When Will wakes up again, he asks about Jack.

“Unless you tell me to save him for you, I’m not sure I’ll be able to stop myself.”

“I don’t know anymore. This isn’t his fault.”

“I disagree, Will.”

“Is anyone taking care of my dogs? Where’s Abigail?” His words slur and he falls back into his drugged up slumber around the second half of her name.

Abigail rejoins them that night and refuses to leave again. She’s brought her duffel bag, a pillow, and a blanket, and glares at Hannibal immediately as though daring him to comment. When she’s put her belongings on the little couch across from the foot of the bed, she reaches in and takes out a few things, her back to Hannibal. Then she joins him at the bedside and holds out his tablet.

He looks up at her from where he’s seated with a pleasantly surprised smile. “Thank you, Abigail.”

She allows herself to smile back, but it’s small and uncertain.

He stands and motions for her to take his chair with a squeeze of her shoulder. “I will bring us something to eat. He may wake up, but likely not for more than a few minutes. Will you be alright?”

She nods.

He places the tablet on the side table and pulls on his coat. Then he strokes her hair and kisses the top of her head once, and leaves. Abigail anticipates that they will never talk about her earlier outburst. She’s relieved and disappointed. This unspoken truce doesn’t calm the battle-ready feeling she’s had all week. She wants to strike Hannibal, to see if she can get away with it. She wonders how much he would forgive if she told him she was just curious what would happen.

Abigail expects him to be a couple of hours, at least, but he’s gone maybe an hour, at most, and returns toting two aluminum take away trays. She takes the one he hands her, looks down at it, and bursts into tears.

“Abigail?”

“You never get take away.”

“It’s not drive-thru, Abigail. I ordered at a nice restaurant and asked them to pack the dinners up. Aren’t you tired of hospital food?”

“Still. That means even you’re worried!”

Hannibal says nothing for a moment, then looks away. “Yes.”

Abigail stops crying soon after that. She finds the honesty comforting. Now that she knows Will’s condition is, in fact, worrisome, and she’s not just catastrophizing, she feels some of her resolution to remain strong return.
After a minute, she blows her nose, wipes her eyes, washes her hands, and sits back down with her dinner, all calm and competence again. “Thank you,” she says, pulling the cardboard off the top and taking the proffered plastic fork from Hannibal. “It looks good, even though it’s not yours.” She tries another smile.

Hannibal returns her smile and sits on the couch next to her bag, tucking into his own food. “You’re staring, Abigail,” he says, after a few bites.

“Sorry,” she whispers.

He looks amused, if a little less so than usual. “What have I done now?”

“I’ve never seen a plastic fork look so out of place.”

“I’m not allergic to plastic, Abigail.”

“I thought maybe plastic’s allergic to you.”

They eat for a while in a slightly more relaxed silence.

“I’ve told you this before: I admire your spirit. You’ve been very brave, Abigail. I think you will be instrumental in Will’s recovery.”

Abigail looks at Will and tries to imagine he’s just napping on the couch in Wolf Trap. She turns back to Hannibal. “I’ll make him recover.”

Hannibal chuckles. “If I were him, I’d be afraid not to.”

It’s late that night when Abigail finally feels Will squeeze her hand weakly. She looks up. His eyes are still closed but he says, “Hi, Abigail.”

She puts her book down and perches on the side of the bed. “Hi, Will.”

“Alright?”

“Mhm. How are you feeling?”

“Only a little humiliated. I’m sorry I scared you. Again.”

She can’t help it – she gives him the best hug she can manage around the IV line and his immobile left side and the bed rail. She has to strain her core muscles not to fall on top of him at the awkward angle, her temple pressing painfully into his chin. She kisses his cheek and straightens. “Now, cut it out.”

She takes his hand again as he falls back asleep with a smile on his lips.

The next time Will wakes, Abigail is curled up in the chair, asleep with her head on the bed by his hand. She’s dead tired, but opens her eyes when she feels him tuck her hair behind her ear. She looks up at him sleepily and says, “I love you.”

He strokes her hair and she falls back asleep. A little puddle of drool seeps into the bedspread.
He sees the ink-black Abigail and Hannibal creatures through thick glass that blurs their features. When he reaches out to touch the pane separating them, he finds it cold. Not glass. Ice. The scene tilts, and he feels gravity pulling him towards the ice. Abigail and Hannibal must be drowning on the other side. He goes to shout that he’ll get them out, but his own mouth fills with frigid water.

They look at him through the ice and wave.

A being made of black smoke wafts through the water as though the water is air. It creeps up behind Will and wraps its arms around his shoulders and neck. It is intimate and fatal, or, at least, it will be. The water is a dilute red. Not as though he is bleeding, more like something is bleeding nearby.

The Hannibal creature taps on the ice to get his attention, and beckons. The Abigail creature leans towards him, too, and says something with a sweet but somehow terrifying smile. He can’t hear anything other than the throbbing in his head from holding his breath for so long. Why doesn’t the smoke just end it already?

It won’t. That isn’t the plan. It’s just keeping Will still. No escape from the inevitable agony of drowning, but no being spirited towards death either. When he can’t hold his breath any longer, he waves back at the two creatures above or below him – he’s not sure which. He can only tell that they are apart from him. He closes his eyes and fills his lungs with glacial, bloody, smoky water.

Will becomes feverish overnight. Hannibal wakes to the heart monitor’s increased rate of beeping.

Will’s breaths are shallow and his forehead and neck are sweaty. His eyes are wide and he’s looking down at his left arm in panic and trying to push it off his stomach with his right. He struggles to roll away from it.

Hannibal jumps to his feet and takes Will’s face in his hands. “Sh, Will. It’s alright. What’s the matter?”

Will continues to struggle to the point that Hannibal worries he will rip out his IV.

“Abigail,” Hannibal says over his shoulder.

Abigail bolts upright and rubs her eyes.

“Come here, please."

She reaches his side in time to hear Will whimpering, “Get it away from me."

Hannibal takes her hands and puts them on Will’s face where his own had been. Then he quickly grabs the blanket from his chair and goes to the other side of the bed.

Will strains away from his left side, twisting and panting and completely nonsensical. Abigail makes him look at her while Hannibal takes Will’s left arm and wraps the blanket around, tucking it in tight to his side. “It wants to kill me,” he practically sobs.

Hannibal calmly returns to Abigail’s side and lays one hand on her shoulder and the other on Will’s stomach. “It’s alright, Will. Look. It’s just us now.”

Will looks down at his stomach and sighs in shaky relief, but he’s still wide-eyed. Terrified.
“Talk to him, Abigail. I’ll be right back.”

Abigail leans down and presses her cheek against his. She has no idea what horror he is experiencing. “Please don’t be scared, Will,” she says into his ear. “You’re okay. Please don’t be scared.”

He wraps his good arm around her waist in a weak hug and she’s relieved until he starts crying and shivering beneath her.

She looks over her shoulder desperately and sees Hannibal enter with the ward nurse and her assistant. “Shh,” she says. “It’s okay now, Will. I promise.” She sees, out of the corner of her eye, the nurse unwrapping Will’s left arm and her assistant holding it down and injecting something into the IV line.

A few moments go by before the gasping and trembling stops. When Will’s arm slides off her onto the bed, Abigail straightens up, looking to Hannibal in muted terror, a high-pitched whine in her ears.

“They’re going to keep him in an induced sleep until the day of the operation.”

Abigail instinctively grabs Will’s hand when the assistant repositions Will and holds his head while the nurse re-intubates him.

“It appears we underestimated the amount of anxiety his arm would cause him. Episodes like this increase the chance of a re-bleed. It’s not ideal, but we will just have to monitor him carefully over the next couple of days.”

Abigail just nods dumbly and lets go of Will’s hand.

After the nurses leave, Hannibal says, “Why don’t you go home, Abigail? He’s alright for now. Have something to eat, shower, get a proper sleep. I suspect that last time you did none of those things, in order to spite me.”

Abigail shakes her head.

“You can come back tomorrow any time you like. I won’t ask you to wait until dark.”

“You promise he’s okay for now?”

Hannibal nods.

Tearfully, she swears, “If he dies while I’m gone, I’ll kill you.”

“That’s fair,” Hannibal agrees.

Chapter End Notes

Beta’d by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr), my Guardian Grammar Angel, and the Queen of Word Choice.
A Busy, Buzzing Hannibee

Chapter Summary

Hannibal takes a turn for the douche.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: more hospital stuff, canon-typical violence, Hannibal-typical cruelty, graphic descriptions of torture

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Abigail does wait until dark to drive back to the hospital. It occurs to her, when she arrives, that Hannibal had only given her his permission to come earlier because he knew she wouldn’t take it. Her fury at having been manipulated by him, once again, just sort of floats away downstream in her mind the moment she rejoins them. By the time she realizes it’s missing, it’s too far away to grab back.

No more meltdowns, she tells herself. And no more fighting with Hannibal.

The latter is not a problem as Hannibal essentially ignores Abigail for the next two days. He answers her questions, brings more fancy take away for them both, and routinely asks how she’s feeling, but it’s clear to her that he’s not present. When he lifts Will’s arms and legs every two hours to keep blood flowing through his inert limbs, or even when he sits by him afterwards, stroking his forehead and hair, it looks robotic, and void of tenderness.

The pod-person is back, Abigail thinks. It is so unfunny she bites her tongue as though she’d said it out loud.

Hannibal takes it upon himself to fill in what he can of the preoperative questionnaire and consent forms – which is everything, except Will’s signature. In fact, Hannibal thinks it’s likely more complete than it would have been if Will had answered the questions himself.

He is not impressed by Dr. Whitney’s reappearance on Monday, nor by her stating that she’ll be the daytime emergency physician in this ward all week.

It is early morning on May 8th, the day of the operation. While Will is being prepared for surgery, Hannibal and Abigail are shunned to the waiting room, where they sit, expertly not talking. They are both already testy, any appetite for breakfast replaced by a roiling feeling of injustice they can do nothing about.

“Have the two of you discussed all outcomes, and talked about what will happen after the surgery?”
Dr. Whitney asks, immediately earning her narrowed eyes from Hannibal and a fiery glare from Abigail. “It’s okay if you haven’t,” she amends in absolutely the wrong way. “You can ask me any questions you have and we can talk about all of your concerns.” She smiles brightly at them then, and, as though it is good news, says, “I’ll be in charge of Will’s post-operative care.”

Hannibal decides she will most assuredly not be.

Nurse Tate pokes her head in around 9am and asks if she can borrow Dr. Lecter. He goes with her, leaving Dr. Whitney to eye Abigail nervously.

She still doesn’t like the doctor, but Abigail is feeling insecure all of a sudden. “I just want him to be okay,” she says, in an attempt to verbally validate her attitude.

She regrets doing so immediately when Dr. Whitney presumptuously puts her arms around her.

Nurse Tate asks Hannibal if he would mind being present while she goes through everything with Will. “It’s not standard procedure, but, after his episode on Friday, I can’t help but think he’ll be much less anxious if you’re there with him.”

Hannibal nods and follows her to Will’s room.

When they enter, a very young nurse tells them Will should wake up in a few minutes. She is recording his vitals. “We weaned him off the sedatives last night.”

In the meantime, Hannibal considers killing the surgical team and performing the operation himself.

Will soon opens his eyes and looks surprisingly alert. Hannibal stands by his right shoulder while Nurse Tate explains the procedure, how long it will take, that they’ll have to shave a bit of hair off just here, the anesthetics that will be used. Will doesn’t look down at his left arm once. None of them can tell if it’s on purpose.

“You might experience a bit of pain after the surgery, but we’ll help you with that. I’m in the recovery ward this afternoon, and your daughter and Dr. Lecter should be able to come see you right away.” She smiles at him candidly, like he’s her favourite. “You won’t have to be alone for a minute.” She passes him a clipboard with the filled in forms and a pen.

It takes Will twice as long as it usually would to read them, and his neck is sore by the time he’s done. As he signs both sheets, he laughs sardonically to himself. “There’s always someone who wants to get inside my head.”

It occurs to Hannibal that Will is afraid.

The desire to battle a higher power, to wrest control of Will’s fate, pounds the walls of the arteries in Hannibal’s neck. He ignores it and cups Will’s chin in his hand. “It’s okay to be scared, Will,” he says softly, “but there’s no need. You’re going to be fine.” He kisses Will deeply, dismissing the idea that he needs to as much for himself as for Will. Dismissing the future in which something so banal as a medical misfortune dared to take Will Graham from him. Dismissing entirely the words *just in case* from his mind. “Abigail and I will be here when you wake up.”
For Abigail, the four hours that Will is in surgery are the least stressful in the 232 that have passed since his stroke. They’re not waiting for Will to die anymore. Someone somewhere in this hospital is doing everything they can to save him. Someone somewhere can do something.

The time passes in a way that feels neither quick nor dragging. Abigail thinks she should try and distract herself with a book, but, for some reason, she doesn’t feel the need to. She leans against the armrest with her chin in her hand and stays that way, listening to the quiet rustle of Hannibal’s sleeve as he flicks through something academic on his tablet. She doesn’t remember closing her eyes, but she must have fallen asleep at some point because suddenly she hears his voice.

“Nurse Tate.”

“Dr. Lecter, Sarah.” Nurse Tate smiles at them warmly. “He’s not awake yet, but I just wanted to let you know Will’s in recovery, and the surgery went well. I’ll come and grab you when you can see him.”

Hannibal smiles and nods, acknowledging her with the appropriate amount of restrained relief.

Abigail leans against Hannibal and closes her eyes, both their appalling behaviour over the past week forgotten.

“Why do I never know where I am?”

It’s Tuesday morning and Abigail is practically bouncing up and down in her chair. “Does it matter?” she asks cheerily. “We’re here.”

“Who…?” Will looks about the room, and, craning his head to the left, sees Hannibal seated on the other side of the bed. “Oh.”

“How are you feeling, Will?” Hannibal asks.

Will closes his eyes. “My head hurts,” he replies.

He feels Hannibal’s fingers on his jawbone, gently directing his face forward, and the bed dips by his waist as Hannibal sits where Will will still be able to see him.

When Will opens his eyes again, Hannibal slowly, but purposefully places his hand on Will’s left forearm.

Will doesn’t notice for a while. He turns back to Abigail. “Okay?” he asks. He doesn’t have the energy to smile, but she’s smiling enough for the both of them.

Too happy to say anything coherently, she nods.

He turns to Hannibal. “You?” He finds it difficult to look directly at him, so he drops his gaze to the bedspread, where he catches sight of Hannibal’s hand on the foreign arm lying next to him.

Hannibal watches him carefully when he says, “I’m fine, Will.”

Will swallows, and something ugly tugs at the corner of his mouth. He closes his eyes, trying not to give anything away, but his voice is acrid when he says, “I’m tired. I’m really tired.” He pretends to fall back asleep.

Abigail looks across the bed at Hannibal, trying not to be immediately angry on Will’s behalf. “Why
did you do that?’

Hannibal inclines his head towards Dr. Whitney, who is scribbling something in her progress notes, a hungry look in her eye.

After Dr. Whitney leaves, Abigail says, “Don’t do it again though, okay?”

Hannibal tilts his head and nods once.

That evening, as Hannibal is overseeing the development of Dr. Whitney’s Chelsea smile, he thinks about Will’s recovery. He breaks one of her fingers and the smile grows wider. He considers whether or not he should reopen his practice for the months before Will is well enough to fly. He breaks another finger, and a ¼ inch is added to the length of each tear. No. He will reserve that time for Will and whatever care he needs. The thought of spending days in the wasteland of his wealthy patients’ dull psyches, instead of Will’s, drives him to break a third finger, switching to her other hand. She winces, ripping her own face open to the cheekbones.

Two more broken fingers and she’s yelling, “Please stop! I’m sorry!” even though it’s more painful, and her words are barely discernable. She is sobbing, and Hannibal uses her own tears to literally rub salt in the wound.

He finds himself rapidly losing interest. Completing this kill the way he’d planned to holds no appeal anymore. He breaks another finger on the first hand for the sake of symmetry, then snaps her neck to speed along what has essentially become a chore. Even posing her doesn’t hold the promise of artistic satisfaction. She is displayed in a glass case, lidless eyes and carved up face forming a parody of an eager smile. In the palm of each hand lies a headless rat.

He spends little time admiring the completed picture before returning to the hospital.

Abigail can tell that Hannibal isn’t the least bit surprised when a new doctor introduces himself on Wednesday morning. She sees his lips twitch up in a barely visible smile when Dr. Matthews says, “I’m sure Dr. Whitney will be back tomorrow. She’s very happy to be working with you.”

Abigail can tell that Hannibal isn’t the least bit surprised when Dr. Whitney remains absent, though he looks human in his concern, and, when they find her body, human in his horror.

Will is as cooperative as he can be during Dr. Matthews’ morning visits, answering his questions and performing tasks and exercises as directed. He’s been in the hospital enough to know that the quicker he does what he’s told, the quicker they leave him alone. Nurse Tate or the young nurse – Nurse Adams, they learn – arrive shortly after Dr. Matthews leaves every morning.

This part of the day is harder, though it’s only about twenty minutes long and he sleeps for several hours afterwards. The nurse carries out passive movement on the arm Will tries to forget about. She says it’s so his muscles won’t atrophy, and Will gives her a small smile and a nod, then screws his eyes shut and lies still and tense for the whole process. He does the same on the successive days. The nurse flexes fingers, bends and stretches the elbow, rotates the shoulder – and he retreats into his head and ignores what’s happening. He knows logically that they are his fingers, elbow, shoulder, but he doesn’t believe it. He can’t stand looking at the arm. It makes him feel sick.
They don’t tell Will what happened to Dr. Whitney, or that the FBI has gotten involved and the papers are talking about “the Ghost of the Chesapeake Ripper”. The day after the body is found, Will begins physio and occupational therapy.

The therapist wheels in a full-length mirror and Will is told to stand in front of it and describe what he can see. Then he’s directed to look down and to his left, at the arm, then to look at the same arm in the mirror. Then to put his other hand on that shoulder, elbow, and wrist, repeatedly, and observe where his hand is in the mirror. He does this over and over, while the therapist speaks kindly and reasonably about why the arm must belong to him. It starts to make sense after a while – looking between the two Will Grahams. The Will Graham missing an arm, but carrying some impostor’s around instead, and the Will Graham in the mirror, apparently complete. But, when the mirror and therapist are gone, the connection is broken and the unease and nausea return, along with a deep sense of having been violated.

Later, Dr. Matthews informs Will that he’ll be his doctor from now on, and he hopes Will doesn’t mind. Will doesn’t care at all. The morning’s ordeals had left him with little interest in anything.

Hannibal is gone most of the time now and Abigail leaves Will alone in the mornings, though she feels like she’s replaced not by people, but by carrion birds. She likes Nurse Tate, and starts to like Nurse Adams when she asks Abigail what she’s reading and says she can call her Anna – but they are the only two who meet her standards. She doesn’t like Dr. Matthews. The only time she meets the physiotherapist, she finds him neither likeable nor repellant, and the lack of discernable character makes Abigail feel he doesn’t deserve to be around Will. Other supposed health care professionals make cameo appearances and she narrows her eyes at each one of them as they walk past her into Will’s room with purpose and entitlement.

After a particularly draining morning, Abigail comes back into the room, alone, and Will says, “This is the second time I’ve fucked things up because I thought I’d get better.”

He doesn’t look sick, or tired, or disoriented, or anything but frustrated.

Abigail shakes her head. “I don’t care if we go to Italy or not. I just don’t want you to be in here.”

“I don’t want me to be in here either.”

“If Hannibal were here, he’d make sure the others stayed out.”

Will opts not to ask where Hannibal is, though the question is on his tongue. He’s been somewhat successful in ignoring his absences, which become more frequent and last longer over the next week.

Will sleeps a lot. Abigail feels bad, but she’s desperately bored. Hannibal leaves his tablet whenever he goes wherever he goes, so she looks up a syllabus online, hopeful that she can convince Margot to teach her calculus when she gets back. With a sort of defiant optimism, she starts teaching herself Italian.
One day, she asks Will if he’ll finally teach her how to tie flies. Will looks surprised for some reason.

“Sure?”

Abigail arches her eyebrow at him. “Have you got something better to do?”

“No. Just… Oh my god, Abigail, stop making that face. There’s something I want to talk to you about.”

She sits on the bed. “What?”

“I don’t think you should stay here.”

She rolls her eyes. “I’m being careful.”

“That’s not what I mean. I think you should leave, like we planned.”

Even though it’s not a question, Abigail responds casually and definitively, like he’d asked her if she wants a coffee. “No.”

“You said this wasn’t supposed to be your life.”

“I wasn’t talking about being in a hospital.”

“I know. I was hoping that line would work anyway.”

That’s as far as the argument goes before Will is too tired, and swats her away with a yawn.

The next day, Abigail does actually produce some fly-tying gear. He tries to give her verbal instructions, but it’s beyond frustrating when he can’t actually show her how to tie the knots. She pretends to be bored, and clears fishing line and feathers off the bed.

“I thought about what you said yesterday,” she says, conversationally.

“Hm. Feel any different about it?”

“No. You shouldn’t say stupid things like that.”

“Like?”

“Like, go ahead without me.”

Will is quiet for a while. “We’d come and find you.”

Abigail is wearing a pensive look, a stormy one. “You and Hannibal?” she says after a while.

“Yeah.”

“Hannibal isn’t here right now,” she says sourly, “What makes you think he’ll be here later?”

“Because he won’t leave until Jack is dead.”

Abigail frowns and looks away. “At least you’re a practical martyr,” she mutters.

“I’m not being a martyr. I want you to be in Italy. You want to be in Italy.”
“I want you to not be here.”

“Well,” Will says, tiring again, “one of us can get what they want.”

Annoyingly, he falls back asleep before she can reply.

He’s asleep for a long time. Hannibal is… somewhere else, and she doesn’t feel like reading or studying, so she paces. There’s a faint hum in her ears that makes her feel a little like she’d been in a crowded, noisy room, when suddenly everyone but her disappeared. All of her senses seem abruptly muted. Suddenly, every thought is urgent, clamoring for her attention.

She thinks about Hannibal telling the nurse her name is Sarah Graham; about Will, hysterical and terrified of his own body; about Hannibal touching Will’s arm and Will being silently horrified; about the surgeon coming to talk to them while Will was in recovery. He told them the operation went really well, but he had to make sure they understood, Will isn’t yet in the clear. He said something about post-op complications, which she’d dismissed as irrelevant, already too happy to sit still without it being painful.

She thinks about Will telling her she should go live her life, and that they would catch up with her. She pictures it briefly, going off on her own while Will recovers. The idea doesn’t appeal to her at all. Instead, she imagines Will hiking Eagle Mountain with her, like he’d said he would, if she wanted to go. She wants to now.

She wonders if Hannibal would join them.

As she senses her thoughts are about to take a dark turn, she tries to pause on the image of them looking out at Lake Superior together. It works, until she finds herself wondering if Hannibal would still love her if Will died. If he loves her now.

She stops pacing and shakes her head. She tries to think about how things were just a few weeks ago, when those questions hadn’t occurred to her yet. She remembers the little knot of nervous anticipation, a secret happiness lodged where her ribs meet over her heart. But that feeling had untwisted so quickly, dissolving into a pool of fate and circumstance.

Later, she will scold herself, but, at this very moment, she feels compelled to shake Will awake, to avoid thinking of all the ways he might still be taken from her.

“Abigail?” Will opens his eyes and turns his head towards her, but doesn’t move otherwise.

“Will you take me to Eagle Mountain?” she blurts out. She’s shivering. Hannibal’s sweater is draped over the back of the chair, and she grabs it and pulls it on even though she’s not cold.

“Of course.” He rubs his eyes and looks at her, sleepy and confused, and worried. “What’s wrong, Abigail?”

Nothing is wrong. Not out here. Only in her head. She says the first thing that jumps from her mind to her tongue.

“You don’t call me kid anymore.” She flushes, embarrassed at the idea of him thinking this is why she woke him up. Still, it’s probably better than telling him the real reason – that her mind seems hell-bent on cataloguing Will’s many potential deaths.

“You’re not really a kid anymore.”
“I like that you had a pet name for me.”

He smiles, but can’t keep his eyes open. “I’d call you sweetheart, but you’re too mean.”

“I’ll be nicer.”

“Okay, sweetheart.”

When Hannibal does visit the hospital, he often stands in the doorway of Will’s room, observing the interactions between Will and Abigail before entering. He doesn’t know when they established their connection, but he sees their bond strengthen every day. Will is so fond of her, and Abigail does nothing to hide that she adores him. The affection she shows him is child-like and irrepressible, and, when Abigail smiles, it’s only a few seconds at most before Will is smiling too. He sees how much Will smiles around her.

Hannibal won’t compete. He would rather make Will want to fish, like Will wanted Hannibal to want to bite.

“Hannibal,” Abigail calls after him as he is leaving one day. She gets to her feet and follows him before she loses her nerve.

He stops and turns back to her, just two feet from the door. “Yes, Abigail?”

“Where are you going?”

“I have some errands to run in Baltimore,” he answers smoothly. “Would you like me to bring anything back with me?”

“You’re coming back?” Something in her voice suggests she’s about to cry, or to pick a fight.

Hannibal tilts his head to one side. “Of course, Abigail. Tell me what it is you really want to say.”

She ends up crying and picking a fight. “Will just had brain surgery. He could still die. What errands are you running? And why are there so many?”

“I’m aware of Will’s condition.” If Abigail weren’t already fully invested in her attack, his look would have stopped her.

However, instead of backing off, as she almost definitely should, she snarls, “You’re a coward.”

There is a monumental pause before Hannibal says dismissively, “You’re being very immature, Abigail. I expected more of you.”

The part of Abigail that isn’t furious, is stung. Not by Hannibal’s words, but by his tone. She realizes that all this Hannibal can feel is indifference and disappointment. In her. In Will. This Hannibal would never allow himself to fall asleep on a pile of dirty coats in the back seat of a car, holding Abigail’s hand. This Hannibal wouldn’t save Will’s gift to her from the hands of the FBI, reunite the two of them, or kiss Will the way he should.

It won’t matter to him what she says anyway, so she says, “Will’s never disappointed when I act my age.”
“I am not Will.” He is still dismissive.

So, throwing the weight of all her hurt behind the words, she says, nastily, “I wish you were.”

Without another word, Hannibal leaves, and doesn’t return until Will is released from the hospital, three days later.

On his way out, Hannibal sees Jack being explicitly barred from the ward. The man looks lost and desperate, and Hannibal is blissfully happy at being handed the opportunity to kill him.

It’s too easy, tailing Jack. He recognizes almost immediately that he isn’t headed home. He follows him effortlessly out of the city and down a logging road along the Potomac River. Jack parks outside a small cabin just off the road in the woods. Hannibal parks around a bend in the road and goes after him on foot.

Hannibal finds it very amusing, Jack’s choice of safe house for Chilton. It is so similar to where Miriam Lass had been found. From the shadows outside the kitchen window, their conversation – or rather, argument – is entirely audible.

“All you have to do is show up.”

“And say what, Agent Crawford?” Chilton’s affected Southern accent is more pronounced, as though to compensate for the presumably shattered left side of his face. “That I am not the killer Miss Lass accused me of being, but I forgive her, and won’t the court please let her go so I can have her over for tea?”

“Miriam Lass doesn’t deserve to be locked up. She was traumatized, hypnotized. She’s not to blame here, Dr. Lecter is. Don’t you want to finally put the real Chesapeake Ripper away?”

“I am supposed to be dead. I do not need to fear Hannibal Lecter anymore.”

Outside, Hannibal smirks.

“Well, I’m asking you to help me catch him, Dr. Chilton.”

“Oh.” Chilton laughs, humourlessly. “I see that I am Doctor Chilton again, now that you have need of something.”

Jack is quiet. Hannibal assumes that he must look properly scolded, however, because Chilton continues, appeased.

“How will you keep Miss Lass from attacking me again? You do not seem to have control over her, or even the ability to rein her in.”

“I’m dealing with that.”

“I am not convinced, Agent Crawford. I would like more information.”

Jack’s voice is tight and tired. “Bedelia du Maurier is in protective custody. She’s helping Miriam recover her real memories and separate them from the false ones Dr. Lecter planted of you.”

“Bedelia du Maurier. Hannibal Lecter’s psychiatrist? Why would she do that?”
“It’s your turn, Dr. Chilton. Can I count on you?”

“All that is required of me is my presence?”

“Yes.”

“Then, yes.”

Hannibal hears chairs scraping against the floor, first one, then another. He assumes Jack is glowering, and that Chilton is fumbling to his feet in an attempt not to be intimidated.

“Dr. du Maurier believes Will about the Chesapeake Ripper. She knows something about Dr. Lecter, but, when he goes down, she’ll need immunity. That’s what I’m offering her.”

Chilton’s unnecessary cane taps loudly on the tiles as he walks away, saying, “I suppose, in exchange for that, a little memory recovery is not much to ask.”

Jack comes out of the cabin and stalks back to the SUV. Hannibal licks his lips, considering the opportunities this situation presents. He pulls out his phone and dials.

“Miss Lounds.”

“Dr. Lecter. Once again you’ve seen through my deception.” Freddie Lounds doesn’t sound surprised.

Hannibal smiles, already enjoying himself. “Your deception? You mean to tell me that you became so single-minded in your pursuit of the Chesapeake Ripper, you faked your own death? Nothing to do with Jack Crawford and Will Graham?”

“Hm. Seems Will Graham went rogue after all. Agent Crawford will be delighted.” She sighs dramatically. “Had I known how dull it would be, I’d never have agreed to be part of their plan.”

“I thought you’d enjoy the exposure.”

“To a point. I’m still waiting for a call from your partner in crime, for lack of a better term.”

“Just partner will suffice.” Hannibal pictures her smirk, and lets her spend a few moments constructing headlines in her mind. He needs her agreeable and greedy for information. “I am aware you and Will have an arrangement. I’m calling on his behalf.”

“He owes me a story.”

“I have one for you. Can I assume you’re holding up your end of the deal?”

“My end being keeping my mouth shut even though the two of you are clearly up to something nefarious? Yes, you can. I haven’t said anything to Jack, and I’m still playing like I think his plan will be a big success.” Her tone becomes disparaging. “Seems I’m the only one pretending, mind you.”

“Yes. Jack has his fingers in too many pies to keep track anymore.”

“I don’t appreciate it. Being dead is so very boring. And your absentee boyfriend isn’t helping.”

“Will is indisposed.”
“Lovers’ spat? I suppose that can be messy between killers.”

“Ms. Lounds, would you like your story or not?” Hannibal asks, affecting exasperation. Once again he can picture her self-satisfied smile.

“Do tell.”

“Apparently you are not the only one faking death for the FBI. Dr. Frederick Chilton, for example, is alive and well.”

“Interesting…”

“Surely it’s more than that,” Hannibal posits mildly.

“If your information is correct – “

“I assure you, it is.”

“This could dismantle Jack’s career. Who is your source?”

“Myself.”

“Oh?”

“I’m looking at him right now. Does the prospect of unmanning Jack appeal to you?”

“I don’t think there are many people left who would answer no to that question. There aren’t many people in a position to expose Jack either, though.”

“Are you in a position to do so?”

“I could be. I’m assuming you called me because you agree.”

“This will not just ruin Jack’s career, it will spawn years of tedious internal investigations and hearings – which many people, especially Ms. Prunell, will try to make go away. I’m not entirely confident that Tattle Crime will be good enough for court.”

“Yes, I expect it will. You have friends there?”

“In high places.”

Hannibal allows a tactical pause. Freddie Lounds, like Alana Bloom, is clever and finely tuned. She will have to be played carefully. Potential problems and choices must be presented at precisely the right moments, if they are to distract from the real issues, and the questions they should actually ask.

At length, he pretends to disclose the last of his concerns. “You know how this will look, Ms. Lounds. Everyone will think you faked your own death for the ratings.”

She laughs arrogantly. “I’m no stranger to notoriety, Dr. Lecter. Where do I find Chilton?”

Hannibal smiles once more and asks if she has a pen ready.

Before returning home, Hannibal disables the two officers stationed outside the cabin, drags them to
a dense thicket of bushes, and rolls them into a shallow ravine to deal with later. He waits for Freddie Lounds to show up, unabashedly take photos through the windows of the cabin, and leave.

Chapter End Notes

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
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Margot and Judy come to the hospital on the same day they land. They look sleep deprived and less put together than usual, but happy. They don’t seem to mind waiting until Will wakes up, content to just sit in the hall, half-awake and leaning against each other. So Abigail goes to hunt down a couple extra chairs to bring back to Will’s room, then curls up in one of them to wait as well.

Later on, when Will has woken up, Judy says, “I’m afraid we come empty-handed.”

“Bringing flowers would just be us pretending to be normal,” Margot adds with a small smile.

Will smiles back. “Thank you, for not getting me flowers. Really.”

“How’s your head?” Judy asks.

“I have no idea.” Will lifts a hand and fingers the dressing. “How does it look?”

They appraise him, and Margot still has the small smile playing over her lips.

“You actually look like you’re doing alright,” Judy says.

Margot says, “You needed a haircut anyway.”

Abigail snickers, then asks them, “How was your hellish two weeks?”

Surprisingly, Margot volunteers, “Slightly less hellish than expected.” She hasn’t stopped smiling, and, now, she presses her lips together to stop a full-on grin from blossoming. When she has it under control, she tells them, “Judy proposed.”

Apparently, since the last time they were all together, Abigail somehow lost the ability to express intermediate emotions. She practically yells at Margot, “You said yes right?”

Will actually jumps. “Jesus, Abigail.”

“Sorry.”

Margot waits for her to settle down before she almost whispers, “Yes.”

Judy has her arm wrapped around Margot’s waist, even as they’re sitting. She gives her a squeeze.
At a volume more audible to human ears, Margot continues. “And, since I’m apparently quite agreeable these days, I’m saying yes to your tutoring proposal as well.”

For some reason, Abigail suddenly feel her age, and a hint of shyness returns.

Later that day, after Margot and Judy leave, Abigail asks Will seriously, “Are you going to let us take care of you when you come home?

Will is in a good mood, so he says, “I’ll try and cooperate once in a while.”

Abigail glares at him, but she’s definitely smiling a little when she warns him, “You know the only reason I’m not hitting you right now is that it kinda contradicts the message.”

Will’s good mood doesn’t last. The “consultants” that continue to come and go become less veiled in their intentions, shamelessly asking him questions that have nothing to do with his stroke. He slips back into his resistant, taciturn ways. His attitude is not restricted to the medical personnel. He pretends to be asleep when Hannibal phones, and snaps at Abigail when she calls him on it. Two days later, he asks Dr. Matthews why he’s still here. He is no more helpful than Dr. Whitney had been, saying something about needing to keep him under observation.

After that, Will swallows his pride and calls Hannibal.

“Please get me out of here.” Already feeling pathetic, he doesn’t even bother trying to stop the next words from coming out of his mouth. “I want to go home.”

After Will calls, Hannibal’s phone rings again before he can put it back in his pocket.

“Ms. Lounds.”

“Dr. Lecter. I’m calling to say mission accomplished. Make sure you pick up a copy of the Sun tomorrow morning.”

“I will. How do you feel?”

“Quite fulfilled, thank you.” There is a pause in which Hannibal pictures her smirk. “You sound like a man with another favour to ask.”

“If I may.”

“You may ask, and I will consider it.”

“I think you will. It’s in the same vein as the last one.”

“Thinking of rubbing some salt in some wounds?”

“Just one wound. One of Jack’s.”

“Careful, Dr. Lecter. You don’t want to become as obsessed with Jack as Jack is with you.”

“Thank you for your concern, Ms. Lounds. I will make sure that doesn’t happen.”
“What’s the favour?”

“Keep Jack in the spotlight.”

“Hardly a favour. I plan to do just that.”

“I’m pleased to hear it.”

“Since our interests are suddenly so aligned, I have a favour to ask of you.”

“Please, Ms. Lounds, ask away.”

“How’s Will?”

“Recovering.”

“When he’s recovered, I’d like an exclusive interview with him on the Dollhouse Murders.”

“I will speak to him about it. In the meantime, you’ll keep Jack busy?”

“Mm. You and Will Graham always seem to need someone to cover for you.”

“You’re the beautiful assistant, Ms. Lounds.”

“I’m not seeing any magic happening.”

**Chesapeake Ripper in Protective Custody: FBI Offering WitPro to Serial Killers?**

“Your safehouse isn’t very safe, Frederick.” At the cabin once more, this time inside it, Hannibal tosses the day’s paper on the table theatrically. “No guards, no phone, no Jack, and no privacy.”

The look on Chilton’s face mirrors that of Miriam’s when she’d shot him. Even around his mangled cheek and jaw, his fury and fear are apparent. “I suppose you are here to offer a solution?” he says tightly, gripping his cane as though he might strike Hannibal with it. But even he knows it would be a poor decision to throw the first blow without complete assurance he can finish the job.

“Not a solution, Frederick. This is not a problem.”

“What do you mean?” Chilton hisses.

“This is an opportunity,” Hannibal answers, in a tone that suggests it’s obvious why. “You can leave, start again. I’ve taken care of your guards, as I mentioned, so all you need do is walk out the door.”

Chilton narrows his eyes suspiciously.

“Or, you can stay here and face bad press, kowtow to Jack Crawford, help the woman who shot you walk free…”

“Either this or that. No other choices.”

“I’m not a magician, Frederick,” Hannibal points out, keeping his voice magnanimous, and his smirk minimal.

Chilton paces, forgetting to limp as his mind is busy stewing. “Why should I trust you?”
“You don’t need to. Jack is losing friends. I don’t recommend hitching your horse to that post, Frederick, because, when it breaks, you will end up dragging dead weight behind you.”

It doesn’t take much more to convince Chilton. Hannibal is home in time to cook dinner for Will and Abigail.

“Good evening, Dr. Lecter. I thought you might like to know there’s a press conference tomorrow morning at Quantico. How’s that for winding Jack up?”

“You’ve outdone yourself, Ms. Lounds.”

“I feel like I’m tempting fate by asking this, but I also feel I’m deserving of a reward.”

“I’m afraid I haven’t been able to speak to Will about your interview yet.”

“That’s not what I’m asking.”

“Oh. I apologize, Ms. Lounds. Please.”

“I’m asking if Abigail Hobbs is alive. I’d like to see her, if she is.”

“Perhaps we can discuss this at a later time. We both have quite enough to deal with at the moment.”

“I think I’ve proven I can keep a secret.”

“That is no longer in question, Ms. Lounds.”

“And I have the patience of… Well, someone like you.”

“An impressive amount.”

“Yes. But not limitless.”

Hannibal doesn’t feel particularly creative when he poses Chilton’s keepers. He simply wants them out of the way. Ripping out their spines is uncomplicated and timely.

He sends an anonymous tip to Tattle Crime. A few minutes later he receives a text from Freddie Lounds.

Now you’re just spoiling me, Dr. Lecter.

Hannibal smiles to himself. He looks forward to their next conversation. For now, he presses 0 on his phone. “Baltimore Sun, please.”

Hannibal is disappointed he won’t be able to draw Freddie as a heap of mangled body parts strewn like the contents of a trash bag ravaged by raccoons. Not yet, anyway. He leaves space above, hoping he can at least draw her lynched by her furious followers, and, next to Dr. Whitney’s grotesque visage, sketches the words Tattle Crime in tasteful calligraphic script.

He hears the front door shut upstairs. He wipes the charcoal from his hands with a rag, and casts a
pleased look over his shoulder at the great black and white mural: His resume; his legacy. He switches off the light and climbs the stairs up into the cellar.

Chapter End Notes

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03, @weesprigofzest on tumblr), High Priestess of the Church of Drinking Obscene Amounts of Tea, and Preeminent Scholar of Dream Sequences.

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Chapter Summary

Margot and Judy fucking adore one another. Will gets to go home, fucking finally.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Judy Ingram is nothing remarkable to look at. All her features are decidedly average – no disfigurements or marks that impede beauty, but nothing to make her stand out either. No full pouty lips or large doe eyes. She’s had breast-reduction surgery, and dresses to accentuate her androgynous figure rather than create the illusion of curvaceousness.

Margot likes everything unremarkable about her. She feels that Judy’s true beauty is a secret only she knows, and she revels in being the one who understands how every little thing about her – every plain feature, every mundane habit – makes her perfect. She hates herself for it, but Margot is glad of Judy’s ordinary appearance. She doesn’t worry about Judy as much as she might if there was anything superficially alluring about her to make the predators of this world look twice.

Margot loves her more than she has ever loved anyone or anything in the world. The nonchalance and casual distain that is the trademark of her candor disappears absolutely when she talks to or about Judy. While Judy was abroad, Margot felt sure her devastation was clear to all. She could hardly function for missing her. Even now, a few months after Judy’s return, Margot feels panic blossom in the spaces between her internal organs whenever she and Judy are apart for more than a couple hours.

Judy is endlessly patient about it. When Will Graham had called her, she’d known immediately how much of their work had been undone and how quickly things would need to look up. Though she’d come home to Margot toeing the line between despair and suicide – the same line she’d almost crossed when Judy met her – Judy refuses to let her go there ever again. She is fiercely devoted to Margot, and vowed a long time ago to spend every waking moment fighting off the Masons of the world.

Steadfastness is another of Judy’s qualities, not immediately remarkable, that Margot loves so much.

“We should go today, I think.” Margot finishes buttoning her blouse and tucks it into her high-waisted slacks. “Abigail said she thinks they’ll have to let him go within the next couple days.”

Judy is already dressed and sitting at the vanity, pinning her hair into a knot. “I thought it had been a while,” she comments. She swivels on the stool and looks Margot up and down. “I like the way your butt looks in these.” Her eyes sparkle flirtatiously as she pinches the fabric between her fingers and tugs Margot closer.

“It has been.” Margot smooths down the lapels of Judy’s blazer and leans down to kiss her. “Abigail is ready to resurrect herself and go to the ethics board.” She pictures the hot-tempered teen barging into a room of aged white men, who look bewildered and listen, in stunned silence, while she
expounds all the ways in which the hospital sucks.

Judy is clearly imagining the same scene, smirking as she gets to her feet. She adjusts one of Margot’s earrings that had skewed while she was straightening her hair, and gives her another quick kiss. “Let’s go.”

Two hours later they let themselves into Will’s little house with an armload of groceries each. Even though the dogs had already been fed by Ella earlier, they follow Margot and Judy into the kitchen, tongues out, tails wagging hopefully.

“Why are we doing this again?” Judy asks as she takes the items Margot hands her and fills the fridge. “It’s not… I don’t know… a little over-familiar? It made sense before I actually had my hands in his vegetable drawers.” She grins up at Margot.

“We watched my brother feeding himself to the pigs together. I think that’s a little more familiar than stocking up a friend’s kitchen.” She watches Judy fit the last of the cold stuff into a perfectly sized gap and close the door. When putting groceries away, folding laundry, packing, or anything, really, Judy plays a life-sized game of Tetris. She’s good at it, too. There’s no need to cram crispers shut or balance containers precariously on the top shelf to make room.

“Okay,” Judy replies with a smile, taking Margot’s hand and standing fully upright. “As long as you think he won’t mind.”

“Oh, I think he’ll mind.”

Judy raises an eyebrow.

“But I’ll mind more if we leave him to the mercy of Dr. Lecter. I’d like him to be able to at least make a damn sandwich without his say-so.”

“Mm. Good call.”

They leave the dry goods on the counter with a note, so that their invasion is marginally less invasive.

Abigail is the one to check Will out of the hospital at the standard 10am. Hannibal had said not to expect him home before 7pm, and asked, curtly, if she could take care of things until then. Things being Will, she reflects, irate.

“Are we just ditching the idea of me hiding during the day?” she’d asked, less because she doubted his judgment than because she felt like talking back.

“It’s significantly less risky now. I think you can see that.”

Abigail drives to Wolf Trap, rather than Baltimore. It’s quiet in the car, and Will is subdued, though he doesn’t fall asleep like he usually does on long drives.

“Thanks, Abigail,” Will says, when he realizes where they’re going.
Abigail is subdued as well, and it takes a minute for her to look over at him and smile in acknowledgement. She’s bordering on numb again. Now that they are on the road, hospital behind them, it’s like trying to drag her mind out of a particularly disturbing dream, only, her mind isn’t ready to leave. She knows it happened, all of it, but she feels like it happened to a different Abigail, who told this Abigail about it afterwards.

They are supposed to have dinner with Hannibal later, so she leaves their belongings in the car, save for the paper bag from the pharmacy containing the clean dressings the hospital gave her and Will’s plethora of medication.

In the kitchen, she fills a glass of water for him and sees the food stacked on the counter, topped with a note from Margot. Her writing isn’t as tidy as Judy’s; it’s a little more ornate, and she’s not as particular about dating all her correspondence.

*Hi Abigail & Will*

*We didn’t know what else to do, so we brought food. Hope you’re both okay. Call if you need anything.*

*Love M&J*

Abigail retrieves the cordless phone, then wanders back to the living room. Will’s hands are busy getting licked and nosed at, so she puts the glass of water on the mantle where it won’t get knocked over, then calls Margot.

“Thank you for the groceries. And thank you for looking after the dogs. Can you thank Judy’s sister for us as well?”

“Of course. Do you want us to hang on to the keys just in case?”

“I like knowing you have a set. I’ll double-check with Will, though.”

“How is Will?”

Abigail looks over her shoulder to where he sits in amongst his canine family. The dogs are clambering over each other in such a way that he’s only visible from the shoulders up. “Good,” she says. “Happier. They should have let him go way sooner.”

“Don’t tell me you’re surprised they didn’t. Will didn’t look like he was in any condition to put up a fight.”

“They were so nosy!”

“Were you able to keep your temper?”

“Mostly. Where are you? It sounds like a party.” A door shuts and the talking and laughter on the other end of the line is muffled.

“Yeah. Ella’s – Judy’s sister’s place. She invited the family over for an engagement dinner.”

“How are you holding up?” She has an amusing vision of Margot in a thicket of excited relatives, standing probably a head taller than everyone, and trying not to look too stern with her dark eyeliner and lipstick.
“Judy’s people are… lively.”

Abigail giggles. “Well, I don’t want to keep you.”

“Actually, I’m glad you called. I have a proposal for you this time.”

Margot walks back towards the front room to rejoin the others, but, just as she rounds the corner, Judy is there, grabbing her hand and pulling her back down the hall. She has a glass of champagne in her other hand, pink in her cheeks, and a mischievous smile on her face. In the kitchen, she attacks Margot with kisses, somehow not spilling her drink.

Margot nuzzles the soft skin at her hairline just above her ear as Judy provocatively backs her against the wall and pulls the fabric of her blouse away from her neck so she can suck a secret little mark just above her shoulder.

“What are you doing?” Margot laughs, blushing as though they’ve just started dating, and haven’t been together for almost six years.

“Just making sure you’re still going to marry me.” Judy pulls back and takes a sip of her champagne before putting her mouth on Margot’s. They make out adolescently for a while until they’re both giggling at their ridiculous behaviour.

Judy knocks back the rest of her glass and reaches back to place it on the counter. “I have a present for you.”

“Oh?” The playful feeling is ebbing away from Margot inexplicably, and she tries to hold on to it.

“I got you a ring after all.”

Judy slips the ring onto her finger: a small red garnet set in threads of rose gold that collect into a slim band. It’s stunning, and looks like it belongs just there on the ring finger of her left hand.

“Oh my god, Jude.” Margot keeps her voice light, as though she might bounce back if she can just get through the next few seconds. “It’s beautiful…” Though she wants to scream as the last of her cheerfulness slips away, she forces herself to smile. It’s what she would do if she felt normal.

Judy smiles a brilliant smile and admires how well it suits Margot. Then she folds her up in her arms and kisses her with far less ridiculousness and far more passion. Margot starts weeping as she gives into the unwarranted sadness that has been ambushing her lately at the most inappropriate times.

Judy just whispers, “I love you, Em,” and runs a hand through Margot’s loose curls. She knows not to ask what’s wrong. It’s nothing that Margot can put into words.

To their relief, the feeling passes more quickly than usual, and, soon, Margot is wiping her tears away and returning Judy’s kisses. Arms around waists, they return to the party, all smiles again.

Chapter End Notes
Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
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Abigail and Will do that thing where they tease each other until they’re both comfortable with their new dynamic. It’s cute or whatever.

It’s Abigail who falls asleep on the couch that afternoon, after a lunch of cheese on toast and a less than successful attempt at a salad.

It’s Will who picks up the phone when Hannibal calls.

“Abigail’s exhausted. Have you already made dinner?”

“It will keep until tomorrow. Will you be coming to dinner then?”

“I don’t know. Abigail’s the boss.”

“Perhaps I will speak with her later.”

“I hope so.”

“What do you mean, Will?”

“I may have been a little out of it these past few weeks, but I could be blind and deaf and I’d still be able to tell that you and Abigail are fighting.”

“Hm. It’s nothing for you to worry about. Do you have everything you need?”

“I have pills. Lots of them.”

“Clean dressings?”

“Yes.”

“Extra?”

“I don’t know. I have a first aid kit.”

Hannibal sighs. “Tell me, please, if you run out.”

“I’m not going to let it get infected. I’m quite liking not being in the hospital.”

“Hm.” Hannibal makes the noncommittal noise again. Will takes it to mean I don’t believe you, or, simply I don’t trust you to take care of yourself. “Get some rest, Will,” he says, finally. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”
When Hannibal hangs up the phone, he feels a tug of regret that he’d not been more ceremonious about Will’s release. Perhaps it was more important than he’d realized that he be there to take Will home. He hopes it doesn’t cost him too much.

Abigail wakes suddenly just after nightfall. She pokes her head out the front door and sees Will sitting on the steps just as she’d expected. “You ready to go?”

“We’re not going to Baltimore tonight. I don’t want you to have to drive anymore today.”

“I don’t mind.”

“It’s too late. I already talked to Hannibal.”

“Sorry, I fell asleep…” She joins him on the steps.

“You looked like you needed it, sweetheart, not gonna lie. Did you sleep at all at the hospital?”

Abigail smiles and blushes a little. “Yeah, I did, but your couch is comfier. What have you been doing?”

“I tried reading but it gave me a headache. So I just walked the dogs. There was a nice sunset.”

“Are you hungry?”

“Not really. I can cook something though, if you are.”

Abigail shakes her head. “Maybe in a little bit.” She consciously doesn’t insist that he just rest and not do anything. She’d rather Will didn’t end up strangling her.

“Were you there the whole time?”

“Whenever Hannibal let me be.”

Will wants to say sorry, and thank you, and you didn’t have to, and that was sweet of you, and I’m glad you were, all at once. None of these things make it around the lump in his throat. He says, “Bet you got a lot of reading done.”

Abigail smiles again, and nods, and Will can tell she got the message.

Still, he feels the need to correct something. “I’m sorry for what I said. I don’t know what it was but I remember snapping at you again…”

“If you apologize for anything that happened in the hospital, I will punch you.”

Will bursts out laughing, then winces. “I kind of feel like I’ve already been punched. In the brain.”

“Head hurting?”

“A little.”

“I should probably change that,” she says, indicating the dressing.

“Okay.”

“Cooperating already. What’s the catch?”
“I don’t think you need me to give you a hard time about this one. I imagine it’s a pretty gross job.”

“I watched a man eat his own face.”

Will lifts his eyebrows and nods. “True.”

“I’m glad you’re being cooperative though. I can pretend it’s disgusting and I hate changing your bandages if you stay all obedient like this.”

Will smiles and shakes his head. “I don’t think we need any more bizarre rituals.”

When she leaves to get supplies, he feels instantly unwell, but he thinks it’s probably due to his sudden and urgent need to cry.

“I shouldn’t have said anything when Hannibal called you in the hospital,” Abigail says when she reappears.

Will swallows.

“You didn’t want to talk to him and I should have left it alone. I was frustrated with him, not you.”

“Is that what I was mad about?” He squeezes his eyes shut and tries to recall the exchange. It’s fuzzy at best, and he knows he’ll just be embarrassed about it, so he stops.

Abigail just replies, “I think so,” and finishes bandaging him up. She piles the used dressing and antiseptic-soaked gauze next to her on the step. “You’re going to hate me for asking this.” She looks up at him warily. “Did you do any of the exercises you’re supposed to?”

He’s not annoyed, though he looks away self-consciously. “I did what I could… I need your help with…” He screws up his face and gestures to his left side, looking faint and slightly disgusted.

Hannibal calls again as Abigail is yawning over a saucepan of tomato soup. Neither she nor Will is hungry, but she slaps a couple slices of bread in the toaster all the same. Her conversation with Hannibal is short and to the point. He doesn’t sound like he’s forgiven her, and she’s still too upset with him to ask for forgiveness.

They eat their dinner in the living room, settled once again – finally – in their usual spots. The dogs flop down around them, heads on the floor or on one of their laps or over their feet. Will nods off as soon as he’s done, fingers tangled in Winston’s fur.

Abigail lets herself back into her own head, to reconcile the many Abigails that have existed over the past few weeks. Will is dozing on the couch just as she’d imagined him doing in the hospital, trying to believe what happened to him hadn’t happened. A chronically furious Abigail simmers just underneath the numb exo-Abigail, not bubbling over simply because Hannibal isn’t around to rile her up. Daughter Abigail wishes he was.

When Will opens his eyes, Abigail is curled up in the armchair across from him, resting her cheek against her hand and watching him seriously with big, bright eyes. He rubs his eyes and looks at her questioningly.

“I’m really glad you’re okay,” she whispers.
He holds out his arm and she goes to him, tucking herself against him with her head on his shoulder. The feeling of relief that accompanies his arm around her is akin to the one she’d felt the night they were reunited at Hannibal’s.

He kisses the top of her head, and she adds, “I’m really glad you’re home.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
A Chesapeake Ripper-Sized Splash

Chapter Summary

Hannibal continues to suck at being anything approaching warm and comforting. Will just kind of rolls with it, mostly. Abigail, however, may or may not lose her shit.

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warning: emotional abuse, gaslighting, fucked up nightmares

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The victims of TattleCrime.com have argued the validity of Freddie Lounds’ articles since day one, and, now, their accusations are publicly acknowledged as well-founded. There was no way Freddie could have anticipated this – that it would be her career that would suffer such a swift and surgical death. She’d expected a *quid pro quo* situation, maybe a little threatening, a little danger. She’d expected to use every ounce of cunning she possessed to get what she wanted. Well, Lecter had given her everything she wanted, no cunning required. Then he’d taken it all away. Worse, he’d stripped her of years’ worth of achievements. Her credibility is now being questioned right back to the beginning of TattleCrime.

The Baltimore Sun Photoshop Scandal leaves Freddie bewildered and defenseless, and her beloved public crying out for her blood. Her dedicated readership is now dedicated to spamming her inbox with graphic hate mail.

She sits alone, deposition-style, on one side of a conference table in the legal department of the Sun’s headquarters. The five faces across from her range from livid to bored. It’s the first time she’s felt intimidated in a long time. Even at Will Graham’s trial, being forced to admit she’d settled every time she’s been sued for libel, she’d barely batted an eye, and had left the courtroom with the exact same amount of self-confidence she’d had upon entering.

Now, she feels as though she’s about to pay for every slippery thing she’s ever done. Every police line she’s crossed, all the yellow tape she’s ducked under. Instead of stylish, she sees herself how her interrogators must see her: a tacky tabloid journalist who’d jumped out of the pond she should have stayed in. She might have worn something drab and forgivable, but she doesn’t own anything that isn’t vibrant in one way or another, so she might as well lean into it. She straightens up and sets her face in a supercilious smile.

“Miss Lounds, you’ve put us in a very uncomfortable position.”

“The Baltimore Sun hasn’t had to retract an article in fifteen years.”

“Not only has this been expensive to repair, but we’ve taken a serious hit to our credibility.”

“The bottom line is, you embarrassed us, Miss Lounds.”
Freddie tilts her head and calmly acknowledges each speaker in turn, her smile unwavering as she waits for the real bomb to drop.

“Luckily for you, it’s not worth the additional expense of pursuing legal action against you, so we are not suing.”

Freddie bites her tongue. She’s tempted to point out that the Sun had been so eager to make a Chesapeake-Ripper-sized splash, they’d neglected to fact check, or even screen for fake photos until after they’d run the story. If she weren’t so appalled at her own idiocy, she’d be appalled at the amateur manner in which they’d dealt with her article.

When she does speak, she keeps it concise, simply reiterating what she’d told them at the beginning of this nightmare. “I did not Photoshop Dr. Chilton into those photos. I don’t know how or why they were doctored, but I saw Chilton with my own eyes.” She adds, “If you speak to Jack Crawford, he can at least tell you Chilton’s alive.”

“Agent Crawford refused to comment.”

At that, Freddie all but throws up her hands, resigned to her fate. It was barely worth opening her mouth at all. Hannibal Lecter knows them all too well. She feels oddly serene, however, contemplating her desecrated reputation. She thinks part of her always knew her downfall was an inevitability, and is simply glad it had come about via such an intelligent design. Good game, Doctor. Good game.

When Abigail and Will arrive, Hannibal is coming up the stairs, wiping blackened fingers on a bit of Webril cloth. He ushers them into the dining room where the table is already laid. After washing up, he takes their dinner directly from the oven to the table. There is very little garnish on their plates, and Hannibal sticks a serving spoon right into the dish so they can help themselves. It’s all so out of character, Abigail and Will are confused into silence. Thus, dinner is quiet, and undeniably awkward.

Abigail eyes Hannibal suspiciously throughout the meal, and gains nothing from doing so. When they’re finished dessert, Hannibal apologizes and excuses himself, saying he needs to step out for a moment. Abigail doesn’t bother saying anything in return.

The moment is longer than a moment. It’s longer than an hour – almost two.

When Hannibal finally returns, Abigail is washing dishes, in a mood after helping Will settle in one of the guest bedrooms. “He said he didn’t want to presume,” she practically snarls, without even turning from the sink. She’s pissed right off that, after all her hard work, Hannibal and Will are back to circling each other warily, in an even wider orbit than before. They’d probably be content to leave it that way, too. Idiots.

Ignoring Abigail’s unpleasant behaviour, Hannibal takes clean dressings and a glass of water up to the guest room, mulling over the sleeping arrangements. He makes a conscious decision to sleep in the guest room after contemplating some rather crucial questions. First, would Will want him there? Second, would it be best, regardless of what Will wants? Third, would he, himself, be able to stand sleeping next to Will again?

Will is curled up on his left side, hand pressed into his stomach as though to repress an ache. He is
still tense, even when sleeping. Will wakes at the sting of antiseptic against his scalp. Hannibal thinks he might have to leave, because the sight of the wound makes him want to kill Will. Instead, he calmly finishes dressing it, discards the old bandage, then strips down and slips into the bed beside Will.

When Hannibal leans down and kisses him, Will immediately deepens the kiss. Hannibal pulls him into his arms fully, and Will’s good hand slides from the back of his neck up into his hair, before migrating down to rest against Hannibal’s cheek. As soon as Will touches his face, Hannibal freezes – just for half a second – then he holds Will tighter against himself, locking their lips together again.

Will slackens in his hold and drops his hand from Hannibal’s face. He doesn’t pull away, just becomes unresponsive. Hannibal slowly stops when he feels the kiss become a one-sided affair.

Looking down at Will, Hannibal sees that his eyes are open, but he is far away inside his own head again. A muscle in his jaw is working. Hannibal watches Will bite the inside of his cheek to still it, and, feeling Hannibal’s gaze on him, adamantly refuse eye contact. With a fingertip Hannibal traces Will’s cheek and jaw, then the curve of his nose, his hairline, and under his eyes. Some life returns to them, but all Will’s eyes reflect is turmoil. Hannibal watches him bite the inside of his lip and refuse eye contact. He kisses him gently on the lips and, caressing his cheek whispers, “Goodnight, Will.”

Will nods and closes his eyes, and his hand returns to his middle to clutch at the imagined pain there.

In the morning, Hannibal offers an olive branch to Abigail, and the two of them make breakfast together.

“Are you still mad at me?” she asks.

“Of course not, Abigail.”

She bites her lip and whisks a bowl of eggs for a minute before saying, “Don’t say of course. You’re not easy to read, and I know you know that.”

Hannibal takes the bowl from her with an inexplicable smile. “I am not angry with you, Abigail.”

It sounds like a lie, and, even if it’s not, the smile she responds with certainly is.

“Are you angry with me?” he returns.

“Not right now.”

“Good,” he says, squeezing her shoulder as he moves past her to turn on the stove. Speaking above the hiss of oil in the pan, he adds, “There’s no sense in wasting energy on hurt feelings. Not while Will is recovering.”

She feels heat in her cheeks, suspecting he knows exactly how backhanded he sounds, or, at least knows that that’s how she’ll interpret the comment, and isn’t doing anything about it. To hide her frown, she prepares a tray to take to Will and then leans against the island with her chin in her hands, fixated on the soufflé puffing up in the pan. She finds that watching Hannibal’s surgical yet performative method of slicing tomatoes and oranges – arranging the garnish with unnecessary flair – is soothing, despite the fact that he is the cause of her ruffled feathers.

Once the sting of his words dissipates, Abigail steers the conversation into safer waters. “Yesterday I did the exercises Nurse Adams taught me to help Will with,” she says softly, hoping that, if they just
talk about their one mutual interest, maybe they can stave off an argument for five minutes. It works, in that Hannibal gives her the majority of his attention as she continues. “Is it ever going to stop being awful for him? He hates it so much.”

“His arm you mean?”

Abigail nods. “He looks like he’s going to throw up or faint or something any time he tries to look at it. I don’t know what to do…”

“It’s a strange and, in Will’s case, extreme misapprehension, but, in time, yes, it will stop being awful by one means or another.”

“What do you mean?”

“Will could either overcome the delusion, and regain normal functionality of his arm, or, with practice, develop an algorithm of sorts—which will lead him from the initial assumption that the arm does not belong to him, to acceptance that it does.”

“Are you sure one of those will happen?”

“I wouldn’t be certain, except, we are discussing Will,” Hannibal answers simply.

Abigail smiles a little.

“For now,” Hannibal continues, “we must expect that it will be distressing for him every time it is brought to his attention. It will take time, and perseverance.”

Abigail rests her chin back in her hands and watches Hannibal plate their breakfasts. “I felt like I was doing something terrible to him,” she admits.

“Recovery often requires tough love. I imagine doubly so, in Will’s case.”

She lifts her eyes and sees Hannibal’s positively twinkle at her. “He warned me he’d be a difficult patient,” she says with a tentative laugh. She reaches for the tray. “Should I take this up to him?”

To her surprise, Hannibal says, “No. I’ll do that. You eat.” He brings a plate and fork over to her and she hops up onto a stool. Her stomach grumbles loudly as Hannibal leaves the room.

Will is halfway out of bed when Hannibal enters the room. His feet are on the floor but he got stuck after that step. Hearing the door open, he almost unbalances himself, swiveling around to bring Hannibal into view. “Oh god, don’t,” he says when he sees the breakfast tray.

Hannibal studies him for a moment before putting it down on the bedspread. “Just this once,” he says, diplomatically. “I wasn’t sure how you’d be feeling.”

“Okay.” Will pulls his legs back up onto the bed and picks up his fork half-heartedly. “Thank you.”

Hannibal sits on the edge of the bed and looks Will over. His tone is light and teasing when he says, “That was an invitation to tell me how you’re feeling.”

Will manages to lift a corner of his mouth in a minute smile. “I don’t know,” he answers honestly.

“Does anything hurt?” Hannibal prompts gently.
Will swallows the forkful he’s chewing and takes stock of his own body. “Um…” He pinches his eyebrows together, unwilling to say.

Hannibal tilts Will’s chin up with his hand so Will is forced to make transient eye contact with him. “Tell me.”

“I ache everywhere. But…” He shakes his head, freeing his face from Hannibal’s grip. He can’t find the words, and isn’t sure he wants to. “But it’s not that bad,” he finishes, weakly.

Hannibal narrows his eyes. “That’s not what you were going to say, Will.”

His voice is stern and doctorly, and Will imagines that his expression matches his tone. He feels a prickle of indignation. “I don’t want to say.”

“I would like you to. I’m here to help, Will.”

Will frowns and looks away entirely. “I feel like it might just be in my head. The pain. I don’t know how to explain.”

Hannibal stands and moves to the bathroom for materials to change Will’s bandage. “Pain is often psychological, a fact that does not make it less of a discomfort to those experiencing it.” When he returns to the bedside he sees that Will has polished off exactly half of his food.

“Thank you for breakfast,” Will says, though the left side of his plate is untouched. He squeezes his eyes shut as Hannibal removes the dressing.

Hannibal cleans the wound and, while covering it with a clean dressing, tells Will that he’ll take out these stitches tomorrow.

Will doesn’t answer. He’s looking down at his plate, stupefied. In his mind, there is no explanation for how it refilled itself. He puts down his fork with attempted calm and pushes the tray away.

That afternoon, Jack calls Will, clearly so desperate for insight that he’s decided to risk Hannibal’s wrath. Will is already rattled from this morning, and the conversation does not go well.

“Will. Are you out of the hospital yet?”

“Hi, Jack.”

He hears Jack sigh as he backtracks and asks the more humane question, “How are you?”

“Alive.”

“That’s good. Other people aren’t.”

*Back to business.*

“I’m grasping at straws here, or I wouldn’t ask…”

“Yes, you would.”

“Okay, I probably would. There’s been another medieval murder or whatever you want to call it. Has to be the same guy as before but we still have nothing on him.”
Will wants nothing more than to hang up on Jack. He feels a giant wave of guilt ready to crash over him, when he realizes it’s because he doesn’t care. “I want to help you catch him, Jack,” he lies, “but I can’t. There’s no way Hannibal will let me.” It’s easier than asking himself whether he just doesn’t care about this one, or if he doesn’t care at all anymore.

“Hannibal? Let you? Will –” Jack is incredulous. When Will offers no context, he sighs once more and says, “Okay. Where are you at right now? With Hannibal?”

Too tired and confused and in pain to walk Jack through an explanation – even a fake one – Will just says, “Forget the plan, Jack. It’s not going to work.”

“What the hell is going on between you two?” Jack does not like mute Will Graham. “Whose side are you on?”

“I’m not on anyone’s side anymore.” Alarmed at the unevenness of his own voice, Will puts an end to the conversation. “Please, Jack, just leave me alone. I’m done.” When he hangs up, Will wonders, for some reason, if that is the last conversation he’ll have with Jack Crawford.

At dinner that night, Will confesses, “I talked to Jack today.”

Hannibal has been observing Will systematically eat the food on his plate from the outside edges of the right half to the middle. The left side of his plate is ignored entirely. Now overtly curious, Hannibal tilts his head and asks, “What did you discuss?”

“He wants my help with the medieval murders. I said no.”

For the first time in weeks, Will is able to read Hannibal’s expression. It is a quickly revolving dais featuring feral anger towards Jack on one side, and pride in Will on the other.

“Just the medieval murders? No others?”

“No. Well, not that he said. Why?” Will is confused by the words that accompany Hannibal’s expression.

Hannibal pauses for no more than a second, but Will is so used to that pause preceding lies or half-truths that he recognizes it anyway. “Jack has a history of expecting more than he solicits,” is all Hannibal says.

Will decides he doesn’t have the energy to pursue it, and, besides, Abigail is saying, I can’t believe he had the nerve to ask you, frowning deeply. Will shrugs. “If there’s one thing Jack has in abundance, it’s nerve.”

“I think you made a wise decision, Will,” Hannibal asserts.

“I don’t think I’m up to it anyway,” Will mumbles.

Hannibal puts his hand on Will’s good arm. “It’s important to recognize your limitations, even the temporary ones, and not to apologize for doing what’s best for your recovery.”

Will slowly brings his eyes up to meet Hannibal’s, appreciative of the reassurance, but embarrassed at his need for it. He nods and smiles a little.

The smile disappears when he looks back down and finds that, again, he hasn’t touched a bite of his
dinner.

Will watches Abigail and Hannibal wash and dry the dishes from the armchair in the corner of the kitchen, feeling useless, sore, and tired.

When she sees his eyes start to close, Abigail orders him to go to bed, then in a less severe tone, says she’ll bring Will breakfast in the morning.

Predictably, he shakes his head. “I’ll let you do the things I can’t do, but I can walk. I don’t want you waiting on me…”

Hannibal dries his hands and crosses the kitchen to Will. “Abigail is right,” he says, holding out his hand. “You should sleep soon.”

Will takes his hand, and Hannibal hardly knows what to do with this cooperation. As they leave the kitchen, Will definitely feeling sleepier than the hour calls for, Hannibal says quietly but firmly, “You will sleep in my bedroom, with me, from now on.”

They establish a routine over the next week or so. It’s not the comforting kind of routine, but they settle into it the same way they settle in for dinner every night. That is, without complaint, but still awkwardly and, for the most part, wordlessly. In general, Abigail finds herself keeping on Will’s left side to prevent him gradually veering off his course or clipping corners. Will doesn’t comment, but she knows that he knows she’s keeping an eye on him.

Hannibal doesn’t know how to approach an unexpectedly pliant Will. He is unaware, at first, of how his subtle adjustments in response to Will’s skewed spatial perception is affecting Will. Without much thought initially, he twists Will’s half-cleared plate around so that Will can see and eat all of his meal. Will pales every time Hannibal does this, and Hannibal realizes that Will thinks he is hallucinating either the first or second half of his meal. He feels the same burning curiosity he’d felt upon recognizing the smell of encephalitis on him over a year ago. He’s careful not to act on that curiosity too much when Will has had a bad day, but it’s an ever-present temptation.

Physio goes poorly most days. For Will, it is confusing – psychological, rather than physical exercise – and it winds him up even tighter, offering no sense of accomplishment. The images of his two selves – the complete and the incomplete – either merge into one, or they don’t.

“I’m sorry,” Abigail says every time she’s tasked with doing Will’s passive exercises. “You know I have to do this…”

When he looks at Abigail and follows her movements down to where her hands are clasped, suddenly nothing makes sense. When he covers his eyes with his good hand and turns his head away again, the world rights itself.

Hannibal is more ruthless. He makes Will watch as he works his arm for him, and asks if he can feel anything when he squeezes along its length. Will swallows back rising bile. When Hannibal is finished, Will retreats to an empty part of the house and lets himself go to pieces.

He tries to tell himself that he’s not failing miserably at whatever it is he’s supposed to be doing, and that Abigail and Hannibal aren’t frustrated with him, but, every so often, Hannibal quite obviously is.

“When can I drive again?” Will asks one evening.
Hannibal answers shortly, “When you can put both hands on the wheel.”

Things get uglier the next day when several hospital bills arrive. Will feels like he’s been gutted when he sees the figures.

“How are these addressed to you?” Will asks, sharper than intended, when Hannibal comes up from the cellar and joins him in the front hall.

“I’m sure you don’t actually require an explanation,” Hannibal answers mildly.

Will drops the offensive papers onto the phone table and rubs his hand over his face. “This is ridiculous,” he says, barely audible.

“This?”

Hannibal has been laconic and, quite often, dismissive since Will’s surgery. More so since Will’s release, so Will isn’t prepared to have any kind of actual conversation. “All of this,” he says lamely. “I want to ask why you’re doing any of it, but I don’t know if that even matters.”

Will has tears in his eyes. He is overwhelmed and clearly in a castigatory state. Hannibal ignores this. He has spent the morning in the basement, admiring and detailing his artwork, and he’s feeling predatory.

“All of this,” Hannibal annunciates, “could have been avoided, Will. Why did you not tell me about the severity of your headaches, or the hallucinations?”

Will doesn’t appreciate being reprimanded when he’s already angry with himself. Though he’s lost the battle against his tears and they spill freely down his cheeks, he makes that known immediately. “So you could’ve told me I’m mentally ill again?” he spits back at Hannibal. His voice is low and bitter, and does not invite an actual answer.

The creature Will is much steadier now. His skin is no longer grey, but a translucent white, so every blood vessel is visible, blood pulsing beneath it, black as tar. He holds his arm up to inspect it in the moonlight. The tips of his fingers are slippery and he rubs the substance between them. It looks and feels like motor oil. He looks down and sees more of the same running in rivulets down his chest. It is frightening and mesmerizing.

Then the creature Abigail is at his side, taking his other hand in hers. He turns to her and strokes her feathers. They flutter in response to his touch. Even though her skin is coal black and opaque, he can somehow see that the blood coursing below its surface is still red. He strokes her cheek. She smiles, then flicks her eyes to just over Will’s shoulder.

He feels the wendigo whisper past him and come to stand behind Abigail. It places a hand on her shoulder and holds the other out to Will. Will looks down at it, not sure if anything flows beneath the leathery exterior. He looks a second too long – waits a second too long. The wendigo withdraws the offer. The hand moves to Abigail’s neck. Its fingers barely graze her throat, but it is a menacing move, and then the wendigo fades away into the night.

Abigail’s smile slowly fades with it. A thin, dark line appears where the wendigo had touched her. It bleeds and bleeds.
He watches paralyzed as her life spills over her fingers, coating them black. Black like oil. When she falls forward, she grabs at him desperately, plunging her bloody hand into his chest. She finds no hold there. She tears his heart out when she falls to the ground, and holds it to her chest as she fades.

The ruffling of feathers stops, and her warm hand cools in his. His own blood mingles with hers. As it pours from his chest it becomes a waterfall of crimson that stems from the rivers of black that are his arteries and veins. Out of the corner of his eye he thinks he sees antlers. When he turns his head, they have gone.

He realizes how utterly silent it is here in the clearing, and wonders if the ambient noise from before was all just Abigail’s beating heart, the ruffle of feathers, and laughter.

Hannibal doesn’t know if Will is even awake, but his hand is clasped tightly around Hannibal’s wrist. His voice is muffled by the pillows. “Sorry, sorry, sorry,” he repeats. “I’m sorry.”

Abigail spends most of her time combating the despair she feels closing in on her. Now and then, when her determination takes over, she brings the fight to Hannibal.

“He’s grateful to you for taking care of him!”

“He was also the first among us to admit that gratitude has a short half-life.”

When she’s not playing middleman, she trails Will around the house, or locks herself in her room, trying to complete the first unit in her online calculus textbook before she sees Margot on Monday.

On Saturday night, she deems it prudent to tell Will and Hannibal about Margot’s proposal.

She joins them in the study some time after dinner, and Will has the familiar sense that she’s bringing fresh air in with her.

“Margot offered me a job,” she says, getting straight to the point.

Hannibal looks stony and uninterested. Will waits for her to say more.

“I start on Monday,” is all she adds.

“Well, you work fast.” Will smiles around a yawn.

She looks at the clock on Hannibal’s desk and blurts out, “Shouldn’t you be in bed?”

Will colours, but doesn’t look annoyed by the question. He shrugs. “I’m alright.” A few minutes later he’s asleep in his chair.

Abigail is about to retire to her room when Hannibal speaks. His voice is soft, but disapproving to the point of sounding menacing. “You did not ask either of us for permission.”

Abigail swallows, but doesn’t yield to his expectation of an apology. “Why should I have?”

When Hannibal leans back and folds his hands in his lap with an icy stare directed at her, it doesn’t matter that he’s dressed down, as he has been for days now. Even in arguably casual clothing, he looks dangerously capable of taking a life.

“Because we are your fathers.”
In her time with Hannibal, hiding while Will was in prison, she’d grown bold. Bold enough to ask questions she probably shouldn’t have. She wonders, fleetingly, if she’d grown too bold. If the life he looks so capable of taking could still be hers. More important to her in this moment, though, is the idea that her faith in their little family might be what blinded her to this possibility.

It doesn’t really matter which of these thoughts is foremost in her mind. Her stance is the same. She squares her shoulders and asks, boldly, “Will you still be my father if Will dies?”

The look Hannibal gives her is inhuman. Abigail has to use all her willpower not to run.

Chapter End Notes

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Sunday finds both Will and Abigail unable, or unwilling, to leave their respective rooms. Still subject to the whims of his weakened body, Will is ill enough to stay in bed with the lights off and covers pulled over his head for good measure. Abigail is still smarting from her latest spat with Hannibal, and burrows in a nest of blankets, escaping into a book. She only manages to stir herself to check up on Will a few times, and, even then, it’s an effort to leave her safe zone.

Hannibal returns home mid-afternoon and considers which to take care of first. Even waving a white flag and carrying a fresh olive branch, a conversation with Abigail is likely to end with her shouting at him, or in tears, or both. Will has been particularly gloomy since his confrontation with Hannibal, and, at times, almost meek. Hannibal finds this watered-down version of his chosen partner irksome.

Abigail is apparently tired of fighting. When Hannibal presents her with a new driver’s license, social insurance card, and passport, all carrying the name Sarah Graham, she just says, thank you, and asks if she can help make dinner.

He smiles and strokes her hair once, and sends her to the kitchen with instructions for a marinade.

“I think he wants to be alone,” she calls after him, when she sees Hannibal is headed towards his bedroom. She doesn’t believe she has any real hope of stopping him, and, to corroborate this, he goes to check in on Will anyway.

Will is hunched over the toilet, retching. Hannibal crouches beside him and pushes his curls back to feel his forehead. No fever. He doesn’t ask if Will has eaten anything. It’s clear he hasn’t. He smooths a hand down Will’s back. “I’m going to take you for an angiogram tomorrow.”

Will is too nauseated and miserable to ask what the hell for.
In the kitchen, Abigail is thinking about how her words probably don’t permeate Hannibal’s human veil at all anymore. About how Hannibal talks to her now like she’s no one special – like they’re not bound together, if not by love, at least by blood. Will doesn’t say much these days – even less than usual – but it seems, to her, that Hannibal is just as closed off towards him. At best, they are a case study in family trauma for Hannibal to study objectively, with professional detachment. At worst – she can’t even begin to imagine.

No one gets those precise, infrequent gestures of caring from Hannibal – the ones that light up Abigail’s memories and made her feel warm, and kept, and loved, because they were so rare and true. Not anymore. Even Hannibal’s gift of a new identity seems calculated, carrying another agenda. Maybe he doesn’t want her around anymore, so he’s giving her a way out. She doesn’t believe for a moment that he wants to make her feel better.

She decides to stop aiming for anything beyond civility for now, and focuses on information. Hannibal telling her the truth always seemed to bring out calm-and-capable Abigail. She doesn’t feel like being angry-and-wounded Abigail.

When Hannibal comes into the kitchen, she asks, without preamble, “Why are they calling you the Ghost of the Chesapeake Ripper?”

Hannibal doesn’t hesitate in his reply, and his explanation is succinct. “The Ghost kills and displays his victims in the same style as the Ripper, but without taking surgical trophies.”

Abigail wonders how long he’d had an answer prepared, knowing that, one day, she would start asking questions again. “Are you killing them here?”

“You know I have no more locked doors, Abigail,” Hannibal says, by way of response.

Finished with her task, and with most of the afternoon still left before she’d find out if she’d followed Hannibal’s instructions satisfactorily, Abigail spends the next few hours exploring. She takes their brief exchange as implicit permission – perhaps even an invitation. The trap door to the basement is well camouflaged, but she is looking for it, and finds it fairly quickly.

The basement is largely empty space. She’s about to leave when a gust of air from opening the trap door makes the tapestry covering the far wall flutter. She goes back to inspect it, and finds it isn’t attached at the bottom, and the top hangs from a rod. She pushes it aside, coming face to face with what must be every single one of Hannibal’s victims, documented in a charcoal collage of murder tableaus.

It must be all of them. This mural covers so much of the wall already, the idea that there are other murals – even if they exist only in Hannibal’s mind – is too overwhelming. She’s relieved, then, to find Grutas and his men among those depicted. Hannibal had described his first kills to her in such detail, she recognizes each scene right away.

Still, Abigail feels acutely insignificant next to Hannibal’s vast body of work. She’d thought their current storyline was the most important, and that their family would be Hannibal’s greatest achievement. She suddenly feels she’d been very wrong. Again. The feeling makes itself at home when her eyes come across his depiction of Beverly Katz’s murder. It’s beautiful – of course it is – but so is every other scene. If she steps back, there is nothing that makes hers particularly stand out. It is nestled in a complex work, each scene created with such attention to detail, that Katz’s death is integral to the composition, but in the way a single brushstroke is to an oil painting.
Abigail pulls the tapestry doubling as a curtain back over the mural and ascends, first into the cellar, then the pantry, and, finally, she rejoins Hannibal in the kitchen.

Will doesn’t surface, and Abigail is very quiet for the rest of the evening.

Monday morning, Abigail leaves early for Muskrat Farm. It occurs to her on the road that she should really ask Will if she can keep using his car. If he’s feeling better, she’ll ask him tonight.

She approaches the Verger Estate from the southwest this time, crossing over an ornamental bridge, and buzzing at the main gate. Through the wrought-iron bars she can see green grass and purple and white lilacs bordering two sides of the courtyard. She doesn’t recognize the voice on the intercom, but it’s Margot who meets her in the courtyard and takes her up to the house.

Margot is dressed in sharp angles. Her hair is smoothed back into a high French roll, her eyeliner and lipstick are as dark as ever, and she is somehow pulling off shoulder pads. With the burnt orange of her jacket and the gold draped around her neck she looks like a Klimt painting. Abigail likes the way she looks: in charge, and in control. Severe again, though she has a smile for Abigail.

The morning is spent with Margot in the security office, where she explains basic protocol to Abigail and helps her familiarize herself with the equipment.

“So, am I like a watchman?” Abigail asks, spinning on the wheely office chair to face Margot, where she leans against a desk next to the numerous screens.

“Only sometimes,” Margot answers. “It just seems like the logical place for you to start. You’ll probably end up assisting Judy most of the time, and doing lots of boring paperwork and running errands.”

“Really?”

Margot looks at her quizzically. Abigail sounds uncharacteristically nervous.

“I mean… That sounds awesome, but, you know, I don’t have a whole lot of work experience…”

Margot nods. “I know. Don’t worry. It’s not necessary. Things operate a little differently around here… I need someone I can trust.”

Abigail feels little butterflies of pride flit about in her stomach. Before she figures out the proper way to thank Margot, Judy comes into the office with a tray of coffees in one hand and a couple of file folders under her arm.

“Hi Abigail,” she greets her. “I don’t know how you like your coffee so I took a chance with two creams and two sugars. We’ll show you the kitchens later and you can just make your own in the future.”

The three of them sit at the small table in the middle of the room. It is already home to several piles of paper and a swatch of post it notes. Judy adds her files to the mix.

“How was your morning?” she asks, directing the question at both Abigail and Margot.

Margot speaks up first. “I think Abigail will pick everything up pretty quickly.”

Abigail smiles and blushes. “I’m supposed to be your assistant?”
“That’s the idea. I’m a little overwhelmed. Margot mentioned that you wanted to do something in exchange for tutoring, so, if you can do the job, it’s yours.”

“Okay. I’ll do my best.”

“I have some pretty pointless paperwork to go through with you. I know that you’re considered dead by most authorities and therefore can’t technically work here, so it’s more just something to refer back to, so you know what’s expected of you and what you can expect of us.”

Abigail looks down at the first sheet, an employment contract. Scanning the page, she sees the terms part time and hourly, and $12.75/hr with raise up to $16.50/hr after 3-month probation period.

“Wait, you’re paying me?”

“Of course. I don’t think tutoring once a week is quite enough,” Judy answers, smiling. “I plan on putting you to work.”

“Could I use my new name and SIN?” Abigail pulls out Sarah Graham’s ID.

Judy looks surprised. “Yeah, I guess so. I assumed we’d be paying you under the table, but this works too. Can I see?”

Abigail holds out her driver’s license.

“How did Dr. Lecter get such a serious photo of you?”

Abigail shrugs and says, “It’s my old driver’s license photo. I’ve given up on how when it comes to anything Hannibal does.”

Judy chuckles and hands her ID back. “Probably a waste of energy wondering.”

The second piece of now not-so-pointless paperwork is a non-disclosure agreement.

“It goes without saying, but you’ll be privy to some confidential information.”

Abigail nods and says, without feeling, “I don’t have anyone to talk to about work anyway.”

“I know, darling,” Judy says kindly. She stands and collects the files. “Let’s show you the rest of the house.”

It’s vast. If every member of the Verger family from the past two generations had an entire wing to themselves, there would still be rooms left over. The tour starts at the top of the house and they work their way down, bypassing most rooms on the second floor – clearly bedrooms. There is a short flight of stairs at the end of the East Wing that leads up into what is obviously an extension. They hadn’t bothered with a transition from the Beaux-Arts style of the main house, to the black and chrome minimalist design of the new wing. Instead, it sticks out from the eastern elevation like an extra limb attached in a grotesque medical experiment. Abigail can guess what, and who, is down there.

When they get to the kitchen, it’s about one o’clock in the afternoon. There is a hot lunch waiting for them. Margot, Judy, and Abigail sit on stools around the large marble island, and, dismissed by Judy, the three-person kitchen staff take off their aprons and go on their own lunch break. “By the way, you don’t need to bring a lunch,” Judy says. “We’ll feed you.”
“How should I dress?” Abigail had only ever worked at a fast food restaurant where a uniform was provided. That had been a short-lived experiment, since her dad would always comment that she smelled like deep-fried murder.

Judy swallows a bite of steak and kidney pie. “Business casual. In case I need you to give people orders. You can wear the scarf if you want to, but you don’t have to.”

“But…” After months of taking painstaking care not to show her face let alone her scar to anyone, the idea of the entire staff of Muskrat Farm being able to see it is as frightening as much as it is liberating.

Margot understands right away. “All our employees have signed confidentiality agreements, and, frankly, they’re used to keeping bigger secrets.”

“Anyway,” Judy adds, “I hate to say it, but most of them will have already forgotten your story.”

Abigail nods, though she’s not entirely convinced.

Judy goes on to explain that there’s a reason they haven’t brought Abigail on until now. “We’ve been weeding out Mason’s men. It’s also why we’ve been so busy. Not an easy job, but everyone who is left has only ever been on Mason’s public payroll, not his private one.”

“Didn’t that just make you a bunch of enemies?”

Margot shakes her head. “Judy found all of Mason’s people jobs elsewhere. Hopefully, none of them are so devoted to Mason that they’ll risk those jobs for revenge on his behalf.”

When they’re finished their lunch, Judy shows Abigail how to use the espresso machine. “I’m only half joking when I say most of your job will be running coffee.”

Abigail is a little more relaxed with a full stomach and a good chunk of her orientation finished, but she tenses again when she looks over at Margot. Her face is pinched, and she looks fragile and unhappy all of a sudden. Abigail is used to Will’s mood swings, but Margot had just gone from day to night, skipping over the sunset, when nothing obvious had happened that could account for this.

Clearly already aware of Margot’s turn for the worse, Judy suggests Abigail go check out the grounds for an hour.

Abigail doesn’t think it would be professional to hug her boss in the workplace, so she lets Margot and Judy be, and takes her drink outside.

Afraid of getting lost, she doesn’t wander far. It’s unusually hot for May, so she mostly stays in the shade of the mansion, exploring its perimeter. She crunches along a driveway of white gravel and finds herself behind what must be a guest house. Sitting on a low wall that separates the drive from the fresh-cut lawn, is Dr. Matthew’s doppelganger. He has the same wideset eyes and rubbery-looking skin, only he’s a little bigger and has cropped hair.

Abigail crunches over to him. “Hi.”

The man switches his cigarette to his left hand and holds out his right to Abigail. She shakes, it and joins him on the wall.

“New?” he asks.

She nods and smiles at him. “Abigail.”
“Barney.” He smiles back and offers her a slightly squashed pack of smokes. She sees the same small teeth set in prominent gums. He’s definitely related to Dr. Matthews.

She plucks out a cigarette and lets him light it for her. She does it to be polite maybe. Or, maybe because she’s been thinking about her father. Along with fast food restaurants, smoking was at the top of Dad’s disapproves of list. He’d said it was just as important to honor her own body as anything – anyone – else’s. The thought of taking up smoking as a rebellion against Hannibal, his need for control, and his refined nose doesn’t occur to her until later.

“What do you do here?” Abigail asks. She takes a small drag of her cigarette. She’d known enough people who smoked to grasp how it was done. She’d also seen enough of her friends try it to know not to be over-eager on her first puff, unless she wanted to start coughing all over her new acquaintance.

“I take care of Mr. Verger.”

“Oh, are you new here, too, then?”

“No. I’ve been here almost three years now.”

“But the accident was only a few months ago.” Abigail snaps her mouth shut too late.

Barney doesn’t seem to think it’s strange that she knows this. He shrugs his muscular shoulders and butts his cigarette out against the bricks beside his left leg. “The Vergers have always had a small medical wing to deal with workplace injuries – at the packing plant usually,” he explains.

“Oh.”

He lights another smoke and starts to offer her the pack again. She’s barely halfway through her first one, since she’s only taking tiny puffs. He smiles a little. “Did I corrupt you?”

She studies the smoke that just hovers around her when she exhales, in contrast to the directed streams coming from Barney’s mouth. It’s pretty obvious. She smiles back somewhat shyly in response.

“So, what have they got you doing here?”

“I don’t really know yet. Probably running errands. Are you a doctor?”

“Nah. I’m an LPN. Before this gig I was an orderly at a mental hospital… so basically a security guard.”

“Which hospital?”

“Baltimore State.”

“Jesus… That’s probably all you need on your resume.”

“Mhm,” he agrees. “I was there six years, too. I have to use the gym here ‘cause I feel like I’ll get flabby. This is a pretty cushy job.”

He’s looking at her, shrewdly, Abigail thinks, maybe trying to decide if the new girl is worth getting to know. “I don’t really have anything to compare it to,” she admits.

“This your first job?”
“Well, no. But I don’t think two months at a McDonald’s counts for much.”

“Huh. Family connections?”

Before she can stop herself, she shoots him a sharp glare. She drops it almost immediately. It’s fair for him to wonder how she got hired. She forgets everything and beams when a beautiful dark grey Weimaraner rounds the corner of the house. She butts out her cigarette quickly and crouches down to greet him.

The dog is dignified in his affection, almost posing as he noses at her hair. She runs her hands over his smooth, short fur, and he wags his docked tail in approval.

“Klinsy!”

She hears Judy calling and she soon joins their little party. She has shed her blazer, but still looks professional in a sleeveless silk button-up and fancy black slacks. Her top is taupe, and Abigail thinks how much she would look like a continuation of the Klimt painting, standing next to Margot. Abigail had done her best to look good for her first day, but that still meant cotton and denim.

“Hello, Mr. Matthews.”

“Afternoon, Ms. Ingram.” Barney collects his butts and Abigail’s one contribution. “See you around – can I call you Abby? My aunt’s name is Abigail.”

She shrugs and smiles. “Sure. You’ll be the first. Thanks for the smoke,” she remembers to say before he takes off.

“Made a friend already,” Judy comments. “Or two.” She grins down at where Abigail is receiving gentle kisses from the stately dog in her arms. “This is Klinsmann.”

“Hi, Klinsmann.” Abigail gives him a final pat right on the top of his head before standing.

“Margot isn’t feeling well,” Judy tells her as they walk back around the house. “And I’m afraid I didn’t plan anything for you this afternoon.”

“That’s okay,” Abigail says. “I need to go figure out what constitutes business casual. I definitely don’t own slacks.”

Judy laughs. “Well, I recommend them. They’re a great way to instantly look like you’re the boss. I’ll just show you my office, so you can meet me there tomorrow. And I’ll give you a personal code for the side gate. There’s no sense in you coming all the way up the main drive every day.”

As Judy is walking her back to her car about twenty minutes later, Abigail works up the courage to ask, “Can I see Mason?”

Judy doesn’t seem to think it a strange request. “Maybe tomorrow. More likely Wednesday.”

Abigail says, somewhat awkwardly. “Will you give Margot a hug for me?”

“Of course, darling. And, even though I know he’ll probably refuse, please tell Will that if he ever needs to go anywhere, we can send a car for him. I feel a little guilty about stealing you away.”

Abigail nods and chuckles. “He’s almost definitely going to refuse. But I’ll tell him. Thanks.”
“See you tomorrow, Abigail. Nine o’clock, okay?”

Hannibal takes Will to Johns Hopkins. Naturally, he doesn’t need to make an appointment. He still has sway here.

“Have you made any progress with your physiotherapy?” the neurologist asks, while Will tries not to hurl all over his desk.

Will shakes his head.

“Some,” Hannibal counters generously. He puts his hand on Will’s shoulder, then strokes it down his back.

He thinks to shake Hannibal off, since he’s quite obviously only touching him to indicate to the other doctor that Will is his possession. He doesn’t think it would do to be rude right now, though. “I don’t understand why I’m here,” he says instead.

“The worry is that vomiting can sometimes be an indicator of bleeding,” the neurologist explains. “Have you had any more seizures?”

“Not that I’m aware of.” Will swallows, heart sinking. “Is that something I should expect?”

“Generalized seizures are sometimes a complication of a hemorrhagic stroke.”

“And those are the good kind?” Will asks mordantly.

The doctor looks at him blankly, and, after a moment, simply asks if he’ll need a sedative during the scan.

Will hands his glasses over to Hannibal and dons the paper gown he’s given, trying to ignore the familiar semi-exposure, and how it makes him feel like he’s about to be imprisoned for a long time.

The back of Will’s left hand is still purple and yellow from his recent hospital stay. He doesn’t feel the bruise, but, when the time comes to inject the contrast agent, the doctor inserts the catheter in his other hand anyway.

The MRI isn’t as bad as he remembers, perhaps due to the lack of waking nightmares and visions of himself cutting up Beth LeBeau’s face. Afterwards, when Will is dressed again, the doctor ushers them back to his office.

“It will take one to two days for the complete results,” he tells them as they sit.

Hannibal decides he will get them the next morning.

“As of right now, though, there’s no sign of another bleed. I know the surgeon at UMD is extremely thorough, so I’m sure he clipped anything that might be in danger of rupturing.”

Will doesn’t look at either of them when he says, drily, “So it’s psychological.” This is the second time those words have come out of his mouth after a brain scan. How many more times would he have to go through this before his body started cooperating? Or shut down completely? Just pick one already, he thinks.

“Not necessarily,” the doctor counters. “You might just be feeling unbalanced from favouring your right side, and from trying to adjust to the shift in your vision. Like motion sickness. I’d like you to
consider regular CVS\textsuperscript{2} treatment.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Will sees Hannibal’s nostrils flare slightly. Not wanting to deal with why right now, he looks away.

“I’m sure Dr. Lecter can explain if you have somewhere to be,” the doctor finishes quickly, seeing Will’s gaze fixed on the clock above his head and assuming they are in a rush. “In the meantime, I’ll write you a prescription for some antiemetics.”

“More drugs.” Will is dismayed.

“Yes, but they won’t interfere with your other medications, so not to worry.” He hands over the script and Will takes it mutely. They fill it on the way back to Hannibal’s house, and Will doesn’t object to this addition to his regime. He is sullen but compliant again, sunk into a mire of self-loathing that Hannibal refuses to wade through.

While Hannibal is driving home, Abigail is driving to Wolf Trap to feed the dogs and take them out for a bit.

She thinks about her conversation with Barney. It had left her feeling that everything is interconnected, in ways that remain invisible until stumbled upon. The feeling that, even when they go to Italy, someone there will know someone here, will have sat in the same chair at some café as someone who is related to someone who knows Barney. And, now, Barney knows her. She doesn’t know if the thought is comforting or unsettling, or even worth having thought.

At Will’s house, she picks up the free district paper that gets delivered to his porch once a week. She knows that Will doesn’t read it, he just hasn’t bothered to take his address off the delivery route. It’s a sorry excuse for a newspaper, printed on cheap off-white paper with ink that makes her fingers come away extra-black. The news it reports tends to not be news anymore, and the articles are poor derivatives of the more fleshed-out articles in the Baltimore Sun or on TattleCrime.com. As the only paper in Virginia that publishes exclusively on Mondays, it’s more of a recap of the previous week. Sometimes Abigail keeps them around for a day or so to do the puzzles.

She lets the dogs out and flips through the paper to find the crossword. A miniscule article on the page before it catches her attention.

**Jack Crawford of BAU Under Investigation**

It’s a terrible title. She wouldn’t have even glanced at the story, except that Jack is named explicitly. As she’d expected, the article tells her nothing useful. She feels something brush against her knees and looks down to find the dogs retreating back into the cool of the house. She’s still standing with her heel propping open the screen door, her hair lifted statically against the mesh. She smooths it down and goes inside to refill the food and water bowls for the dogs.

Only Winston isn’t flopped over lethargically. He laps up some water and looks up at her lovingly. She wonders if they miss Will and that’s why they’re so lazy. She scratches under Winston’s chin and spends a little time cuddling the others. “I’ll bring him back soon,” she croons, rumpling greasy fur. She wrinkles her nose. “But not until I give you guys a bath. You’re getting gross.”

Buster yips indignantly at her when she says the word *bath.*
On the way back to Baltimore, she stops at a gas station and asks the man behind the counter if he has any papers from last week. He rifles through a box of recycling under the counter and pulls out a crumpled Sun from Friday. She offers to pay for it, but he waves away the $1.50 she holds out. On impulse, she buys a pack of cigarettes and, with an inexplicable flush of pride, produces her new ID.

At Hannibal’s, she leaves the packet of cigarettes in the glove compartment, but brings the newspaper and her two bags of business casual purchases with her into the house. Neither Hannibal nor Will is on the main floor. She dumps her bags somewhat defiantly in the front hall and makes her way to the kitchen. Because she’s feeling particularly adult, she pours herself a glass from the apparently self-replenishing bottle of white wine in the fridge.

On the back porch, she spreads the paper out. The front page article is not just about Jack; the headline hints that the entire FBI is going to come under scrutiny over the next few pages. It ends up being a seven page feature insinuating that Jack and Freddie Lounds were conspiring to forestall Miriam Lass’s trial by making up stories about escaped convicts. It also points fingers at the Bureau as a whole for keeping such a shady character on as the head of the Behavioral Analysis Unit. Somehow, they’d found out about Bella and had passed the judgement that Jack should be forced to retire. To wrap it all up, there are three censored photos and two pages on the latest serial killer the FBI is failing to apprehend. They’re calling him the Carpenter.

“You shouldn’t look at that shit, Abigail.”

She turns to see Will leaning heavily against the frame of the back door and frowning at the newspaper.

“Did you read this?” she asks.

He shakes his head.

She sips her wine and pushes the paper aside. “Come sit down.”

When he joins her, she takes his left arm and starts massaging it absently while thinking over the article. “I don’t know if the Carpenter is a great name for a serial killer,” she muses aloud, when she realizes they’ve been sitting in silence for quite a while.

“It’s because he makes his own instruments of torture out of wood.” Will’s voice is strained. He’s trying to make himself watch her hands work, and it’s making him sweat.

Abigail looks over at the photos. “Is this the case you were working on before the Dollhouse?”

“Yeah. There was just the one victim then.”

“There’s three now.”

“I knew about the second one. I didn’t know there was a third.”

It sounds to Abigail like he both wants to know and adamantly doesn’t. When he doesn’t ask, she changes the subject. “I’m sorry I didn’t ask if I could use your car today.”

Will smiles wryly. “I’m not using it.”

She should have expected him to say something like that. “Can I keep using it?”
Will looks up from her hands and she sees some of the softness that’s been buried under layers of depression, angst, and anger return to the surface of his gaze. She thinks maybe he wasn’t expecting her to ask for real.

“Sure, sweetheart.”

“Thanks. I spent some time with the dogs. I can feed and let them out after work, or I can ask Judy for Ella’s number…”

Will looks undecided. He says thanks, but it’s not really an indication of which he’d prefer.

Abigail finishes with his arm and picks up her wine again. “You don’t look very well,” she says, hesitating as she brings the glass to her lips. “What did the doctor say?”

“I didn’t have another stroke. There’s some treatment he wants me to try. I wasn’t really paying attention. How was your first day?”

Abigail frowns at how quickly he changes the subject, but decides to leave it. “It was a short day. Margot and Judy showed me around and explained some of the equipment. I met Dr. Matthews’s brother. He looks just like him.”

“Is he a doctor too?”

“He’s Mason’s nurse. I think I like him better than Dr. Matthews.”

Will smiles to himself. He realizes he’d been missing their conversations, and her blunt observations and unapologetic judgement of everyone she meets. “What else?” he asks.

“Judy said to tell you, if you need to go anywhere, they’ll send a car for you.”

Will is quiet.

“Yeah, that’s what I thought you’d say,” Abigail teases, finishing off her wine.

Chapter End Notes

1Vanessa on tumblr made the comparison between Margot in Tome-Wan (S02E12) and Judith and the Head of Holofernes, the painting by Gustav Klimt, one of my favourite artists of all time. Her post can be viewed here: http://vannezacorporation.tumblr.com/post/86097856790/margotverger-in-hannibal-2-12-tome-wan-and

2Caloric Vestibular Stimulation (CVS) is used as more of a diagnostic tool than as treatment for unilateral spatial neglect (USN), because there have been inconsistent results across clinical trials, and improvement or remission of neglect has been reported as temporary (max ~20min)
at best.
For those of you who like getting into research spirals, as I do, there are some articles listed below.
Or, for those of you developing medical kinks ;)


Also, the 2014 Stroke Rehabilitation Clinician Handbook is available online.
The next morning, Abigail leaves for work looking like a successful young professional. She smirks when she sees that Judy was right, and slacks do make her look important and business-like. She ties on a scarf, then unties it, then shoves it in her bag in case she changes her mind on the drive. She is satisfied with her choice of footwear when she hears that the broad heels make a satisfying clomping noise, rather than a timid clicking as she walks out the door.

Margot and Judy are interviewing candidates for a more official and less criminal version of Carlo’s position. It takes all morning, so Abigail is left by herself in the security office with a stack of invoices to file. Margot says she’ll see her at lunch time and looks apologetic when she closes the door.

When the three of them convene around the kitchen island again, Judy looks impressed with her outfit. “Very classy.”

Abigail points at the ring on Margot’s left hand. “That’s beautiful. Is it from you?”

Judy nods. She gazes at the engagement ring, pleased, and then at Margot’s face with unabashed happiness. “Isn’t it perfect for her?”

Margot blushes, then asks if Abigail wants help with her calculus today, since there still isn’t much for her to do this afternoon, and Margot’s schedule is meeting-free until tomorrow. She suggests they sit outside, and goes with Abigail to retrieve her notebook, which is already partially filled with completed exercises.

“Aren’t you eager…” Margot comments as she flips through Abigail’s work. “I remember the first part of calculus being an incredible drag.”
“It sort of is,” Abigail admits.

“It gets more interesting, and, surprisingly, easier. But maybe I just think that because I’m lazy and like shorthand. This all looks good.” Margot sets the notebook down and asks, “Did you have any trouble?”

“Not yet. I’m pretty slow though.”

Margot waves her hand dismissively. “You’ll get faster. How’s Will?”

Abigail smiles at the evidence that Margot is as prone to foregoing segues as ever.

“He’s okay. Not great.”

“How is Dr. Lecter treating him?”

Abigail looks at her to gauge what kind of answer she wants. Margot is present and interested, and Abigail desperately wants to confide in someone.

“They both make it so complicated,” Abigail starts.

Margot nods for her to continue.

She lets loose a short, frustrated sigh. “So, there were all these pamphlets and things at the hospital, like, for family to read. They listed all the things you’re supposed to do and not supposed to do if you’re living with someone recovering from a stroke. It’s like… Hannibal does everything right on paper…”

“…but is a cold bastard in real life?” Margot suggests. “Sorry... I just haven’t quite forgiven him yet.”

Abigail gapes at her, wide-eyed, at the word yet. “You don’t have to forgive him ever.” Her voice is very quiet when she adds, “I don’t know how you’ve forgiven Will and me.”

“For what?”

“For loving Hannibal.”

Margot shrugs. “I know a little about loving monsters.”

“You’re better now, right?” Abigail asks timidly, worried that Margot might become abruptly distraught.

Margot puts a hand over her middle thoughtfully. “Yes.”

Abigail knows Margot is too tight-lipped to tell her the whole truth in one sitting. In fact, she’s worse than Will at talking about her feelings. She should have asked Judy instead.

As though he hears Abigail and Margot talking about him across the state, and wants to prove them wrong, Hannibal is surprisingly warm towards Will today. That is, it might have surprised Will, if he had the capacity to feel anything besides melancholy.

When he catches Will staring wretchedly down at the sizeable pile of pills on the counter, Hannibal goes to him, and actually puts an arm around his waist.
“This isn’t a life sentence, Will,” he says softly. “You will recover.”

Against his better judgement, Will melts at the touch. It’s nice, this physical suggestion of support. He almost confesses how unsure he is of himself, but doesn’t, certain that if he lets on how much he’s grown to trust Hannibal, Hannibal will give him a reason not to. Instead, he tries to push away the warmth from his hand that is stealing through his skin and into his stomach, and brewing what is likely false hope. He puts a hand over Hannibal’s and just savours his touch for a moment, then steps away before Hannibal can withdraw the comfort himself.

He regrets the subtle power play later when he takes a long, hard look at the state of his relationship with Hannibal. They might as well be in separate rooms at night, since Hannibal is there neither when Will falls asleep nor when he wakes up. Will is pretty sure it’s his own fault for retreating that first night, but doesn’t know what to do about it, and barely has enough energy just to get through the day, let alone worry about the night.

Will is still doing more thinking than he wants to out on the back porch when Abigail gets back from work.

She joins him outside with a glass of wine, and he gives a shadow of his past playful smirk when he sees her. “Job already driving you to drink?”

Abigail swats him on the arm – a shadow of her past indignant violence – and sits. “Where’s Hannibal?”

Will shrugs. “How are you?”

“I had another easy day. How are you?”


“Thank you.” Abigail sips her wine, and, after a few moments, says, “Stop looking at me like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like you’ve failed me.”

Will looks away, outed by her succinct summation of the feelings he’s trying to hide. He couldn’t argue even if he wanted to.

Abigail’s no-nonsense tone remains when she tacks on, “I don’t give a shit what you think you’re supposed to be doing right now – providing or whatever.”

“It’s not that. I know Hannibal has enough money that we probably don’t need jobs at all.”

Instead of immediately asking, What is it, then? she studies him. It could be any number of things he wouldn’t want to admit to. Maybe he feels like a burden. Maybe he feels useless. Maybe he’s afraid she’s pulling away and this is the first step. She shivers. That’s what her father had been afraid of when she’d applied to colleges out of state.

“It’s not that I don’t want you out there, either.”

Will so accurately follows her train of thought, she’s startled. She hasn’t felt that connection much lately. She has to remind herself that they used to talk like this all the time.

She scoots over to him when she sees him wipe at his cheek. “What is it, Will?”
Drying his eyes was pointless. He pictures them as the Abigail and Will sitting on the library steps together. Her voice has the same tone now as it had when she’d given him permission to call her his daughter. It doesn’t help that she is sitting on his left, so he can’t see present-day Abigail as he stares straight ahead, trying not to cry pitifully.

Before he fails at that, he manages to rasp out, “I have no idea.” He means it.

Will makes a point to join Hannibal in the study after dinner, though he feels awkward without a glass of scotch in his hand and really just wants to go to bed. Hannibal looks pleased, however, and Will feels that same warmth in his stomach. It doesn’t keep when he wakes up much later and realizes he’s alone in bed again.

He identifies both the pain and the occasional warmth he feels in his gut as humiliation, burning through the lining of his stomach to contaminate his blood cells and be carried to every part of his body. Every night for the rest of the week, no matter how Hannibal acts towards him during the day, Will is left by himself with the feeling until he falls asleep. Hannibal only watches him take his medication and sometimes drink down a glass of water before he leaves, regardless of what time it is.

The rest of the week features a twisted parody of domestic life with uncomfortable family dinners and falsely affectionate pecks on cheeks before turning in for the night. Will is depressed, Hannibal is aloof, and they both are apparently playing Bedtime Chicken. Will can’t know that Hannibal waits almost precisely an hour after putting Will to bed to go to bed himself, but Abigail does. On Friday, she decides she’s had enough.

“What are you doing?” she demands, when Hannibal closes the bedroom door behind him after making sure Will is settled. She is standing on the landing with her arms folded in their least-playful configuration. “He stays up way later than he should because he wants you to go to bed with him. How can you turn your back on him now, when he needs you the most?”

“I’m doing everything I can to help him recover, Abigail.”

“No, you’re not!” Abigail actually stamps her foot.

Though it’s childish, it makes Hannibal pause for a moment before he turns and starts walking down the stairs.

She follows, not giving up. Not letting him off the hook. “Do you know what he said to me after his surgery? He told me I should go ahead and start living our new life in Italy, and you two would join me later. How could I do that, though, if this is how you’re going to be?”

Abruptly, Hannibal stops and turns to her, just a two steps behind him. “How am I being, Abigail?”

“Absent! You aren’t here! You’ve gone back to wherever you were before we became a family. You can’t do that!” she says fiercely. “You can treat me however you want, but you have to treat Will better.”

“I don’t appreciate your tone, Abigail.”

“I don’t give a fuck if you—”

The slap comes quickly, sharp and stinging. Abigail reacts by shoving Hannibal hard in the chest. He
is clearly not expecting this, as he loses his balance and immediately tumbles down the rest of the stairs.

He groans as he gets up, but Hannibal is on his feet again impossibly fast, eyes glinting murderously. He takes a step towards the stairs and Abigail instinctively shifts her weight onto her back foot, preparing either to spring, or to pivot and run for her life.

“Abigail, what’s going on?” She hears Will’s voice above her. He’s looking between her and Hannibal, and the rage visibly emanating from both of them.

Hannibal smooths down his hair, straightens his shirt, and stalks silently away into the kitchen. He stands at the kitchen sink for some time without the light on, staring out into the night beyond the window. Then, somewhat mechanically, he fills two glasses with water and makes his way back upstairs.

He pauses at Abigail’s bedroom door, the crack between it and the floor betraying that the light is on and she’s probably still very much awake. He balances both glasses in one hand and goes to knock, then changes his mind.

In his bedroom, he can hear Will’s breathing is deep and even. He puts the water down and finds there is still a full glass next to the sleeping man. He strips down, then sits on the bed at Will’s side.

“Will,” he says, shaking him gently. “You need to drink this.”

Will sits up and does as he’s told, eyeing Hannibal over the rim of his glass.

“Good,” Hannibal says when he’s done.

Will puts the glass down and lies back. “What were you and Abigail...?”

Hannibal shakes his head. “Nothing. A misunderstanding.” He leans down then and kisses Will deeply.

Will wraps his good arm around Hannibal. He feels the smooth skin of his back and can’t help how hopeful he sounds when he asks, “Are you coming to bed?”

“I thought I might,” Hannibal replies. He climbs in on his side of the bed.

“Will you please come over here?” Will’s voice is steady, but very quiet.

Hannibal goes to him and snakes an arm under Will’s to rub his chest. He kisses the back of his neck softly and says, “Good night, Will.”

Will is so tired, he barely manages, “‘Night,” before he’s fast asleep again.

The next morning, however, Hannibal isn’t beside him. Will showers and dresses, then knocks on Abigail’s door.

Abigail knows his knock. She puts aside her reading and lets him in.

“Are you hiding?” he asks, taking in that she’s fully dressed and, by the state of her room, has been awake for a couple of hours at least.

Abigail looks at the floor. “Wouldn’t you?”
“If…?”

“If you’d accidentally pushed Hannibal down the stairs? I thought that’s what woke you up.”

Will shakes his head. He doesn’t quite believe he’d heard her right. “You did what?”

“We were fighting.” She goes back to her bed and sits cross-legged next to the network of books and papers.

Will joins her and thumbs through some of the papers.

“Did you sleep okay?” she asks him. “How are you feeling?”

“Yeah. Fine. How’s the Italian coming?”

“Non lo saprò fino a quando non parlerò con un italiano.”

“What’s that mean?”

“It means I won’t know until I talk to an Italian.”

Will chuckles.

Abigail gives him a small smile, but it slips off her face almost immediately, and she’s back to looking miserable. He goes to say something, but she beats him to it. “You looked like you wanted to ask something when you came in here.”

“Yeah. I changed my mind though.”

“What was it, Will? Do you need something?”

“No, sweetheart. Thank you. I was going to ask you to drive me home but, yeah, I changed my mind.”

“Oh. Why? I was actually going to suggest the same thing.”

“You were?”

Abigail colours and tells herself sternly not to go into it. “It was just an idea.”

Will tucks her hair behind her ear and his thumb lingers on her cheekbone. She thinks he’s frowning, but it’s so subtle she can’t be sure.

“Are you going to come downstairs?” he asks. “You must be hungry.”

She nods. “Will you think about Wolf Trap? You might feel better there.”

“Maybe. Maybe if you stay with me.”

Downstairs, they find breakfast already made up on two plates, keeping warm on the stove. When they finish, and go to find Hannibal to thank him, they are presented with a closed and locked study door. Abigail knocks. Hannibal doesn’t answer. Will says, “Okay, yeah, let’s go back to Wolf Trap.”
"It means I won’t know until I talk to an Italian."
I fucking hope that’s what it means. Any Italians in the audience?

UPDATE: BlackSea very helpfully corrected what I had before and I'm incredibly grateful to them.<3
"...we prefer to say "talk with" rather than "to" and use the future tense..."
Regret is not a sentiment Hannibal wishes to indulge in. Upon hearing the door shut behind Will and Abigail, he leans his elbow on the armrest and looks down at his tablet. Aside from his eyes scanning over an electronic copy of the weekend paper, the only movement he makes is to flick his thumbnail repeatedly against the pad of his forefinger. The article does not hold his attention, though it serves as something to look at while considering, instead, his next move.

Hannibal doesn’t appreciate that his altercation with Abigail has removed Will physically from his sphere of influence. The two of them and the entire situation are becoming increasingly difficult to control. The last time truly felt unsure he’d acted best, he had still been certain that Will would return to him, if only to deliver a reckoning. Now, Will is testing him again, though unconsciously this time. Worse than unconsciously – passively. Testing Hannibal’s ability to wait for a worthy man to rise from the ashes that are this broken, miserable creature.

Abigail is far from passive, willful, impertinent child that she is. She seems determined to find flaws in every one of Hannibal’s interactions with Will. He thinks he might be more disposed to kindness were she not around. He is, in fact, the epitome of tenderness on the days Abigail has work and he has Will to himself. However, when she returns, so, too, does the intense desire to choke the feebleness out of him. To bleed Will himself to show him the relative benevolence of an aneurysm. To kill and kill and kill, and turn each murder into a private display for Will, until he understands—sees—that whatever died during his stroke was weak and unnecessary, and he should be glad to be rid of it.

What would this Will do when confronted again with his lover’s violence? How violent could Will be in return? He would, of course, prefer Will to break free on his own, but he aches almost intolerably for the answers. Hannibal has never been averse to taking charge of matters. The matter of Will’s self-imposed chrysalis may need to be taken in hand. And shattered.

Will is his beloved – had earned his title – and Hannibal will not accept his resignation.

However, their retreat, presumably to Wolf Trap, affords him the time to deal with Jack Crawford and Miriam Lass. Not without reluctance, he recognizes this as priority, and brings up the Baltimore City Circuit Court on Google Earth. He reviews the sequence of events to be carried out tonight, though he doesn’t need to refresh his memory. His plan is impeccable in his mind, vivid and detailed as though freshly sculpted.
He will take care of this small matter – it won’t take long – and then return his attention to Abigail and his tortured Will.

“Hi,” Abigail says, tentatively entering the room where Will sits, contemplating something quite seriously.

“Hm,” Will says, frowning slightly.

“What are you thinking about?”

Will shakes himself back to reality. “What?”

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah.” Will scrubs his hand over his face and sighs like he’s just come out of a reconstruction. “You?”

She nods uncertainly. “How are you feeling?”

He stands and stretches his back. “Like I could use some fresh air.”

Abigail thinks he looks a little better already. As luxurious as Hannibal’s Baltimore house is, it’s a far cry from the freedom they have here in Wolf Trap. She sheds her uncertainty and smiles at him warmly. “I noticed the blackberries on the roadside on the way here. They’re super ripe. I bet there’s tons down by the stream…”

“I bet.”

“Up for a walk?”

“Sure. There are some plastic buckets in the bottom cupboard next to the stove.”

Abigail goes to retrieve them, and Will is glad he hadn’t bothered to take his shoes off, given the incredible pain in the ass it was to get them on.

When Abigail returns with a neat stack of three or four, she points out that he’ll probably be too warm in his jacket. She helps him off with it and uses the opportunity to peek under his bandage. The incision has started to scab over, so Abigail puts his dorky brown baseball cap on him with a cheeky smirk.

When they get outside, the dogs make it known just how ecstatic they are that Will is finally home. They’d been very good all morning while Abigail made lunch and Will sat on the couch, looking out the window pensively. Perhaps taking Winston’s lead, flopping down on the floor, tails still wagging, content to sit in their master’s presence and wait for cuddles. However, their reservation does not stand up to the excitement of sunlight and tufts of green grass and the suggestion of a long walk. They circle Will and Abigail, barking cheerfully and nipping at each other’s ears.

As though it isn’t difficult enough already to walk steadily, Will finds himself continually tripping over their competing furry paws, but it’s hard to be annoyed by all the affection. He is reminded keenly of his reasons for being antisocial. His dogs were content and adoring, or else restless, hungry, or needing to relieve themselves. He can’t remember the last time he felt like he was meeting a person’s needs. The thought isn’t too upsetting, though it makes him feel a little sentimental about the days when he was strictly an FBI instructor, with normal hours and a normal – if secluded – daily
life. When a glass of whiskey on the back porch surrounded by his loving pets was all he wanted. All he *thought* he wanted.

The bushes lining the path are laden with berries, but they continue down to the stream where there is a light breeze before stopping to pick any. Abigail is too late with her whistle. The dogs rush forward and launch themselves into the water.

Will laughs and Abigail groans.

“I guess you didn’t need to give them a bath the other day,”

Abigail watches them with fond irritation for a while, then asks, “Do you want to be the fingers or the bucket?” She doesn’t suggest helping him hook the handle of one of the buckets over his bad arm. In her opinion, it’s still too early in the day for that kind of trauma.

“I’ll hold the bucket,” he says. “Your fingers are tiny. I’ll probably squash them.”

”Right. Because of your giant Hulk hands.” She rolls her eyes.

“They’re really ripe,” he says indignantly. “We’re already going to be making jam, basically.”

She plucks a berry from just above eye-level and it turns to purple mush between her fingers. “You may be right.”

For almost an hour, they don’t speak. There’s no need to interrupt the tranquility of the faintly rustling woods and running water. At first their silence is tense, then they both slowly relax as they meander towards their old comfort level. They remember that they don’t put up with silences heavy with unspoken words. So, if there’s silence, there’s nothing to say. Neither of them are tactful enough to have it otherwise.

“So, how are you feeling, really?” Abigail asks at a natural break in their activities. The natural break being Buster, sopping wet, barreling excitedly into the back of her leg and nearly toppling her into the thorns.

“Are you gonna keep asking me that?” He doesn’t mean to sound irritated, but he does.

Abigail flushes and turns her face away, and picks a few more berries while waiting for her skin to cool. “Yes.” She turns back to narrow her eyes at him. “A *lot*. And I’m going to ask you tomorrow, too. And the next day.”

The corner of his mouth slips up into a smile the moment she starts glaring at him. “You’re a tyrant,” he says.

“He shrugs. “Okay.”

They go back to picking berries, but, a few minutes later, Abigail whirs back around and says, crossly, “You didn’t actually answer the question.”

Will doesn’t do much to hide his smirk. “Thought I got away with it.”

Abigail whacks him on the arm. Apparently, she’s decided he’s well enough to start taking her abuse again. Really, Abigail is just happy that he’s smiling. That’s enough of an answer for now.
Later, when they are leaning against the kitchen counter, looking at the three full buckets of blackberries and realizing they didn’t have a plan for them, Abigail ventures, “You look better.”

He smiles at her. It’s the seventh smile she’s counted on him today. Seven smiles more than yesterday. Seven smiles more than the day before.

“Do you feel better?”

“A lot better,” he assures her softly, adding, “Thank you for this.”

There had only been one incident. After they’d agreed they had more than enough berries and should head back, Will whistled for the dogs and started walking downstream. It took Abigail a couple of confused seconds to call after him. “Will! Where are you going?”

“Sorry,” he said, trekking back to her. “I got confused.”

She linked her arm through his and they made their way home without further complications.

“We could make jam for real,” Abigail suggests.

“I don’t have any wax. Or jars, for that matter.” Will suppresses a yawn and blinks rapidly a few times.

“You shouldn’t use wax anyway. It makes a shitty seal.”

Will raises his eyebrows at her.

Abigail shrugs and says, almost flippantly, “My family had that whole nothing goes to waste policy, remember? My mom did a lot of canning.”

“Oh.”

“Jars to put the jam in are kind of a must, though.”

Abigail catches Will rubbing his eyes. He is tired and flushed from all the fresh air and exercise.

“Go lie down,” she orders, a little relieved. She hadn’t meant to bring up her parents or their family values. “I’ll keep brainstorming.”

Blackberries were abundant in the woods surrounding her father’s cabin. It would have been wasteful not to pick them. Her mother would bake blackberry pies, blackberry turnovers, blackberry tarts, blackberry pudding… Blackberry crumble. That, she can do. It was the only thing her mother made that was easy enough for Abigail to pick up just by watching. She’ll make blackberry crumble, she decides, and maybe ask Hannibal what to do with the rest.

She’s rather proud of herself when she sets the pan in the fridge, ready to be put in the oven while they eat their dinner. In a fit of improvisation, she’d chopped up the apples that had grown wrinkly from sitting out on the counter, and mixed them in with the blackberries. Waste not, want not.

As she’s tidying up her mess, she is suddenly hit in the stomach with a pang of loneliness. The kind she hasn’t felt since – she can’t even remember when. It is so powerful, she sinks down right there on the kitchen floor, hands dripping dishwater over her bare legs and her skirt.

After a few minutes of her leaning against the cupboards, curled in on herself, the stabbing pain
settles down to a dull ache. She reaches up behind her and pulls open the drawer with the tin foil. She tears off a sheet and fashions it into a little boat, still sitting on the floor. She then collects her cigarettes from upstairs and the cordless phone from the hall, and takes them out to the front porch.

She glances back inside through the living room window and sees that Will is fast asleep, as are most of the dogs. It's a sweet scene.

Sitting on the bottom step, she lights a cigarette, takes a deep breath, and dials Hannibal’s number.

“Abigail.” Hannibal picks up after the second ring. He’s not messing around. The fact that she didn’t have to wait five rings, coupled with the worry in his voice, tells her that he definitely isn’t in the mood to play games.

Abigail suddenly feels very, very sorry that they had run out on him this morning. She says as much, digging the toe of her boot around in the dirt and unearthing a couple pebbles to weigh down her little foil ashtray.

“Are you and Will alright?” he asks gently.

“Yeah, fine. He’s asleep. We went for a pretty long walk earlier.”

Hannibal is quiet for a moment, though Abigail is sure he’s not struggling for words. He probably just wants to embed them in the appropriate amount of silence. “I’m sorry I hit you, Abigail.”

She nods dumbly, and thinks he must be aware of it, because he continues as though he’s received a response.

“That will never happen again. Do you understand?”

Abigail says, yes, immediately, because, how could she not? He hasn’t sounded this earnest about something in weeks. Months, even. Maybe the slap had been like a fever breaking, or a final crack of thunder before a storm passes. “It’s okay. It didn’t hurt,” she lies. The palm of his hand felt like a ping pong paddle.

“That’s not the point, Abigail.”

“I know. I’m just saying. Sorry I pushed you down the stairs.”

It sounds like he’s smiling when he says, “I wish I could say that didn’t hurt.”

She swears she can hear warmth in his voice, and she giggles nervously.

He gives an answering chuckle. “I have to leave shortly, Abigail. I assume you’re staying in Wolf Trap this weekend?”

“Oh, I think it might be good for Will… He missed his dogs,” she adds, not wanting to start another possessive tug-of-war over Will’s wellbeing.

“Do you need anything?”

“Just ideas about what to do with about a thousand pounds of blackberries…”

When their phone call ends, Abigail folds up her foil and pebble contraption with the butts of the two cigarettes she’d gone through while they talked. She tucks it under the steps where the dogs can’t get at it, and sits picking at the peeling paint for a few minutes. She’s disappointed that making up with Hannibal hadn’t knocked the loneliness out of her system. Now she just misses him, too.
After dinner, Abigail kicks Will out of the kitchen. “Don’t go back to sleep, though. I made dessert.”

They eat it sitting in the living room, side by side on the couch, while she studies his bookcase in silence. There is a gap where the wildlife encyclopedia used to be. It now permanently resides on Will’s bedside table, dog-eared from his going through it at the hospital and marking the things he wanted to point out to Abigail when they got home. He has a beautiful collection of Classical mythology. They are old, old books, cared for as only someone like Will would care for them. They also look like they’ve lived on that shelf forever, which is the only reason she doesn’t smirk and ask if Hannibal bought them for him. The rest of the shelves are taken up mostly by textbooks and academic journals. There are a couple of books with stiff spines and offensively glossy jackets that had obviously never been read. They were probably from exes who thought he’d like murder mysteries just because he used to be a cop.

She feels Will’s eyes on her and turns to see him giving her a very exasperated look. “You’re psychoanalyzing. I can tell.”

“Sorry,” she says automatically.

“I forgive you, but only because dessert was delicious.”

She smiles and blushes. “Why, thank you.”

When she sees what time it is, she collects their empty bowls, quickly washes the dishes, and refrigerates the leftovers. She doesn’t hang around and watch Will swallow his medication like Hannibal does. He only has trouble with the screw caps, so she dumps what he needs in his hand, gives him a quick kiss on the cheek, and heads to bed, herself. She partly affords him this privacy because she knows that she will probably be overbearing in every other possible way.

In bed, she finds her pillow sponging up hot tears she hadn’t noticed she’d been crying. She thinks they’re tears of happiness – happiness that they’d finally had a good day. Not all together, but it’s a start.

It’s just past six on Sunday morning when Judy calls. She tells Abigail that there is a car on the way to pick Will up, and she will meet him at the courthouse.

“I thought it was a closed trial?”

“I don’t think there’s going to be any trial.” Judy pauses. “You’ve got a strong stomach, so I’m just going to go ahead and tell you. There’s been a triple homicide. The judge, and both the prosecution and the defense lawyers are all displayed… really publicly.”

Abigail wakes Will up with plenty of time to shower and get dressed before the car arrives. Still, she hears him swearing under his breath as he does battle with his bad arm, probably trying to wrestle it into a shirt.

He paces around the kitchen while Abigail boils the kettle. He looks at the coffee pot with longing, but Abigail hands him a cup of herbal tea and a slice of buttered toast, and tells him not to tempt fate. Then she metes out his medication and pours him a glass of water, all rather brusquely. Let the insufferable coddling begin, she thinks.

The car shows up and Will is about to leave when Abigail yells, “Wait!” from the kitchen, and, a
moment later, comes rushing down the hallway after him.

She puts an old film canister in his hand. The small, black kind, with the grey snap-on cap. He is nonplussed until she explains, “Your puke pills. So you don’t have to, you know –” Abigail mimes pressing down and twisting something with her palm, “–with the lid.”

“Oh my god. My puke pills…” he laughs, shaking his head. He hugs her gratefully, thinking he couldn’t possibly love her more.

It’s horrifically crowded at the courthouse scene. Judy walks over to Will when she sees him get out of the car.

“I guess I’m no better than any of them, but it’s amazing how many people stick around at these things out of morbid curiosity.” She smiles at him. “Alright?”

He smiles back at her. “I’m armed,” he says wryly, rattling the canister of pills in his hand. “How are you doing? Abigail says you visited at the hospital. I don’t really remember.”

“You’d just woken up.”

“I was probably terrific company.”

She laughs. “Doped up people often are, actually.”

They start walking towards the crime scene. “I don’t think I can thank you enough for taking care of the dogs and the house and for the food and everything.”

“Happy to help,” she says easily. “I’m glad you let us. Margot says you’re not great at that.”

He chuckles. “That’s pretty accurate.” He clears his throat. “It’s really great that you and Margot are engaged. I’ve... never seen anything like what you two have.”

Judy beams. They can almost see through the throng of people, and she says, “Let’s celebrate by looking at some dead bodies.”

By skirting the edges of the crowd they find a path of lesser resistance and manage to make their way right up to the police line. “Where’s Jack?” Will asks, scanning the scene.

“Probably holed up in the BAU headquarters. There’s a fair bit of internal investigation going on. Doubt he’s allowed to show face right now.”

Will is about to ask how she knows all this, when the answer walks right up to them in the form of Kade Prurnell – her permanent half-sneer already affixed, even at this hour – and a young, hard-looking woman who softens a little bit when she sees Judy.

“Mr. Graham.” Kade Prurnell acknowledges him curtly.

“Ms. Prurnell.”

“It’s good to see you, Ingram.” The young woman shakes Judy’s hand with enthusiasm.

She is stunning, both in looks and in the palpable intelligence she radiates. Her long, tight dreadlocks are swept into a knot, and her attire is tailored and black, in spite of the promise of a scorching sun later in the day. Her dark eyes gleam. Her gaze is far from severe, but Will imagines that no one
would want to be anything less than their absolute best in her presence. He finds himself trying to subtly improve his posture, though he has no idea who she is. If Judy were to turn to Will and introduced her as an Egyptian goddess, Will would believe her.

Instead, she introduces her as Special Agent Ardelia Mapp of the FBI. “Ardelia and I were undergrads together,” Judy explains. “A million years ago, back in Chicago,” she adds.

Agent Mapp shakes Will’s hand, and her grip is less crushing than he’d imagined it would be. Still, he is completely and utterly intimidated by her.

“Mr. Graham?” she asks. “As in, former Special Agent Will Graham?”

He nods, eyes darting briefly to Kade Prurnell, whose lips are pursed, and who clearly wants them to wrap it up already.

“I’m sorry you’re no longer working with us. I hope you’ll at least return to teach at the Academy, when you’re fully recovered.”

Will lifts the corner of his mouth in a half-smile, attempting politeness, though he doesn’t really know what’s going on.

Kade Prurnell is uncharacteristically helpful in this. “Special Agent Mapp will be taking over as head of Behavioral Science when Jack Crawford retires,” she tells him. Which will be soon, she leaves unsaid.

“Congratulations. I think.”

“Thanks. I think.” Agent Mapp returns his half-smile.

“I’d like to come back. Wasn’t really planning on leaving in the first place.”

She tilts her head to one side slightly and raises an eyebrow. “No one really plans on having a stroke, do they?”

Will wants to die. He wonders how her sharp gaze hasn’t already reduced him to a pile of flesh-coloured ribbons on the pavement. “I guess not.” He looks away with a self-deprecating laugh.

Kade Prurnell clears her throat.

“Well, Mr. Graham,” says Agent Mapp. “What do you think?” She folds her arms and points her chin at the crime scene.

“Besides the obvious,” Judy says, a little darkly. “That someone really doesn’t want this trial to go forward. Or even start.”

The time has come, Will thinks, lugubriously. He squints up at Hannibal’s latest exhibition, and reminds himself not to look fascinated, or impressed.

The judge – all decked out in his robes, but missing his eyes and ears – is impaled on the central of the three flagpoles that protrude from the façade over the front entrance of the courthouse. The two lawyers are impaled on either side of him, their jaws dislocated and tongues cut out. No subtlety there.

Because of the angle of the flagpoles, the bodies have slid back against the wall. It doesn’t diminish the effect. The blood-soaked flags would have looked for a couple of hours like they were springing
from the bellies of the dead or dying, continuing to flap, careless of the use they’d been put to. Will
can picture it. But this scene is just as, if not more disturbing. Splayed against the white bricks of the
courthouse, the judge and lawyers look as though Justice herself had come down from the heavens
and run them through with righteous spears.

“I don’t know what to tell you,” Will admits.

“That’s alright. You’re not getting paid.” Agent Mapp gives him a wry smile. “Anyway, we know
who it is.”

Will’s pulse jumps in his throat.

“It’s the Ghost,” she continues. “He’d have to be a ghost to set up something like this at a fairly busy
intersection on a Saturday night.”

Not a ghost, Will thinks. Smoke.

“Ardelia, we should let you work. I’ll catch up with you later.” Then, to Will, Judy offers, “Do you
want me to drop you off at Dr. Lecter’s?”

Will is dead tired already, but agrees, hesitantly. “Yeah, that’s probably a good idea.” There is an
unsettling mixture of reluctance and anticipation stirring his stomach, and his nerves hum lightly. He
feels as though he’s about to approach a famous artist at the grand opening of some fancy gallery –
derdressed and underprepared, wishing he’d brought cue cards so he could comment on, well,
anything. At that thought, he has to bite back a grin. Never, ever tell Hannibal that.

As Judy and Will are about to leave, Kade Prurnell says, “Mr. Graham.”

Reluctantly, Will turns back to her.

“I don’t feel I owe you an apology.”

Will sighs audibly, rudely unrepressed.

She carries on anyway. “My job sometimes involves leaving people behind. It wasn’t personal.”

Will shrugs and says, without venom, “I really don’t care.”

Kade Prurnell is clearly taken aback by his blunt, unfeeling response. She looks like she had been
steeling herself for some rage on his part. He’s both sorry and not sorry to disappoint her. After a
moment, though, she gives him one of her small smile-sneers and says, simply, “Good.”

“Catch up with you later?” Will asks, as he and Judy get into her car.

“We’re going to get lunch,” Judy explains, then, with a chuckle, adds, “You’d think working a scene
like that would put anyone off their appetite, but this is a light day for Ardelia.”

When Hannibal opens the front door, Will stumbles past him with a faint, I forgot to bring my keys.

“Is everything alright, Will? I wasn’t expecting you.”

“Can I sit down?”

“Of course.”
They go into the library, where Will drops heavily onto the couch and keels over to one side, pressing his face into the cushions. “Just a minute.”

Hannibal gives him *exactly* a minute before asking, “What’s the matter, Will?”

“I’m just dizzy.”

Hannibal crouches and does his customary sweep of Will’s forehead before standing again and sighing. “I wasn’t anticipating that you would be called to the crime scene. Was it too much for you?”

After a few deep breaths in through his nose and out through his mouth, the nausea passes, and Will sits up and rubs his eyes. “I’d argue it was too much in general.” He drops his hand to his lap and looks up at Hannibal. “I wouldn’t expect you to half-ass any of your creations, though.”

Hannibal smiles down at him, deciding he will never tell Will just how *half-assed* he has been about his kills lately. He cocks his head to the side and posits, “I think you’re making fun of me, but I’m going to take that as a compliment.”

Will gives a small laugh. “Are you going to tell me why you did it? Why are you trying to stop the trial?”

Hannibal mulls over this as he sits down next to Will, crossing his legs and laying his arm along the back of the sofa. “Two reasons,” he says finally. “Aside from it being an excellent way to let off some steam, I want to find out what Jack is up to before he goes to court. I haven’t yet sniffed out all the pies he has his fingers in. Also, the messier things get at Quantico, the worse things will be for Jack. Let’s just say, that pleases me.”

Will just looks at him for a moment, trying to reconcile the weight of Hannibal’s words with the lightness of his tone. He fails. Had Hannibal always been this absurd? Had he forgotten? Then, he bursts out laughing. “So that’s where you’ve been going,” he wheezes, wiping away tears of mirth.

“Yes,” Hannibal affirms. “Are you feeling better?” he asks, when Will’s fit of amusement subsides. “Not dizzy anymore?”

“Incredibly, after that, no.”

Hannibal’s hand leaves the back of the sofa and trails up Will’s spine. Will sighs and drops his head, exposing more of his neck, which Hannibal doesn’t hesitate to take advantage of.

After a long moment, Will turns his head to face Hannibal. “You can’t hit Abigail,” he says, in the same tone one would use to tell a delinquent teen *you can’t talk to your mother that way*.

“I know.” The movement of Hannibal’s hand on Will’s neck ceases. He pulls it away and clasps both hands in his lap, instead. “I have already apologized to her. She understands,” he adds, pointedly.

“What, exactly, does she understand?”

“That it won’t happen again.”

“That’s it? That was your apology?”

Hannibal sighs. “She understands that someone I care about telling me something I don’t want to hear about someone else I care about is… upsetting.”
The breath of air Will lets out sounds like relief. “You still care about her.”

“Of course. But she is unhealthily protective of you, Will. It’s not good for either of you.”

“She’s just like that, Hannibal. After everything we’ve gone through, can you blame her for being so vigilant?”

“She’s also headstrong, and reckless.”

“Isn’t that the reason you liked her so much to begin with? She’s a lot like you.”

“I would not describe myself as reckless.”

“You’re careful about being reckless, but you’re still reckless.”

“Hm.”

“I like that she’s stubborn and temperamental. It’s part of who she is.”

“Not exactly qualities one usually seeks in a caregiver, however.”

There is a long pause.

“What exactly are you worried about, Hannibal?” Will asks in a low voice.

Hannibal doesn’t answer. Instead, he looks down at his hands and flexes his long fingers.

“Did you kiss me the other night because you thought Abigail would take me away from you?”

Hannibal’s fingers twitch. *Strangulation? Asphyxiation?*

There is a long pause, then Will says, “I’d make a dramatic exit, but I actually need you to drive me back to Wolf Trap.”

The corner of Hannibal’s mouth lifts, and his fingers relax. He meets Will’s gaze and nods, once, accepting the truce.

Will looks away and smiles to himself. “You’re a fucking idiot, though.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03, @weesprigofzest on tumblr), aka Sprig d'Zest, BSc. (Butt Stuff Consultant).

[My tumblr]
[Our Etsy Store]
Chapter Summary

Not content to simply start a swear jar, Hannibal finds appropriate punishment for Will. As per Biffy Clyro's "A Girl and His Cat": Nothing ventured, nothing maimed. Hannibal’s addendum: Nothing maimed, nothing gained. (It’s fine. He’s just going to maim his dignity a little.)

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: descriptions of post-stroke physical/mental state and rehabilitation

Abigail’s morning is spent prowling around the house, restless and grouchy, and combing the internet for news. She knows Will will tell her everything later, so it’s less about wanting information than wanting something to do besides sit around wishing she’d been able to go with him. She stops looking after a while, and lets her mind wander onto a very different train of thought. She’s chain-smoking on the roof when she hears her name being called.

Sitting up and looking out over the roof, she sees Will craning his neck to look up at her, hand shielding his eyes from the sun. “Yeah?” she calls back.

Will says something.

“I can’t hear you.” She stubs out her cigarette, grinding it against the foil, but gives no indication that she plans to come down. “Are you okay?”

She sees him nod and figures, since it’s not an emergency, he can come up and talk to her if he really wants to. She lies back and lights another cigarette.

Will doesn’t bother her. Abigail retreating upstairs basically means leave me alone, as far as he can tell. He knows what she’s doing out on the roof. She hasn’t tried particularly hard to hide it.

When she does come down, Abigail finds Will in the living room with several windows open on his laptop. The top one shows TattleCrime.com’s replacement website, CrimeTimeNews.com. The main article is an exposé on the Carpenter.

“It’s hardly an exposé,” Abigail comments. The writers at CrimeTime really couldn’t fill Freddie’s shoes. The article lacks the juicy details she’d always managed to procure, and her signature sass and style. “Sorry, I borrowed your laptop earlier…”

“You can use my laptop,” Will says, without looking up. “You don’t have to ask.”

Will makes an unimpressed noise when he finishes reading. “You’re not wrong.” He yawns and closes his laptop. “I almost miss Freddie Lounds… I can’t find anything of substance on the Carpenter.”

“They probably don’t have anything. It’s usually you that provides the insight, remember?” She sounds proud. “Why are you looking, anyway?”

Will shrugs and smiles a little sheepishly. “Jack always said work was a source of stability for me.”

Abigail’s smile disappears instantaneously, and she glowers in a way that would give Jack himself a run for his money. “Don’t even say his name,” she hisses, scathing.

“On some level, though, I think he’s right.”

“I don’t care.”

Will raises his eyebrows.

“You know how people tell you to go to your happy place when you’re frustrated?”

“Uh huh…”

“Well, my happy place is Muskrat Farm, and, instead of Hannibal, it’s Jack who’s about to get eaten by pigs.”

“That’s what calms you down?”

She inhales and exhales dramatically and gives him a serene smile. “All better.”

“You’re a terrifying human being.”

Will sleeps through lunch and most of the afternoon. When he wakes up, Abigail is still there, curled up in the armchair like old times, deep into The Iliad. She smiles at him when he stirs and sits up, then goes back to reading. Just like old times.

“You know I love you, right?” he says, suddenly.

“Yeah, I think so.”

“Even though I don’t say it?”

Abigail shrugs.

Just like old times, that conversation abruptly ends and a new one abruptly begins.

“Tell me about the courthouse?”

He does, as Abigail knew he would. Will spares no detail in terms of the crime scene, although he leaves Agent Mapp out of his recounting of them.

“Hannibal probably already knows about the smoking,” he tells her, when he’s done relating each element of Hannibal’s latest design. He figures that, for them, going from talking about Hannibal’s artistic prowess to his olfactory prowess is a pretty decent segue. “He’ll have smelled it on you.”
“I know.”

“Was that the plan?”

“No.”

“But you don’t care.”

“That’s right.” Abigail hesitates. “Are you mad at me?”

Will shakes his head, looking at her like she’s crazy for thinking that was even possible. “I smoked for years. I’m actually amazed you didn’t take it up before now.”

She cocks her head to the side and gives him a tentative smile.

“I’m not condoning it, mind you. I’m just not surprised is all.”

Manipulative Abigail is tempted to say something along the lines of, I knew you’d be the cool dad. Instead, she admits, “It’s just something to do.” She goes back to her book.

Later, as Will emerges from the house, Abigail asks him, “Did you know he was going to do all that?” She is sitting on the porch steps after throwing a casserole dish filled with vegetable-and-potato-supplemented leftovers in the oven and hoping for the best. Little Zoe is in her lap, looking lazy and content around her under-bite.

“Hannibal doesn’t tell me his plans. He’d rather see if I can work them out on my own.”

“Well, that’s annoying.”

“You don’t say.”

“I don’t know whether to be mad at him or not. Did he kill those people for us, or to avoid us?”

Will sits down next to her, but, before he can answer, Buster takes this as a cue to come bounding towards them. He looks at Zoe, receiving special treatment, then leaps into Will’s lap. “Look what you’ve started…” He laughs. When Buster is quite settled, after turning a few circles and digging his paws into Will’s thighs, Will voices what he feels is scant understanding. “Hannibal always follows several trains of thought at once, all for his own amusement. Still, he cares about us. Enough.”

“I wish he would take care of us, too. Or take care of you, at least. Maybe in a less murdery way.”

“Hannibal would take better care of me if he’d been the one to hurt me in the first place.”

Abigail is quiet.

“Let’s not talk about this,” he says. “We’re headed for a conversation where I get really morbid, and you call me stupid a bunch.”

Abigail purses her lips, but it’s more to repress a grin than anything.

Over dinner, though, she draws him back to the subject with a fairly rudimentary observation. “Hannibal is trying to punish whoever is responsible for what happened to you.”
“Something like that.”

“So, why doesn’t he just kill Jack already?”

“Ah. That’s what you were getting at… Jack isn’t responsible, Abigail,” Will reasons. “If anything, I did this to myself.”

“Shut up. That’s a stupid thing to say.”

He smiles. Under his breath, he says, “That’s one…”

Abigail scowls at him.

“Anyway, I don’t know what he’s thinking. Maybe he’s waiting for us to kill Jack,” he suggests.

“And in the meantime, he’s… what? Harbouring a grudge against human anatomy?”

“I would have thought mine, specifically, but he’s not really colouring within the lines, if that’s the case.”

Abigail snickers. “I think he likes your anatomy just fine.”

Will almost chokes around a poorly timed bite. “Beyond inappropriate.”

“You really didn’t think that one through, did you?” she says, with an intolerable smirk.

“Always with the… I thought you’d cut that out.”

She pats his arm and shakes her head in mock pity. “No.”

She’s so hilariously pleased with herself, it’s hard to be annoyed. “You about done?” he says, as grumpily as he can.

“Yeah…” She stops giggling gradually. “I know that’s not what you meant. But how can he be mad at your blood vessels? That’s insane.”

“She is so…” She stops giggling gradually. “I know that’s not what you meant. But how can he be mad at your blood vessels? That’s insane.”

“Have you met Hannibal?”

She smiles around a mouthful as though to say, good point.

“I don’t think he’s angry, really. You can call me stupid, but, I think it’s more that he feels a sense of property violation.”

To Will’s surprise, Abigail doesn’t scold him or whack him on the arm. Instead, she’s quiet for almost a full minute. “I didn’t want to say it…” She doesn’t look him in the eye.

“Neither did I. But I think it needed to be said.”

They eat the rest of their dinner in an almost mournful silence. Then, Will awkwardly washes the dishes one-handed, and Abigail dries them.

“We can still have everything,” Abigail says as they’re finishing up. “There were two weeks where everything was basically perfect. Hannibal’s just… forgotten them.”

“Repressed them, more like.”

She sighs. “What are we going to do?”
“I think we both know the ball is in Hannibal’s court.” Will glances at her, but is unable to guess what she’s thinking. It doesn’t matter. She tells him.

“I’m tired of waiting.”

“Me too. I may have made that known this morning.”

Abigail looks at him with interest.

“I may have called Hannibal an idiot.”

This time, it’s quite a long while before Abigail stops laughing.

On Monday, Will forces himself to wake early so there will be a pot of coffee waiting for Abigail when she gets up. Abigail is endlessly grateful when she considers the two-hour drive to Muskrat Farm. When she’s dressed and ready for work, she pours herself a cup and goes to ask Will if he wants some tea for the road.

He’s standing in the living room in his undershirt and shorts, looking out the window at the dogs tearing around outside.

“Oh… I thought you’d be dressed…” She looks at her watch. They’re cutting it a little close for time.

“I’m probably just gonna go back to bed,” he says.

“Um.”

Will turns to look at her and just catches her expression changing from confused to embarrassed.

“I… can’t leave you alone here…”

Will clues in. He gnaws on his lower lip.

Between the two of them, there is dead silence for a minute, then Abigail starts babbling remorsefully. “I’m sorry– I thought you knew that. I was going to drop you off at Hannibal’s, but… you could probably come to work with me – maybe – if you’d rather do that… I don’t know… I’m sorry. I just can’t leave you here.”

“It’s okay, Abigail. I didn’t know that. I probably should have.” He shakes his head and makes for his bedroom to get dressed, saying, “Sorry. I’ll be quick.”

He doesn’t meet her eyes when he passes her, and his hands shake as he pulls on his pants and socks. He opts for a t-shirt so he doesn’t have to contend with buttons, and stuffs the laces of his shoes down the inside instead of tying them. He returns to the living room in under ten minutes, flushed with humiliation, but ready to go.

Abigail has knocked back her coffee and herded the dogs back inside. She’s waiting for him on the porch with keys and a travel mug in one hand, wiping her eyes with the other.

“Oh, sweetheart…”

She turns and smiles at him brightly, handing him the mug. He notices that the bruise on her cheek – hardly visible to begin with – is just about gone. “Tea,” she says. “I made an executive decision.” Her eyes are glistening, but she sounds like herself again. Cheerful and bossy.
Will doesn’t buy it. He puts his good arm around her and plants a kiss in her hair as they walk to the car.

Upon Will’s arrival, Hannibal wastes no time expressing his opinion that they should begin taking a more aggressive approach regarding his rehabilitation. Will is not in the mood. Not after his rather drastic miscommunication with Abigail. Part of him wants to snap at Hannibal, why didn’t anyone tell me I was going to need a fucking babysitter? Another part of him just wants to cede his remaining control and be told what to do in every regard. Both parts are, at base, angry with and ashamed of himself.

Though he resolves to just – as Abigail would say – deal with it, his sardonic, please, Doctor, continue, is a little too sour not to be rude.

Hannibal has made his own resolutions, however, and ignores the attitude. “Come,” he says, leading him to the dining room and sitting him down at the head of the table.

Will’s right arm is all bandaged up in a sling before he gets out of his own head long enough to ask what the hell this is all about.

“Constraint-induced movement therapy,” Hannibal explains, tucking the ends of the sling under the splint restricting Will’s wrist and hand. He is definitely in doctor mode today. “Unfortunately, your therapists at the hospital, and, of course, Doctors Whitney and Matthews, were more interested in how you perceived yourself and your surroundings than anything else. In fact, I would argue they were singularly interested in your psychology.”

He says this loftily, as though he’s never been inappropriately curious about someone with cognitive impairment. Will would have laughed out loud if he weren’t so apprehensive about what comes next.

Hannibal carries on, unprompted. “Though your physiotherapy has not been harmful, it hasn’t been very physically therapeutic either.” He gives Will a small smile. “I see no reason to limit your therapy to simply overcoming the delusion you are experiencing.”

Will swallows and flicks his eyes to his bad arm, suddenly feeling like he’d just woken up to a ferocious hangover. He’s not ready for this. “So…?”

“So, restricting the movement of your right arm will force you not only to acknowledge your left, but to use it.”

“Well, shit.”

Hannibal makes a humming noise, halfway between disapproval and amusement. “You’ve also developed a bit of a mouth since your stroke.”

“I started developing a mouth when I realized that swearing in front of Abigail is the last thing I need to worry about.”

Hannibal is definitely amused now. Will rolls his eyes and looks away.

“How long do I have to wear this for?”

“Three or four months, I should think.”

“What?”
“Not at all times,” Hannibal reassures him. “However, it must be worn consistently or you will not benefit from this.” He finishes appraising his work on the sling and takes Will’s left hand, massaging it gently to get the blood flowing properly.

Not reassured at all, Will asks, “How much is consistently?”

Under the absurd guise of concentrating on flexing Will’s elbow, Hannibal is quiet for a while. “We shall see,” he says gently, touching Will’s cheek before standing and collecting the remaining bandaging materials from the table. “Have you eaten anything today, Will?”

With mounting anxiety, Will shakes his head.

Hannibal, of course, known Will wouldn’t eat breakfast, so it’s not long before he returns from the kitchen, bearing a plate heaped with the same type of protein scramble they’d eaten together in Minnesota. Will finds it apt, since he feels pretty much the same amount of dislike towards Hannibal at the moment as he felt back then.

“How am I supposed to do this?” he asks, when Hannibal returns a second time with a coffee for himself and a glass of orange juice for Will, and – Jesus Christ, there’s a straw sticking out of it. Already humiliated, he mumbles, “I’m bad enough with just my right arm. How am I supposed to function without that, too?”

“It will be difficult, but that is why we are going to set you meaningful, goal-oriented tasks. When you complete them, you will feel a sense of accomplishment, and grow more confident in your own abilities.”

Will nods silently, but wonders how that’s possible when ninety percent of the time he can’t even accept the arm is his.

“This is not a punishment, Will,” Hannibal continues, when Will doesn’t say anything. “I am more than confident in your abilities. You shouldn’t doubt the progress you’ve already made.”

“I don’t feel like I’ve made progress.”

“None at all?”

“I’m a little better at tying my shoelaces one-handed,” Will answers wryly. “That’s about all I can say for myself.”

It takes over ten minutes to even lift his arm high enough that his knuckles scrape against the edge of the table. He’s already lost his appetite by this point. His hand drops back into his lap and he despairs at the thought of having to do it all again. “Are you going to watch me the whole time?” he asks, cringing at the shakiness in his voice. He doesn’t realize how tightly his right arm is secured to his body until he subconsciously goes to pick up his glass with that hand.

Hannibal is accommodating enough to take his coffee into the library.

After an arduous forty-five minutes, Will has managed to eat a quarter of the food on his plate – half the food, in his mind. When he finally managed to close his fingers loosely around the handle of his fork, he had felt a fleeting sense of accomplishment, but it dissipated quickly when he realized how low he had to duck his head to get the fork in his mouth. Hannibal might as well have put a dog dish on the floor and had Will eat directly out of it.

Will tries not to hate Hannibal, or view this as being done to him, but he can’t help thinking maybe Hannibal is getting back at him a little, for calling him an idiot. A fucking idiot, no less. He feels he
might pass out if he puts any more effort into breakfast.

Hannibal rejoins Will eventually, and finds him with his face buried in his arm, and the fork still dangling from his fingers.

The rest of the day is spent in the library – with a brief lunchtime sojourn to the kitchen – reading, and sometimes talking.

When Will asks about the CVS treatment he was supposed to try, Hannibal makes it clear that he has already made a decision about that.

“I don’t believe it would be anything more than a waste of your time,” he says dismissively.

Will says, “Indulge me.”

Hannibal replaces the bookmark and closes his book. “The effects of the treatment are temporary. You wouldn’t even make it out of the clinic before they wore off. I can’t imagine what you’d hope to accomplish with a maximum of twenty minutes corrected vision.”

Around his overwhelming disappointment, Will manages to say, “Oh.”

“It has its merits, in research and diagnosis. I thought you might be tired of testing.”

It sounds like a considerate statement, but, once again, Hannibal manages to put something more into it. A dare, maybe. Will goes back to reading with a poorly hidden grimace. As he turns the page – a task that feels like it takes eons to complete – he looks across the room to find Hannibal still watching him.

Will’s face heats. “You’d better not be getting off on this,” he snaps angrily.

Hannibal sighs and returns to his book. “That was rude, Will.”

Abigail picks Will up just after six. Her eyes go immediately to the sling, then to Hannibal. Her expression is blank and she walks back to the car without saying anything. When they get home, she makes a beeline for the shower. She cooks dinner with her hair just wrung out – not even towel-dried, already in a t-shirt and boxers. She avoids eye contact all evening.

Will thinks maybe she’s still upset about this morning, but he’s been wrong before about what goes on in her mind. He asks the broader question, “Are you alright?”

She’s terse in her answer. “I saw Mason today. Don’t wanna talk about it.”

They sit down to eat. Will manages to lift his arm on to the table and pick up his fork, though, again, he can’t get a firm grip on it. He thinks that humiliation is going to become a significant, if not overwhelming part of his emotional repertoire, like his empathy. He considers just pretending he’s not hungry.

“Did Hannibal say you have to sleep in that thing?”

“Hannibal didn’t say anything, really.”

“Do you want me to take it off you?”
“For the love of god.”

Will falls asleep on the couch almost immediately after dinner. It’s not even nine when Abigail shakes him awake and tells him she’s going to bed.

“I left your medication in a cup on the kitchen counter.”

“Thanks.”

She gives him a kiss and whispers, faintly teasing, “I left you the dishes, too.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
His Own Personal Apothecary

Chapter Summary

Something about it being darkest just before dawn. Or something. Things get a little shittier for Will.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: descriptions of post-stroke physical/mental state and rehabilitation
Trigger Warnings: severe anxiety, severe depression, hardcore panic attacks

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will spends the Tuesday morning drive to Hannibal’s thinking of ways to apologize for his behaviour. Unsurprisingly, he doesn’t come up with much beyond, “I’m sorry.”

Hannibal tilts his head curiously, and takes the splint and sling Will holds out.

“Yesterday.” Will sighs. “I know you’re just trying to help me, and… you are.”

“I’m glad to hear it.” Hannibal smiles rather tenderly at Will and takes his arm, steering them again into the dining room. “I would like to continue helping you, if you’ll allow it.”

Though Will would essentially rather die than go through another day of what feels like being in a strait jacket, his stomach unclenches just a little bit. He isn’t prepared, however, for Hannibal to take the conversation further.

“I can only imagine how difficult this must be for you,” Hannibal says as he sets the splint. “And my imagination is no match for yours.”

Will just watches Hannibal’s hands work. It doesn’t occur to him to reply.

Hannibal continues, anyway. “I have been careful of my own feelings, and wary of yours.”

When Hannibal’s hands finish with the splint and disappear to knot the sling, Will stares at his chin instead.

“It has caused a rift between us.”

Wills tilts his head back slightly and his eyes travel to the ceiling.

“I would like to amend that.”

Will stops him. “Can you just…” If his eyes do more than well up, he’s in trouble. He doesn’t think he could handle adding not able to wipe up own tears to his list of impairments today. “Can you maybe not… say things like that right now?”
All morning, Will applies himself diligently to his therapy. He notes, almost clinically, that his intermittent desire to amputate his affected arm doesn’t seem to depend on whether or not he is able to complete a task. He doesn’t ask Hannibal if this is a good thing or not.

As he had done yesterday, Hannibal takes pity on Will at lunch time and allows him to use his good arm. He doesn’t call it pity, of course. He makes a point of calling it a reward for Will’s progress. After wrapping Will’s arm back up, he neatly tears open an individually wrapped gauze sponge. Will eyes it suspiciously.

“This is to put over your good eye.”

Will looks at Hannibal like he’s approaching him with an ice pick and hammer rather than some soft cotton and medical tape.

“You won’t have to wear it nearly as much, and it won’t feel as much like a restraint.”

“But… together?” Will asks, stomach sinking.

“If, after, say, twenty minutes, you feel it’s too much, I’ll remove it, and I promise not to suggest it again until you have better use of your arm.”

Twenty minutes comes and goes, and it really isn’t so bad. Will can see fine; he just feels a little more unsteady when he tries to walk around. The worst part is actually when the patch comes off and he experiences vertigo for a few minutes while his brain adjusts. He tells himself his next goal-oriented task will have to be uncapping his puke pills with his bad hand.

When Abigail arrives, Will is exhausted, but a lot less angry than yesterday. Abigail looks tired, too.

“You have a ridiculous commute from Wolf Trap, Abigail. We should go back to staying in Baltimore. At least on weekdays.”

“Don’t worry about it,” she answers, sounding unconcerned. “Margot is paying me for my travel time. I think she likes the idea of you being in Wolf Trap.”

So, they carry out the rest of the week in a similar fashion. Will has good days and bad days. He tries to make it seem like it’s no worse than minor mood swings, because Abigail clearly has good days and bad days as well. A number appears on Will’s fridge and Hannibal’s phone table. Abigail tells them it’s for her new work phone.

Will continues to make coffee for Abigail in the mornings and to wash the dishes after dinner. After a few days, he’s able to dry them decently well too, by holding a dish cloth in his bad hand at waist level, and bringing the dishes to it with his good hand. He knows his insistence on doing these things is ridiculous, but there’s so little else he’s able to do around the house. Sometimes he cooks for them, but, even though Abigail takes the sling off for those events, it’s difficult not to make a mess or forget about things on his left side until they start to burn.

The weekend is spent doing lots of walking and napping, and smoking, in Abigail’s case. Will is allowed to forgo the sling, though Hannibal cautions him that he may regress if he doesn’t force himself to purposefully acknowledge and use his affected arm throughout the day.
So, on Saturday, Will grits his teeth and, in a series of mental hurdles, grabs his bad arm with his
good hand and flops it onto his desk. He flattens his fingers against the wood. The skin looks soft –
almost boneless – and, even though there is no difference in pallor, he sees it as a pale, clammy,
undead thing. He makes himself look at it for a whole five minutes before allowing himself to turn
away and gag. It’s definitely more difficult to make himself look when he’s alone. He only manages
to do it twice that day.

Though Will doesn’t view his arm as belonging to a separate, malevolent being anymore, which
Hannibal tells him is an improvement, he doesn’t feel ownership of it either. He isn’t afraid of it so
much as repulsed by it. On the best of days, it is a withered, pallid protrusion of flesh that had once
been his before it necrotized, and he very much wants to saw it off and bury it somewhere his dogs
won’t accidentally dig it up.

Mid-morning on Sunday, Will returns from a walk to find Abigail on his laptop, sniffling and
searching for a pharmacy that’s open seven days a week.

“What’s wrong?” Will asks, thoroughly alarmed.

Abigail buries her face in her hands. “Two of your meds run out today, so you won’t have an
evening dose unless I find somewhere to get refills.”

He sits next to her and sees that she’s definitely crying behind the curtain of hair. “Why are you so
upset, sweetheart?”

“I was supposed to pick up refills on Friday and I forgot!” she moans.

“It’s okay… We can call Hannibal. I’m sure he’s his own personal apothecary or something.”

It might have been the wrong thing to say, judging by the marked increase in the volume of her sobs.
Obviously, there’s a much bigger problem at the root of her distress. He goes out into the hall and
calls Hannibal. As expected, Hannibal has access of some sort to some place that has some drugs.
Will doesn’t ask any questions.

He rejoins Abigail and says what is apparently the right thing to say. “I told him the dogs ate them.”

Her sobs quieten and, eventually, she laughs tearfully and asks, “Really?”

“Really. You’re the most responsible person I know, Abigail. Will you please stop beating yourself
up about this now, and tell me what’s really wrong?”

Abigail shakes her head. “Nothing. I’m just a little stressed.” She wipes her eyes with the corner of
her sleeve. “I’m fine now. I just panicked.”

He holds out his arm and she gravitates into his hug. “Let’s go back to Baltimore.”

“No. You feel better here.”

“You have enough on your plate. You don’t need to be taking care of me too. Especially since
you’re the only one of us with a job right now.”

“I like my job, and I like taking care of you. Deal with it.”

“You’re going to kill yourself, sweetheart.”

Abigail shoves him away, and Will is stung.
Vehemently, she says, “If Hannibal wants to help, he should come here and help.” She stands and grabs her cigarettes from the hall table.

Will isn’t sure what to do until she asks sharply, “Are you coming?” before disappearing out the front door.

He follows her onto the porch, expecting a proper tirade, but she seems to be done with that conversation. It’s bizarre to watch her light up and smoke so casually in front of him, like this isn’t the first time she’s done so. It’s almost odd how not odd it is.

“I mean it, you know. About you being responsible. I never have to ask you to do anything. That’s probably unheard of in the history of eighteen-year-olds.”

“They just want to rebel. I already did that. With you. And it sucked.” Abigail shrugs and takes a few puffs before adding, “I want to do my part.”

“You do more than your part, Abigail,” Will says seriously.

“Maybe that’s because you don’t tell me to.”

“If I did, you wouldn’t?”

“Not if I thought you were arbitrarily trying to teach me a lesson.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know… Like, assigning housework to teach me responsibility or something. That’s what Marissa used to complain about, anyway.”

“I don’t think anyone ever taught me those things are connected.”

“You’re just a neat freak because your parents were or something?”

“My parents were absent.”

“Oh.”

“Maybe that’s why.”

“Maybe.” Abigail stamps out her cigarette. “Obviously, my dad was teaching me different lessons.”

Monday through Wednesday mirror the previous week. Coffee or tea, drive to Hannibal’s, work or physio, and so on. On the drive home, Abigail and Will each attempt to assess the other’s mood, and the tone is set for the evening. Dinner together on the couch or porch, with the amount of conversation usually regulated by how tired they are. They change Will’s medication regimen to allow them both to go to bed earlier. Given their routine, it seems like a bad omen when, on Thursday morning, there’s no pot of coffee waiting for Abigail in the kitchen.

Abigail finds Will still in bed, but not asleep. He is lying on his side, shoulders heaving, trying to muffle wet sobs with a pillow. She tiptoes away before he sees or hears her, and calls Margot.

“I can’t leave Will today. Can I work from here?” She speaks quietly, knowing how mortified Will would be if he overheard.
Margot sounds worried, though the roughness in her voice suggests she hasn’t been awake more than a few minutes. “Is he alright?”

“I don’t know. He’s really upset. He hasn’t been upset like this since the hospital.”

“Are you okay on your own?”

“I think so…”

“There’s nothing time-sensitive at the moment. You can take tomorrow off, too, if you want.”

“Will wouldn’t want me to, but maybe? He’s going to be all twisted up about today already. I’m really not sure…” She hears her own voice start to sound stressed the way Margot’s usually is.

“It’s okay, Abigail. Call me in the morning. Or, before then, obviously, if you need anything.”

“I can still go do stuff from here,” Abigail tries again.

“If you want to, but why don’t you just relax?”

“I’ll go crazy. And then I’ll try and do everything for Will. And then he’ll go crazy.”

Margot makes an exasperated sound, though Abigail can tell she’s smiling. “You’re like a slightly smaller Judy, sometimes.”

“Great! I’ll set up call forwarding.”

“Fine, you lunatic. I’m cutting you off at 4pm, though. Take care, okay?”

Will is sitting up in bed with his face in his hand. He’s not crying anymore, but he can’t seem to stop shaking. Abigail kneels in front of him and gently drums her fingertips on his kneecaps.

“Hi,” she says. “What’s wrong?”

He shakes his head, shivering.

Abigail knows the warning signs. She leaves for a minute to fetch his medication, a glass of water, a damp washcloth, a clean towel, and a blanket from the couch. Will hasn’t had a full-blown panic attack since the hospital. She’s slightly worried he’ll be more freaked out than usual, and, not knowing what he might need, she just brings all of it.

When she perches next to him and puts a hand on his back, he starts shaking his head more vigorously. “I can’t – I can’t today…”

“You don’t have to,” she says softly.

His breaths, already hitched, get more erratic. “You’re gonna be late…”

“Nope.” She rubs his upper back, gently but purposefully, like she’s trying to iron the panic out of his lungs. “I’m working from home today. Margot said it would be such a short day, it wouldn’t be worth it for me to drive out there.” It’s not precisely the truth, but it’s just as honest.

Will is apparently still cognizant enough not to believe her. “D-don’t, Abigail…”
Her heart flips over at how frightened he sounds. “Will, did something happen?” She tries to keep her voice calm, and coaxes him to the edge of the bed so he can properly lean over and put his head down.

He sucks in far too much air with every breath – when he has panic attacks alone, he must just pass out.

She hadn’t remembered accurately just how scary it is to watch him hyperventilate. “Breathe, Will.”

He’s still trying to speak. “I thought… I thought I could–” Each inhale sounds like a bucket scraping against the bottom of an empty well.

“Shh.” Abigail resumes rubbing his back. “You don’t need to answer right now, okay? All you need to do is breathe. Everything will be okay.”

He nods jerkily but can’t catch his breath. Half-wheezing, half-croaking, he sounds like he’s dying, and he’s probably feeding into his own panic. Yeah, he definitely just passes out.

“Will. Breathe. Slowly. It will be okay.” She drops to the floor, bringing the washcloth with her, and sits back on her heels in front of him. She pushes back his hair and presses the cool cloth to his forehead, trying not to think of herself as a weird amalgam of Hannibal and her own mother. She’s been thinking too much of her mother lately.

Aside from his flushed face, he looks clammy, and he’s shivering.

“Think you can get that sweaty shirt off you?”

He grabs at the fabric behind his neck and pulls, but the shirt dangles off his bad arm. She plucks it off him and chucks it in the direction of the laundry hamper. Then, she wraps the towel around his shoulders and drapes the blanket over him, and finds him a fresh t-shirt for when he feels like he can handle wrestling it on.

She settles back in front of him, gently tugging at his wrist until he releases his white knuckle grip on his own hair and takes her hand. She hopes that focusing on not crushing it will ground him a little.

“You’re safe, okay? This is all you need to do. Just breathe. You’re safe.”

Very slowly, very gradually, Will’s breathing eases, and the horrific death-rattle type gasps cease. He crawls back up to his pillow and collapses wearily.

Abigail climbs up onto the bed next to him and leans back against the wall, stroking a hand through his hair until he falls asleep.

All morning and part of the afternoon, Will alternates between being a weeping mess of violent tears and falling into exhausted sleep. Abigail camps out next to him, snoozing in between calls and message-taking and texting Judy. At one point, he says something about her missing work. She says, if it makes him feel better, she’s stealing his laptop for the day. He tells her she doesn’t have to stay. She tells him to deal with it. It’s become her catchphrase.

Abigail is vaguely surprised that Hannibal doesn’t call, or simply show up. She supposes he’s playing another game of chicken. Around lunchtime, when Will is in a rare state of wakefulness without rib-wracking sobs, she asks, “Do you want me to call Hannibal?”
Will doesn’t answer aloud. His throat must be raw, and his chest and abdominals in agony. He shakes his head stiffly.

She can’t see his face, so she asks a follow-up question. “Do you want him to come over? He would,” she asserts, believing that Hannibal would, too, if only to remind Abigail that his sway over Will is more powerful than hers.

All Will does is lift his shoulder in a barely visible gesture of defeat. It looks like how the words I always want that would sound.

Later, he rolls onto his back and sleepily reaches for her hand.

Hannibal arrives well after dinner.

Mood levels are approaching normalcy, and Abigail has persuaded Will out onto the flats with the dogs. As usual, he stays out of the trees, knowing she would worry if she looked out the window and he was out of sight. He’s kind to her this way. He tries, and mostly succeeds at not being angry with her when she babies him – though she knows he must be frustrated out of his mind, and waits for the day he starts openly resenting her.

Hannibal can let himself in, of course, but Abigail decides to take a stab at being polite, and opens the door for him when she hears his car pull into the drive.

She feels his watchful eyes appraising her right away, and her instinct is to frown at him. She doesn’t want to make him leave, though. She’s spent the entire day avoiding getting into mental arguments with him and winding herself up.

Will comes back inside, looking a whole lot better than he had this morning, though his eyes are still bloodshot and he’s managed to retain a bit of a runny nose. Hannibal goes to him and helps him out of his jacket. Abigail whistles for the dogs and leaves Will and Hannibal alone.

Maybe out of habit, she’s still optimistic that one or both of them will make a romantic gesture towards the other. Something – anything – to keep them together while Will gets better, even if it’s just a Band-Aid. She’s stopped teasing Will for the most part, and stopped harassing Hannibal altogether, but she hasn’t managed to stamp out those embers of hope in her chest.

In the kitchen, she feeds the dogs and refills their water dishes, and contemplates making a snack for herself. Her nerves quickly relay the message to her stomach that no, she can’t possibly eat right now. Instead, she goes up to her room and climbs out onto the roof, relieved of her duties for at least a couple of hours. Up here, she’ll be able to see if Hannibal decides to leave Will in her care tonight. She lights a cigarette and hopes, for all their sakes, that he’ll stay. She wonders if this is how Will feels when he thinks he’s failed her.

“I’m so goddamn tired all the time,” Will says flatly.

Hannibal pulls him close. “I know.”

“I don’t know what to do…”

“You don’t have to do anything, Will.” He wraps his other arm around Will’s shoulders.
“I do.”

“No, Will.” His voice is gentle, and his hand reaches up to cup the back of Will’s head. “I’m sorry I made you feel that’s the case.”

“I don’t want to be like this anymore.”

Hannibal does not take his eyes off Will’s face. “You’re feeling trapped in your own body. It’s not responding the way you want it to, and that is frustrating.”

“That’s putting it mildly,” Will mumbles. He drops his forehead to Hannibal’s shoulder.

“You won’t want to hear this, Will, but, the truth of the matter is, it will take time. Likely, more time than you expect. Definitely more time than you want to spend in a body that doesn’t behave how it used to.”

“Please… tell me it gets better.” Will is practically vibrating with the maddening uselessness he feels when he considers said body. “I don’t know if I can believe you right now, but tell me anyway.”

“It will get better. I promise. It already has.”

“Sometimes I think I’m dying.”

“You’re not.” Hannibal turns his head and his lips graze Will’s temple where the scar tissue is forming. He suddenly feels he might burst with affection. “Listen to me, Will. It’s good that you’re frustrated. Frustration can be a powerful motivator.”

“I don’t feel motivated.”

Hannibal tilts Will’s chin up and forces their eyes to meet. “How do you feel, Will?”

“Tired. Just tired.”

Letting go of Will’s jaw, Hannibal allows him to rest his head back on his shoulder. They’re quiet for a moment. Then, “I would like to stay here with you tonight, if I may.” Hannibal speaks as though Will has the power or energy to say no.

When they are in bed, Will actually allows Hannibal to put an arm under his shoulders and pull him tight against himself. It’s rare for Will to be so receptive to unsolicited tenderness from Hannibal this far outside of a sexual act. In the unchecked part of his mind, Hannibal thinks, this is alright. He can allow Will his human weaknesses, as long as he doesn’t go inside alone.

They both sleep in the next day, breathing synchronized, as though they are sharing Will’s exhaustion and despondence between them. Neither wakes up until the phone rings in the early afternoon.

Hannibal shifts Will off his chest, and, in a voice gravelly with sleep, answers the phone. “Abigail?”

“I called your cell phone…”

“Tell me what happened.”

Hannibal can visualize Abigail her wringing her hands, though there is only silence on the other end of the line.
“Abigail.”

Abigail whimpers.

Hannibal repeats, calm and authoritative, “Abigail, tell me what happened.”

“I fucked up… I have Jack Crawford. What do I do?”

Chapter End Notes

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03, @weesprigofzest on tumblr), alias Mrs. John Wilmot.

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Survivors

Chapter Summary

I’m putting this in a separate chapter instead of with the next bit because the material is quite sensitive. If any of the following triggers apply to you, please skip this chapter. You’ll be able to continue the story without it. There is also a synopsis at the end.

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03, @weesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warnings: physical & psychological child abuse; child-on-child sexual abuse; extreme homophobia; systematic emotional manipulation; PTSD; mention of systematic rape & child pornography

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She and Mason were very young, still in primary school together, when Margot expressed her budding proclivities for the first time. She gave a valentine to a girl she liked, because she wanted to be her friend. She didn’t know about any other kind of attraction yet. The girl was very pretty, and when she thanked Margot for the card, Margot felt compelled to kiss her on her rosy cheek. Maybe a slight flutter of nervousness, but that was all. They were pure, childish feelings of mutual adoration.

Mason showed his aptitude for cruelty and spoiled it, by outing Margot before either of them had any idea what it meant to be gay. All they knew was that the church said it was a sin, and Mama and Papa said it was sick. Mason, a keen student of his own interests, was naturally determined to learn more. Inevitably, his interests expanded. In almost no time at all, he was watching copious amounts of child pornography and giving Margot anatomy lessons. His balls hadn’t even dropped yet.

Her parents made it clear that they hoped Margot could be saved, with their guidance, and discipline, and prayers. Margot was never sure if her mother knew what was going on under her roof. She would tell Margot that she was strange and her behaviour off-putting, which suggested she didn’t, but she always knew which parts of the house to steer clear of, which suggested she did. Molson, on the other hand, knew full well, and even watched from time to time. The first time he watched, he told her to stop crying, and to let Mason fuck the gay out of her. The only time she’s ever seen Judy cry was when she told her about that.

As they grew up, Mason grew less and less interested in fucking her, and, when she got her first
period, he was disgusted, and stopped altogether. For one blissful week, she thought that was the end of her suffering. But then came the chocolate years.

The first time, he deceived her. He gave her the chocolate before saying or doing anything, and she thought it was an apology. She learned very quickly that he wanted to cut her, or brand her, or break a bone in return. She learned just as quickly that taking the chocolate was not optional. Somehow, Margot’s injuries were unanimously chalked up to her being clumsy – which she wasn’t.

By their early teens, Molson had established a small nurse’s office (little more than a first aid station) in their house in Chicago. It was ostensibly for employees who got minor injuries on the job. Mason would tell her loudly, in front of Mama and Papa, to stop being oafish and using up resources meant for the workers. It was about this time that Papa started pulling Mason out of school in order to conduct his real education.

Margot went away to college, and, while she was gone, their mother died. When Margot returned for the funeral, Mason made such a show of having missed her and having changed, talking of his recent court-appointed therapy and his reading of the bible in pursuit of spiritual happiness. He performed so well, he convinced her to move home and work security at the Verger’s Chicago plant while she did her master’s degree.

He was so very clever. He let himself slip up and have fits of sadism now and then, purely so he could look contrite and appalled at himself afterwards. It made the illusion all the more believable. He talked on and on about family, and brother and sisterhood, and needing each other now that Mama was dead. “Papa won’t be around forever,” he told her mournfully, “and then all we’ll have is each other.” Meanwhile, he was orchestrating his own grand design, which took the form of thousands of nightmare pig hybrids.

It was at Verger Meat-Packing, Chicago that Margot met Judy for the first time. Their interaction was fleeting. Judy was affiliated with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, representing several employees who claimed the plant conditions were dangerous. She’d barely finished asking Margot how long she’d worked there, when Mason interrupted and jauntily led Judy to Papa’s office via the route with the fewest health code violations.

When Judy left, Carlo followed her home. Margot didn’t find out until almost a whole week later, when Mason made a tasteless joke about it while carving into Margot’s back. “Papa’s just being careful,” he said. “It’s easier to scare people than to turn them into lard. In terms of organization I mean.” Mason chuckled, pleased with himself. “Mechanically, it’s quite easy.” No doubt he was referring to the need to pay investigative parties off that time three of Molson’s employees tried to unionize and were subsequently sold as Durham’s Pure Leaf Lard.

Margot tracked down which hospital Judy was at, and Judy recognized her right away. “You’re the girl from the packing plant.”

Margot nodded. “Em.”

“Was it naïve of me to think I could investigate the wealthy without getting stabbed?”

“A little.”

“Naïve to think I’d get to practice law for at least a year first?”
“No, that’s sounds reasonable.”

“Forget a year. It’s my first month at this new job.”

Margot visited her every day. Sometimes twice a day.

After a week or so, Judy said, “I can’t believe I didn’t think to ask this ’til now. How did you know I was here?”

“I overheard some people,” Margot answered vaguely. “You’re going to drop this, right?”

“Probably not. I mean, now I’m just mad.”

“What if I told you it doesn’t matter?”

“How could it possibly not matter?”

“Because the plant’s closing in a month.”

“How do you know that?”

“I’d really rather not say.”

“Why?”

“Because I like you, and I think you like me. I haven’t figured out what to do about that.”

“We could make out,” Judy suggested.

They did, for a while. Then, Judy asked outright, “Are you Margot Verger?”

Margot was mortified, but answered in the affirmative.

“You don’t seem as keyed up as your fellow Vergers,” Judy observed.

“Meat packing isn’t really my thing. Even if it were, my brother is the sole beneficiary in our father’s will.”

“We’d better find you a rich husband, then.”

“Funny.”

Margot spent that whole night manipulating numbers, and, the next day, managed to convince Papa that the money they’d save on distribution would offset the cost of paying everyone out and closing the plant early.

At this point, Mason had grown tired of waiting for Papa to die, and went travelling to inspect the different branches of his swine-breeding franchise. Carlo went with him. The remaining Vergers made their strategic move to Maryland, to the property that had been in their family since the turn of the century.

Judy went back to working with OSHA. Margot returned to Chicago to visit her a lot. Molson, now closer than ever to the White House, continued to sidestep liability for anything by making
arrangements with several politicians. When he died a little over two years later, Mason returned to Muskrat Farm, positively gleeful.

It was almost two years after meeting that Margot and Judy finally slept together. It wasn’t an intentional delay on their part; Judy was getting licensed as a notary public (“Back up, in case someone else decides to get stabby with me in the future.”), and Margot was due to present her Master’s work.

Margot went to Chicago and stayed with Judy for a whole week to celebrate when she was granted her Master’s and accepted into the PhD program. One night, they started reaching under each other’s clothes at exactly the same time. However, when Judy felt the scars all over Margot’s back, and Margot just said, *my brother*, they almost stopped. Margot later found out exactly how furious Judy had been in that moment, but, that night, Judy simply kissed her everywhere, told her she was the most beautiful girl in the world, and ate her out until they were both exhausted.

The next day, Judy gave her notice at OSHA, and listed her little house.

“I’m totally in love with you,” she explained to Margot.

By the end of their week together, Judy had found a place just outside Baltimore County. She arranged for Margot to pick up the keys and said she should stay there whenever she wanted. Judy completed her two weeks, packed up her place, and was in Maryland the same day she finished. Margot had worked hard in that time to make the place ready for her. It was worth it to see the look on Judy’s face, then have her collapse in her lap and mumble thank you into her navel until she fell asleep.

Chapter End Notes

Synopsis: All you need to know to move forward with the characters:

1) Margot had an incredibly fucked up childhood, yes, but her sexual orientation was not determined by the abuse she suffered.
2) Mason is highly intelligent and manipulative, and he’s incredibly committed to his projects. Testing Margot has been a lifelong project for him.
3) Judy used to be a lawyer affiliated with the OSHA. She was representing some of Molson’s employees, who had filed complaints, when she was stabbed by Carlo to scare her off the case and her clients into keeping quiet.
4) Three former employees of Verger Meat-Packing, Chicago were processed and sold as lard after trying to get the workers to unionize. Molson obviously managed to pay off anyone looking into their disappearances.
5) On Sibling Violence (SV):

“Despite a generalized intolerance of abuse, there still appears to be a hierarchy of acceptance for different types of family violence.” (pp. 438)

“As such, siblings who report SV victimization are more likely to be blamed either for provoking their assailant and/or for not defending themselves properly (Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998).” (pp. 440)
Ethics or Chickenshit

Chapter Summary

Margot and Judy flirt with the idea of getting rid of Mason altogether. They also flirt with each other. In the pants.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Abigail thinks it’s about damn time she got her shit together and braved seeing Mason again. She makes her way over to the new wing and is at the top of the steps when she hears voices in the hall. Out of habit, she pauses to listen just out of sight.

“Dr. Lecter was right. I don’t have room for all the hate Mason deserves. I don’t think I want to make room.”

“He’s still a mad dog. But I guess all his teeth have been pulled, so it doesn’t really matter.”

“I can’t say for sure if it’s ethics or chickenshit.”

“That’s not really a question that needs answering, is it? If you kill him – or have him killed – you’d be showing him mercy. If you don’t, you’ll make sure he’s cared for properly. I know you, Margot Verger, insane, beautiful bitch that you are. You know when enough is enough.”

“I don’t think I do. If I did, I wouldn’t be on the fence about pulling the plug.”

“You love him, and you pity him. Poor girl. Despite a family history of congenital heartlessness, you actually have one.”

“How dare you.”

“Mason deserves death, and you can give him what he deserves without consequences. You can know all that and still not want him to die.”

“That sounds like something Dr. Lecter would say.”

“The man – if you can call him that – occasionally has a point. Not that that excuses his wanton evilness. I’ll never forgive him…”

“So fierce.”

“Like you’re not just as fierce when I’m not around.”

“What I do isn’t being fierce. I look pissed off unless I’m actively trying not to. When you’re not around, I just lean to it a little more.”

“Fiercely. You know – I’d kill Dr. Lecter if I didn’t like Abigail so much.”

“What if it was for her own good?”
“No, that wouldn’t stand up. If I ever kill anyone, it will have to be for myself, or for you. Everyone else… well, it’s not my decision. Is this new?”

“Mhm.”

“It looks very… removable.”

“Fierce and coquettish.”

“Mm. Kiss, please.”

Abigail peeks around the corner to see Margot and Judy walking hand-in-hand away from Mason’s room. As usual, they look like an animated painting. The afternoon sun is at just the right angle to glance off the chrome, creating dark shadows cut with brilliant light. It looks like a movie scene when they stop by one of the windows and engage in the silhouette of a kiss.

Whenever they’re together, something beautiful happens. The sun will shine just right; or the position they happen to pause in will be particularly tableau-like; or a mist will snake around their ankles like an infinity symbol on their early morning treks to the stable. Abigail knows it’s mostly her imagination augmenting her view of these two women she admires so much. She knows that sunbeams and rainbows can’t actually follow them around everywhere, and lightning can’t strike a nearby tree every time they kiss in the rain, showering them with sparks. It’s nice to pretend, though.

Margot and Judy are so selfless in their love for one another that it doesn’t matter what terrible things they’ve had done to them, or how ruthlessly they deal with the rest of the world. Even Mason’s broken, disfigured body is a burden shared, and therefore halved. Abigail wonders if they have any secrets from each other at all.

Abigail’s silent tears speckle the front of her blouse. Is it so wrong to want that for Will and Hannibal? They could make the very air pulse without ever touching, and others would be awestruck, not even knowing the source. They would shiver in the presence of such greatness, unaware that it’s the magnetic field between two intimate souls they feel. Why can’t Will and Hannibal see that, despite them being monsters separately, there are no two halves of anything in existence that together make a more complete whole. Margot and Judy are killers, too, or at least have that instinct, and yet Abigail would never question that they deserve the happiness they bring each other – that they build together. No wonder she imagines, when they loop arms about each other’s waists – which is always – that the sun shifts in the sky to make a halo for them both.

Abigail changes her mind about going to see Mason and retreats quickly and quietly to the main house. Back in Judy’s office, while she tidies her own little desk, she considers the four of them. Will, Hannibal, Margot, and Judy, all share the same darkness she herself houses. They are all alike on some level, and, at the very least, intellectual matches for one other. If madness is a blood-borne pathogen, shared by all, why, when they are paired off, are they so different?

She sets the office phone to go directly to voicemail for the weekend and locks up. She’s pretty sure Judy won’t be back, and she’s pretty sure she knows why. What she doesn’t know is how it’s possible for Margot and Judy to spend all day, every day together, and still want to rip each other’s clothes off as soon and as often as they can. They are so deeply in love and so celebratory about the fact. She’s pretty sure Hannibal and Will haven’t had sex since Will’s stroke. If she thought she could get away with it, she’d like to point out in her snarkiest possible voice that, maybe if they relieved some of the tension in bed, they wouldn’t storm out on each other so often. She wonders what she’ll have to deal with when she gets back to Wolf Trap. They’d spent all night and, as far as she knows, all day together. If one or both of them isn’t in pieces she’ll be surprised. If they’re still talking to each other, she’ll think she’s died and gone to heaven.
She’s preoccupied with these thoughts all the way out to her car, and all the way to the gate. So preoccupied, she doesn’t see the big black SUV do a U-turn in her rearview mirror, and doesn’t notice it following her until she’s halfway to the highway.

“Naughty!” Judy grins as she exposes Margot’s choice of undergarments. Black, lacy, and so alluring on her, Judy wonders how everybody in the world – regardless of sexuality – doesn’t just stop what they’re doing and daily worship the female form. “I can’t believe I waited all day to unwrap you…”

Margot smiles and holds her arms out.

Judy crawls onto the bed and kisses her lovingly. “Gorgeous girl…” She runs her hands over every inch of bare skin and her lips follow. She kisses her way back up Margot’s thigh and comes to rest between her legs.

“Mm.” Margot smiles. “What are you doing?”

Judy mouths at her through the sheer fabric. “Just making sure you’re still going to marry me,” she says, wickedly.

“I will marry the fuck out of you, but only if I can take your last name. I don’t think there needs to be a next generation of Vergers.”

“Mrs. and Mrs. Ingram sounds fine to me. Let’s do it now.” She presses her lips against Margot’s clit and hears her moan the smallest, quietest moan before answering.

“You know I would. I’d love a simple courthouse wedding.”

“The media want a big, flashy wedding.”

“We could probably get away with a small, flashy wedding.”

“Would that appease the vultures?”

“I don’t know, but people will get bored quicker with a few pictures than with a headline that reads Wealthy Lesbian Marries in Secret. And, this way, your family could come.”

Judy moves back up Margot’s body to reignite their kiss and slips a finger between Margot’s legs. She smiles when it comes away wet. Margot opens her mouth and lets Judy run the same finger along the inside of her bottom lip. She sucks the tip of it lightly when Judy withdraws.

“We could elope,” Judy suggests, while her hand steals past the seam of Margot’s panties and teases apart her lips. They’d be flushed with the heat building, and sopping by the time Judy is done with her.

“God, Jude,” Margot moans. “Why didn’t you suggest that a month ago?”

Judy brushes her nose against hers. “Sorry, baby.” They kiss a while longer, and Judy softly runs her fingers over Margot’s slit, right up against it, until they are slick, and Margot subconsciously starts tonguing her way into Judy’s mouth while moaning softly. Her moans always start out soft.

Judy is kissing her way back down, murmuring how sweet she’s going to taste – how she always tastes so sweet – when the phone rings. Judy reaches over a frustrated Margot, saying, “You’ll still
taste sweet two minutes from now.” She takes the phone off the night stand, provocatively rubbing her hip over Margot’s clit. “Hello?”

Margot squirms a little beneath her, glaring. Daring Judy to take longer than that. Judy knows if she does, Margot will unapologetically start fucking herself against Judy’s hip bone.

“Hello, Dr. Lecter.” Judy can practically hear Margot’s arousal puff out of existence. “No, you certainly may not. Would you like me to pass on a message?” She pauses for his reply, then informs him, “Oh, she’s home.” Not about to explain that he doesn’t deserve to speak with Margot, however, she lets the awkward impasse last another five seconds. “Would you like to give me that message?”

Margot is laughing to herself, which is a relief, because it so easily could have gone the other way, and Judy doesn’t want Dr. Lecter breaking the five-day depression-free streak she’s been on.

“Yes, I think we can do that… Well, I suppose your place is as good a rendezvous as any… See you then… You’re welcome, Dr. Lecter.”

“Bad news?” Margot starts absentmindedly rolling her pelvis against Judy’s again.

“Debatable. But it is time-sensitive.” Judy slides back down between Margot’s legs. “Otherwise, I’d take care of this first.” She grabs her panties and pulls them roughly aside to expose her cunt, licks up her slit once, sits back, and smooths the fabric back into place.

“His wanton evil knows no bounds,” Margot mutters as she drags herself off the bed and ties her dress back up. “Can’t believe I just got box-blocked by Dr. Lecter.”

“Actually, we’re going to help Abigail move a body. But I still plan on finger-fucking you in Dr. Lecter’s fancy bathroom later.”

Margot smiles and actually blushes. “Naughty.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta’d by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
A Murder Family Field Trip

Chapter Summary

The Family takes care of some Murder Business. Team Chesapeake Ripper is born.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: descriptions of murders and crime scenes, as one would expect

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03, @weesprigofzest on tumblr), aka Her Holeyness, a source of profound wisdom on the ancient teachings of why Hannibal and Will should put each other's holes to good use.

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store

Something meaty for the main course. // That's a fine looking high horse.

–Hozier, “Take Me to Church”

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal hangs up the phone, pleasantly surprised by the amount of courtesy Margot’s highly protective spouse had managed to show him.

Will stirs next to him.

“Good morning, Will. Good afternoon, rather.”

“I shudder to think,” Will says, sitting up and rubbing sleep out of his eyes.

“How are you feeling?”

Will turns to look at Hannibal and smiles hesitantly. “Better.” His voice is breathy and a little hoarse. “Really did a number on my lungs, though.”

“Your penchant for letting the things you feel build up will have that effect.” The words are reproving, but Hannibal’s tone is nothing less than affectionate.

Will shrugs. There’s nothing he can say to that, really. “Why were you calling Judy?” He starts a little when he feels a hand on his back and lips on his shoulder blade, but it’s not unwelcome.

“I was calling Margot, actually.”

“Why?” Will turns his head so he can actually see Hannibal breathing against his skin.
“We will likely need her assistance today.”

“Do you ever just voluntarily offer information?” Will shrugs him off his shoulder, unimpressed.
“What for?”

Hannibal smiles smugly. “You need to shower.”

Will sighs. “Rude.” He starts getting out of bed, but Hannibal smoothly – almost lazily, the smug bastard – encircles his waist and drags him back against himself.

“You didn’t let me finish, Will,” Hannibal admonishes. “You need to shower because we have that date with Uncle Jack after all.” He lets go of Will’s waist, but not before he sucks a feral kiss into his trapezius.

Will feels a bizarre sense of the playing field being levelled a little bit, but not because of the touch. Rather, Hannibal’s sudden shift in attitude when he says Jack’s name. It reminds Will of Max and Harley, before he’d trained them out of hunting squirrels. They’d turn up at the back door, eyes bright, expecting gratitude or praise for their gifts of raw meat. Is Hannibal actually seeking Will’s approval? If so, Jack will never know how monumental a contribution his death will be to their bond.

Abigail sits at the end of the bed and removes her scarf. She pulls her hair back into a ponytail, revealing the right side of her head and the malformation of scar tissue there. The room is too dark for her black eye to be noticeable, but it isn’t really relevant. Bella comes out of the bathroom, toting a portable oxygen tank, and sees her. Abigail smiles at her warmly, and helps her back to bed, pulling the sheets up over her without tangling the line.

Bella puts everything together immediately, and says breathily, “You’re… the Hobbs girl… Jack thought… you were dead.” She wheezes every few words.

“That was the idea.”

“What are you… doing here?”

“I came to kill you, if that's what you still want.”

Bella’s seems darkly amused. “So… Dr. Lecter took you… under his wing.”

“He told me you tried to overdose. I don’t need anyone’s wings, though.”

Bella brings the oxygen mask to her face and inhales. “I can’t say I’m… sorry you’ve come,” she admits when she catches her breath. “I’m… tired of being kept alive… even for Jack.”

“A lot of people are tired of being a lot of things for Jack.”

Bella smiles ruefully. “My husband… is a difficult man.”

“He’s desperate,” Abigail allows. “Someone needs to act for him.”

“I know. He’s… lost, and stubborn… but he’s… a good man.”

This is Bella’s time, so Abigail neither agrees nor disagrees. After a while, she says, softly, “He’ll be better off once you’re dead, you know.”

“Yes.” Bella sighs. “Jack won’t al… allow himself to heal… until there’s nothing… else… he can
They sit together quietly for a few minutes. Bella’s hand finds its way on top of Abigail’s.

“How will you do it?” she asks gently. It sounds like she’s asking Abigail how her day went.

Abigail had meant to smother her, nice and easy, but Bella’s tone is so reminiscent of her mother’s, she blurts out, “However you want.”

Bella gives her a smile, and Abigail returns it, almost shyly. She’d expected to feel guilty, especially if Bella actually spoke to her. Instead, she feels a transient sort of connection – as though they’re sharing in a private joke. One that Jack, or Hannibal, or even Will wouldn’t understand.

“Nothing too… spectacular, please,” Bella requests, and, though she coughs with the effort of so much talking, her eyes are bright and even teasing. Abigail thinks she would have been a good mom. “Something quiet. Don’t be… cruel… to Jack. I’d like him… to remember me as… me, not as… a victim in some… case.”

Abigail nods. “He’ll think you died in your sleep. You’ll look peaceful.”

“Thank you.”

Abigail is sad, but not remorseful. “Are you ready?”

“Yes.”

They smile at each other one last time. Abigail covers Bella’s face with a pillow, leaning her whole weight down on it and finding that unnecessary. Bella doesn’t thrash or scratch. Her movements are miniscule. She had already left the world in her mind, longing for the comfort of death, so, quickly and easily, her body follows.

Even though she’d only met Bella Crawford today, Abigail cries hard before starting the car and driving to Hannibal’s.

“What the hell happened to your eye?” Will asks, turning from the sink to find Abigail standing in the doorway, developing quite the shiner.

She walks into the kitchen. “Funny story...”

“Come here.” Will takes her chin and tilts her head so he can inspect it. He tuts and says, “Anything else?”

She shakes her head. “You don’t get to say anything. I didn’t get stabbed or shot or anything.”

Will pretends to be wounded by her words.

“And I actually kind of did this to myself. Jack was… a little heavier than I thought he’d be. So… technically Jack’s head did this, but it was a pretty unconscious head.”

“Does it hurt?”

“Not really. What are you doing up here?”

“Thought I’d better take a couple puke pills before joining them.”
“It’s good I caught you. You’ve never been to the basement before, have you?”

“No, come to think of it. Why?”

“The steps are a pain in the ass even if you have stellar depth perception. It would kinda suck, don’t you think? Surviving all that stabbing and shooting just to die from falling down some stairs?”

“Well, thank you for accidentally coming to my rescue.”

“Are you ready for this?”

“We’ll find out, I guess.”

In the basement, the tapestry is drawn back, and the murder mural is exposed in all its glory. Will bursts out laughing and goes to inspect it before even acknowledging Hannibal and Jack by the opposite wall. When he does join them, he feels strangely lighthearted, despite the situation and Hannibal’s unimpressed frown.

“I’d call you a narcissist, but you’re not even embellishing here, are you?”

Hannibal’s frown disappears and he affects a diffident tone that is betrayed by his smirk. “Well, no.”

“You’ve really done that to all these people.”

“Killed them? I did, indeed.”

“Is there a DSM entry for people whose narcissism is arguably warranted?”

“Not that I’m aware of.”

“There should be. I’d call it Hannibalism, but I think you’d be downright unbearable if something were to be named after you.” Will casts a glance back at the mural. “Can’t say I’m not impressed.”

“Will...” Hannibal says tenderly, “That is the most convoluted compliment I’ve ever received. Thank you.”

Abigail hadn’t come up with a level of surprise for the occasion that Will and Hannibal might be laughing together. Utterly dumbfounded is what she ends up going with.

Finally, Will says, “Hello, Jack.”

“Will. Was this your plan all along, then?”

“To have a stroke immediately after solving a case specifically to wind you up enough that you would eventually come here, where you were already going to be?” The words are tumbling out of his mouth, one after another – more words than he can remember ever stringing together at one time. “I thought you couldn’t think less of me, Jack, but that is idiotic.”

Hannibal disappears from Will’s periphery. Abigail shuffles into it.

“What were you going to do with Abigail, Jack? Did you have a plan?” Will asks, genuinely curious. When Jack doesn’t answer, sighs and says, “I guess not.”

“Perhaps Uncle Jack got a taste for the media circus,” Hannibal suggests from the corner of the room, where he is busy buffing something with a cloth. “Perhaps one press conference wasn’t enough.”
Will should have checked the restraints before getting in Jack’s face, but his hand had closed around Jack’s throat of its own accord. “How did it feel to be accused of something you didn’t do? Did you like being hated by everyone? By people you didn’t even know?”

Jack shakes his head.

“No. I didn’t either.”

When Will loosens his grip on Jack’s neck, Jack takes the opportunity to try and head-butt him. Will darts back, but there’s no need. Hannibal’s restraints are too strategically placed to allow for any neck movement, beyond the amount needed to nod or shake his head.

Jack fruitlessly flexes his muscles against the restraints, while Will takes a minute to check himself, but just ends up breathing hard from the struggle. With the tight pinch of resignation in his voice, he entreats Will, “Let me call Bella. Please, Will. Let me talk to my wife before you do this.”

“Bella’s dead,” Abigail tells him.

Jack looks momentarily stunned, then starts yelling and throwing himself against his bonds again. Threats and accusations punctured with yells of no and Bella erupt from him.

Will finds he’s put himself between Abigail and Jack, though she’s in no real danger. She’s hanging onto his sleeve, and he doesn’t blame her for being a little freaked out. Jack’s explosive transformation into his own monster is so different from the discreet way in which she, Will, and Hannibal each become theirs.

Hannibal puts down whatever he’s working on and comes over to them. He regards Jack thoughtfully for a moment, before jabbing an elbow into his nose. While Jack slackens, and looks dazed behind all the blood, Hannibal returns to the corner to complete his task as though nothing has happened.

“I think that leaves us with the one option, then,” Will says, drily.

“Yes, I suppose it does.”

Abigail shakes his arm. “What?” she asks, whispering for no reason.

“On the drive over, we were considering ways in which to... dispatch Jack,” Hannibal begins.

“And how to get rid of any evidence,” Will interjects. He addresses Jack briefly. “It isn’t smart to piss off a guy who thinks about killing people for a living.”

Hannibal continues the explanation from his corner. “Depending on how cleanly you were able to subdue him – very cleanly, by the way, well done – we might have been able to simply induce cardiac arrest, and then place him back in his own home.”

“God knows he’s been under a lot of stress lately.”

“What’s the option we’re left with then?”

“It’s not our only option, but…” Will scratches his chin. “I say, to hell with it. Let Jack be the Ghost’s last victim in this sounder. Poetic enough. Bit messier though, on such short notice.”

Abigail whacks him.

Will grins. He thinks he ought to be afraid of how disturbingly upbeat and garrulous he’s being.
How good he feels, terrorizing the person he’d brainwashed himself into believing was his colleague, if not his friend.

“You know...” he muses, “for so long I just took it for granted that you had to be one of the good guys. On some level I think I really believed that if I didn’t like you, there was something wrong with me.”

“I am one of the good guys,” Jack says thickly, nose still dripping blood down his front. “And you are too. Come on, Will, this isn’t you.”

“You don’t learn, do you, Jack?” Some of his ebullience gives way to harshness. “People don’t often take kindly to being told who they are. And you’ve done more than your fair share of that in this lifetime.”

“We’re friends, Will.”

“No, Jack.”

“You save lives, remember? I know you never wanted to kill anyone.”

“Maybe you’re right. Maybe I’m broken. Are you going fix me, Jack?”

“You think Hannibal the Cannibal will fix you? Think, Will. Think about what you’re doing!”

Will looks at Jack thoughtfully, and then looks to Hannibal, making quite a drama out of the moment. He’s pretty sure he can see Abigail laughing silently out of the corner of his eye.

“Hannibal doesn’t think I need fixing.”

“Fear makes you rude, Jack,” Hannibal quips, rejoining them. He places a hand on Will’s shoulder and, with the other, offers him the handle of a freshly oiled hunting knife. “It’s quite sharp. You’ll be able to make some beautifully intricate lacerations before he loses consciousness. Or, make it quick,” he adds, with decidedly no enthusiasm. “If you must.”

“Sweet of you.”

Will can tell the moment Jack finally sees it – that this isn’t Will unhinged, but a part of who he really is. Jack had been willfully blind to Will’s darker potential, and, now, that darkness won’t be ignored. Jack is going to die at its hands.

After reminding Will to correct for what he can’t see, Hannibal says a cordial goodbye to Jack. “I want to thank you for your friendship, Jack.”

Without any hesitation, Will hands the knife to Abigail, and she stares down at it, open-mouthed, as he plants a kiss in her hair. “I love you, kid,” he murmurs, and squeezes her shoulder reassuringly.

Her eyes follow him as he steps back, letting her have the floor. She finds herself tearing up.

Instead of taking the life they all agreed was rightfully his to take, he is giving it to her. It’s a gift, the way him calling her sweetheart at the hospital was a gift. He’s letting her do exactly what she’d hoped he’d let her do.

Abigail approaches Jack, shaky, but not because she’s afraid. “I’m not a complete monster,” Abigail says softly, even though Jack deserves to die believing worst had happened. For some reason, she wants to tell him, so she does. “Bella died the way you wouldn’t let her – peacefully, and with
dignity.” Then, with an unnecessary, but satisfying windup, she thrusts the knife into Jack’s abdomen and forces it upwards. He chokes on the blood trying to escape him.

Abigail understands, now, why Margot and Judy said this should be a family affair. As Jack comes apart, she feels something else come together – for her, for Will, and for Hannibal. They come and stand by her, as though her thoughts are magnetic. Will puts his arm around her, and Hannibal strokes her hair just like he used to. She sighs as their common enemy dies in front of them. “I’m glad he found me. We’re one step closer to being free.”

They are silent around Jack’s last breath.

Then, Abigail, discarding any notion of reverence for the dead, says, “Man, I really needed to stab someone.”

As agreed, once the family affair is over, Margot and Judy help carry Jack’s body out to the van. Judy drives, Margot navigates, and the three other live bodies, and one dead body, ride in the back. Abigail falls asleep on the hour-and-a-half trip to Quantico, head pillowed on the lumpy and heavy-looking canvas bag that Hannibal brought, but, of course, neglected to explain.

When Margot asks what they’re breaking in to, and Will says, Jack’s office at the BAU, Margot scoffs. “No problem,” she says, and that seems to be the end of her list of questions.

“Should I ask why that’s not a problem?”

“I guarantee you; most of the security at Quantico is psychological.”

“They count on people thinking it’s a stupid idea to break into a government-run law enforcement facility,” Judy elaborates.

“Like you guys have all the latest surveillance equipment or something.”

“Do we not?” Will had literally never given a thought to it before.

Margot looks over her shoulder at him with that familiar airy disdain.

Judy says, “Oh, honey...” and laughs. “You think the latest technology is used anywhere but in Washington and the military?”

“I hate to break it to you, but your security cameras probably still use tapes.”

“Well, I can’t think of anyone, besides us, who would want to break in. If someone is nerdy enough to steal lab equipment, they probably already work there.”

Judy looks at him in the rear-view mirror with a teasing smile. “It’s just the great minds, like yours, that are of value, then?”

Will’s nigh elated cheerfulness from this afternoon hasn’t worn off, and, only the very best, leaves his mouth before he stops to wonder if it’s even funny.

Hannibal is quiet during the drive, showing no interest in participating in their conversation. He is looking contemplatively at Abigail, where she’s now slumped against the back of Margot’s seat.

“How did you find her, Jack?”
“I didn’t find her. She drove right towards me.”

“So, you were visiting our friend, Mason Verger.”

“It’s been months since his accident. Now that he’s recovered, I thought he might have some insight.”

“I’m curious, Jack. What insight were you hoping to gain? You know the story. Mason himself gave an interview to the Harford County News.”

“Just a cheap story. I know you had something to do with it.”

“And you hoped Mason would tell you what. Interesting.”

Abigail wakes up when they are about five minutes out from the BAU headquarters, panicked that she might have missed something. Margot asks her if she wants to take care of the gate, though, so she can’t have missed too much.

Judy idles in some shadows. Margot snaps on a pair of nitrile gloves and gets out of the van. Abigail follows, donning her own gloves.

The mechanism is similar to the one Abigail encountered at Muskrat Farm, but, as Margot had predicted, was older and even less complicated. Still, Abigail decides just to watch.

While Margot works, she reminds Abigail, “Don’t forget, later, I have cash for you.”

“Cool. Thanks.”

“We agreed on half time for travel, right?”

“Which is already too much…”

“Not really.”

They whisper, not because they need to, but because it’s fun.

When they get back in the van, Margot actually gives Will a full smile. “Child’s play.”

Killing, itself, hasn’t always been a solo operation for Hannibal. It is a new and interesting experience, however, having company for this part of the Ripper’s activities. It’s not an experience he was looking to have, yet he’d called Margot without hesitation. Perhaps their family picnic with Mason at Muskrat Farm was more binding than he thought. They slip into a collective calm, petty irritations set aside, working as smoothly as if they had been planning for days.

Hannibal and Judy drag Jack up to sit in the desk chair, and Margot affixes him to it. Will and Abigail dump the contents of the canvas bag onto the desk, like they’re sitting at a coffee table about to start a puzzle together. Abigail giggles when ten vacuum-sealed internal organs spill out.

“Did you brainwash Abigail Hobbs? Did she kill Nicholas Boyle because you told her to?”

“Don’t be absurd, Jack. Abigail can decide for herself whether or not to take a life. If she ever were to kill anyone, I imagine she would do so to her own standards. Isn’t that why you never liked her? Too much of a survivor?”
“Gross,” Abigail says. Then, struck with a thought, she looks up at Hannibal, eyes serious. “It’s kind of a waste, though, isn’t it?”

Hannibal is removing Jack’s fingers with the deft ease he exhibits in the kitchen. He could be chopping carrots for all the expression on his face. “Materially, yes,” he answers. “However, it sends a rather clear message, don’t you think?”

“Fingers in different pies?” she suggests, back to giggling.

Will smirks a little. Hannibal appears to be unshakably serene at the moment, so he says, “Subtle,” sarcastically, just because can get away with it.

Judy whispers something that is probably filthy in Margot’s ear. Will catches the words fingers and pie, which, on their own don’t need much help to sound pornographic. Margot shakes with silent laughter.

“You had influence over her. Over Will. You played them, and you played me. Whatever happened to Will is on you, Hannibal.”

“Oh, we all like to play, Jack, but I’m not the one who broke him.”

“You wanted to be. You’re doing this because you’re upset it wasn’t you that put him in the hospital. Can’t get revenge on an aneurysm, but someone other than you has to take the blame, right, Hannibal?”

“I assure you, Jack, I’ve been waiting to do this since you showed up at the wrong door to my office. You’re not a patient man, so I won’t try to make you understand how pleased I am that you will no longer be playing. Shall I tell you why this is your fault?”

“Are you done with the scalpel?” Will asks.

“Just a moment.” Hannibal plucks out Jack’s eyeballs and severs the optic nerves to leave quite a long tail on each orb, then hands off the scalpel so casually, Will might have just asked to borrow a pen.

Will makes a small incision in each of the wrapped organs, and Abigail fits a finger into each of them, like birthday candles in a bizarre batch of cupcakes. Hannibal presses the eyeballs back into their sockets backwards and leans back to make sure the optic nerves hang down straight. Margot says something about too many chefs, and drags Judy out of the office. Abigail watches them go, suppressing a grin. The atmosphere is positively festive.

“You deceived Will. Made his role at the FBI ambiguous, so he would never know if his hours were too long or the work outside his job description. Do you know what decompensation is, Jack?”

“Oh, of course you do. You’re the head of Behavioural Science. You brought me on as his stability, so you could destabilize him whenever you liked. Dehumanize him. That’s not very responsible, Jack. You exhausted him. Razed those defenses he needed.”

“You framed him.”

“Indeed. Your relentlessly rough handling of Will was indispensable in my being able to do so. Forgive me for glossing over my own actions, Jack. I am not the one who is unaware of his sins.”

When they finish setting the scene, they do have a solemn moment. They each say something they might have meant, if this were the funeral of the Jack that existed before any of them knew him. The
Jack that existed before the Minnesota Shrike, before the Evil Minds Museum, Miriam Lass. The Jack that existed before the Chesapeake Ripper. The good man Bella spoke of.

Abigail says, “I forgive you, Jack.”

Hannibal says, “You were a formidable opponent, Jack.”

Will just says, “Thanks, Jack.”

Jack had barreled through the warnings given him in his dreams, and through those that came from the mouths of his colleagues, almost systematically. It was time to put the man out of his misery. To rid the world of what Jack believed to be a righteous venom, taking no heed of its leaking out and poisoning those around him. Hannibal had nothing more to say to him, having recounted the man’s iniquities in satisfactory detail. They waited in silence – enraged in Jack’s case, bored in Hannibal’s – for Will to join them.

Hannibal is the last to leave, taking a moment to commit the scene to memory, for reproduction on his kill mural later. As he does a final sweep for fingerprints, he remembers something. Something from what feels like years ago. He rifles through Jack’s desk drawers quickly, careful not to upset the body, and finds what he’s looking for.

The pet project Will had been so annoyed about is now a much thicker pile. The first few files have notes in Will’s handwriting added to the local law enforcement’s primary reports. The rest are abused-looking, the folders tattered at the corners, and pages slightly crumpled along one edge as though a meaty hand grabbed at them on a regular basis. He can picture Jack taking out the files, glaring at them fruitlessly for a few minutes, then stuffing the pages back into the folders in frustration, shoving the pile back in the desk drawer, and storming off to find Will. He imagines this was a common occurrence.

Hannibal flicks through the collection, interested, but not expecting to find anything. Curious what had Uncle Jack in such a perpetual rage for the last few months of his life. Curious, even with the dead man sitting right there in front of him – his part in their story clearly over. Hannibal isn’t convinced he’s looking at a case at all until he solves it, which happens quickly. It isn’t fair, really. He has such an edge. Before tucking the stack of files under his arm and exiting the room, he runs a finger over one of the few photos Jack had managed to get his hands on. He shakes his head and smiles to himself. “You are naughty, Dr. du Maurier.”

Chapter End Notes

Kate had the idea of turning Jack’s eyeballs around to symbolize how he sees what he wants to see, aka the first thing that makes sense in his own head. Because she’s brilliant like that.

Nitrile gloves are more resistant to tear, don’t need to be powdered, and are generally less of an irritant to sensitive skin. But, most importantly, they are almost twice as expensive as latex gloves, so I feel like Hannibal would use them exclusively. Also, being a surgeon at Johns Hopkins and stuff.
Chapter Summary

Will is less of a pure emo bitch. Hannibal befriends the new head of the BAU. He’s also a little goddamn nicer to his murder daughter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They look so like a normal couple; Abigail thinks her eyes must be tricking her. She blinks several times, but the scene before her doesn’t disappear. She runs through a multitude of explanations, including, Hannibal drugged Will, and, Will is having an episode. She can see, though, that, while Will’s head is resting on Hannibal’s thigh, he is not unconscious, and is, in fact, having a conversation with him. Hannibal is running his fingers through Will’s hair, and Will is letting him. She has to back away from the door with her hand over her mouth to avoid yelling at them in her excitement.

In the kitchen, she lets her grin spread across her face and actually jumps up and down a few times before she calms down. Self-preservation Abigail says, Don’t freak out. You know them. They’ll be at each other’s throats in an hour, and not in any good kind of way. Relentlessly romantic daughter Abigail tells her to shut up. The two Abigails continue to war with each other while they make lunch.

“I’m trying to make the most of what I know is a temporary high,” Will says, studying Hannibal’s kneecap.

“It doesn’t have to be temporary,” Hannibal muses.

“I can see the panic out of the corner of my eye. I’m anticipating it.”

“Why are you anticipating panic, in particular?”

“Because I know myself. Thursday… well, that never happens in isolation. I basically invited everything to the surface and now everything is organizing a panic party in my brain.”

“Do you know what a self-fulfilling prophecy is, Will?”

“Do I even dignify that…”

Hannibal smiles, unseen by Will. “Let us put panic aside for the moment. Tell me, what was your experience yesterday? I don’t think I have ever seen you more lucid or surer of yourself.” He pauses. “If I’m honest, I expected you to be somewhat tormented.”

Will starts to sit up, but Hannibal pulls him back down with an arm over his chest. Will doesn’t fight. He thinks there’s not much to be said for being upright at the moment anyway. “When I saw him, it made sense. Whether or not he deserved it was irrelevant. It was… his time. And I could see that part of him felt it, too. You gave him what he wanted and Abigail gave Bella what she wanted, so what
would be the point of allowing him to live?”

“Is that why you gave Abigail the knife?”

“No.” He looks up at Hannibal who, who simply waits for Will to elaborate. “I gave her the knife because she deserved it more than you or me. I feel bad for ever thinking Jack was mine to kill. He ruined her entire life.”

Hannibal considers this. “I believe you deserved to kill him at least as much as Abigail. Perhaps, though, you would not have gained as much satisfaction by killing him, yourself, as you did by watching her kill him. I’m curious,” he says, going back to combing through Will’s curls with the hand not still firmly pressed against his chest. “How did you know I had hit Abigail?”

“She didn’t tell me, if that’s what you’re getting at.” Will frowns up at Hannibal. “She was being evasive, and she had a bruise.”

“I was not accusing her. Abigail is manipulative, but I don’t believe she is manipulative in that way.”

Will yawns. “She was just here.”

“I know.”

“She’ll be off somewhere planning our wedding now.”

Hannibal chuckles.

“Why are you stroking my hair?”

“Why are you not stopping me?”

“Too tired.” Will closes his eyes, but there’s a small smile playing at the corner of his mouth.

They spend the weekend together in Baltimore. Abigail doesn’t expect everything to be perfect now, but she feels this is the first real chance they’ve had to be happy in months. She’s anxious to make it work. She’s on her best behaviour with Hannibal, letting him take care of Will. She stays away, apart from mealtimes, and even considers going back to Wolf Trap on her own. She’d never felt like she could, in good conscience, leave Will entirely in Hannibal’s care, until this past Friday night. Since then, every time she catches Hannibal looking at Will, he’s practically pink with adoration.

“Thank you,” she says, on Sunday evening, as Hannibal is washing the dishes and she is drying them. Naturally, she says it without preamble or further explanation. After a moment’s hesitation, she adds, “And thank you for bringing his medication last weekend.” Abigail notes that she is subject to this need to confess, apologize, or show more gratitude than she feels whenever she and Hannibal talk in any depth. Admitting her weaknesses and mistakes to him seems to absolve her, and even endear her to him. She’s not sure she likes what that implies about their relationship, and she’s fairly certain it’s ridiculous to have a despotic system in place where there are only three of them in the pack. She is tired of fighting with, shouting at, and being afraid of Hannibal, though, so the idea of averting her eyes and slinking away with her tail between her legs once in a while is much less aggravating now than it had been, say, a month ago.

“You were hiding that night,” Hannibal recalls.

“I thought you were going to be smug and awful about it. Either that or be really angry with me.”
“You're only eighteen, Abigail. You are doing a remarkable job caring for Will.”

She smiles only a little, sensing the imminent but.

“But you cannot let yourself be taken over by this role, or you will feel lost when he no longer needs so much help.”

“I don’t care. I just want him to get better. I’ll get over it.”

Will resumes his constraint therapy on Monday morning, after Abigail leaves for work. He finds he has, indeed, regressed after the few days he’d spent not wearing the sling. Hannibal hadn’t mentioned it all weekend, and Will had taken advantage of that. In hindsight, he thinks it may have been a test, and he feels the hot prickle of shame, even in his bad arm. Hannibal gives no indication that he is disappointed in Will, but Will feels enough disappointment for the both of them. It spurs him on, at first, but he pushes himself too hard in the morning, and, by lunch time, Will looks so pallid and drained, Hannibal tells him to go lie down. He poses it as a question, but it’s indisputably an order.

Soon after this, Hannibal receives a call from Special Agent Ardelia Mapp, asking if she might come by and ask him some questions.

“I apologize for the last minute request. I finished some interviews in Baltimore much earlier than I expected, and it seems like too good an opportunity to speak with you not to ask.” Her voice sounds the way a liqueur tastes and feels – potent and smooth, with the potential for sharpness and bitterness. Rich, and warming.

Hannibal likes her immediately.

When she arrives twenty minutes later, he is in a three-piece ensemble for the first time in at least two weeks.

“Special Agent Mapp, please come in.”

Her jacket is already off, draped over her arm. “Thank you, Dr. Lecter.” She holds out her hand and her handshake is cool and firm. “I’m very pleased to meet you, and I appreciate you accommodating me on such short notice.”

“Not at all, Agent Mapp. The pleasure is all mine. I’ve heard good things about you.”

He leads them into the study and offers her a seat by the desk, noting that she’s much less animated in her appreciation of his space than Jack had been when he’d turned up at his office that first time. She sweeps the room with her eyes once, but doesn’t wander about and touch things to try and instill herself as the alpha in the room.

Once seated, she says, “I’ve heard of you many times, but not much about you. Are you a friend of Judy Ingram’s?”

“We are acquainted,” he replies, going to the bar cabinet in the corner. “You also met my partner the other day.”

“Will Graham?”
“That’s right. Can I offer you a drink, Agent Mapp?”

“I’ll have what you’re having,” she says easily, hanging her jacket over the back of her chair. “You appear to be a man of good taste.” When Hannibal returns with two bottles of Alana’s private reserve and two glasses, she asks, “How is Mr. Graham?”

“He’s been doing much better recently.” He sits across from her after pouring their beer and folds his hands on the desk between them.

“Excellent.” She raises her glass and nods before taking a sip. She smiles in approval. “Let me guess. You bottled this yourself?” She retrieves a leather-bound diary from her satchel and places it in front of her. Hannibal notes that she effortlessly aligns it with the edge of the table.

He tilts his head and gives her an answering smile. “Very astute.” After a moment, he leans towards her slightly, as though in barely controlled earnestness. “Forgive me for being so forward, Agent Mapp. Do you have news regarding Jack Crawford?”

Mapp sighs. “I’m afraid no more than we’ve already given the papers. I understand you were quite close friends. I’m very sorry for your loss.”

Hannibal only nods his thanks.

“Actually, I have two reasons for coming to you, and they’re both related to Agent Crawford.”

“I sincerely hope I’ll be able to help.”

“Thank you, Dr. Lecter.” She doesn’t shy away from eye contact. “I’m in a rather awkward position at the moment,” she begins. “Between press conferences and meetings with internal affairs, Agent Crawford didn’t get the opportunity to hand over the reins gently. I’ve been left with a bit of a mess. There are inconsistencies and omissions in a lot of his paperwork, and many of his reports have unexplained abbreviations.”

“Jack did have a penchant for being cryptic.” Hannibal pitches his voice to sound fond and saddened. “Have you spoken to Bella – his wife?”

“I’m afraid Mrs. Crawford had already passed when we went to inform her, although perhaps that’s a mercy…”

Hannibal makes sure his grief is apparent when he agrees, “She was very ill. Almost at the end, I think, the last time I saw her. It’s good that she died in peace, without the knowledge and pain of Jack’s death.”

Mapp nods. They sip their beer in silence for a while, then Agent Mapp gets back to the problems at hand. “Did he ever confide in you?”

“Often.”

“Would you perhaps be able to make sense of some of his documents?”

“I’d be happy to try.”

“When you’ve had some time.”

“I prefer to keep busy during sad times, and I think it would please Jack to know the BAU is running smoothly. I could come by tomorrow?”
“I’d be so grateful.” Mapp opens the diary by the ribbon so it falls open on exactly the right page. “If you’re sure it won’t be too upsetting.”

“I dislike it when frivolous things such as paperwork impede extremely capable people such as you in their work. I think Jack would feel the same way.”

Mapp smiles, but does not blush at the compliment. “Tomorrow, I’m overseeing an autopsy in the morning,” she informs him, looking down at her calendar. “Do you think you’ll be available around this time? My afternoons tend to be more flexible.”

“I will see you tomorrow afternoon then. What was the second reason for your visit?” he asks as she makes note of their appointment.

“Well…” she sighs again, and takes a long drink before continuing. Hannibal mimics her. “I hardly know who’s in my department; that’s the state of things at the moment. I thought you were, after seeing that you consulted on a few cases. I have to say I was disappointed not to find you on the payroll anymore. Would you consider consulting again?”

Hannibal makes a show of hesitating. “Agent Mapp… paperwork is one thing. I’m not sure I’d be any use to you in investigating Jack’s murder.”

She waves her hand and hastily puts down her beer. “I’m so sorry, I should have clarified. You wouldn’t be consulting on the Ghost case. That would be irresponsible of me, and cruel. If you were to consult, you would be consulting on the Carpenter murders.”

“Ah, of course. I apologize for jumping to conclusions. Has there been another murder?”

“I’m afraid I can’t tell you that unless you’re officially on the case.” She states this in a matter-of-fact, rather than apologetic manner.

“Perhaps I can give you an answer tomorrow? I should speak with Will and Sarah first.”

“Of course. Who is Sarah, if you don’t mind my asking?”

“His daughter. Her mother died recently – she sought out Will.”

“So they’re spending some time together? That’s nice.”

“Not today. Will is upstairs resting. Sarah is at work, otherwise I’d introduce you.”

“Another time, maybe.” Mapp stands and gathers her jacket and satchel. “Thank you very much, Dr. Lecter,” she says, offering her hand again.

He sees her to the door. “Have a good evening, Agent Mapp. I will see you tomorrow.”

When Abigail arrives home that night, dinner has been ready for over an hour. “I’m sorry,” she says, peeling out of her blazer in the hot kitchen. “I should have called. You guys didn’t have to wait for me.”

“It’s alright, Abigail. Come, let’s eat now.”

Dinner has the same lack of tension they’d enjoyed all weekend, but it’s still a quiet affair. Will and Abigail both look sleepy. Hannibal looks between the two of them and smiles fondly, amused – as he would be with no one else – by the sympathetic yawns they keep exchanging, and how poorly
“Special Agent Mapp came by today.”

That wakes Will up. Abigail doesn’t seem to know who that is, which surprises Hannibal, given that Will doesn’t keep much from her.

“How?” Will asks.

“To enlist my help in the Carpenter case, and to help her make heads or tails of some of Jack’s files.”

Will smiles around a mouthful. He swallows and says, “Good luck with that.”

“Who is that?” Abigail asks.

“She’s the new head of Behavioural Science.”

Abigail puts down her fork and frowns worriedly. “She didn’t come by because she suspects you?”

“There’s always that possibility. But, if that’s the case, she’s a very good actress.”

Abigail nods and picks up her fork again, but only pokes at her remaining food.

Hannibal watches her. “What’s on your mind, Abigail?”

“Um. When are you going to Quantico?”

“Tomorrow afternoon to start with. To help with the paperwork issue. I haven’t yet given an answer as to whether or not I’ll consult on the case.”

“I can’t take any days off work right now,” she tells them. “Judy is going to be away next week. I already committed.”

Hannibal appears unconcerned. Will is temporarily caught up in studying his plate.

“Why would you want to take days off?” Hannibal asks mildly.

Abigail manages a small smile. “Funny.” Her smile falters when Hannibal raises his eyebrows at her. She looks to Will, then back to Hannibal. “Seriously?”

Hannibal says, “You’re worrying too much, Abigail.”

She opens her mouth, but, what can she possibly say to that? She stares at Hannibal.

“If Will promises not to do too much, I think we can leave him by himself during the day.”

Will keeps his face neutral, because he has no idea if this is meant to be a punishment or a reward. Hannibal hadn’t said anything at all today about lifting surveillance. He can picture Abigail jiggling her leg up and down under the table. Are you sure? is written all over her face. Not that he could do any better, but he’s sure Hannibal could have dropped the bomb with a little more delicacy, given that he knows exactly how Abigail feels.

Abigail puts her fork down again and sits on her hands until Hannibal and Will have finished their dinner, then she wordlessly collects all the dishes and takes them into the kitchen. She watches the sink fill, mind wandering as a mountain of bubbles grow in one corner. She jumps when she feels a hand on her shoulder. Looking up, she sees Hannibal’s reflection in the window. She closes her eyes
for the length of one breath. *What is wrong with you, Abigail?*

He leans against the counter at her side – almost like Will does. She thinks it wouldn’t look so awkward were he dressed the way he had been this morning. He looks much handsomer without all the ties and pocket squares and vests. She also instinctively dislikes that he’d dressed up for Ardelia Mapp, special agent or no.

“What is it that you’re worried about, Abigail?”

She doesn’t answer immediately, though not to be difficult. She’s been actively avoiding that question herself. The dishes are ready to be rinsed before she says, “I don’t know. I just don’t like it.”

“Think, please.”

She doesn’t want to. The list of ways Will could be hurt or die or be taken from her will only have lengthened since the hospital. She doesn’t want to feel that same drowning, helpless panic. And yet, her mind and body have been wracked with worry, despite not messing around with finer details. *But worry is better than panic.* When she’s worried, she can act. She can stop bad things from happening. It’s when she lets down her guard that things go wrong.

“Abigail.”

“Everything,” she says softly. She talks carefully around the pain in her chest, trying not to knock any sobs loose. “I’m worried about everything.”

Hannibal takes up a dish towel and starts drying. “You’re much too young to take on that.” His voice and smile are gentle, fatherly.

Abigail can hardly stand it. She wipes down the counter and sink and puts the dried dishes away. Then, when there’s nothing left to do, she looks at the floor and confesses, “I’m afraid something bad will happen.”

Hannibal folds and sets aside the dish towel, and leads her to the armchair in the corner. He kneels in front of her the way he had done after she’d dropped the cup filled with mushroom tea and it had shattered on the floor. Suddenly, Abigail doesn’t mind that he’s trying to be fatherly.

“At some point, Abigail, we are going to have to trust that Will can take care of himself. You’re drowning yourself in thoughts of what if? That is a bottomless pool.”

She just nods, throat constricting.

“All those what ifs most likely come from one place. One fear. I think it’s time we identify that fear, and put words to it. Yes?”

She nods again.

“So I want you to think, Abigail. Close your eyes, if you like. What is the something bad you’re so afraid of?”

He strokes her cheek so tenderly; she wonders at this being the same man who had spent the past few weeks overtly disliking her. She feels her face screw up, and, before she can help it, she’s throwing herself into his arms and crying into his shoulder. “I’m afraid I’ll lose another dad.”

That night, Hannibal makes her tea and actually tucks her into bed. Abigail lets him treat her like a child because she so desperately wants to be one again.
“Abigail okay?”

Hannibal slides into bed and pulls Will to him.


Hannibal licks his lower lip and says, slowly, “I stand by what I said the other day about her overprotectiveness. It’s not healthy. I’ve allowed her to take on too much responsibility.”

“She thinks you don’t care about me.”

“Is that what you think?”

“I have a more pragmatic view of this than Abigail.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning, I’m in no position to complain.”

Hannibal is silent for a while.

Will sits back up against the headboard and turns on the bedside lamp. He frowns down at Hannibal. “What?”

“I’m considering something.”

Hannibal’s hair has fallen into his eyes, which has always had the effect of making him appear more human. It’s maybe this that compels Will to tug him closer, until his head is in Will’s lap. Will fingers the wayward strands without pushing them aside. Then, he traces his fingertips over Hannibal’s cheekbones and jawline, and his hand comes to rest lightly on his throat.

“Are you done considering yet?”

Hannibal smiles. “Yes.”

“Am I still going to be awake by the time you decide to tell me what it is?”

Hannibal lets out a breathy laugh. “I was considering asking you a question.”

Will leans his head against the wall and closes his eyes. “You’re a very irritating person.” He yawns. “I’ll be up here, if and when you stop dancing around whatever’s on your mind.”

“Would you prefer being in Wolf Trap?”

Will removes his hand from Hannibal’s neck to rub between his eyes, where a sharp pain has suddenly blossomed. “Yes,” he admits. He turns off the light before resting his hand again on Hannibal’s throat. “Don’t tell Abigail that, though.”

“She’s completely devoted to you.”

“I don’t deserve her.”

“That is for Abigail to decide, Will.”

Will’s fingers migrate up Hannibal’s neck. For some reason, he wants to feel the lips these words are
falling from. Hannibal catches his wrist and kisses his fingertips, perhaps remembering the last time Will had touched his face; how he had turned to stone, and Will had retreated.

“I’m not having Abigail drive two hours to work every morning, and two hours back every evening. She was late enough tonight.”

“Abigail could stay here, while I stay with you in Wolf Trap.”

“Or, I could stay in Wolf Trap by myself.”

“Give him an inch…” Will feels the corner of Hannibal’s smile.

“I thought you were okay with leaving me alone now,” Will says, sounding almost petulant.

“For an afternoon here and there.”

“Hannibal.”

“Yes?”

“Tell me I don’t have to point out the logical fallacy in that.”

Hannibal sighs. “You may not have to point it out to *me*, but I believe Abigail will take more convincing than you have energy for.”

“And you’re not going to help me.”

“Not with that, no.”

After a pause, Will asks, “How long are you thinking?”

“As long as you need.” Hannibal says this as though it’s obvious.

“That could be a long time… I’d feel guilty.”

“Why?”

“My house isn’t exactly the lap of luxury.”

“Luxury is, by definition, not a necessity. It is one of the ways in which I show myself respect.”

“Are you saying I don’t respect myself?”

“I’m saying nothing of the sort. You don’t, however, take very good care of yourself.”

“What are you talking about?”

“You push yourself too hard—”

“Only when I’ve been slacking off,” Will protests.

Hannibal carries on as though he hasn’t heard him. “—and I know you to be incapable of indulgence without coercion. If you insist on being so parsimonious, I will feel the need, from time to time, to force simple pleasures on you. I want to share the luxuries I have with you and Abigail.”

“Why?”
“Because you are family.”

“But you’re already caring for me…”

“Having your basic needs met is not living in luxury, Will.”

Will’s voice grows quiet. “There are other reasons I don’t want to get used to being indulged.”

Hannibal doesn’t respond for some time. Then, “Is it difficult to accept that I would give you everything, simply because I once took everything away?”

“You say that so glibly. As though everything is nothing.”

“Glibness often masks one’s true attitude. Tell me I don’t have to point that out to you.”

“Are you sorry you took everything?”

Hannibal’s voice is low when he answers. “More than sorry.”

“Repentant?”

“That would imply that I’ve changed my ways. I have not. However, I meant it when I said I’d like to mend the rift between us.” He considers a more appropriate description for the sentiment. At length, he lays a hand on Will’s knee and says, simply, “Let us just say I am somewhere in between sorry and repentant.”

Will runs the back of his forefinger down the nape of Hannibal’s neck, stalling in the dip between each vertebra. “Okay,” he says quietly, though he doesn’t know in answer to what.

Hannibal takes it to mean what he wants it to mean. “I will take you back to Wolf Trap at the end of this week, and we will stay there, and you can recover in your own home.”

“Thanks.” Will shifts Hannibal off his lap and lies back down. He wraps his arm around Hannibal’s waist and presses his forehead into his scapula to try to dull the throbbing there.

“There is one aspect of your standard of living I cannot abide, however.”

“What’s that?”

“Your piano is horrifically out of tune.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta’d by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Distressingly Functional

Chapter Summary

Z&P are jumped up on coffee. Hannibal and Will have a little fire-side therapy session. Abigail peaces out for most of this chapter.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: descriptions of medieval torture devices

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Will makes coffee for Abigail in the morning, as had been their routine in Wolf Trap. It’s definitely nicer coffee, and Will watches enviously as she drinks it down.

Abigail catches him and asks, “When are you allowed to start drinking fun stuff again?”

Will shrugs. “I haven’t asked. I’m afraid Hannibal will tell me something awful, like, a year from now.”

“What’s happening a year from now?” Hannibal enters the kitchen, freshly showered and dressed Hannibal-casual.

“Nothing,” Will mumbles.

Abigail rolls her eyes as she goes to wash her mug in the sink. “You have the most bizarre way of going about things.” She gives him a kiss on the cheek and pulls on her blazer. After a moment’s hesitation, she goes to Hannibal and gives him a kiss on the cheek, too. “Please don’t stay at Quantico too long,” she begs quietly, before grabbing her bag from the armchair and hurrying out the door.

Hannibal waits for Special Agent Mapp outside her currently empty office. He can see through the blinds that it is not as luxurious as Jack’s, though it has the benefit of not being a crime scene.

Agents Zeller and Price pass by, then do a double take at the same time. Price says, “Dr. Lecter. Nice to see you again.”

“Agent Zeller, Agent Price.” Hannibal stands and shakes each of their hands. “I thought you might have taken some time off.”

Zeller shrugs, looking extremely sleep-deprived. “You’re here working, and you knew Jack better than any of us.”

“No rest for the wicked.” Price, too, is baggy-eyed, and his tone is pinched.
“The wicked being us, apparently. There’s too much killing going on right now for any of us to take time off.”

“Jack would be pleased by your continued dedication. I’m sure he would want the case solved sooner, rather than later.”

“Is that why Agent Mapp brought you in?”

“She asked me to work with you. I haven’t yet agreed, but I plan to.”

Agent Mapp rounds the corner then. “Gentlemen,” she greets them, unlocking her office door. “Come in.”

“Oh, we were just pass…” Zeller trails off and shakes his head, clearly wondering at his own protestation.

Mapp gestures for Hannibal to take a seat while she speaks to the other two. “The M.E. is finished with Agent Crawford’s autopsy. As I said earlier, there is no onus on you to examine the body. I oversaw the procedure myself, and will have the full report by tomorrow. If you do feel the need, you have until 4pm, and then he’s being moved to the funeral home.”

Zeller and Price both nod. “Thanks, boss.”

“No problem, gentlemen. I’d like to meet with you both in the lab this afternoon, either way.”

“That’s where we’ll be.”

They carry on their way, and Mapp closes the door behind them. “Dr. Lecter, how are you? How is Mr. Graham?”

“We are both quite well, thank you.”

“I hope he wasn’t offended that I didn’t request his help today.”

“No, not to worry.” Hannibal smiles and tilts his head, adding, “Although he might have been, if he thought you were being delicate.”

“I’m afraid I have a limited supply of delicacy, so I have to use it sparingly.” Mapp smiles in return, and brings another chair around to the same side of the desk as Hannibal.

“What are we looking at, Agent Mapp?”

She pulls a stack of file folders towards them and starts laying them out, one by one, in a row across the table, explaining as she goes. “So, we have copies of Agent Crawford’s reports to the OIG here, all very vague. His notes on open cases… His closed cases that need reports filed… Two log books… Invoices and expense reports… and this.”

“A mystery file?”

“Completely unlabelled. Nothing with an official seal on it. I don’t even know if it’s important or just scrap paper.”

Hannibal takes it from her and flips through it. Jack’s writing is the impatient scrawl of a man who brought a shotgun to arrests, instead of a simple sidearm – uneven lines and non-uniform lettering indicate resentment at having to file reports at all. Aloud, Hannibal says, “I had no idea Jack’s handwriting was so terrible...”
“No disrespect, Jack.”

“I doubt Jack would have any interest in being remembered for his penmanship.”

She tilts her head in agreement with a small smile. “What I’m interested in, first and foremost is— may I?” She takes the folder back and rifles through it. “There’s a page in here that’s just a list of dates, and a couple phone numbers... Here it is.” She isolates a page near the bottom of the file and hands it to him.

As he scrutinizes it, he also watches her close the file and tap it on the desk, shuffling the papers down in the folder so the bottom edges are all aligned.

“If you can even guess at any of it, please do.”

“I imagine BDM stands for Bedelia du Maurier,” Hannibal offers, indicating the initials scribbled next to the phone numbers she spoke of. “Have you tried the numbers yet?”

“I have. Both have been disconnected. But... I think I saw that name in a couple of expense reports...” She reaches for the file dealing with the department’s finances, asking, “Do you know this Bedelia du Maurier?”

“Yes. She was my therapist for a number of years.”

“She’s a psychiatrist.”

“That’s right.”

“That makes sense with this, then.” Mapp finds what she’s looking for and points out, “There was a fee paid to her every other week from March to June, inclusive. Services rendered were apparently psychotherapy for ML. Oh dear, is that someone else in my department I have yet to locate?”

“I don’t think so, Agent Mapp. Again, this is merely a guess, but ML likely stands for Miriam Lass.”

Mapp frowns. “The young woman who shot the Chesapeake Ripper while he was being interviewed?”

“Jack was very close to her. He felt responsible when she disappeared. I imagine he felt responsible for Dr. Chilton’s death, as well, since it was his firearm that put the bullet in him.”

“She’s in the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.”

Hannibal nods.

Mapp is silent and thoughtful for a long while, looking back and forth between the two sheets of paper. She shakes her head and sighs. “I’m not a hardass, Dr. Lecter, but I am somewhat appalled.”

“Pardon me, appalled by what?”

“In no way do I want to downplay the value of friendship, and loyalty to friendships, but, using department resources for what is quite clearly a personal matter... That’s unacceptable.”

Hannibal licks his lower lip and gives a small nod. “Of course.”

“We can’t continue to pay for Ms. Lass’s treatment.” Mapp walks around the desk to retrieve a pen and notepad from the drawer. She writes herself a reminder to call someone in accounting, then rejoins him. Her eyes scan the pages in question once more, looking for an exact end date. “The last
recorded payment was made... Interesting.”

Hannibal gives her a questioning look.

“Is Dr. du Maurier easily spooked, by any chance?”

Hannibal decides to answer, before asking any questions of his own. “Dr. du Maurier is a difficult woman to read. That’s why I liked her as a therapist. Psychiatrists are terrible patients,” he explicates. “We know all the tricks.”

Mapp smiles at that. “I can imagine anyone with doctor in front of their name must be awful at the receiving end of their trade.”

“Why do you ask if she is easily spooked?”

Mapp taps her pen lightly against the notepad, thinking. “I’m wondering if she didn’t get scared by the murders at the courthouse, and skip town.”

Hannibal makes a show of considering this. “Well, I don’t know whether or not she scares easily, but, I do know she has very few attachments in Baltimore – no husband or children, and she retired her practice. If she felt the need to leave, I don’t imagine it would take her long to pick up and go.”

Mapp acknowledges this with a nod, setting her pen atop her notepad. “There’s no legal reason why she shouldn’t leave if she wants to. It’s just all very curious and secretive. I do wish I could have talked with Agent Crawford more...” She stands. “Shall we get a coffee?” she suggests, pulling on her jacket. “I don’t know about you, but I should have got one straight after leaving the morgue. My head is spinning.”

They sit across from each other in the café on the ground floor. Mapp sips her coffee and lets out a sigh of relief.

“Is the day catching up with you, Agent Mapp?”

“Hm.” She makes a noncommittal noise and takes another sip before disclosing that this is her first cup today. “It’s well overdue,” she says, then, after a few moments, “Thank you for coming in today. You’ve been a great help already.”

“I’m glad I could help. If I’m honest, I wasn’t terribly optimistic.” He sets his coffee cup down and folds his hands on the table. “I spoke with Sarah and Will. Will agrees there would be no better way to honour Jack’s memory than to help solve his final case.” He pauses and swallows, as though around a lump in his throat, then concludes, “I would be more than happy to.”

Mapp gives him a smile that isn’t quite sympathetic, but has a certain softness to it. Then, looking over Hannibal’s shoulder, she says, “Agent Zeller. Agent Price. Please, join us.”

Zeller and Price collect their orders at the counter, look at each other, then shrug and pull chairs over to the table.

“Dr. Lecter has just agreed to work with us on the Carpenter murders,” Mapp informs them.

The news is met with synchronized, very audible sighs of relief.

Mapp chuckles lightly and asks Hannibal, “When can we have you?”
He unfolds his hands and presents them palm-up in a gesture of openness. “Whenever you’d like me to start.”

“Now would be great,” Price suggests.

“Maybe we can start easing up on the jet fuel now that there are four of us,” Zeller adds, draining his cup impressively quickly and shaking it slightly over his mouth to recover every drop.

“One can hope,” Mapp agrees. “Welcome to the team, Dr. Lecter.”

“Refill, anyone?” Zeller stands.

Price is likely the only one in the building who can match Zeller’s speed when it comes to caffeine consumption. He hands him his cup over his shoulder.

While Zeller is gone, Mapp says, “If you could start today, that would be pretty wonderful.”

“Are we finished with Jack’s paperwork, then?”

Mapp sighs and leans her elbow on the table, cupping her chin in one hand. “Probably not.”

Hannibal admires her fingers. They are long and slender, and a little rough. Her wrists are thin, and he imagines flexible. He finds himself hoping she plays an instrument. What a waste it would be if she didn’t.

“I’ll try and fill in some blanks tonight with what you gave me. We’ll see.”

“Now that I’ve seen some of the documents, I could ask Will if he knows anything,” Hannibal offers.

“Would you?”

“Of course.”

“And please tell him I’d be happy to have him on the team again, if and when he’s ready. I don’t plan on hindering his recovery, though.”

“I very much appreciate your not pressing the matter. Will has a habit of agreeing to things that are inarguably bad for him.”

Price takes the coffee Zeller hands him, and postulates, “We’re all a little twisted that way, aren’t we?”

Zeller supplements this with, “If I wasn’t at least a little self-destructive, I wouldn’t have spent all morning rooting around in a guy’s chest cavity.”

“Any joy?”

“He lived a hell of a lot longer than you’d want to after getting two rusty prongs right through the ol’ mylohyoid.” He jabs two fingers under his chin and makes a choking sound for added effect.

“A very illustrative example of our shared morbidity, Agent Zeller,” Mapp says drolly.

“Indeed,” says Hannibal. “Perhaps that is information Will can do without, for the time being.”

“Although, I did detect a hint of obstinacy from him when we met, and was half expecting him to
show up today, as well.”

“It’s quite possible he would have, if he weren’t spending the day with his daughter.”

“New puppy?” Price asks.

Hannibal chuckles. “No, his human daughter.”

“Wait, what?” Zeller narrowly manages to avoid doing a spit-take. “Will has a kid? You’re joking.”

Mapp raises her eyebrows.

“The guy was in a mental hospital for three months. I mean, we tossed his place. No sign of any little Grahams.”

“They were estranged until very recently,” Hannibal explains. “The ex-wife ran off with her when Sarah was just a baby.”

Zeller is speechless for a moment. “Well, shit. No wonder he was always such a Debbie downer.”

“Zee, you utter ass. Not everyone revels in your company.”

“Oh come on,” Zeller protests. “I was always nice to him!”

Price sips his coffee primly and waits for him to correct himself.

“I mean, maybe a couple of times... the only child thing...” Zeller shrugs. “I was just messing around. We’re a team right? I make fun of you all the time.”

“Like an ass.”

“Whatever. I was nice. Like when...” He stops and furrows his eyebrows. “Oh. Nope. I was actually never nice to him. Not even a little bit.”

“Gentlemen, as much as I’m honoured to watch your personal revelations unfold...”

“Sorry, Agent Mapp,” says Price, clapping Zeller on the shoulder. “It’s just that he doesn’t have them very often.”

Mapp appears quite entertained as she stands and puts her jacket on. “Let’s head to the lab, shall we?”

“Okay, so, as of yesterday, we have four victims of what appears to be one killer.” Price spreads some photos out on the table in front of an array of swabs and vials.

Zeller sees Hannibal eyeing them, and says, peeviously, “Mass spec broke. We have to send these to Washington ’til we can get it repaired.”

“Which we are going to pay for out of our extremely tight budget,” Mapp adds, sounding rankled. “Carry on, Agent Price.”

“He’s a sadist, or a vigilante, or both. Zee?” Price turns the floor over to Zeller.

“We weren’t able to name the devices off the tops of our heads, like Will.”
Price rolls his eyes. “You don’t have to be an ass to him when he’s not even here.”

“I’m just saying... So we’ve got: number one, the Spanish Donkey; number two, the Heretic’s Fork; number three, the Scold’s Bridle; and, the latest one, the Judas Cradle.”

“This last one… He’s escalating?” Mapp queries, drumming those elegant fingers on the table beside the photo. She wears an emerald set in silver on her right hand. It clicks along with the drumming of her fingers.

“That’s right,” Price agrees. “Historically, the first three devices were engineered for torture and humiliation. The Carpenter had to alter their medieval specs in order for the mechanisms themselves to be lethal. The Judas Cradle, though... No mention in history of anyone surviving that.”

“That’s seems like less of an escalation than a pole vault to the next level.” Mapp frowns.

“Perhaps he simply tired of making alterations,” Hannibal suggests. “He may be keen to otherwise employ his creativity.”

“What – so this is it for him? He’s bored of medieval torture?” Zeller looks incredulous.

“What you mean is, he’s bored of being bored of medieval torture,” Hannibal adds. “Or more likely, he’s bored of the fact that no one who’s been tortured by him survived.”

“Or he’s bored of the fact that he’s bored of torturing people,” Zeller mutters.

“Or more likely, his audience is bored” Mapp adds.

“Perhaps he simply tired of making alterations,” Hannibal suggests. “He may be keen to otherwise employ his creativity.”

Price says, “Okay, well, the only profile we have of this killer is the one Will gave us. Big, muscly guy, probably quiet or shy, with a home workshop and gym.”

“Do you have any idea how many footballers are born and bred in Virginia?” Zeller grumbles. “Not to mention Maryland and New Jersey – i.e. everywhere we’ve been looking for this guy?”

Mapp raises an eyebrow. “I do not, Agent Zeller. I assume that was rhetorical.”

“Enough to make this profile – I mean, I don’t wanna say useless…”

“Then don’t,” Hannibal interposes peremptorily. He then moves on as though he hadn’t just done his equivalent of telling someone to shut up. “I can add to it that he has an education. Possibly, he learned carpentry growing up and saved to go to university. He has at least an undergraduate degree in Medieval History, but likely still makes his living woodworking. He’s well into his thirties, at least.”

Mapp goes to the white board at the end of the room and writes down everything that Hannibal says. Above it, she summarizes the profile Will had constructed.

Price leans towards Zeller and, out of the corner of his mouth, asks, “How stupid do you feel right now?”

Zeller colours and keeps his own mouth shut.

Mapp repeats the names of the states he had mentioned, and looks to Zeller for confirmation. When he nods, she asks “Why these states?”

Zeller shoots Price a pleading look.

Price rolls his eyes. “Because Will said he’d be from Virginia, or, somewhere north of Virginia along
the coast. We got used to just taking his word.”

“Hm,” says Mapp, capping the pen. “Well, his record does speak for itself.”

“Annoyingly,” Zeller mutters, and gets an elbow in the ribs from Price. He shuts his mouth again and looks anywhere but at Hannibal or Mapp.

“Agent Zeller,” Mapp says evenly, “There is clearly something you’re itching to say out loud.”

Price jumps in quickly. “He’s just overtired.” He gives Zeller a pacifying pat on the shoulder.

Mapp pauses for a moment to allow Zeller to refute this, then says, “Alright,” and steps back from the white board to survey their notes.

She collects the photos from the table and is pinning them to the adjacent bulletin board, when Zeller burst out, “Okay!” He flings his arms wide, in a dramatic _so sue me_ manner. “I don’t like the guy’s attitude. I hate that he doesn’t bother explaining shit like that. We’re supposed to be colleagues, but it’s like he thinks he’s better than us or something. Or it’s not worth his time to justify his suppositions– oh, come on, man!” he says, seeing Price’s _tone it down_ look. “That’s what they are! And, based on his _suppositions_, we get sent on a wild goose chase up the coast. I mean, _fuck_.”

Price’s eyebrows climb into his hair. “Well.”

Mapp appears neither amused nor angered. Bemused, maybe. “Well, indeed.”

Zeller crosses his arms over his chest and focusses on the white board. “Sorry, Dr. Lecter.”

To Zeller’s surprise, and his own, Hannibal chuckles. “No apology required. It’s necessary to express these feelings from time to time.” Zeller dares to look at him then, and Hannibal gives him a good-humored smile. “I can pass along the message, if you like.”

“I’d… uh… appreciate it if you didn’t.”

There’s a minute or so of silence while the tension in the room clears, after which Hannibal asks, “Where are the devices?”

In unison, and with matching frowns, the other three answer, “Washington.”

It’s not long before they decide that being in the lab is pointless, since they won’t get any results until tomorrow, at the earliest.

“I’d pack those up now.” Mapp indicates the samples on the desk. “The couriers like to sign and dash – don’t want to be chasing after them.”

“Right.” Zeller looks around the room and doesn’t find what he’s looking for.

“I have boxes in my office,” she says, and leaves them for a few minutes.

Zeller clears his throat. “So, uh… I know it’s none of my business…” He has his arms folded tightly, both hands tucked against his sides. Perhaps so they don’t do the talking for him. Hannibal has noticed that there is often increased activity in his limbs when Zeller is uncomfortable. “But, uh… you and Will…?”

Price rescues him, saying, “For heaven’s sake. We’ll be here all night. What Zee is _trying_ to ask
is, are you two a couple now?”

Hannibal smiles a benign smile. “I can see how that might be confusing, given our history. There were a lot of misunderstandings to sort through before we could even be friends again. It’s been an enlightening few months.”

“And he and his kid… Sarah? They’re staying with you?”

“Will is not yet recovered, so, yes, much of the time they live with me.”

Price camply claps a hand over his heart. “Come on, Zee,” he says, shaking Zeller by the shoulder when he doesn’t visibly share his delight. “It’s lovely – they literally kissed and made up.” He looks to Hannibal for confirmation. “That’s correct isn’t it? There was kissing? And making up?”

Mapp rejoins them then, and hands Zeller a cardboard box and a roll of packing tape. “Will the three of you be attending the funeral on Thursday?” she asks Hannibal.

“It will likely just be Will and me. Sarah didn’t know Jack, and with her mother’s recent passing…”

“Oh, of course.” She gives him that warm, quasi-sympathetic smile again, and Hannibal is struck by the disturbing realization that he doesn’t know what it means.

When Hannibal arrives home, Will is dicing vegetables in the kitchen. Poorly. Hannibal can’t repress his amusement entirely, but tames his smile a bit before approaching. “Can I help?”

“Probably.”

“What are you making?”

“I have no idea. Can you salvage any of this?”

Hannibal runs his hand up Will’s back and rests it on his shoulder. “I’ll do my best. How are you feeling?”

“Good.”

“Bored, though, I see.”

“A little. Got a headache from reading, so I looked around the house for anything that needs repairing…” He sighs. “Everything is distressingly functional.” He turns his head to look at Hannibal, standing absurdly close.

“I’ll break something for you.”

Will cocks his head to the side and goes back to chopping. “Interesting word choice.”

Hannibal goes to the fridge and returns with two glasses of white wine. One, he places delicately on the counter and nudges towards Will.

Will glances at it, face unreadable. “Thanks.”

Hannibal takes a sip of his own drink and then rounds the corner to relieve Will of the knife.

Will takes his glass and goes to the armchair, pulling off the eyepatch as he goes. “Anything
interesting at Quantico?”

“What would you like to know?”

Will leans back and closes his eyes. “Whatever.”

Hannibal finishes chopping the carrot Will was halfway through and says, “Jack’s funeral is on Thursday.”

“Hm.” Will swallows. “Should we go?”

“Yes.”

“Okay.” When the nausea passes, Will sits up, taking the glass out of his bad hand and drinking deeply of it. “Everything else go well?”

Hannibal glances over his shoulder. “Do you want to know about the case, Will?”

Will studies his glass. “I guess I do.”

“You no longer have to go inside the minds of others.”

“I don’t have to, no.”

“Your tone suggests you haven’t stopped.”

Will gives a sardonic smile. “Well, observing is what we do. I can’t switch mine off any more than you can.”

“I can give you less to observe.”

Will concedes by taking another drink, almost emptying the glass. He licks his bottom lip, looking thoughtful. “I was so angry with Jack when he brought me to look at that fucking Spanish donkey,” he says quietly. “He made me look. Now, I want to look… Why do I want to look now?”

“You need to problem-solve.”

“Problem-solving is hunting.”

Hannibal smiles as he sweeps the chopped vegetables into a dish. When he turns around, Will is rubbing his eyes and palming his forehead.

“Now that you’re off the painkillers, your migraines will probably come back.”

“Oh good,” Will says roughly. “It would be disturbing if there was nothing at all wrong with me.”

Hannibal folds his arms and tilts his head.

“Sorry.” Will sighs. “I was looking forward to maybe feeling normal after all this.”

“We should get you another brain scan to make sure they’re just headaches.”

“Okay.” He sits back and yawns, then looks annoyed. “Shouldn’t I be less tired now that I’m not on so many drugs?”

“Unless the fatigue is not a side effect of those drugs.”
“What?”

Hannibal gives him a level look before going to put the dish in the oven. “I’m not comfortable purposely bringing you in on something that was previously very traumatic for you,” he says at last.

“I just forgot to keep it intellectual. I can help.” Will looks down at his glass, struggling to find the words. “You know, it doesn’t make sense – that I would feel bad for committing someone else’s murders, but not my own.”

“Of course it does.” Hannibal closes the distance between them and holds his hand out to Will.

Will finishes his wine and takes it. They migrate to the study and take their usual seats in front of the fireplace. Will once again feels the absence of a glass in his hand and thinks, it’s probably not a good thing that it makes him feel so vulnerable. “Why don’t I feel bad for killing Jack?”

“You told me yourself, this weekend. It was his time.”

“I was high.” Will shakes his head. “I can barely stomach the premeditated killing of criminals. And yet… I knew what was going to happen in the basement. I knew I’d have blood on my hands – hours before we even saw Jack, I might add.”

“You didn’t need to be a part of it.”

“I know. You and Abigail would have killed him no matter what.”

“But you wanted to be there.”

“Yes. I wanted to be the one to do it.” Will sighs, then concludes, “I’ve lost it.”

“You know what I’m going to say, Will.”

“That I didn’t lose anything? That I found something? That I learned my power?”

“There’s really no need for the sarcasm.” Hannibal drums his fingertips on the arm of his chair and studies Will for a moment, then asks, “What do you feel when you go into another killer’s mindset?”

Will shrugs. “Whatever they felt. Usually enraged, or betrayed, or lonely. Sometimes just bloodthirsty.”

“And after?”

“You know I feel guilty.”

“Guilty because you were there. You not only witnessed the murder, you committed it. But you did not choose to.”

“Everyone has a choice. I choose to look.”

“And, once you choose to look, all other choices are taken from you. You save lives, but in order to save lives, you must experience death as though you are dealing it. You don’t choose your victims; you end their lives whether they deserve it or not, watching from the very moment they begin to die. You accrue guilt with every case.”

Will scratches at his stubble uncomfortably. “So, it’s not fucked up that I don’t feel guilty, just because I chose Jack’s death?” He narrows his eyes at Hannibal. “You just want a partner in remorselessness.”
“Be that as it may, it was your choice, and also your mind that was present. No other voices in your head.”

“You might have been up there a bit,” Will admits.

Pleased as he is by this, Hannibal continues to question Will with seriousness. “How much of it was my choice, though? Me telling you what to do?”

Will furrows his brow slightly. “None,” he says, puzzled. “You were just… supportive.”


“Maybe that’s why I gave Abigail the knife. I’d already decided to kill him, so it felt like I already had. It was Abigail’s turn.”

Hannibal gazes at him intently. “If you want to understand why you don’t feel guilty, you need some clarity when it comes to your own motivations.” He leans forward on his elbows and clasps his hands together. “What do you want, Will?”

Before Will can come up with an answer, the front door opens and shuts, and, moments later, Abigail joins them.

She perches on the arm of Will’s chair. “Hi.”

“You look tired, Abigail. Are you alright?” Hannibal asks, leaning back again and crossing his legs.

“I’m fine.” She smiles at Hannibal, then picks up Will’s bad arm and starts massaging it. “I’m just glad to be home.”

Will watches her hands work, and, somehow, doesn’t feel sick. In fact, he thinks he can feel the warmth of her fingers where he sees them dig into the muscle. When she’s done, she gives him one of her adoring smiles and slides onto the floor, where she curls up and rests her head against his knee.

They sit together quietly for a long time. At last, Will makes eye contact with Hannibal and whispers, “This.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta’d by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03, @weesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Swinging More, Hitting Less

Chapter Summary

Hannibal continues to get cozy with the new head of Behavioural Science. Miriam Lass is now completely fucked over. Will gets cozy with a bottle of whiskey.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: mental hospital stuff

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Thank god you’re here.” Mapp looks up from her desk as Hannibal simultaneously knocks and enters the office. He leaves the door slightly ajar, as it had been, but Mapp shakes her head and waves her hand for him to close it properly.

“Agent Mapp, I hope I’m not late.”

“You’re right on time. It’s just me... I’ve been here since the crack of dawn.”

Hannibal joins her and says, lightly, “Perhaps you should leave at the crack of nightfall.”

She chuckles as she stands and stretches.

“What have you discovered?” Hannibal asks, glancing over the array of files as he takes a seat.

There are more coloured tabs and sticky notes decorating them than yesterday.

“Well, I’m hoping you’ll be able to tell me otherwise, but it looks to me like Agent Crawford was attempting career suicide for months…”

Hannibal sighs.

Mapp leans against the desk and folds her arms. “That doesn’t sound like you’re about to tell me I’m wrong.”

“I can only say that it doesn’t surprise me.”

“Elaborate?”

Hannibal sits back and crosses his legs. “How familiar are you with the Copy Cat trial?”

She cocks her head to the side with a small smile. “Enough to be surprised that you and Mr. Graham are even on speaking terms.”

Hannibal returns her smile. “I wake up surprised myself most days.”

Mapp turns her chair to face him and sits back down. “Most of what I know I was told by Kade
Prurnell, who doesn’t seem to like Mr. Graham very much. Maybe you could flesh out the story for me.” She rests her elbow on the desk and her hand dangles over the edge. Hannibal follows the movement with his eyes, lingering momentarily on the ring she wears – simple and elegant.

“Jack started displaying symptoms of depression immediately after he found out about his wife’s lung cancer,” Hannibal begins. “However, he came to me when he needed to talk, and appeared to have a healthy attitude about his grief. Up until he accused himself in front of a courtroom full of people of having pushed Will to the point of a mental breakdown. No doubt Ms. Prurnell voiced her displeasure at that?”

“Oh, yes.”

“He was talking about taking Bella to Italy so she could die there. I advised him not to burn bridges with the FBI. He would need his work even more after Bella passed.”

“Was Jack Crawford the type to take advice? That’s not what I’ve gathered.”

“Generally speaking, no, but finding Miriam Lass seemed to ground him, and it looked as though we would all heal quite nicely after everything that happened.”

Mapp just nods. She is a most attentive listener, and Hannibal finds her delightful.

“My point is, it wouldn’t surprise me if Jack was only grounded temporarily. He became very closed off after Dr. Chilton was shot, even towards me. He alienated Will and Dr. Bloom as well, so, I can’t say I know how he was going about killing his career. Perhaps you could flesh out that part of the story?”

“Hm.” Mapp looks thoughtful, and pulls one of the folders on the desk towards her. “Sorry, did you say Dr. Bloom? Dr. Alana Bloom?”

“Yes. The four of us were good friends.”

“Oh no,” she says quietly, lifting her hand so her fingertips cover her mouth. She closes her eyes, looking somewhat mortified. “I just spoke to her yesterday.” She drops her hand and sighs. “She was on my list of people to contact regarding the Ripper… no wonder she didn’t want to consult.” She starts flicking through the file. “I feel awful. What a way to find out…”

Hannibal shakes his head. “Dr. Bloom hasn’t officially consulted on a case for over two years,” he tells her, kindly. “She wouldn’t be in any of your records, especially not with Jack’s approach to bookkeeping.”

Mapp smiles at him gratefully.

He thinks to pat her on the shoulder, but decides to defer physical contact for now.

“There was no way you could have known about her relationship with Jack. I should have told her myself.”

“Speaking of unpleasant conversations… I spoke with the finance division this morning, and discovered that the department was also paying for a non-FBI-approved lawyer for Ms. Lass.” Mapp finds what she’s looking for in the file and extracts two or three pages. “I only know this because I berated some poor young man for playing fast and loose with protocol, until he showed me the falsified documents Jack submitted.” She slides the papers over to Hannibal.

Hannibal rubs his chin and sighs in not a bad impression of Will. “I’m sorry, Agent Mapp. I’m sure
this isn’t what you envisioned for your first week.”

“This department has not had a good year in the public eye – or anyone’s eye, for that matter.” She takes back the papers and tucks them into the folder once more. “I could look at crime scenes all day every day and not get tired… but this? This is exhausting.”

“I couldn’t agree more.”

“It’s hard to resent Agent Crawford, though, much as I’d like to. Aside from being very obviously at the end of his rope, he was also my idol for years.”

“Oh?” Hannibal says, with interest.

“Not just mine. When I was still in training at the Academy, half our year wanted to work for the BAU.” The corner of her mouth stays lifted in a lingering smile as she stands. “Agents Zeller and Price are with the technician at the moment. Would you accompany me to Baltimore State? I have to go talk to this poor woman in person.”

Will takes off the eyepatch and lets the world spin while waiting for his cab to arrive. Hannibal said he shouldn’t wear it if it’s going to cause him the kind of stress that might contribute to another panic attack. He also said it was unsafe to leave Will alone with his good arm bound, so he would have to wear the sling in the evening, instead. Will has no particular feelings about this. He’s dealing with everything very much day-to-day, and this method seems to be keeping the panic at bay. Today, a thought that’s been churning in his brain for a while suddenly makes itself a priority.

At the BSHCI, he almost hails the cab again before it even finishes navigating the roundabout, suddenly feeling incredibly stupid, and not just a little afraid. He presses his hand against the knot in his stomach and climbs the steps. The embargo on Miriam Lass’s visitors has apparently been lifted, as she’s brought to see him in the privacy room without any of the hassle he’d encountered last time he was here. She’s cuffed to the table and they’re left in peace.

“Hello, Miriam,” he says.

She doesn’t look doped up, but she doesn’t look particularly sane, either. Miriam looks at him, but her eyes keep flicking over his shoulder. It makes a chill creep down his neck. “Hi, Will,” she replies, voice sounding hoarse. “You took your time.”

“I’ve been sick.”

Her voice is flat when she asks, “Are you all better now?”

“More or less.” He watches her hands for a moment. She’s digging the fingernails of her right hand into the flesh coloured rubber sleeve that covers her mechanical one. He can see she’s managed to pick right through it in places. He brings his gaze to her face. “Before I got sick, I wasn’t allowed to visit you. Do you know why?”

She shakes her head but, after a moment, says, “Jack, probably.”

“Yeah. I think so too.”

“What are you doing here?” Her gaze is spending less time on his face and more time over his shoulder.
Will leans forward, elbows on the table, and her eyes leave the wall and follow him. “Do you remember everything now?”

Miriam doesn’t draw back, but she does shut her eyes for a minute. “Sometimes I think I do. But…”

“But?”

“But…” she swallows. “It’s very confusing.”

Will places a hand on hers. “What do you remember?” He asks gently.

“I remember the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“Who is he?”

Her lip trembles. “I don’t know.”

“Dr. Chilton?” he tries.

“Yes. But sometimes no…”

“Who else is he?”

“No one.”

“Dr. Lecter?”

“No one.”

She looks like she’s withdrawing inwardly, so he changes the subject. “Miriam, what did Jack want with you?”

She shrugs, somewhat lethargically, and continues to pick at her fake skin. “He said Dr. Chilton wasn’t the Chesapeake Ripper, but he wasn’t dead, either. He said he’d get me out of whatever charges I faced, and all I had to do was try to remember.”

Will nods. “Dr. du Maurier was helping you, right?”

“She was. She left.”

“Left? Left where?”

“I don’t know. She just said she was sorry, and she’d made a mistake coming back.”

Will files that away for later. “What did Jack say about me?”

“He said you’re unstable.”

“Yeah, he’s said that before.” Will can barely keep the irritation out of his voice. “What else?”

“He told me you had a plan to catch the Ripper, but he didn’t know if he could trust you. He wanted me to remember what happened so I could tell everyone at my trial.” Hollowly, she concludes, “He said he was counting on me because he couldn’t count on you.”

The prickle of unease at the back of Will’s neck turns into the prickle of anger. His voice is harsh when he says, “Well, Jack is dead.”
Miriam stares at him, wide-eyed. “What?”

“The Ripper got him.”

Her mouth works behind closed lips for a while before she manages to say, through clenched teeth, “Who’s going to get me out of here?”

Will says nothing. He’s starting to feel the same ubiquitous numbness he’d felt looking down at Mason Verger’s flayed face.

“Will!” Miriam doesn’t sound dazed anymore.

He raises his eyes to hers.

“Are you going to get me out of here?”

He shakes his head slowly.

“The lady from the OIG… she told me they investigated, but Dr. Chilton wasn’t where the papers said he was. There was no sign he’d ever been there…” In her panic, her pitch begins to climb and her voice quivers. “Dr. du Maurier was supposed to help me find something. Jack was supposed to get me out of here! Who’s… who’s going to get me out?”

Will’s next words come out sounding so detached, he shivers at the chill in his own voice. “No one.”

“Oh my god,” she whispers, drawing back as far as she can. “You’re with him!”

“Sorry, Miriam. Playing on Jack’s team gets you hurt. No one knows that better than I do.”

She stares at him, still wide-eyed, disbelieving. “Playing on the Ripper’s team doesn’t?”

“It does. But the Ripper is in control. Jack wasn’t. Jack swung his fists around in the dark and hoped to hit some bad guys. He was swinging more and hitting less when he died.”

Miriam’s eyes fill with tears. “But why are you on the Ripper’s side now? I thought you and I were the same – his victims!”

“I was,” Will agrees, voice still callous. “But I passed his test. You almost did, too. The Ripper always has failsafes in place. He got me out of here exactly when he wanted to.” He tilts his head and looks at her with Hannibal-like curiosity. “Do you think Jack even considered what would happen to you if his plan wasn’t executed perfectly?”

Miriam’s face is the perfect mixture of equal parts incredulity and fear. Anger hasn’t set in yet.

“He lost it, Miriam. And he lost you, after all.”

She sits, trembling and lost, and says nothing.

“Who is the Chesapeake Ripper, Miriam?”

“No one.” It comes out like a gasp.

“What does no one look like?”

Her eyes slip over his shoulder and stay there. “Empty space… and darkness.” She says nothing else.
Will is sufficiently unnerved, and starting to feel the darkness as a physical presence just behind him. He stands and motions to the orderly waiting outside.

The movement jerks Miriam out of her stupor. She looks back at him and says evenly, “It should be you in here.”

The door opens and the orderly starts to uncuff her from the table. Her face is a mask until she’s free of the table and slams her elbow back into the orderly’s nose. She dives across the table towards Will, hands still linked together and feet still linked together, but absolutely savage with rage. She doesn’t get far. Like many of the orderlies here, this one has too much experience shepherding intermittently violent patients to and from the visitors’ rooms to be fazed.

Will doesn’t look away as Miriam kicks out, screams, and spits at him. The orderly’s thick arms are wrapped around her torso, pinning her arms to her sides. Will makes himself watch as she’s carried away, thrashing, gnashing her teeth, and searing the message into his mind with her eyes. When she’s gone, the room still echoes with it. As he leaves the visiting area and walks back to the main entrance, he can hear it bouncing off the walls, combining with other echoes, until he’s being chased down the hall by a howling chorus. Only when the door is shut behind him and he’s down the steps does the din begin to fade.

It should be you.

After their visit with Miriam Lass at the BSHCI, Hannibal spends the rest of the day wishing Jack were alive so they could kill him again. He isn’t angry at Jack for having so many pawns. He’s angry that he moved them around so ineffectively. His game became disappointingly sloppy at the end, and Jack had stopped taking ownership of his actions.

When they arrived at the hospital, they had to wait an hour before they could see Miriam. The doctor said she’d been sedated just a little while ago. She was still drowsy when she was brought to the cages and hung her arms through the bars, leaning her face against them while they talked.

“Do you understand what I’m saying, Ms. Lass?” Mapp asked gently. “Your treatment will continue, but with the hospital staff instead of a private psychiatrist… and we will get you a new lawyer – one who represents the FBI.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Miriam said. “She’s gone. He’s dead. No one’s going to help me…”

“Do you mean Dr. du Maurier?” Hannibal asked.

Miriam barely looked at him. “Yes. She left me.”

“Do you know where she went?”

“Away.”

Mapp leant forward and tried to make eye contact. “Ms. Lass, you’re not alone. You are a former FBI trainee and a survivor of the Chesapeake Ripper. We’re not just going to abandon you. I don’t know why Agent Crawford felt the need to look for help elsewhere.”

Miriam closed her eyes. “Jack.”

“Yes.”
She finally sat up straight. Red lines creased her face from pressing it against the cage. “Jack said he’d get me out.”

Mapp exchanged looks with Hannibal.

“But Jack’s dead. No one is coming for me.”

Hannibal’s expression was concerned. “Don’t give up hope, Ms. Lass. You’ve been through several traumatic events now, but the worst is behind you. Jack may be gone, but he’s not the only one willing to testify on your behalf.”

Miriam turned her dead eyes on him, swaying slightly.

Mapp nodded. “Wait and see. Your lawyer will be here next week. In the meantime, why don’t you try talking with some of the staff? Help them understand, so they can help you remember.”

Hannibal signaled to the orderly. “I think you need to rest now, Ms. Lass.”

The orderly cuffed her and helped her shuffle slowly back towards her cell. She found some strength, just as they were leaving the visiting area, and twisted about to yell over her shoulder, “It should have been him in here!”

“Who do you think she meant?” Mapp asks as they re-enter the BAU headquarters. She stops at an office on the ground floor where a woman hands her two manila envelopes before she even asks for them. Mapp smiles at her. “Thank you.”

Hannibal pretends to consider the question in the elevator, and down the hall to her office. “Well, I can’t imagine she was talking about Jack. She’s devastated by his death.”

“Or,” Mapp counters, unlocking the door and switching on the light, “She’s devastated by what that death means for her freedom.” She deposits the envelopes on her desk then picks up the phone and dials an extension. “Agent Zeller. Are you two done down there?”

Hannibal can just hear the voice on the other end of the line say, “It’s fixed. Just lining up some samples.”

“My office, as soon as you’re done, please.” She hangs up, sighs, and sits.

Hannibal joins her and takes the envelope she offers him.

She opens the other one and lets the contents slide out. “I don’t mean to be unkind, but that poor woman isn’t going anywhere. Agent Crawford may have made things worse for her by being so clandestine.”

“It’s very possible, yes,” Hannibal agrees softly.

As she stands again and goes to the bulletin board, she concludes, “The least the FBI can do is provide her with a lawyer who will make sure she doesn’t get the needle. I don’t know what else to believe, but I believe she doesn’t deserve the death penalty.” She starts tacking the pictures from her envelope to the board in thoughtful silence.

After a few minutes of sitting quietly at the desk, Hannibal joins her, looking reflective. “Agent Mapp, who is investigating the Chesapeake Ripper, if not us? It was my understanding that the case was Jack’s from the beginning. There must be a lot of information to pass on.”
“Oh, we’re still investigating it.” She stands back and folds her arms. Hannibal admires her work. All the pictures are evenly spaced with enough room between each to pin relevant notes. “I just don’t want those closest to Agent Crawford to work on the initial findings for his particular case. We’re also waiting for an expert in behavioural science whose name I can’t remember right now, and a few agents who are transferring in from the Chesapeake field office. Sort of a mix and match of the old task force and the new one.”

“You certainly have your hands full.”

“I’m used to it. People transferred in and out of Richmond all the time. Newark was even worse.”

“Why’s that?” Hannibal asks, just as Zeller and Price walk in.

She smiles a little bit and takes a couple steps to her right to accommodate the newcomers. “New graduates would request placement there, optimistic about driving down to Cape May on weekends.”

“What weekends?” Zeller asks dryly.

“Exactly.”

Will takes Hannibal’s giving him a glass of wine the day before as permission to consume alcohol again, so he helps himself from the cabinet in the study. The bottle is difficult to open and he nearly spills what he’s sure is at least two hundred dollars’ worth of liquor all over the carpet. He screws the lid back on very loosely, in case one glass isn’t enough to dissipate the rising panic. Two fingers of whiskey does quiet his nerves, for the most part, but he pours another glass anyway.

Abigail gets home before Hannibal, and helps a groggy Will into the kitchen, where she deposits him in the armchair so she can start making dinner. It feels like only a short time passes before she’s shaking him out of his stupor. “Drink this,” she says, holding a gigantic glass of water in front of his face. “Unless you want to be in trouble with Hannibal.”

He sobers up by the time Hannibal gets in. Ashamed, he mutters, “Sorry, Abigail. I was going to make dinner…”

She rolls her eyes at him. “Don’t worry about it.”

“Worry about what?” Hannibal asks, joining them in the kitchen.

Abigail doesn’t miss a beat. “Falling asleep when he’s supposed to be keeping me company,” she answers airily. Dinner in the oven, she tidies up her mess and goes to sit on the arm of Will’s chair. She massages his limp limb and, when she’s worked her way down to his hand, he gathers up some energy – not quite enough to squeeze, but enough to fold his fingers over her palm. Her eyes flick to the left to make sure Hannibal isn’t looking before she gives Will a sly wink. Any other father might be concerned by their daughter’s effortless lying. Will is amused and – particularly right now – grateful.

When they are seated at the dinner table, Abigail says to Will, “You should let me give you a proper shave.”

“Has my shaving been substandard?” Will is already smiling and she hasn’t even begun teasing him.
“It’s pretty impressive...” She smiles cheekily at him. “…That it doesn’t look worse.”

“Thank you?”

“You’re welcome. And, you’re welcome in advance for the excellent job I’m going to do.” Clearly as an afterthought, she adds, “Please.”

“Are you going to do my hair and makeup too?”

“I told you, you’re very pretty,” she says with an impish grin. “So you better not make suggestions like that unless you mean it.”

Will waits until Hannibal goes into the kitchen to prepare dessert before throwing the piece of broccoli he’d saved at her, and getting her square in the nose. She picks it up where it falls on the table, and pops it into her mouth. They plaster innocent looks on their faces when Hannibal returns, certain they’d just violated several of his commandments.

Abigail says lightly, “Luckily for you, I only have concealer, and only know how to apply it to a black eye.”

“That is lucky,” Will agrees. Then, to Hannibal, “I wasn’t anticipating the need for a suit when we came here, so that’s definitely back in Wolf Trap.”

“We’ll leave a little early, then,” Hannibal replies. If he’d noticed any airborne food, he doesn’t show it. He does scowl at Will a little bit, however. “I would have bought you a suit if you’d given me any time.”

Will shrugs and tries to look appropriately scolded, but he’s much too relieved to have bypassed such an ordeal to do a very good job. A topic change seems like a good idea. He tries to remember where they’d left off yesterday, and realizes they’d changed the subject before resolving whether or not Will should be allowed information on the Carpenter murders. He clears his throat. “Any developments in the case?”

“Nothing of import.” Hannibal tilts his head and looks at Will for a moment, evidently doing some sort of mental coin toss. “More information on the victims from forgetful family members. Agent Price is continuing to search the ViCAP database for anyone fitting the location and profile you provided. Agent Mapp and I spent most of our time getting to and from the Baltimore State Hospital, and interviewing Miriam Lass.”

Will waits for Hannibal to elaborate on any of those headlines. Infuriatingly, he doesn’t, so Will decides two can play that game. “I also saw Miriam Lass today,” he says, voice as bland as he can make it.

Hannibal’s face becomes an unreadable mask.

Abigail looks between the two of them and raises her eyebrows. “Wow. You guys are terrible at coordinating.” She clears their dishes away and Hannibal starts to wash them as Abigail herds Will towards the bathroom.

“Why do you still wear your watch on your left wrist?” Abigail asks, getting out Will’s shaving kit. “You’re not gonna look at it there.”

Will shrugs. “Force of habit?”
“You could just not wear a watch.”

“I like knowing I can check what time it is if I really want to.”

“You could wear it on your right wrist.”

“I’m not there with my dexterity yet.”

She stops rooting around in the kit and gives him an exasperated look. “So ask.”

“It seems like a stupid thing to ask.”

She softens, albeit momentarily. “Just because you’re getting better doesn’t mean you’re not allowed to ask for help.”

Will doesn’t reply, and is quiet while she trims his beard and applies the shaving cream.

He knows that, technically, he is getting better. He does more with his left and has to think about it less. He veers to the left less drastically. But he still feels cumbersome and clumsy, and he hasn’t stopped seeing things, or imagining things. A lot of the time he’ll find he’s eaten less of his meal than he thought he had. Sometimes he’ll imagine eating all of it and find he’s actually eaten none of it. He’ll blink and objects that weren’t there are suddenly right in front of him. And when these things happen, the strange ache he’d felt after being in the hospital returns. The ache he feels, but doesn’t believe is real somehow. And he has no idea how to say any of this to Hannibal, so he tries his best to ignore it, and suffer in silence when he can’t.

Abigail flicks open Will’s straight razor. It was a gift from his only long-term romance, over a decade ago. She admires the gorgeous cocobolo wood handle and the still polished carbon steel blade, but claims he’s too twitchy and she’ll probably wind up cutting his throat.

Will says he’d been meaning to give it away anyhow.

“Dapper,” Abigail announces when she’s done giving him a proper shave and has cleaned him up with a hot washcloth. “No, don’t move. Your hair needs a trim.”

“You know…” Will begins, then yelps as she pulls out one of his hairs without warning.

“Oh my god!” She dangles it in front of his face. “You have a grey!”

“Jesus, Abigail.” He glares at her and she starts laughing. He grumbles, “You know I’m almost forty, right?”

“Uh-huh.” She wipes her eyes.

“So, calm down. It’s not a unicorn. I’m surprised you only found one.”

She giggles. “I can keep looking.”

He stands and removes the towel from around his neck. He drapes it over her head and says, “I think we’re done here.”

She snatches it off, still grinning. “No trim?”

“No trim.” He pushes her aside and walks out the door, but not in time to hide his smile. He can hear her, still cackling, all the way down the hall.
Back in the study, Hannibal asks, “Why would you do that to yourself?”

“I didn’t have a choice,” Will says lightly, purposely not answering the question he knows Hannibal is asking. “Or are you not talking about getting a shave from Abigail?”

“I am not. Why would you go back to the hospital?”

“Well, I can’t just sit around all day thinking about being disabled.”

Hannibal gives him a sharp look. No introductory banter, then.

“It seemed important.” Will goes to the cabinet and avails himself of another glass of whiskey. Emboldened, he takes charge of the conversation when he returns to his seat. “Why didn’t you choose her?” he asks. The boldness ebbs away when he realizes he hadn’t offered to pour a drink for Hannibal. He would lose points there for sure. He knocks back half the glass. If he can make quick work of it, he may be able to salvage the conversation.

“Miriam Lass?”

“Yes. You were in her head longer than mine.”

“And what makes you think longevity of my influence is what I’m looking for in a partner?”

“You kept her around… You were impressed by her. She could have challenged you if you hadn’t turned her into a pet.”

“I was impressed by her, yes. But I don’t care about every person I find impressive. Are you done feeling guilty now?”

Will shakes his head. “We took her last chance at freedom.”

“And gave it to Abigail.”

“Will you just let me have this self-loathing for a while?”

“What good would it do?”

He shrugs. “I’d feel human.”

“Not yet ready to claim your power.” It’s an innocuous enough comment, but, coupled with a subtly disappointed tone, it brings Will’s panic right back to the surface.

Will runs his hand over his face. “I don’t know.”

Hannibal keeps pushing. “You know what you want. You told me last night. I thought you were sure of your motivations now.”

“I am…” Will can envision the exact corner he’s being backed into. He downs the rest of his drink.

Almost as predatory as he had been the morning Will confronted him about the medical bills, Hannibal presses, “Do you only want what you want sometimes?”

“Will you stop being so fucking superior?” Will snaps.
Hannibal purses his lips. He stands and takes Will’s glass to refill it. When he hands it back to him, Hannibal presses the palm of his free hand to the side of Will’s face. “For now.” He caresses his cheek, and runs his thumb over Will’s chin before pulling away.

Will’s anger abates rather quickly. “I still need to adjust, that’s all.”

“I only want what’s best for you, Will.” Hannibal retakes his seat, no drink for himself.

Will sips his and avoids Hannibal’s eyes.

“What is it?” Hannibal asks.

Will shakes his head and doesn’t answer.

“Will.”

“I’m not always certain that’s the case… or that it will continue being the case. You’re contradicting yourself, which is supposed to be my specialty.”

“Explain.”

“The night you brought back Abigail, you said the concept of good and evil is a difficult one to let go of. I’ve figured out that the worst of me fits great in this life. I want the best of me to fit as well.”

Hannibal studies him. “Is that all you want?”

“I want to maintain some sense of justice. I have to… or I’ll just crumble away.”

“You can maintain that. But you may need to adjust your standards.”

“What about your standards?”

“What do you mean, Will?”

“Does any part of you want the good in me?”

Without hesitation, Hannibal simply replies, “I want all of you.”

“Well… the good part of me says Miriam doesn’t deserve this.”

Hannibal nods. “I know. But that is irrelevant, Will. What happens to Miriam has to happen; there is no other way.” Though his tone imparts that he has no more to say on the subject, he doesn’t rush on to a new one.

Will is grateful. He needs a minute to think – to let some key words and phrases fill another shelf in the reference section of his mind. He’d have to refer back to these conversations in the future, because turning his back on Miriam Lass is not the last choice he’ll have to make on this path. He needs another minute to indulge the guilt-ridden problem-solving part of his mind, which is telling him there has to be an alternative. Finally, he gives himself a minute to think about Abigail – about why he’s doing this.

After his stretch of introspective silence, Will asks, “Are you going to explain why you let me live?”

“What are you talking about, Will?” Hannibal asks.

Will realizes that, as inhumanly intelligent and discerning as he is, Hannibal simply doesn’t have as
much experience dealing with the awkward transitions he and Abigail are so used to getting away with. It must annoy him to no end. “Everybody wanted to think I was a psychopath. I wasn’t going to beat that with an insanity plea. Not with Marion Vega on the prosecution.”

Hannibal tilts his head. His expression is unreadable, and Will wonders if it’s because he’s as unsure of what Will is thinking as Will is of what Hannibal is thinking.

“Did you think about that?” Will probes when Hannibal doesn’t answer. It’s not an accusation – more just curiosity. “If I went to prison, they would have executed me eventually.”

“I wouldn’t have let that happen.” Hannibal states it the way one states a fact.

Will sighs, hearing the end of another conversation in Hannibal’s tone. “I suppose since you took my word for it that I wouldn’t let you be locked up, it’s only fair that I take your word for it that you wouldn’t let me rot.”

“I won’t pretend all my motivations were good.”

Will smiles sardonically. “Even if you were to pretend, Hannibal…”

“Some were. We could no longer protect Abigail – she was about to be arrested.”

It’s Will’s turn to tilt his head questioningly. “What else?”

“I had an idea that being locked up for a time might actually liberate you from some of the residual empathy you tote around.”

“How thoughtful. Mostly, though…”

“I was curious. I wanted to see what you would be like caged.”

“There it is. Did I meet your expectations?”

“You exceeded them. You know that.”

Will doesn’t respond, and, instead, polishes off the remaining drink in his forgotten glass. Abruptly, he asks, “Do you think Alana will be at the funeral tomorrow?”

“No.”

“You seem confident.”

“I am.”

Will sighs again and doesn’t press it. “And you’re sure Chilton’s gone for good?”

“The poor man will stay in hiding as long as he thinks I’m alive.”

“So we can still get away?” For some reason, he needs to hear Hannibal say it.

“Yes. And we will. When you’re better.”

“Why wait though?” he asks, relieved but impatient. “Jack’s dead. Isn’t that what we were sticking around for?”

“Don’t forget Freddie Lounds.”
“What is she still alive for, if that’s what’s keeping us here?”

“That’s not all that’s keeping is here. We are staying here because I’m worried about you, and I think it would be unwise to present you with so many changes – every change possible, really – while you’re still recovering.”

Will feels heat in his cheeks. “I feel fine…”

“I believe we agreed not to lie to each other.”

Instead of protesting, Will asks what’s in the envelope.

Hannibal glances at it where it sits on the table next to him. “Agent Mapp made a copy of the case file for me to bring home, so I could – at my discretion – solicit your help.”

“So, you’re officially on the case.”

“It’s as official as can be.”

“Can I see it?”

“I haven’t decided yet.” A small smile that most would have missed plays around the corners of Hannibal’s mouth.

“Christ, you are really enjoying this, aren’t you?”

“A little bit, yes. Any more questions?”

Will sighs, feeling the whiskey dull any complex line of inquiry he might have pursued. “Did you and Abigail make up?” he asks.

“Isn’t it obvious?”

“Things are obvious with you extremely rarely.”

Hannibal is still smiling. “You seem to be able to anticipate my words and actions well enough.”

“Being predictable isn’t the same as being obvious.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta’d by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Chapter Summary

It’s funeral time. Buckle up for a little psychological meltdown, a little manipulation, a little whiskey, a little butt stuff...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The whiskey has the opposite of the predicted effect. While it used to let Will drift numbly into a darkness that most resembled normal sleep, tonight it makes his dreams vibrant, full of pendulums and white noise, and every shade of red. It takes the format of a person’s life flashing before their eyes just before they die, as portrayed in movies. It isn’t his life, though some of it is familiar. Mostly, it’s a rapid-fire display of all sorts of things gone terribly, terribly wrong. It follows no apparent chronology, and isn’t confined to this universe.

When the reel of sped-up tragedy slows, he looks down at his hands and sees that he’s clutching a fistful of black feathers in each. He whirls around, wondering why he’d grabbed her. Why she’d run in the first place.

He’s surrounded on all sides by garishly gruesome scenes. They seem to be highlights from what he’d just witnessed, projected on to screens that flutter and undulate like flat sheets hung out on the line to dry. Sometimes the screens whip back on themselves as though struck by a sudden gust of wind. He takes a few steps towards one of them and it calms in its movements, rippling gently, almost invitingly.

Miriam Lass stands stunned in front of a kneeling Hannibal, a bloody scalpel in her hand. His hands are wrapped around his own throat, in an attempt to stem a flow that won’t be stemmed. In her other hand is a drawing of Wound Man, smudged with bloody fingerprints. When he leans closer, he sees that Wound Man himself is bleeding. Blood soaks through the paper, dissolving it in her hand and cascading over her fingertips beautifully. Hannibal looks up at her, eyes commendatory, bright in recognition of a job well done.

He turns away and wanders in another direction. Another screen becomes tame. At first, he thinks he’s looking at a blurred image of a compass, four tapering arrows pointing North, South, East, and West. The image slides further out of focus, then abruptly clears. The arrows are four bodies wrapped in black silk. Against his will, he reaches into the scene and pulls back the cloth from one of the faces. Something shoves him from behind. He falls forward, and, as he falls, he feels silk against his skin. When he lands, he’s replaced the body he’d exposed, and Hannibal and Abigail are looming over him. No feathers, no antlers. Flesh, blood, tears, sweat, and shaky breaths. They both look betrayed. Not by each other – by him.

It’s raining. He blinks away droplets and sees red. Water and blood keep dripping into his eyes and he reaches blindly for something to wipe his face on. His fingers curl around silk. He buries his face in it until the rain stops. When he opens his eyes, he’s kneeling with one of the screens ragged in his hand. He looks up and sees part of it still undulating in midair, displaying fragments of the scene. The cloth in his hand is dynamic as well, though the images are incomprehensible for being bunched up and wrinkled. It looks like he’s torn curtains from a curtain rod in a rage, and left some behind.
He thinks to try and put the pieces back together…

You were so afraid.

A voice vibrates through the air, and the screen disintegrates in his hands. It might be his own voice. Black feathers out of the corner of his eye. A dark shadow that becomes a silhouette flitting behind one of the screens and disappearing on the other side. Abigail. He feels the Ravenstag nudge his back again. He turns just in time to see the antlers before they run him through. As he bleeds out on the floor of his mind, he sees the ravenstag effortlessly leap over him and gallop off in pursuit of shadows.

Will wakes with a jolt. It’s a new moon, so the room is dark, and he can’t be sure he’s not still dreaming. He lies gasping and paralyzed in the blackness until Hannibal turns on a lamp. He looks down. His chest is puncture-free, and covered in sweat, rather than blood. He blinks several times to be sure and swallows loudly as he catches his breath.

He feels Hannibal sit up next to him. He squeezes his eyes shut and reluctantly sits up as well. His head starts pounding immediately. “You would have killed me, wouldn’t you? If I hadn’t confessed?”

“Are you trying to gauge how much power you have over me?”

“What?” Will winces and rubs at his eyes.

Hannibal is silent for so long, Will is tempted to open his eyes just to read his face. Eventually, Hannibal says, “I would have made sure you suffered first. You would have lived long enough to understand all that you could have had.”

Will feels Hannibal’s gaze on him as heat from a coal furnace. He imagines flesh searing in trails behind the sweep of his eyes over Will’s face.

“Don’t betray me, Will.”

“You know I can’t. Would you have made Abigail suffer too? Would you have killed her? Or…” he adds hopefully, “were you going to take her and run no matter what I did?”

Hannibal doesn’t answer immediately, and, when he does, his words are vague. “She would not have escaped unscathed.”

Will has the look of someone who had expected a punch in the gut, and received one. “I can picture it all so clearly,” he whispers. “Like a memory. Like it happened.”

“In some other world, it did.”

“In that other world... Did either of us survive?”

“We survived. And we didn’t. Everything that could have happened did happen.”

“I can’t stand it,” Will says painfully. “Thinking about what happened to Abigail in another world. Infinite other worlds...”

“I believe we are in the best possible world.”

“She said something like that the first week she stayed with me. We should probably be a little more
grateful, then.”

“Grateful to whom? God?”

“If there is a god, I don’t think he wants anything to do with us.” Will opens his eyes to see Hannibal’s no longer smoldering as they must have been.

“Each other, then,” Hannibal suggests.

Will nods. “I think that’s what Abigail’s been driving at.” He reaches over Hannibal to turn off the lamp. They lie back down. Will yawns. “It’s quite possible she’s smarter than both of us.”

Mapp, Zeller, and Price are congregated just outside of the church where Bella and Jack’s funeral is being held; an edge population existing between the bright, sunny lot, and the cool, solemn interior. Several other agents are milling about, looking none too keen on going inside. Will can see that both Price and Zeller are self-conscious in their suits. Either that, or just uncomfortable. He relates. Mapp looks no less like an Egyptian goddess than the last time he’d seen her, but her dress and heels, and dreadlocks hanging unpinned down her back, seem to soften her.

Price is the first to see Hannibal and Will, and acknowledges them with a pleasant smile. “Nice to see you’re better, Will,” he says when they join their little group. “Nice to see you two worked things out, as well.”

Though he shakes Price’s outstretched hand, Will’s small smile doesn’t even begin to reach his eyes. Hannibal’s hand once again has a possessive grasp on his shoulder, and, once again, Will thinks to shrug it off, and decides against doing so.

Zeller says, “We’re not saying anyone’s a serial killer anymore, right?”

Will lets out a short, humourless laugh. “I’ve stopped accusing people of murder. And people have stopped accusing me. Everybody’s happy.”

“We realized we have more in common than we originally thought,” Hannibal says. “All the false accusations may actually have strengthened our friendship.”

“Well, queer ducks flock together.” Zeller frowns and colours barely a second later. “ Nope,” he says, and, without further ado, slinks away inside to find a seat. Price follows, a long-suffering look on his face.

Mapp’s fingers are pressed over her mouth and she’s clearly trying to suppress a laugh. “I’m sorry.” She sucks in her cheeks to mask her smile and explains, “I’ve just never met anyone who puts their foot in their mouth with such regularity.”

Will glances at his watch. He’d asked Abigail to put it on for him before she left for work, because it seemed to bother her for some reason, but now he’s glad she’d pointed it out. The service is supposed to start in five minutes.

Mapp sees this action and inclines her head to the door. “Shall we?”

They head inside and make their way to a few empty seats halfway down the aisle. Hannibal slips his arm around Will’s waist. Will gives him a withering look. When they are seated, Hannibal brazenly takes Will’s hand, completely undeterred by his scowl, and holds it in his lap for the better part of the ceremony.
Will supposes it makes them look sympathetic to anyone who might glance their way, which is good because he has no idea how his face is currently arranged. Annoyingly, it feels quite nice. Hannibal’s thumb brushes over the heel of Will’s hand in consistent, gentle strokes, while Will thinks about introducing that same heel to the nasal area of Hannibal’s face.

Zeller and Price speak. They both share anecdotes about Jack on the job. Zeller is surprisingly passionate when he says, “It’s a real tragedy that a man so committed to justice met with such an unjust end.” Price says he will be missed, not just as a colleague, but as a friend. Two of Bella’s friends talk about how strong she was to the very end. Finally, the priest gives a sort of extended eulogy for both of them, a verbal collage of information gathered from family and friends. He does an admirable job of animating their lives together.

Will feels fraudulent when tears prick his eyes and spill over before he knows what’s happening. He wants to stop crying, not because he’s embarrassed, but because it feels disrespectful. He doesn’t know what he’s crying about, but he does know he’s not crying over Jack. He liberates his hand from Hannibal and presses his fingers against his eyes. He manages to suppress further tears, but the shaking of his shoulders still gives him away. He feels worse because he knows Hannibal is just loving it. When the church roof doesn’t collapse on them, Will lets Hannibal put an arm around him and rub his shoulder for the remainder of the service, while he sobs quietly and wills himself out of existence.

Hannibal doesn’t care if the tears are genuine or not. It makes the whole affair more interesting to have Will either acting or reacting beside him. After the ceremony, Will does feel a little embarrassed, but both Zeller and Price’s eyes are red around the rims as well. Mapp is dry-eyed, but she hadn’t known Jack, and Will has the distinct impression that no one has ever, or will ever, see her cry.

Back in the car, Will asks, “Did you enjoy that?” with an impressive amount of snark given how physically and emotionally tired he looks.

“What’s that?”

“Watching me discover that you’ve laid claim to me and apparently everyone knows it?”

Hannibal doesn’t take his eyes off the road, but tilts his head and muses. “Laid claim to you…”

“Did you personally tell everyone in the department that we are an item? Or did you just plant seeds and watch the grapevine do its thing?”

“I’m confused, Will. Are we not?”

“Irrelevant. You did it just to mess with me.”

Hannibal lowers his voice as though wounded by Will’s words. “Is that what you think?”

Will scoffs and looks out the passenger side window. “I think we’re not an item unless someone’s watching. Then your hands are suddenly all over me.”

“I apologize for ruining your carefully constructed reputation.”

“Shut up, Hannibal.” Will can’t stand to look at him. “You’ve just proven this is still a game to you. We’re still a game.”
When they get home, Will sneaks some scotch, and falls into a thankfully dreamless sleep on the sofa in the study. He sleeps through dinner, the rest of the evening, and most of the night. At some point, Abigail shakes him awake and makes him sit up to take his medication. When he wakes up in the early hours, a blanket has appeared on top of him, and he can’t bring himself to relocate, so he just lies there until he falls asleep again.

Later that morning, when he stumbles into the kitchen for a glass of water and his morning medication regimen, he sees that Hannibal has left the case file on the kitchen counter. Atop it is a note that simply reads, *Don’t wear yourself out, please.*

Hannibal arrives home midafternoon to find Will in the study, sitting on the floor in front of the sofa, arms around knees, gazing at a scattering of photos – a scattering that is probably a network, in Will’s mind. The bottle of scotch is untouched.

Will drops the photo in his hand and rubs his eyes when Hannibal sits on the sofa beside him.

“Any thoughts, Will?”

“Not enough. I can’t figure out how he’s choosing his victims.” Will sighs and scrubs his hand down his face, as he does when his mind goes places he’d rather it didn’t. “Do you know?”

“No.” Hannibal leans forward on his elbows. “I would agree they appear entirely unrelated.”

“I can’t even figure out if there is some sort of order to his kills… An end goal… Anything.” He picks up another photo – the one of the Spanish Donkey at the crime scene, after the victim had been removed. There are patches of lighter shades of red where blood had seeped into areas of untreated wood. The feet are unsanded. “There’s something about the carpentry aspect of this I feel should tell us something. The work is rough, but… I don’t know… Not in a novice kind of way.”

“What could be the significance of that? Does he have low standards?”

“You said that carpentry may have been a family trade. Maybe he was never interested in it. He isn’t incompetent. Easily bored, maybe…? Maybe once the device is functional, that’s good enough for him. It’s not the woodwork in these scenes that he takes pride in…”

“Is he impatient?”

“I don’t know if that’s it exactly.” He massages his temple, just below the scar. “It feels more like he’s lashing out in more than one direction… because he doesn’t know for sure yet who his real target should be. There’s something in all of this we can use, but I can’t find it…”

Will trails off and Hannibal lets him brood a while longer before saying, “Speaking of misplaced anger.”

“Jesus, is that an apology?”

“Is an apology necessary?”

“It would be the polite thing.”

“Are you still angry with me?”
“No.” Will hasn’t looked up from the photo, and continues not to when he adds, “But I probably would be, if I cared more what other people think.”

“Why?”

“Because I like my personal life to be private. I’ve been exposed enough. People already know too much about me.”

“People don’t know you at all.”

“You mean people don’t know me like you do.” Will sighs and puts down the photo at last. “I don’t think Occam’s Razor is applicable here.” When he’s met with silence, he looks up to see Hannibal puzzled. “I’m talking about the case.”

Hannibal considers the photos again. “Two of these devices were used, in their time, to punish men and women for sexual misconduct,” he points out. “The other two were for punishing verbal misconduct.”

“That’s not a pattern… or, rather, not the pattern.” Will shakes his head. “You’re reaching, Hannibal. Everything was about adultery and heresy in those days.”

“True enough,” Hannibal concedes.

After a minute, Will says, “Oh.”

“What, Will?”

“I see what you did there.”

Hannibal gives Will his most innocent look. “What did I do?”

“Showed me the negative.” Will wants to both slap Hannibal, and kiss him. It’s not a new feeling. “You’re an asshole,” he says. “But thank you.”

Hannibal looks pleased.

“The last time I worked on this case, I came to you.”

“I remember,” Hannibal replies. “You asked me to explain how I could torture others, knowing how it feels to be tortured.”

“Yes.”

“Was my answer unsatisfactory?”

“Not tautologically. I want to clarify something, though, because I think you lied.”

“A bold accusation, given our agreement.”

“Not on purpose. Maybe I should say, instead, that I don’t think you told the truth. I’m not big on euphemisms, though.”

“Please explain, Will.” Hannibal doesn’t sound annoyed, the way he had when they’d last broached this topic, but his voice carries a faint note of aggravation.

“I know you were lying when you said the humiliation, pain, and death you inflict on others isn’t
cathartic. You admitted it after you killed the judge and lawyers at the courthouse. What I want to know is – were you lying about it not being arousing?"

Hannibal’s slight frown disappears and he beams down at Will, as though he’s a very clever student who has just asked an insightful question. “I don’t know.”

“How can you possibly not know if you get off on killing?"

Hannibal leans back and crosses his legs, considering. Will starts to turn and face him, but decides he might get a more complete truth if he can’t see Hannibal’s face. It’s difficult to know with absolute certainty if Hannibal is lying, when he can use his expressions as well as his voice to manipulate Will.

“I have never experienced sexual arousal during my work, but then, I have never tried to make it an arousing experience. Nor do I recreate those scenes as violent sexual fantasies during intercourse or masturbation. So,” Hannibal concludes, “the answer to your question is, I don’t know. But, I assure you, when the need for that type of satisfaction arises I pursue activities that guarantee relief.”

Will can’t help but smile at Hannibal’s absurd phrasing. After a moment, he says, “I think that’s the most forthcoming reply you’ve ever given me.”

“I find the topic of what stimulates people’s sexuality endlessly fascinating.”

“Well, that’s good. I imagine a large portion of your clientele is in therapy for anxiety over their preferences.”

“You’re not wrong.”

“So, there is insufficient data on whether or not you get sexual pleasure out of torturing and murdering people.”

“Are you suggesting further research?”

“I’m really not. But, since we’re on the topic, I’m curious what you mean by guaranteed relief. I mean, your pursuit of earthly pleasures is practically a sport…”

“Or an art,” Hannibal suggests.

Will exhales heavily. “Never mind.”

Hannibal smiles at the back of Will’s head and reaches over to run a hand through his hair. Will twists at the waist, resting his arm on the seat cushion and finally looking at Hannibal.

Hannibal begins again. “What I mean by guaranteed relief is this: Pleasure can be achieved by many means – some of which both of us have become familiarized with at some point or another –” he fingers one of Will’s curls and purposely brushes his hand against his cheek. “But at the very core of it, nothing is absolutely necessary except one’s imagination. Everything layered on top is negotiable.”

Will doesn’t pull away from his touch, although he does drop his eyes to Hannibal’s pinstriped kneecap. “Are we negotiating?”

Hannibal speaks slowly, smoothly. “I revel in the idea of having you as a sexual partner. We understand each other’s minds so fully; it seems a natural addition to the relationship.”
Will should be allowing eye contact in a conversation like this – it’s only polite. “We already had a sexual relationship,” he says, as he returns his gaze to Hannibal’s face. “It was… destructive. You want that back?”

“I wouldn’t say it was destructive. I would say it was appropriate. The violence of it matched our circumstances well.”

“The violence wasn’t all circumstantial.”

“No. You were discovering your capacity for violence, and I will admit to provoking you. However, violence may have been the only catalyst available to us at the time.”

“Catalyst?”

“For the romance to manifest itself in physicality.”

“You’d say it was a romance before we slept together?”

“Wouldn’t you?”

“I suppose so. Not if you’d asked me at the time, though.”

“If sex is not something you want, Will, I don’t believe our psychological connection will suffer for the lack of intimacy.”

“If this is a romance, but we’re never intimate…?”

“Forgive me. I should have been more elucidative. I meant lack of sexual intimacy. We are already physically intimate.” He underscores this by stroking down the back of Will’s neck.

Will nods thoughtfully.

“You know, Will… Until the end of the 19th century, physical intimacy in platonic male friendships was common. It was considered masculine, and also completely distinct from homosexuality.”

“Romantic friendships one was unable to have with women, because they lacked the capacity for such a virtuous bond?” Will rubs his temple and huffs a small laugh.

“Lesser men were also incapable of true friendship. Only higher forms of human could develop such unity.”

“This is pretty lofty talk. You’re assuming we’re both elite in some way.”

“I believe we are. And I believe you believe we are, though you won’t admit it.”

“So I won you by default.”

“In a sense, yes. But, more accurately, no. If we weren’t friends, I’d hope we would be enemies.”

“That’s awfully Nietzschean of you to say.”

Hannibal smiles. “In one’s friend one shall have one’s best enemy?”

“Be at least mine enemy.” Will mumbles, dropping his gaze again. Then he smiles and chuckles quietly. “Should we really be building our relationship based on Victorian Era philosophies?”
“Some certainly impart more flavour to life.”

“One day someone will feast on us, and comment on our wild existence.” Will isn’t entirely joking. He closes his eyes and leans into Hannibal’s hand. “I’m not opposed to it. I just… haven’t ever had much of an appetite.”

Hannibal inclines his head and lifts the corner of his mouth. “I don’t imagine I will be disappointed by your appetite. Sex is no more a drive for me than the drive to go to the opera. I am simply confident that anything sexual that happens between us will be enjoyable and rewarding if and when it does happen again.”

“Compelling, as always.”

“You seem unconvinced, as though you have a decision to make. Will,” Hannibal says, cupping his chin and forcing their gazes to meet. “I’m not trying to convince you of anything besides my own attitude.”

“I know.” Will is quiet for several minutes. Hannibal goes to say something, but Will says, “Shut up. I’m thinking.”

Hannibal acquiesces and resumes stroking his fingers through Will’s hair.

When Will does speak, his voice is softer than he’s allowed for anyone, let alone Hannibal. “I don’t want to do anything else right now. I just want to kiss you.”

“I would like that very much.”

They kiss for a long time. It is comfortable and comforting. Neither feels the need to take it further, until, quite suddenly, Will does. Maybe it’s finally feeling – after months, now – that the need for understanding, acceptance, respect, and passion is mirrored in the other. Maybe it’s just untethered lust. Whatever it is, it charges every particle in the spaces between them and around them, and Will is filled, not with need, but with want. He wants to touch Hannibal so badly.

Hannibal tugs him closer, so he’s caged in by his knees on either side. It seems Will has no desire to get up off the floor, but he quickly makes it apparent that this is not because he’s tired.

“May have changed my mind,” Will says, loosening Hannibal’s tie and beginning to unbutton three ridiculous layers of finery. He keeps kissing him as he does this, but gets frustrated and mutters, “It’s summer, for Christ’s sake.” He feels Hannibal smile against his mouth, warm and contagious, and adds, “Will you help me out here, please?”

As each article of clothing comes off, Will throws it with some force away from them.

“I find your disgust at my material belongings quite attractive,” Hannibal admits, finally shirtless and slightly tousled.

Will mutters something into Hannibal’s chest, and Hannibal lifts Will’s face by the chin again. “I said it’s goddamn unnecessary,” he repeats.

Hannibal chuckles. “We’ve already established I’m not as prudent as you.”

Will pauses his explorations at Hannibal’s navel. “Prudent being a euphemism for frugal.”

It’s Will’s turn to press a contagious smile into Hannibal’s skin. At this point, his bad arm is limp and useless at his side, but it’s not in the way, so Will ignores it. Hannibal’s pants, thankfully, come unbuttoned with one hand. He is already half hard, and stiffens when Will wraps his hand around his shaft. He holds Hannibal and licks around the head of his cock, sucking lightly and tonguing the slit. Hannibal just says, “Oh,” and lays his head back.

His hands still in Will’s hair and on the back of his neck when Will takes him in his mouth fully and Hannibal lets out a contented sigh. Will licks forcefully up the underside of his cock and then tightens his lips about him and takes him right down to the hilt. Hannibal presses his hips up slightly and pushes his hand down gently on Will’s neck. His other hand clutches Will’s hair.

His breath comes hard through his nose as Will repeats this again and again. The long, indulgent press of Will’s tongue up his shaft and the tight, wet drag of his lips down it is neither gentle nor teasing, though his pace is slow. Every touch is deliberate and demands Hannibal’s attention. Nothing superfluous – not this time – just persistent, heavy lips and tongue on his already throbbing cock.

Will keeps him in his mouth so he can cup Hannibal’s balls in his hand, and slides his tongue up and down an inch or so. He picks up speed slightly, and, reaching his fingertips past his sack, drags them along his perineum at the same pace.

“Slow down, Will,” Hannibal murmurs. “Or this will be over quickly. And you feel rather divine, so I’d like to last a little while, if you don’t mind.”

Will gives him a half-smirk-half-smile. “It would be a slap in the face if my gift didn’t have any… personal benefits.”

Hannibal begins unbuttoning Will’s shirt. When he’s done, Will divests Hannibal of his shoes and socks hurriedly, so he can get on to removing his pants. He shrugs off his own shirt carelessly. He considers Hannibal when the man stands, naked and hard in front of him. He’s no less composed and refined in his manner than if he were walking to his desk in his finest three piece suit. He locks the study door with a small smile on his way back to Will.

Setting the accoutrements on the floor beside the sofa, he sits back down and says, “There’s no need for you to be wearing clothes,” as casual as can be.

Will shuffles out of his jeans and briefs. He’s already barefoot because he couldn’t be bothered putting on socks and shoes when he had nowhere to go. Hannibal pats the cushion beside him and Will joins him on the sofa. He goes to take him in hand again, but Hannibal slips down off the sofa and nudges Will’s legs apart, taking Will in his mouth instead. Will had forgotten how mesmerizing it is watching Hannibal do this, and how the hungry moans that escape him – even with his mouth around Will’s cock – make him absolutely desperate to fuck. What is unfamiliar, but easily the most damningly hot part of the whole affair, is the way Hannibal opens himself up at the same time.

Hannibal reaches to the side, where his fingers find the condom packet and he tosses it up to Will. Then he slowly, almost reluctantly, removes his mouth, sits back on his heels and works his own cock for a while.

Will lets Hannibal work himself fully onto him while he strokes up his chest. When Will is all the way inside, Hannibal grabs around his shoulders and pauses, burying his face in Will’s neck and breathing heavily against his skin.

Will wraps his arm around his waist and waits for Hannibal’s breathing to even out, then thrusts up inside him with a sharp moan. The noise this elicits from Hannibal is somewhere between a gasp and
a groan. He pants in his ear as he starts to rock his hips on top of him.

Will plants hot, heavy kisses along his clavicle. He begins to feel more present. He feels clarity. He feels real. He tightens his grip around Hannibal’s back and drags his lips up to his ear. “Hannibal…”

It’s a moment before Hannibal manages, “Will?” between harsh breaths.

“I fucking missed you.”

Hannibal forces their lips together. They don’t separate for a long time. Will feels the muscles under his scapulae rippling with each movement. He feels Hannibal’s hardness rub against his stomach.

When their mouths are their own again, Hannibal says roughly, thighs squeezing Will’s hips, “I thought I was going to lose you.” He straightens to look down at Will for a few moments before setting a new pace. He rides Will slower, and takes him deeper.

Will’s fingers claw into Hannibal’s sides. His head falls against the back of the sofa, and he closes his eyes, just letting Hannibal decide how he wants to be fucked. “I thought I had lost you,” Will whispers with an involuntary shiver.

Hannibal shakes his head and licks his lips. “You thought I would leave you. I thought you would die.”

“Same thing.” Will’s tone is decidedly more factual than sentimental. “Uhh, fuck…” he groans. He lifts his head to suck the depression at the base of Hannibal’s throat. He dips his tongue into it and then licks up over his Adam’s apple. It’s as erotic as sucking him off. He grabs Hannibal’s ass with both hands like that’s exactly what he’s doing.

Abruptly, he partly throws and partly bucks Hannibal off him onto the floor, crawling on top. It’s a little inelegant because, before he can do anything, he has to position his bad arm to take his weight. He doesn’t care. He shoves back in, noisily sucking his breath in through his teeth. Then their lips reconnect briefly. For a while, neither speaks, though they are far from quiet. Will’s hips snap against Hannibal’s and his thrust become deeper and more urgent, his groans louder, his expelled breaths more audible. Hannibal meets him, thrust for thrust, shoving his hips upwards to take him as deep as he will go. They jam their mouths together whenever they can coordinate it.

After one such kiss, Hannibal pulls away and speaks with that iron certainty, laced with threats. “I won’t.”

“What?”

“I won’t leave you. Never again.”

Will leans down and takes Hannibal’s mouth with his own again, shoving past his lips with his tongue as though he wants to eat Hannibal’s words. He pulls Hannibal’s legs around him and looks Hannibal straight in the eye. “Don’t,” he says, just shy of growling. “I’ll die. I will. And I’ll kill you first.” He picks up the pace again, trying to bring him closer even though their foreheads are already pressed together. He feels sweat drip down his neck and sees sweat beaded along Hannibal’s hairline. Tastes sweat when he brushes his lips over Hannibal’s cheek to find his mouth again.

“Will…”

Will reaches his hand down to work Hannibal’s dick, wondering how he’d gone so long without hearing that moan. “Hannibal?”
“I’m close.”

The words turn Will’s spine into a lightning rod. He breathes out heavily. His thrusts include more of the rolling motion that makes him slide so deliciously against Hannibal’s insides. “I’m gonna come,” Will grits out. At that, he feels Hannibal spill over his hand with a sharp gasp. Will comes barely a second later.

When they catch their breath, Will pulls out, but he doesn’t move from his position above Hannibal. “I don’t just mean your body.” He breathes heavily and pushes hair out of his eyes. They blaze as he fixes Hannibal with a heated gaze, no less fiery after his release. “Don’t give me a piece of your mind and then leave me alone with it.”

Hannibal nods, and unable to speak, pulls Will down and holds him tightly against his chest. They roll onto their sides without letting go. After a few minutes, Hannibal says softly, “I don’t doubt you will kill me.” He keeps his cheek pressed against Will’s, but angles his mouth towards Will’s ear. “I think you will kill me whether I leave you or not. My greatest fear is that that day will come too soon.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta’d by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03, @weesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Talk Dirty to Me (Vergram Style)

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will deal with the aftermath of their respective confessions. Or, rather, don’t deal with it. But it’s okay for now, because less talky talky = more kissy kissy, and, even though Hannigram are back at it, Margot and Judy are still fucking enough for everybody.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Margot loves the way Judy’s skin smells in the morning. Whether she wakes up with her face tucked against the back of Judy’s neck, or Judy is snuggled against her so she hardly has to move to brush her lips over Judy’s scalp, she always enjoys the balmy scent of the woods and faint traces of tea tree oil. It makes Margot think of floating on a lake, surrounded by great conifers reaching up into a sky that feels very far away, isolation bringing her tranquility. If they’d had sex the night before, there’s an added layer of musk that’s a mixture of them both. Sandalwood and honeysuckle. The scent alone is often enough to drive them to a repeat performance the following morning.

This morning is one of those mornings. It’s hot at night now, and they sleep with only a flat sheet covering them, so they can still wrap themselves around each other. Margot wakes up curled around Judy in the same position they’d fallen asleep in. Judy is slightly bowlegged, which makes it easier for Margot to slip her own leg between hers so the entire lengths of their bodies touch. She unwraps her arm from about Judy’s waist and lifts her hand to trace patterns into the skin of her shoulder. Judy makes a small contented noise, still mostly asleep. Margot brushes her hair away and plants a kiss on the back of her neck. She kisses her way up to her ear and whispers, “Don’t go.”

Judy stirs and mumbles, “Okay, baby.” She leans into Margot nuzzling her hair.

Judy makes a small contented noise, still mostly asleep. Margot brushes her hair away and plants a kiss on the back of her neck. She kisses her way up to her ear and whispers, “Don’t go.”

Judy stirs and mumbles, “Okay, baby.” She leans into Margot nuzzling her hair.

Margot slips her arm back around her and traces the scars under each of her breasts before sliding over them, grazing her nipples. She mouths at her neck for a while longer, then leans over to kiss her soundly on the lips. Judy rolls onto her back and Margot straddles her. She feels Judy’s hands migrate into her hair, where she pulls gently at the long loose curls. “Your hair is like a waterfall,” she says sleepily between kisses. “Do I have morning breath?”

“You sure do,” Margot answers before kissing her again.

“Good,” Judy giggles. “You do too.”

“Mm. Sexy.”

Judy’s smile in the morning is always affectionate and sweet. It’s one of those precious things Margot is selfishly glad is all hers. Judy’s eyes are puffy and cheeks pale with sleep, making her few freckles stand out. She has the beginnings of both frown lines and crow’s feet, which she’s proud of, she says, because it means that she’s working hard and playing hard. She doesn’t want to be one of those adults who look like they’ve never emoted in their lives. She doesn’t wear much makeup to begin with, but Margot likes her best in the morning, when she’s most herself.
“I know you have to leave, but I’m going to eat you up first.”

“Then I won’t be able to leave.”

“That’s the idea.”

Judy slides her hands down Margot’s back. “Are we okay with cannibalism now?”

“Just with us.” Margot bites Judy’s bottom lip lightly. “Because I love you so much.”

“I think the Lecter household is having a bad influence on you.”

Margot’s tone is inveigling, and she looks at Judy through her eyelashes. “Stay, then. Keep an eye on me.”

“I said okay already.”

“But you didn’t mean it.”

“I’d stay if you asked me seriously, but you’re not asking seriously.”

Margot nuzzles behind her ear. “I know. That’s why I’m not going to. You’re so good to me.” She starts sucking kisses down her neck and over her chest, then closes her mouth around her nipple and licks until it’s hard against her tongue. She massages what little is left of the breast tissue and Judy arches her back underneath her.

“You deserve it.”

Cupping her other breast, Margot returns to Judy’s mouth and almost smothers her with hot, heavy kisses. Then she slides smoothly down her body, her mess of hair trailing after her. Judy sweeps it to one side so she can stroke the shorter, finer hairs at the nape of her neck.

“You’re so beautiful, Em.”

Margot lifts her head and tries to look cross, but she’s blushing, as usual, at the direct compliment. “I’m worshipping your body right now!”

Judy laughs. “Okay. I’ll be quiet.”

“Don’t be quiet,” Margot says with a mischievous smile. “Just don’t talk.” She parts Judy’s legs and lies down on her stomach between them. She tugs Judy a little closer by the hips, then gives one slow lick up her slit. Judy shivers. The next one parts her lips and she tastes Judy’s wetness on her tongue. She raises her head a little and kisses her clit. Softly, savouring each of Judy’s deepening breaths, she tongues around it and brushes her lips over it for a while. Then she laps at her opening again, before roughly rolling Judy over. She kisses up the backs of her thighs while Judy emits soft little sighs, her kisses feather-light the way she knows drives Judy crazy.

Parting her legs again, Margot drags her thumb over her lips, then presses it firmly inside her cunt. Judy moans into the pillows and wriggles down against her as Margot strokes her from the inside. She removes her thumb and replaces it with her middle and forefinger. Judy squirms, torn between rubbing herself against the sheets and lifting her ass to have Margot’s fingers deeper. Margot makes the decision for her, and pulls her up by her hips until she’s kneeling on all fours. Keeping her fingers inside, twisting minutely, gently, Margot bends over her and once again devotes her mouth to Judy’s back and neck. She feels herself getting wet at the sight of Judy slamming her cunt into Margot’s hand, steadily harder and faster. She feels Judy tighten around her and her moans become
loud and open-mouthed.

Margot shoves her back down onto her stomach, leans down and braces her arm along her lower back so she can’t move her hips. “You can talk now,” Margot says. She teases around Judy’s opening again. “Remember last week, when you said you were going to finger-fuck me in Dr. Lecter’s fancy bathroom?”

“Oh… yes…”

Margot slides one finger back inside. “Tell me about it.”

Judy rests her head on her forearms and looks back at Margot. “I don’t know what his bathroom looks like.”

Margot presses down lightly with her finger and Judy’s hips jerk.

“Mm. Okay. Assuming it’s like other rich people’s bathrooms…”

“Like our bathrooms?”

“Right… I’d lock the door and shove you up against it. You’ve left your panties in the van, and you’re so wet already it’s a miracle it’s not showing through your dress.”

Margot adds a second finger. “That sounds about right.”

“Everyone’s done in the basement and cooking dinner in the kitchen. It’s just down the hall, so we have to be quiet or someone might come and stop us.”

“But we’re not very good at being quiet, are we?” Margot says, slamming her fingers into Judy as deep as she can. She pulls out a tiny bit then slams in again. And again. And again. Judy cries out every time in affirmation. “Do we keep our clothes on?”

“Of course,” Judy pants. “That makes it so much dirtier. What if we got something on your dress or my skirt? Everyone would know what we were doing…” She starts trying to grind against the sheets again. “And I want them to know. Oh my god… Em… I want them to know that you had your legs spread on his shiny fucking marble counter. That I used his Egyptian cotton terry hand towel to clean up the mess you made when you came. That the second time you came you came so hard you almost broke his antique mirror…”

“Do I get to make you come?” Margot is working three fingers in and out steadily now. She bends down and bites her gently on the ass.

“No,” Judy gasps. “Because I’m… fuck… mmm… worshipping your body now.”

Margot smiles at her own words being thrown back at her. “Selfish,” she laughs, then removes her fingers and dives down to lap at her with her tongue.

The noises Margot makes are so obscene, Judy thinks she could orgasm without even being touched. But she doesn’t, because Margot knows her so well, she knows exactly when to cruelly remove her mouth. “Em…! You’re such a bitch…” Judy groans.

Margot laughs and bites her ass again before her fingers resume their work. “So… you were worshipping my body…”

Judy smiles wickedly over her shoulder. “Oh yes. But you’re so sensitive right now… You’re all
flushed… Your cunt is swollen and dripping. I should clean you up first…”

“Mm. How do you do that?”

Judy’s hands clutch at the sheets. “Fuck me harder, and I’ll tell you.”

Margot does, and finally removes her arm from Judy’s back, releasing her hips.

Judy can’t answer for a while because all she _can_ do is yell “fuck” a lot.

Margot finally slows down and keeps her fingers buried in her, sliding her free hand between Judy’s pelvis and the bed so she can work her clit. She massages her inside and out. Her movements are so persistent, insistently pulling Judy right up to the edge.

“How?” Margot repeats.

“With my tongue,” Judy moans, and, right before she finishes, “and his stupid fucking monogrammed washcloths.”

They spend Sunday doing all sorts of indulgent things – showering together until the water runs cold; eating lunch in bed, using each other’s stomachs as plates, and then laughing at how _not_ sexy it is; napping, fucking, watching movies, and cuddling. On weekends, Judy usually gets up right when they wake up, or soon after they’ve had sex, spending the day organizing something or being otherwise productive. It makes their day of hedonism and profligacy even better.

Will wants to be alone. His awkward acceptance of his and Hannibal’s mutual desire hangs heavy in the air, making what should be his oasis an uncomfortable place. All weekend, he ignores the nagging feeling that says he should deal with this, choosing, instead, to go for a walk – down to the stream, since Abigail isn’t here to worry – or to knock back some whiskey, or to find Hannibal and assault his mouth, letting his hands and lips distract him. He knows he’s not fooling anyone. He’s not acting like himself. He’s not a flirt, yet he constantly finds himself coyly changing the subject, or unbuttoning Hannibal’s shirt so they don’t have to talk. Hannibal lets him.

Abigail doesn’t join them in Wolf Trap. Will feels bad, knowing she prefers it here, but, when she calls on Sunday, sounding tired but relaxed, he feels a little less guilty. That afternoon, he suggests to Hannibal that they go back to Baltimore tomorrow. The moment he opens his mouth, he knows Hannibal is going to make him say what he really means, and a nervous hum begins in his ears.

Hannibal just gazes at him serenely, and waits for Will’s nerves to make him expand on his thoughts. It works. They both know he doesn’t want to be here with Hannibal, but what Will says out loud is, “If I can’t be alone here, then I don’t want to be here.”

When it gets dark out – these days it’s almost 9pm before the sun goes down – they go for a long walk out on the flats, purposely leaving the lights on in the house and the dogs inside. They stand at the tree line and look back. It’s a perversion of the little boat on the water, anchored where he could always swim back. They stare quietly for a while, and then Will feels Hannibal’s eyes turn to him.

“Do you feel safe, Will?”

“Never.” The night air is warm, but Will shudders.
Hannibal says, “I’m sorry.” They walk back to the house in silence.

They wake up early the next morning, and Hannibal says he thinks it’s fine if Will wants to be by himself for a while. “However, I can’t promise Abigail will feel the same way.”

Will’s smile is grateful and his kisses are much more honest. “Thanks,” is all he says. He can’t tell whether or not Hannibal is wounded by his not wanting him here. If he were genuinely hurt, it wouldn’t be obvious. He thinks Hannibal probably isn’t, and that he’d expected Will to act exactly the way he is.

Margot takes Judy to the airport – just the two of them, no driver.

“You never told me how your lunch with Mapp went.”

Judy is triple checking her ticket and passport are where they should be. “We weren’t very creative. We went to the same restaurant as last time.”

Margot smiles. “You can’t be creative and efficient. That wouldn’t be fair. So, does the restaurant fold its napkins into triangular pyramids?” She starts giggling halfway through the sentence.

“You never even met her!” Judy protests, also laughing.

“You told me she’s even more of a neat freak than you are. I can’t imagine what your dorm room must have been like…”

“Tidy! And clean! Like it should be!” She shoves Margot playfully.

Margot shouts, “Driving!” without any real concern.

“Anyway, I think she’s disappointed with her new job.”

“Oh?”

“I mean the description the Bureau gave her was basically catch serial killers using a highly trained team of agents with backgrounds in violent criminal apprehension. Instead, she’s spending most of her time in her office, or the lab, if she’s lucky.”

“Why?”

“Fucking paperwork. Cleaning up after Jack Crawford. Liaising between the OIG and the BAU. Trying to get the department more money…” Judy laughs suddenly, remembering Ardelia’s words. “She said I’m spending too much time with live bodies, and I’m not a fan of most of them.”

“Hm. I can relate to that. Where do we stand, exactly, with Mapp and Dr. Lecter? I mean, we know things…”

“I think where we stand – or where we should stand – is outside of it.”

“Don’t help, don’t hinder?”

“Unless he tries to hurt her. Not having any of that.”

“You know,” Margot says, voice low and thoughtful, “I don’t think he would. She’s too respectful, and too clever. Not nearly rude enough for his tastes. He let Miriam Lass live, remember? Although,
he *did* take her arm…”

“And her sanity. He let you live, too. Although he *did* take your uterus.”

“And arguably my sanity.”

“Oh, you’ve always been insane, my love.” Judy smiles and rests her hand on the back of Margot’s neck, stroking her thumb up and down.

“He was just jealous,” Margot says after a while.

“Of your lady parts?”

Margot shrugs. “Maybe. Not necessarily my ability to have a child… the fact that I used it. I gave Will something he couldn’t.”

“I guess I can’t make fun of that,” Judy says somberly. “That’s still not an excuse, though. And I still won’t forgive him.”

“I think I accidentally *did* forgive him…”

Judy leans her head back against the seat and looks at Margot for a long time, then whispers, “Pull over.”

Margot does, and when Judy grabs her around the waist, she quickly flicks on the hazard lights. Judy pulls her closer, so she has to undo her seatbelt to stop it digging into her stomach. She ends up basically sitting in Judy’s lap, while Judy ravishes her mouth with her own.

When even Margot starts worrying about them making it to the airport in time for Judy’s flight, they pull away from each other reluctantly. “You’re the most beautiful girl in the world,” Judy says softly. She pinches Margot’s butt playfully as Margot crawls back over to her seat.

Judy hops out at the airport entrance, rather than waiting for Margot to find a spot in the densely packed airport parkade.

“Come back to me or I’ll cancel your cards again.” Margot smiles adoringly at Judy as she closes the car door.

“Last time you did that to keep me *away*.” Judy leans back in through the window for one more kiss. “For a programmer, your logic is the pits, Em.” She brings their mouths together, and, against Margot’s lips, murmurs, “Maybe that’s part of why I love you so damn much.”

“How’s the new interdepartmental coordinator today?”

Abigail looks up to see Barney standing in the entrance to Judy’s office. “Is that what my job’s called?”

“Dunno. Just sounded professional.”

“Well, I am a professional.” Abigail stands and showcases her blazer and slacks. She grabs a pencil off her desk and tucks it behind her ear for added effect. “Super professional.”

Barney smiles at her and jerks his head towards the door. “Coming out for a smoke?”
“Sure. One sec.” She shuts off the computer and locks up, then they walk down to their usual spot together. “Do you live here?” she asks abruptly, as soon as the thought takes shape.

“Not in the main house, but yeah. I’ll show you where.” They pause to light up. Barney leads her past the guest house and down the drive a bit until they come to a converted stable. The bottom is a gated garage with a row of black town cars all bearing license plates with MUSKRAT followed by a number. What she assumes are show cars are wrapped in heavy black customized covers. Above the garage, the slate-roofed gables have been turned into four narrow, but long, apartments. Barney points up to the one farthest from the main house.

“That’s so cool and weird!”

Barney grins. “Yeah, I like it. It’s not as nice as the room they offered in the main house, but I like that I can cook and stuff, and it’s separate, like I have my own place.”

“I know what you mean. Who lives in the other ones?”

“No one right now. Used to be Cordell and the Deogracias brothers. Whenever they were in town, that is.”

“Was Cordell one of Mason’s men too?”

“The worst. Pretty much of a sadist… Maybe something worse.”

Abigail’s head is cocked to one side in her listening pose. She likes when the autodidact in Barney subconsciously personalizes a phrase. She’s noticed he says pretty much of, instead of just pretty much, and she thinks it sounds better.

“He’s from Switzerland. He was a doctor there until his license was revoked. Medical malpractice and kiddie fiddling. Just bad news. I think he even creeped Mr. Verger out sometimes.”

“Hard to imagine anyone being able to do that.”

“Yeah. He never let on, but, sometimes, after Cordell said something really heinous, I noticed Mr. Verger would call his sister in and try to do worse. Like they were competing for the title of Most Evil Mind.”

Abigail is silent.

“You could ask Cordell to do anything. That’s why Mr. Verger hired him. Nothing was off limits.”

“Where is he now?” she asks, not entirely sure she wants to know.

“Oh, Mr. Verger sent him away. Caught him striking a deal with one of his competitors. I dunno the details, but Mr. Verger sent him off to one of the pig farms in Italy and said not to come back ’til he’d learned some loyalty.”

“Mason as a man of virtue… Interesting.”

“If by interesting you mean paradoxical.”

“I do.” She smiles. “So, is Cordell gone for good?”

“Nah. Mr. Verger’s calling this altruistic punishment. Cordell can’t legally get a job anywhere in healthcare… He needs the Vergers’ connections. He’ll be back. And Mr. Verger likes him, he’s just got to make sure Cordell won’t turn on him.”
“How can he ever be sure of that?”

“He can’t. But the Vergers believe what they want to believe.” Barney shrugs his broad shoulders. “I don’t really give much of a shit, one way or the other. I got a nice fat pay raise to take over Cordell’s duties. On the other hand, I wouldn’t mind not being responsible for Mr. Verger’s bath-time.”

Abigail wrinkles her nose. “Gross.”

“Yeah, it is gross. And he’s pretty much of a bastard the whole time.”

“Wouldn’t you be worried, though, if Cordell came back?”

“Nah. He always left me alone. Must be too able-bodied for him to pick on. We just stayed out of each other’s way.

“What happens if Mason needs a doctor? Do you call your brother?”

Barney raises his eyebrows, and his wideset eyes are surprised. “You know my brother?”

“I know a doctor who looks just like you. He works at UMD, right?”

“Yeah.” He frowns. “Why were you in the hospital?”

“Not me. My dad had a stroke.”

“Oh, sorry. He alright?”

Abigail just nods, clearly not about to expand on his condition.

“What did you think of him – my brother?” Barney asks curiously.

“Not much,” falls out of Abigail’s mouth.

Barney laughs. It sounds like a rare thing.

“Sorry,” she says. “I mean, I didn’t like anyone except the nurses. He was better than Dr. Whitney at least.”

“I don’t know Dr. Whitney.”

“She was awful. She treated my dad like a lab rat, and she was so cheerful. She hugged me.”

“Uh oh.” Barney looks amused.

Abigail makes a face at him.

“Well, I’ve got enough life experience to know that excessive chirpiness does not bode well for the chirpee.”

Abigail stares at him – open-mouthed, she realizes with embarrassment. “She was murdered by the Ghost of the Chesapeake Ripper…”

“Guess my theory stands. Speaking of standing, we’ve been doing a lot of it. You wanna see inside? Have a cup of coffee?”

Abigail looks at her watch. She’d bought it at a drug store, and is surprised that Hannibal hadn’t made a comment yet. “Maybe at lunch?” she suggests. “I should get back to work.”
“Alrighty, Ms. Graham.”

Abigail smiles. “Didn’t like Abby after all?”

“Technically, you’re my superior now.”

“Cool.” Abigail grins. “In that case… shouldn’t you be getting back to work, too?”

Barney pulls a sleek black pager from his pocket. “I am working. I’m on call. Told you this was a cushy job.”

“Yeah, except when it’s not.” Abigail laughs. “Like, at bath-time.”

He agrees by poking his chin forward a few times in an odd sort of nod. “And mealtimes. And bedpan-changing time.” He holds out his hand and she drops her butts into his palm. “I’m gonna go down to the gym. If you see Margot, tell her for me? She likes to join sometimes.”

“Sure. See you later, Barney.”

“Bye, Ms. Abby Graham.”

They each have a grin on their face when they part.

Margot comes to visit her in the office around 11am. She looks a little wound up. “I don’t think we’ll have time for lessons this week. That okay with you?”

“Yeah, no problem.” Hoping to ease Margot’s mind a bit, Abigail is quick to add, “My heart’s not really in it right now anyway, and Judy left me with a bunch of stuff to do.”

Margot does look a little relieved. “Do a few review problems though, so you don’t lose it. You’re doing really well so far.”

“Thanks.” Her smile gets a little wider and she blushes.

“Also, I have a present for you, if you pass the standardized exam.”

“Bribery. I like it.”

Margot smiles a tense little smile. “Can I steal you this afternoon? I want you to come with me to the board meeting on Wednesday.”

“Sure. By the way, Barney’s in the gym. Well, that’s where he was going about an hour ago.”

“He’s probably still there.”

“I was gonna bring him some lunch in a bit.”

Margot’s eyebrows draw together in confusion.

“He invited me over to see his place,” Abigail explains.

Margot nods slowly. “He’s a nice man.” She looks like she both wants to and doesn’t want to say more. “Just… keep your head. I know you will,” she says, in response to Abigail’s indignant look. “It’s just that, secrets are worth a lot around here. They always have been. That’s never changed.”
“Okay.” Abigail shrugs nonchalantly. “I’m good at keeping secrets.”

Abigail sits on the bottom step outside Barney’s apartment, jiggling her right knee up and down. She’s starting to feel a little silly, sitting here with two hot sandwiches from the kitchen and no idea whether he’s coming or not. They hadn’t actually said where and what time they were going to meet, and she’s pretty sure she’d only said *maybe* anyway. She’s about to go down to the gym to look for him, when Barney rounds the corner of the building.

Abigail shields her eyes from the sun bouncing off the short-sleeved whites he’d changed in to, unbuttoned over a white undershirt.

Barney sees her and says, “Hey there. Do I dazzle you?”

“I think you burned my corneas off,” she says, standing and following him up the steps. “Do your whites have to be so white?”

He smiles as he unlocks the door, showing off his baby teeth. “They come this way. I just have a bad habit of keeping them real clean.”

“I wouldn’t call that a bad habit,” she says as he leads her to a tiny table by the window at the front of the apartment. There’s a kitchenette next to it, and, when she sits across from him, her hair almost falls into the sink, that’s how cramped the space is. Barney seems comfortable enough, however, for such a big guy in such a little place. She slides one of the wrapped sandwiches over to him and studies the rest of the apartment.

A couple feet behind Barney’s chair is a closed door, and, farther along the wall, near the back, is an open door, revealing a tiny bathroom with a little bathtub that is clearly meant to be stood and showered in, and not used for actual baths. On the other side of the back door are a worn brown leather couch and an aged coffee table. The TV in the corner is the biggest thing in the apartment, after Barney.

“You watch any TV?” he asks, eyes following hers.

She shakes her head. “I don’t really know what’s on TV at the moment. I just watch movies if I don’t feel like reading.”

He somehow manages to stretch out his legs and cross one ankle over the other without knocking into anything or kicking her. “I don’t really know either. I just watch reruns of The Simpsons mostly. Sometimes a football game if one’s on.”

Abigail unwraps her sandwich. “I like your place,” she decides out loud.

“Thanks, Abby.” Barney shrugs out of the top half of his uniform, and hangs the white button up over the back of his chair, exposing his bulky upper arms. *Semper Fi* is tattooed on one in thick but elegant black lettering and, on the other, an eagle and anchor partially cover a globe.

“You were a Marine?”

“It’s on my laundry list of *previous employment.*” Barney twists in his chair slightly so Abigail can better inspect the left tattoo, which she seems quite taken with.

She puts down her sandwich and leans forward, though the table is so small she doesn’t actually need to move much. “It’s beautiful…” she marvels. “The feathers are so detailed!”
“Took a few visits. You got any?”

She shakes her head. “I wouldn’t know what to get.”

“Probably shouldn’t get one then.”

“Probably not,” she agrees. “So, when you were an orderly, did you just roll up your sleeves a little if the patients gave you trouble?”

“Nah. The ones who gave me trouble weren’t the type to balk at a little ink.”

Abigail hums around a bite of juicy turkey and melted brie. “What was Dr. Gideon like?”

“Abel Gideon? Never actually met him. I left a few days before they brought him in.”

“Oh. Why?”

“Got a job as an autopsy technician.”

“That is very cool. Why’d you apply for that job though?”

“Truth?” Barney smiles conspiratorially at her. “Chilton was just pissing me right the fuck off.”

She’s glad she’d swallowed the last bite of her sandwich because she likely would have choked on it in her surprise and delight. When she recovers from her giggling, she sees that Barney is also finished his lunch. “I’m gonna walk Klinsy. Want to come?”

Barney looks at his watch. “I’ll come part way.” He pulls his shirt back on and this time buttons it up. “Gotta bring Mr. Verger his lunch.”

Abigail grins and stands, bundling their sandwich wrappings. “You know, I think you can just say feed the beast when he’s not around.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta’d by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Grounded or Something

Chapter Summary

Abigail visits Mason and is duly repulsed. Hannigram try to be better dads but a little bit fail.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At precisely one o’clock, Abigail knocks on the open board room door. Margot is sitting at the polished mahogany conference table, laptop open in front of her, chin in hand, eyes unseeing, and mind clearly miles away. She starts and straightens up when Abigail enters.

Abigail still feels somewhat timid around Margot. She feels young. Not stupid, just not very worldly. Judy’s presence doesn’t have the same effect on Abigail, even though she’s older than Margot. When Margot first stayed with her and Will in Wolf Trap, Abigail had been without a female presence in her life for so long, she was embarrassingly speechless. She wonders if she feels this way because Margot can be so inscrutable. Or maybe it’s because there always seems to be some sadness about her, and Abigail doesn’t feel she has the ability to help. She knows that at least part of her awe comes from having glimpsed how deeply intelligent Margot is. She wonders if this mixture of admiration, nervousness, and the desire to impress – and maybe a little jealousy, if she’s honest with herself – is how she’d have felt towards a big sister if she’d had one.

“Are you in the middle of something?” she asks, approaching tentatively. “I can come back…”

“No, come in. My mind was just wandering.”

Abigail sits across the corner from her and sets down a legal pad and pen. The pen she picks up again almost immediately and starts twirling between her fingers. “So, this board meeting…?”

“Yes. It’s probably going to be unbelievably boring for you, but I need you to take notes.”

“Like, minutes?”

“Mmm… sort of. I only really want you to focus on two items, so we can report to Judy when she gets back.”

“When does she get back?”

“Next Friday.”

Margot looks like she might go over to the dark side, so Abigail quickly asks, “What are we reporting on?”

They spend most of the afternoon acquainting Abigail with some accounting terminology and the roles of the different board members, then move on to what Margot will be proposing, and what the COO has recommended to her. There is also some commentary on the board members themselves, and a little of Margot’s serene arrogance returns.
They relocate to Margot’s actual office about an hour before the end of the work day. Abigail sets *appraisal practices* and the words *family limited partnership* aside in her mind, and recovers the question she had been wanting to ask since lunch with Barney. In her inelegant attempt to phrase it a little less bluntly than *why does Barney still work here?* she ends up sounding accusatory.

“I thought you said no one on Mason’s private payroll works here now?”

Margot gives her a thoughtful look as she unlocks the office door. “Mr. Matthews is someone I trust, for rather complex reasons.”

It’s the most reticent she’s ever been with Abigail. She doesn’t talk much, maybe because she’d grown up being told she was bad at it, but this is different. This sounds like she’s actively hiding something. Abigail decides to leave it for now, and they slip into a quiet work flow. Margot prepares slides on her laptop, and Abigail uses the office computer to make graphs from some important-looking spreadsheets.

Half an hour later, Margot asks, “Did he tell you he worked for Mason?”

Abigail shakes her head. “No. It’s just… some things don’t make sense otherwise.” She avoids Margot’s eyes, feeling like she might be in trouble.

It’s worse than being in trouble. When Margot speaks again, she sounds like a politician who has been prepped on exactly what to say and what not to say at a press conference – like she’s feeding Abigail a very carefully worded line and Abigail is supposed to just eat it up. “Mr. Matthews is extremely hard-working. He provides ‘round-the-clock care for Mason. We never need to bring in anyone to relieve him.”

“Cool,” Abigail says flippantly, as though she’s not that interested. She goes back to converting data, stung. *She* is supposed to be someone Margot trusts.

“You’re very observant,” Margot comments a little while later. She doesn’t offer an explanation as to where that thought had come from.

Absently, Abigail replies, “Sometimes I think it’s a useless thing to be.”

Margot closes her laptop and looks at Abigail with a puzzled frown. “Why?”

She looks up from the computer and shrugs. “I make observations, but I don’t know what to do with them. Usually there’s nothing I *can* do.”

Abigail feels extremely put out when she leaves Muskrat Farm that evening, though what exactly is so troubling eludes her.

Late that evening, Hannibal calls Will.

“So?” Will asks right away.

Hannibal doesn’t dance around it, pretending he doesn’t know what Will wants to know. “We fought. Abigail is not pleased.”

Will is so caught off guard by Hannibal’s answering immediately that he doesn’t have anything
prepared. “Can I talk to her?”

“She’s asleep.” There is a distinctly amused note in his voice. “I believe she wore herself out yelling at me.”

Despite the knot of guilt in his stomach, Will can’t help but laugh.

“On her behalf, I will ask, did you take your medication this evening?”

“Yeah.” Will is pretty sure he had, anyway. “Any new material on the case?” he asks, only half-hoping to get an answer.

“I’ll email you the information on the victims.”

Once again, Will is slightly stunned.

“For a price.”

That’s more like it. “Mhm. What’s that?”

“You call. Often.”

Will tries not to sigh. “I know.”

“You do?”

“I know I’m essentially on probation. If I’m in any way imprudent, you or Abigail will probably hire a nurse to keep an eye on me around the clock.”

He can hear the smile on Hannibal’s face. “An extreme take on it, but that is the flavour of the situation, yes.”

When they end the call, Will realizes Hannibal hadn’t used his name once, and for the third time since the beginning of their conversation, Will is mystified.

Mason’s chamber is quiet and dark. The faint blue-green glow from the aquarium and the shadow of the eel on the walls makes everything look like it’s rippling. Abigail immediately feels unsettled, and, though nothing but the scents of balsam and wintergreen hang in the air, she smells death.

“Magnificent creature, isn’t it? It’s a Muraena kidako, but its common name is the Brutal Moray. Would you like to see why?”

“Are you going to ask everyone who comes to visit you?” Judy says exasperatedly, and Abigail loses some of her fear. She approaches the tank and waits for the eel to circle back. Clearly, Mason loves its lethality. It can’t be the brown, irregular spots, or the head shaped like a bolt-cutter that Mason finds magnificent. The curved teeth, maybe. She’s sure no fish had ever escaped them.

She shivers very slightly, and overcompensates by saying boldly, “It’s ugly.” The eel swims away again. She turns to Mason and makes herself look at his face. Well, his mask. “Is that why you like it?”

Mason cackles and it sounds exactly the way it had when she’d had a gun in his face. Back when he still had a complete one. “You’re a little like my sister, with that rough mouth. I never got your name.”
She’s finding it difficult to think. Only being able to see Mason’s eyes – dead one minute, maniacal the next – over the three pieces of uncanny porcelain is more than a little disquieting. She looks away and says, “Abigail.” Sarah is her cleaner, untainted self. The self that doesn’t know the feeling of his spidery little hand around her wrist, or how surreal it is hearing his voice, while those porcelain lips stay shut.

**Mason is conversational. “You seem a little scared, Abigail. Does my new look frighten you?”**

**Abigail sniffs disdainfully. “No. I just think it’s too bad the mask doesn’t cover everything.”**

A few hysterical barks of laughter later, Mason announces that he’s tired, so she and Judy leave. **All the way back to the office, Abigail tries to empty her lungs of the oxygen she’d shared with the monster.**

Abigail had avoided going back to Mason’s chamber since that first time, having been sufficiently creeped out in a single visit. The room alone was stifling and disturbing. The sight of Mason was a terror in and of itself. **Not just the sight of him,** she recalls. Even though he couldn’t move, she’d felt he was lurking in the shadows. She scanned every wall but saw no light switches anywhere.

This time, Mason is asleep already, and the eel is hiding amongst the rocks at the bottom of the tank, only visible because of its festive skin. There is a seating area in the corner, lit severely from above, but the spotlight doesn’t contribute anything to the rest of the room. Outside the sharply defined circle of light, which contains an armchair and a writing desk/coffee table hybrid, the dark room is lit only by the iridescent light of the eel’s great tank.

Abigail pokes her head into the bathroom. It looks like a cross between a spa and a mental institution. It spans the width of the wing, with a steam room and a wide-doored shower, and drains built into the clinically white tile floor. Anything that isn’t glass or tile is stainless steel, including the bathtub, with the exception of the coiled orange hoses on each side of the entrance. She wonders if Barney ever just wheels Mason to the far end of the room and sprays him down from the doorway. She smiles a little. That would make bath-time less terrible – maybe even fun. She returns to the darkened chamber.

**Her plan is to come back every single day until she isn’t afraid anymore.** Mason had been right, and she can’t allow that. If she isn’t afraid of Hannibal, there’s no way she should be afraid of Mason. Mason, who can only move his right hand, and only in an awkward, crab-like fashion. Mason, who’d lived on a respirator for months and needed a full-time nurse.

She goes to the mini fridge with the chilled martini glasses and fills one with water. She sits on one of the low sofas in front of the aquarium and drinks, eyes fixed on Mason, listening to the eel’s teeth clicking together with a sound like a telegraph key.

When she’s done, she explores the vast glass cabinets of unguents from the Farmacia di Santa Maria Novella. She opens each of the various sized and coloured bottles, phials, lachrymatories, and ampullae, inhaling each scent. She’s made her way to the part of the room between Mason’s bed and the wall separating the bed chamber from the bathroom. She hadn’t noticed last time, probably because of all the being scared, but Blake’s “The Ancient of Days” hangs above the couch. **All Mason has to do to see it is turn his head ever-so-slightly to the right.** She wonders if it’s comforting to him – given his renewed religious zeal – to think of Urizen and his calipers; God, up there with his grand design, everything measured below him. She draws closer and sees that it’s a print. She would have thought a man with Mason’s means would buy an extant copy, coloured by William Blake himself, if the picture meant so much to him. Then again, he isn’t Hannibal. Maybe a print looks no different to him than any of the originals. Maybe he doesn’t even look at the picture. Maybe it’s not so comforting after all.
She fishes a carp out of a smaller tank, which sits in a particularly shadowy corner of the room, and shakes the net out over the aquarium. The eel pokes its head out, and Abigail swears it looks her in the eye before noticing the carp’s frantic movements. It snaps it up so quickly, she jumps. As she watches the fish disappear down the eel’s throat, one of Hannibal’s favourite lines comes to mind. *Every creative act has its destructive consequence.* The eel stares at her for a moment, as though to ask, *is that all?* and then settles lazily back down in its grotto. If feeding Mason to himself was the act, she can’t help but feel that the destruction has barely begun. When the time comes, which of them in their murderous little family would meet with the consequences?

Margot is walking towards her when Abigail leaves Mason’s chamber. She looks angry underneath dark eye makeup and poppy-coloured lipstick that she hadn’t been wearing this morning. When she sees Abigail, she lifts the corner of her mouth in her trademark half-smile. It settles into a hard line again quickly.

“Do you want company?” Abigail asks her.

“No, thank you.” Margot stops just outside the chamber doors. “You can go home if you want. Or… work on whatever Judy left you.”

“All ready for tomorrow?”

She shrugs and says, wryly, “You know how fond I am of public speaking. Before I forget,” she adds, gesturing to her own throat, “Maybe wear a scarf tomorrow. And some makeup.”

“Are you sure it’s a good idea if I’m there? I mean, if you’re worried about people recognizing me…”

“I don’t think they’ll recognize you if you don’t give them a scar to look at. I’m only worried someone might be nosy and ask about it. The makeup’s just so you look a few years older.” She gives Abigail a small smile that disappears as she disappears into the darkness beyond the doors.

That evening, Hannibal calls Will to tell him Abigail is on her way.

“It’s okay.”

“Perhaps you can help her to look at the situation from your point of view.”

“I doubt it. If she starts crying… game over.”

Hannibal chuckles softly. “Really, Will, is shedding a few tears all she has to do to get her way?”

*Real* tears. I can tell when she’s faking it at least.”

“I’d be grateful if you would keep me apprised of the situation.”

“Alright. She might come running back to you when she remembers how we eat here, but I guess she’s asking for it.”

“Or rather, not asking,” Hannibal corrects him before wishing him a good night.
When Abigail arrives, Will isn’t unhappy to see her, though she makes a show of being severely unhappy with him. Her presence isn’t a violation, the way that Hannibal’s is at times. She gives him the silent treatment all evening, but cuddles up against him for a few minutes before going to bed.

The next day is much the same, but Abigail is distinctly apologetic. “I’ll leave you alone,” she promises. “I know you hate me right now.”

“Shut up,” Will teases. “That’s a stupid thing to say.”

She smiles and swats his arm, but does end up keeping to her room, and the roof. She leaves his medication in a cup on the counter again.

On Thursday, she just gives him a hug, says hi, and goes upstairs. She doesn’t reappear. When dinner is ready and Will goes to tell her, he finds her fast asleep on top of the covers, still in her work clothes. Friday she gets home late and doesn’t even make it to bed. She passes out on the couch, shoes and all.

They spend Saturday together, at Will’s insistence. “I hardly see you anymore. I kind of miss you.”

“Aw,” says Abigail.

“Don’t let it go to your head,” says Will.

It’s almost unbearably hot and humid outside. The air is thick and heavy with the promise of a storm. The dogs only run around for a little bit before flopping down in the grass and panting lazily. At two in the afternoon, the rain starts with the suddenness of a tap being cranked all the way open in one quick motion. They sit on the living room floor, toweling off the dogs that didn’t have the sense to come back inside right away.

Will debates letting most of Sunday go by, too, but decides Abigail might – might – be less aggravated if he gives her time to think about things. So, early Sunday morning, he steels himself and goes up to her room.

“You awake?” Will directs the question at the pile of blankets he’s only sure contains Abigail because some of her hair is sticking out the top of her cocoon.

“Mhm.”

“You gonna be up for a drive later?”

“Mhm. Where to?” The blanket pile morphs to allow her head to poke out.

Will doesn’t understand how she can be bundled up in this heat. “Baltimore.”

“Oh.” She disappears again.

Later rolls around.

“Is Hannibal cooking dinner for us?”
“I assume so,” Will answers, “but that’s not why we’re going.”

Abigail is apprehensive, and it isn’t long before her fears are confirmed.

Without ceremony, he tells her, “Pack your stuff. We’re going to stay there for a while.”

Normally, Abigail would just say no in response, but there’s a strangeness in Will’s voice she’s not familiar with. Instead, she asks, “Why?”

“Because you can’t spend four hours a day on the road. It’s insanity. I should have put my foot down earlier.”

“I like driving.”

“Nobody likes driving that much.”

“I like it. And when I don’t like it, I don’t mind it.”

“I don’t care, Abigail.” He pinches the bridge of his nose and closes his eyes.

Abigail immediately worries, but it becomes clear that it’s just the resurrection of an old habit. Like going to the window during a confrontation. He’s forestalling the headache he thinks he’s going to have soon. She’s mad at him for it, even though she knows it’s basically a tic and he’s not manipulating her on purpose. “I don’t want to go.”

“I’m not really asking.”

“Make Hannibal come here. Then I’ll stay in Baltimore.”

“Abigail, this isn’t a negotiation,” Will says sharply. It’s a tone he’s never used on her before and it makes her want to punch him. He sounds like he has his mind made up and is in no mood to be detailing the whys of it, but he softens a little and explains, “You can’t keep doing this. You’re so worried about what I want, you aren’t thinking about what you need. It’s not healthy.”

“Hannibal tell you that?” she spits out, still wanting to strike him.

Will looks taken aback, but doesn’t deny it. “He’s worried about you, too.”

She stares at him, nostrils flaring, and shakes her head.

“You don’t have to believe that, but it’s true.”

“You don’t see it, do you? He loves when I apparently can’t handle taking care of you!”

Will is aghast. “It’s not your job to take care of me…”

“I want to! Why are you punishing me for that?” Her volume and pitch are rising.

“I’m not –” Will stops suddenly. His mouth becomes a hard line, and the voice that comes from it is hard as well. “I’m not arguing with you, Abigail. Go get your shit ready.”

“No.”

He is fully frowning at her when he finally sighs and says, “You and I can go to Baltimore together, or Hannibal can come and get me and you can stay here and sulk. I think we both know what the reasonable choice is.”
She feels like he’s slapped her. Her eyes sting, but somehow don’t well up. “You’re being a real
dick, Will,” she says through clenched teeth before turning and leaving the room. It’s the first time
he’s spoken to her like she’s not an equal. Played the authority trump card. Pulled a dad move. But
she can picture him rubbing his hand over his face, frustrated, and bewildered, and hurt. She hates
that she feels bad about walking out on him.

Several rooftop cigarettes later, she hears the front door open, then the screen door squeak open and
bang shut. She goes back inside and crawls into bed. When she wakes up, it’s dark out, and she’s in
a terrible mood, though she can’t immediately remember why. When she does, she looks out the
window and sees no Bentley in the drive. She opens her bedroom door and looks down the stairs.
She can’t see Will, but the light is still on in the living room.

She doesn’t know if this means she’s won, won temporarily, or lost. It doesn’t feel like a victory, no
matter how she looks at it. She can’t help the growl of frustration that escapes her. She stomps
downstairs and dumps Will’s medication into a cup, making sure to bang each bottle of pills back
down on the counter when she’s done with it, then stomps back upstairs, and slams the door. She
feels bad when she hears a couple of the dogs whine. She’s mad about that, too.

The next morning, Abigail finds Will fully dressed in the living room with the sling and splint in his
lap. His face is unreadable. Will doesn’t say anything when he sees her luggage, wary of Abigail’s
mood. For some reason, though, he is comforted by the fact that she’s still using her old duffel bag,
rather than the fancy suitcase Hannibal had presumably bought her for their trip.

She dumps it by the front door, and, on her way back to the kitchen, asks curtly, “Got your stuff
together?” He nods, and she goes to have a cup of coffee by herself on the back porch.

In the car, Abigail is the first to speak, though there is a good thirty minutes of simmering silence
before she does. “You were right,” she says. She’s not happy about it, but she’s not mad anymore. “I
thought about it.”

“Okay.” Will still looks a little pissed off, but it’s hard to tell with him sometimes.

“I called Ella last night,” Abigail continues. “She’s going to look after the dogs during the week.”

Will just looks at her.

“We’re going to stay in Wolf Trap on weekends though.”

He can’t help but smile a little at the matter-of-fact way she says it. “Okay,” he says again.

“I’m sorry.”

“Me too.”

“You really were being a dick though.” She smiles at him, though she’s not sure she’s altogether
over it.

“I didn’t think I could win against you any other way,” Will admits.

“I was being a hypocrite again.”

“We’re all hypocrites.” After a few minutes of silence, he asks, “Why are you worrying about me
again?”
Abigail shrugs like she doesn’t have an answer.

“I’m trying to understand why you’re being so stubborn about staying in Wolf Trap.”

“I’m good at being stubborn.” A little while later, she adds, “I never really stopped worrying about you. I can’t stop.”

“Why, sweetheart? I’m fine.”

Abigail doesn’t reply until they’ve turned onto Hannibal’s street. “I love you so much.” It’s barely above a whisper.

Nothing he could say to her could possibly match how those words in that voice make him feel. “Abigail…” he starts, then stops and shakes his head. “If you make me cry one more time, I swear to god…”

She starts to smile and looks over at him. “What?”

“I don’t know. You’re grounded or something.”

She laughs as she pulls over in front of Hannibal’s house to let him out. “You have no idea what you’re talking about, do you?”

“Not even a little bit.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03, @weesprigofzest on tumblr), Comma Counselor and leading Ellipsis Expert.

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Trying Self-Help Books Instead

Chapter Summary

Will tries to stop fantasizing about his own death. Failingly. Auntie Margot comes over for a Murder Family dinner, but she’s super bummed out about Judy being so unbangably far away, so, it’s less than fun. Still, it’s preceded by a lovely little kitchen blowjob, so there’s that.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Since he and Abigail returned to Baltimore, the days have started bleeding into one another. What happened yesterday becomes indistinguishable from what happened the day before, or the day before that. He sleeps through a large part of each day, simply because he’s tired of looking for things to do.

When not asleep, he paces around the house, practicing not walking into things. After removing the eyepatch, he lies on the floor with his face pressed against the cool hardwood. He forces himself to use his bad arm whenever possible, only to regress into startled disgust at it when Hannibal removes the sling, and he has use of his good one back. He breaks out into cold sweats when Hannibal takes his bad hand in his. He tries to occupy his mind with books and case files, but he can only read a few sentences at a time, and, now that he’s aware he does it, he feels ridiculous craning his neck to get a whole page in view. The headaches decide it’s time to reinsert themselves with regularity.

He’s so tired of his own deficiencies, he’s gone beyond disappointment. Beyond panic. Beyond fear. He thinks the stroke might as well have finished him off, since his brain is turning to mush anyway, and all he seems to be capable of feeling is boredom, fatigue, and pain. Essentially, he is tired of existing. Sometimes, the words *I wish I were fucking dead* come unbidden to his mind, and he immediately feels guilty for having the thought. The guilt doesn’t help, and the edges of each day continue to blur, until his life feels more like one endless day.

All day, Margot has been bland in her speech – laconic, even for her. She’s not dressed in her usual bold orange, red, and gold accents over black, and even her hair seems slightly dulled. She sits perched on the corner of Abigail’s desk, looking over her review problems.

Abigail looks up at her. “Can I ask you something?”

“Sure,” Margot says apathetically.

“Why’d Will say Mason didn’t let you get your PhD because he didn’t want you working anywhere else? Isn’t a Master’s still a pretty big deal? You hired *me*, and I barely graduated high school.”

Margot doesn’t answer right away, and is terse when she does. “He was talking about the CIA.” She hands Abigail her notebook back with a few corrections.

“Oh shit,” Abigail whispers, absently taking the book. “You could have been a CIA agent?”

Margot slides off the desk. “Wouldn’t be very good for Mason’s less-than-legal enterprises. Let me
know if any of my notes don’t make sense.” She heads towards the door.

Once again on impulse, Abigail calls after her. “Margot, do you want to come for dinner?”

Margot turns back to her. Her face is expressionless. “Don’t feel sorry for me, Abigail.”

“I don’t.”

“I know how pathetic I seem.”

Abigail is fierce in her response. “You and Judy love each other so much, you can’t stand being apart. That’s the opposite of pathetic.”

Margot frowns slightly.

“It wouldn’t be that crazy to want some company right now. Plus,” Abigail adds in a lighter tone, “We like you.”

Hannibal’s renewed presence at home in the lull between Carpenter killings has Will’s nerves feeling rubbed raw. His ability to disguise his frustration isn’t a particular strength at the best of times but, today, he is utterly transparent, and sullen and withdrawn by lunchtime.

“You’re thinking too much, Will,” Hannibal says when Will tries to replace a glass in the cupboard and, after several failed attempts, sets it on the counter with unnecessary force.

“What?”

“Stop thinking about how you’re going to accomplish the task. Simply let it be done.”

Will’s voice is rough with irritation. “Why are you watching me again?”

Hannibal places both hands on Will’s shoulders, feeling the muscles there tight and tense. Without answering, he unties the sling and unwraps it, then turns Will to face him. “That’s enough for today,” he says gently.

Will looks at the floor between their feet. “It’s barely one o’clock.”

“There’s no point continuing if you’re feeling this discouraged.”

“It’s been weeks. I still can’t even put the fucking dishes away.” Will is radiating frustration so palpable, Hannibal can almost taste the sweat along his hairline.

“Hold out your arm,” Hannibal instructs.

“Which one?”

Hannibal just stares at him until he lifts his left arm reluctantly. “Your ability to maintain your arm at any height is, in itself, an accomplishment.” He takes Will’s elbow and traces down the veins in his outstretched arm tenderly with the tips of his fingers. “If you recall, you weren’t able to do even that, at first. There’s no reason for you to be disappointed in yourself.”

“Stop placating me,” Will says, but without much heat.

Hannibal lifts Will’s chin. “I’m doing no such thing,” he says, and leans in to kiss him. “I’m very
proud of you, Will. I would like to be able to tell you that without you assuming it isn’t true.”

Will sighs, clearly skeptical, but, after a pause, he says, “Just give me an hour. I can keep going.”

Hannibal smiles indulgently at him and wraps his hand around the back of his neck. He kisses him again. Against Will’s lips he murmurs, “Alright.” He kisses him a little more insistently. “Do you have an idea how you’d like to spend it?”

Will smiles a little at that. “No.” His hand migrates absently to Hannibal’s waist.

“May I make a suggestion?”

“Seems you’re about to anyway.”

“Yes,” Hannibal agrees. He unbuttons Will’s shirt and runs his hand over his chest, then over the tight abdominal muscles that are less the result of working out than they are of being perpetually clenched. He backs him against the counter almost by the force of his lips alone. Will relaxes slightly and lets Hannibal press his tongue past his lips and teeth and against his own, wrapping his good arm around Hannibal’s shoulders.

They’re kissing wetly, hungrily, when Hannibal shoves his hand down Will’s pants with no warning. Will grips tighter about Hannibal’s shoulders and pulls them closer together, pressing himself into Hannibal’s hand. He buries his face in his neck and his breaths fall hot and heavy on his clavicle.

Hannibal angles his lips towards Will’s ear. “Stop thinking, now. Let me enjoy you.”

Will doesn’t answer, but makes a small open-mouthed noise that is little more than a sigh as Hannibal begins to stroke him in smooth, provocatively slow motions. He’s not entirely sure how or when his pants are unzipped or his briefs pulled down just to the tops of his thighs. It’s only when he feels the edge of the cool countertop dig into his bare ass that he realizes he’s exposed. It feels sacrilegious. He tugs on Hannibal’s hair and presses their mouths together forcefully.

“Good,” Hannibal whispers.

“Feels good.” It’s a massive understatement. His naked flesh pressed against Hannibal’s altar for ritual sacrifice fills him with a wild, pagan pleasure. His arousal is almost spiritual, and stems, for all he knows, from the simple idea of having spontaneous sex in the room of Hannibal’s house that is most subject to ceremony.

Hannibal grips him tighter and works him until Will is moving against him, then stills halfway down his shaft and lets Will fuck himself into his hand. “I want you,” he fairly growls into Will’s ear.

It’s as though Hannibal is reading his thoughts. As though he knows how much Will wants to defile this church he’s built in order to observe his own twisted but beautiful practices – for the preparation of his offerings. As though he knows that, in this moment, Will’s own twisted, beautiful mind wants Hannibal’s worship – or maybe even wants to be his offering.

Some indistinct expletive falls breathily from Will’s lips before he asks, “Want me how?”

“I want to make you feel good.”

Will groans. “Not really an issue…” He thrusts himself harder against Hannibal.

“No,” Hannibal whispers, biting down on his earlobe. “Not like this.”
“How?” Will pants.
“I want to fill you.”

Will shakes his head but can’t stop the movement of his own hips.

“Let me be inside you, Will.”

“No.”

Hannibal starts moving his hand again, delicious pressure all up and down Will’s length, and for a second Will almost gives in. “Please,” Hannibal says.

Will grabs Hannibal’s hand to pull it away.

Hannibal doesn’t stop him. Instead, he cups Will’s face in both his hands and kisses him fiercely. “Then let me use my mouth.”

Will closes his eyes and his cock twitches. “Stop,” he gasps. “Stop for a second.”

Hannibal eases up on his lips. “I don’t think I should,” he says softly. “You might start thinking again…”

Their eyes connect. Will says, just as softly, “I don’t want to think.” Then Hannibal’s lips are warm against his again, and he imagines them kissing down his body, and being employed elsewhere.

“Shall I keep going, then? Tell me what you want.”

“Your mouth…” Will mumbles.

“Yes?”

“Suck me off…”

Hannibal licks against his tongue once more before saying, quite seriously, “With pleasure.” Then he’s kneeling and running that tongue firmly over his shaft. With wet fingers he strokes the sensitive skin around his asshole, but doesn’t press them inside. Soon enough, he plans to make Will gasp for it. He grasps a cheek in each hand and takes his whole length in his mouth. He doesn’t gag, even though the action makes Will jerk his hips forwards involuntarily.

For a while Will closes his eyes and just enjoys the feel of Hannibal’s lips sliding wetly against his skin. Then Hannibal starts mouthing his balls and playing more insistently with his hole. Will allows it, because his breath against the damp skin feels so good. Hannibal keeps a hand on his cock as he pushes his face further between Will’s legs. Before he knows it, Hannibal is dragging his tongue over his hole and he finds he’s still thrusting into his grip, hand tangled in Hannibal’s hair.

The spell is broken when he opens his eyes and looks down to find his bad hand resting against Hannibal’s neck. He yanks it away, horrified.

“What’s the matter, Will?”

“Nothing,” he says quickly, putting that hand behind himself on the counter. However, when Hannibal returns to licking him and gently fingering around his hole, he’s no longer at ease, and pulls Hannibal’s hand away. Hannibal seems momentarily disappointed, but soon channels that spare energy into vigorously sucking him and massaging the base of his cock with his fingers. His other hand he clamps firmly on Will’s backside as though to pin his face and Will’s pelvis together.
Will clutches the counter and presses his lips together, though it does nothing to suppress his groan. Somehow, Hannibal manages to take him even deeper. Will feels his mind shut down completely, and his brain succumb to the rapid firing of neurons responding to the persistent press of Hannibal’s tongue.

“I’m really fucking close…” He goes to grab Hannibal’s hair and pull himself out of his mouth, but Hannibal pushes his hand away and wraps his arm around Will’s waist. With Will’s cock buried to the hilt in his mouth, he sucks and tongues at him, and Will’s head falls back helplessly as he comes with a sharp, low moan down Hannibal’s throat.

Abigail calls later that afternoon to tell them she’s invited Margot for dinner and that Margot wants to know what kind of wine she should bring. Will hands the phone to Hannibal and leaves the kitchen. In the study, he takes down the autobiography of some artist from the bookshelves. He’s not particularly interested, but it had seemed like a better idea than diving into the stacks of existential philosophy.

Unsurprisingly, Margot is very quiet during dinner. What is somewhat surprising, is that Abigail is equally so. When offered wine, Margot waves her hand and says, “No, thank you. Water is fine.” Abigail helps herself to the wine and fills her glass almost to the brim. After an entire course is eaten in tense silence, Hannibal seems to feel it his duty as host to start a conversation. His choice of topic ensures Will’s contribution is continued silence.

“May I inquire after Mr. Cordell?”

Margot lets out a quiet but lengthy sigh. It’s really more the exhalation of a deep breath. “You may, but I don’t know why you’d want to.”

“Curiosity,” Hannibal replies. “Cordell is someone whose interactions with others should either be documented, or stopped entirely.”

Margot raises her eyes from her plate, but can’t quite look Hannibal in the face. “Sort of like Mason.”

“I believe one is even less human than the other.”

“I take it you experienced some of Cordell’s care while you were Mason’s guest?”

“Indeed. Though the treatment was not allowed to run its full course, I did glean some insight into his methods.”

For whatever reason, the thought of Hannibal at the mercy of Cordell isn’t nearly as pleasing as Margot figures it should be. “Cordell was too twisted, even for Mason.”

“Interesting.”

“Not really.” Margot tucks her hair behind her ear and looks back down at the table. “I’m just glad he’s gone.”

“Gone? Or dead?”

“Gone. Off learning a lesson or something. I don’t want to know.”
“And Mason?”

“He’s alive.”

“For long?”

Margot says nothing.

Hannibal takes his time sipping his wine, eyeing her over the rim of his glass. “Still undecided, I see. I would be interested to know why.”

“I’m sure you would be… but I’m not sure it’s a concept you can connect with.”

Hannibal gives her a rather insipid smile. “You must have found a new therapist by now.”

“I’m giving self-help books a try instead.”

It’s strange. Banter without the amity. Civil conversation with Hannibal that isn’t dishonest, but isn’t revealing either. Not censored for Abigail and Will’s benefit, but lacking any of the sharply dressed admissions she’d been prone to dropping as a patient of Hannibal’s. Glancing across the table at Will, she starts a new conversation with all the elegance of flipping to the next cue card in her deck. “How have you been doing?”

Margot directs the question at both Will and Hannibal. Will manages to time his next mouthful so that Hannibal is once again obliged to speak. He sets his fork down and chews slowly, looking to Hannibal as though he himself had asked the question.

“I think we are doing quite well. With time comes recovery, and, with recovery, a certain practicality.”

Margot looks at Will, Hannibal, and Abigail, in turn, then drops her gaze back to her empty plate. “Maybe we can bond over how practical we all are.” Her voice is thin, sounding both strained and resigned.

Will wonders why Margot had agreed to come here, and wonders if she’d tell him if he asked. Dessert is eaten silently. About halfway through, Will realizes Abigail is staring at him, trying to get his attention. She tilts her head ever-so-slightly in Margot’s direction. He nods his head ever-so-slightly in return. While Abigail and Hannibal start clearing the table, Will pours two glasses of scotch and shows Margot out onto the patio.

“I don’t actually like whiskey,” she says, shaking her head at the proffered glass. “I was just trying to get in your pants.” Her tone is dry, but there is a hint of an apology in it.

He dumps the contents of her glass into his own. “Can I get you something else?”

She shakes her head.

He sits in the other chair and puts the empty glass on the table between them. “You doing alright?”

“I honestly don’t know.”

“That’s a familiar feeling.”

She nods and is quiet for a long time, then asks, “Can I tell you something?”

The quaver in her voice causes him to look her full in the face. “Of course,” he says, trying to keep
his voice soft despite his alarm.

Her haughtiness is all but disappeared, though she still attempts the disdainful upwards tilt of her chin. “I’m afraid.”

“I know.” He takes her hand and squeezes it. “What are you afraid of?”

Margot actually slumps her shoulders and slides down a little in her seat. “Myself.” She starts shivering uncontrollably though it’s still very warm outside.

He finishes his drink quickly and stands. They go inside and settle on the sofa in the study. She clings to his hand throughout.

“Margot…” he begins. Unsure that he’s even remotely equipped to be comforting, he forces himself to ask, “Are you afraid of yourself because you think you might hurt someone else? Or because you think you might hurt yourself?”

Margot gives him a pained look that says, please don’t make me say it out loud.

Will nods once and swallows. “Is it all the time?”

“No,” Barely audible, she adds, “I don’t want to die.”

“But?”

“But sometimes I feel like it’s not a choice.”

“You’ve tried before.” It’s not a question.

Margot looks away, scarlet in the face, and pulls her hand out of his grasp. “Don’t think less of me.”

“I don’t.” He takes her hand back. “You’re scared you’ll try again?”

“Last time… nothing set it off. The opportunity presented itself and I took it, that’s all. I felt like I’d already stopped being. That’s what scares me... I still feel that way sometimes.”

“Like you’re not really in control?”

“I can’t predict when my mind will decide it’s time.”

“Can’t protect yourself.”

“Can’t save myself. And… sometimes I think, maybe that’s just fine.”

Her confession tears something deep inside Will messily in two. He doesn’t answer. At length, he asks, “Does Judy know?”

Each of Margot’s next words is accompanied by a fresh teardrop sliding down her cheek. “She was the one who found me.” She tugs her hand away again and wipes brusquely under her eyes.

Will is reminded of how she’d been during her hospital stay, iciness melting under the unbidden flow of hot tears. Angry, and wounded, and angry at being wounded. She needs permission to admit any weakness – permission that probably only Judy can give her. With him, she’s asking for something else, and, the more they talk, the more he feels that all the empathy in the world won’t tell him what that is. He squeezes her hand, not knowing what else to do. The freshly torn tissue beneath his ribcage burns. His chest aches.
“What if I can’t stop myself again?” Margot whispers fearfully.

“I’ll protect you.” The words leap from his mouth automatically. “Abigail will protect you.”

“It’s ridiculous,” she says through tears laced with self-fury. “I can protect myself… Just not, apparently, from myself.”

“I know what it’s like to have your mind be your own worst enemy.” It feels as though he has to shove the words out of his mouth, they are so unwilling to be spoken aloud. Later, he will marvel at what he’s willing to admit to when Margot needs a bit of truth.

Margot nods and sniffs. “That’s why I’m telling you. I need help…” her voice trails off into a whisper once more.

“Has it been worse since…?” His face and neck and throat feel numb.

She nods again. “I thought it would get better, but it’s been so long now… I don’t even know how long it’s been.”

“Six months on Saturday.”

Margot stares at him. “Why… why would you know that?”

“My mind just works that way…” Will wants to die. “…I didn’t mean to…”

She doesn’t reply. After a long pause she looks away and says, “So it’s been six months and I still don’t feel any better. I still can’t tell when I’m going to feel good or bad or destructive. I’m just… scared.”

He reaches out tentatively, and touches her shoulder. She doesn’t shake him off. He scoots closer and wraps his arm around her, and she buries her face in her hands and lets the tears flow freely. “Has it really been half a fucking year?”

“I’m sorry, Margot. Fuck. I’m so sorry. I shouldn’t have said that.”

“I understand it,” she chokes out. “I just can’t believe it.”

Will tightens his arm around her. Over her head, he sees Abigail pass, pausing in the doorway, then biting her lip and walking away. However, he fails to notice when, a few minutes later, Hannibal, too, pauses in the doorway, suspended in the choice before him. He doesn’t see the micro-expression of pain that crosses Hannibal’s face right before he, too, walks away.

Will is travelling back in time with Margot. Back to the five weeks when they’d shared a child but, he couldn’t bring himself to speak to her. The five weeks that, right at this moment, he wants back more than anything.

Chapter End Notes

1I am alluding to a chapter in the fic my murderwife, Kate, is writing, in the hopes that she’ll be encouraged to post it when it’s done, because she is far more talented than she
gives herself credit for.

She also betas the fuck out of this series. She is asprigofzest on A03, and aweesprigofzest on tumblr.

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Chapter Summary

Hannibal continues to gaslight Will while simultaneously demanding his trust and trying to seduce him. Their successful sexy times are of course followed by more manipulation and sulking. Abigail only witnesses the sulking, and is super unimpressed with her two dads and their continuing high school drama.

TL;DR Hannibal is bored of not having Will’s dick in his mouth. Will is bored of being bored.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: fucked up nightmares

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He’s in a desert of ashes, dry wind sweeping clouds of it past him. The horizon ripples like heat on concrete and he walks headlong into the wind towards it. Steam and magmatic gasses erupt from great geysers on either side of him. He squints into the wind and sees that, but for the path in front of him, which is still rolling ash over hard packed earth, the desert has been covered by viscous lava. Plumes of flame dot the scarlet landscape, flickering in the wind, but never going out. Each of the geysers’ ejections is accompanied by the sound of squealing, as though all Mason’s pigs are being burned alive beneath the surface. Or, as though they are being fed.

Very slowly he comes to find himself standing outside the madness instead of amidst it. Above it, as though he’s standing atop a cliff looking over a torch-lit battlefield at night.

He’s sitting back in his armchair in the study, and the battlefield becomes a bed of coals in the fireplace, some of the torches winking out as the fire dies down. He tries to shake off the dream, but is confused. It’s the height of summer. Why is there a fire?

He watches the furniture in the room set alight by the pools of liquid fire spreading across the floor, and backs against the wall as everything solid around him disintegrates. He whirls around and there are no more walls. He’s in a desert of ashes, dry wind sweeping clouds of it past him.

He doesn’t know whether or not the whiskey he’d consumed before bed is responsible for the circular nightmare, or the pounding headache that assails him when he wakes from it with a violent start. He digs the palms of his hands into his eyes. He sucks his breath in between his clenched teeth, trying not to allow his pain to be audible, although – or perhaps because – he knows Hannibal is most likely awake. The glass on his bedside table is empty, so he stumbles downstairs into the kitchen and, after refilling it, sticks his whole head under the faucet. It helps a little, enough that he makes it back up the stairs, but when he reaches the landing, his head is throbbing so hard he knows he doesn’t have a hope of getting back to sleep. He turns into the guest room instead of going back to...
Hannibal, sets down the glass and curls up on top of the blankets. Only when he has a pillow pulled over his face does he let loose an agonized groan. It hurts too much for him to worry or care if it’s anything worse than a migraine. He does eventually fall back asleep, and dreams of oases in fields of ash, but there are pools of boiling magma rather than water, and oversized antlers instead of trees.

When Abigail emerges from her room in the morning, dressed and ready for work, she finds that Hannibal’s door is closed, and the guest room door is open. She can just see Will’s curls in a mess against the pillows. She unshoulders her bag and leaves it by the door, leaving it by the door as she goes to investigate. “You alright?” she asks quietly, sitting on the edge of the bed and poking his shoulder lightly.

He starts out of a light sleep and sits up very, very slowly. “Massive migraine,” he grits out.

Abigail doesn’t voice her concern, though she worries her bottom lip with her teeth. She’s been making a conscious effort to trust him since their fight. So, instead of asking if he’s sure, she asks if she can get him anything. “I know you’re not supposed to take aspirin anymore, but isn’t there anything else that could help?”

Will adheres to his side of their unspoken agreement and requests a glass of water. When she returns with it, he says, “That was a nice thing you did, inviting Margot for dinner.”

Abigail looks uncomfortable.

“What?” he asks.

“It just made her more upset… I almost followed her home.”

“You can’t take care of everybody, Abigail.”

“I know,” she snaps. “That’s why I didn’t. Anyway, Judy gets home tomorrow night. I just hate seeing her sad is all.”

“Yeah. Me too.”

She gives him a peck on the cheek and gets to her feet. “See you later.”

He nods, but, as she turns to go, insists, “It was still nice of you. It’s not your fault she wasn’t cheered up.”

“I know,” she says again, without the bite. When she reaches the door, she says, “Love you,” and manages to smile at him before disappearing. The question she’d really wanted to ask is why the hell are you sleeping in the guest room again? Naturally, she assumes the worst.

Hannibal finds Will in the study, sling at his side, eyepatch on, alternately squinting at his computer screen and jotting notes down on the legal pad sitting next to him on the sofa. He doesn’t see Hannibal approach, and starts when he places a hand on his shoulder.

“Sorry if I woke you up last night,” Will says, by way of good morning.

“You didn’t.”

“That’s obviously a lie.”
“Obviously?”

“Painfully so.”

“I’m a little out of practice with you. Did you have a migraine?”

“Yes. It came out of nowhere.”

“Paracetamol doesn’t have the same anticoagulation effect as aspirin. You might consider taking some next time.”

“Okay.”

“You’d have to cut down your alcohol consumption. The two do not mix well.”

“I know.”

Hannibal picks up the legal pad and seats himself next to Will. He looks over the current page and the three filled ones before it. Will is scrolling through a series of documents on his computer. “Why are you looking at these, Will?”

Will spares Hannibal a glance before closing his laptop. “I’m having trouble understanding the Carpenter.”

“And you feel that looking at old reports will help?” Hannibal frowns in disapproval.

“I had a system when I solved these cases. I obviously need to get back a certain mindset.”

“What are these notes for?”

“They’re questions I asked myself at the time.”

Hannibal looks thoughtful for a moment, though still displeased. “Will, you are trying to manufacture empathy. To regain a gift that never left you.” He sighs when Will doesn’t respond, then flips the pages so that they are all face up again and smooths them down with both palms. “If you are having difficulty with this case, it’s because your mind is telling you to stop. I’m telling you to stop, Will.”

Will gives him a pained look. “You asked for my help on this.”

Hannibal looks blankly back at him.

Will sighs. “Still fucking placating me…”

“You aren’t helping,” Hannibal says in a stern, even voice.

Will looks like he’s been slapped.

“You are working too hard, and wearing yourself out, and when you’re worn out, you can’t think clearly. What good is that?”

“It’s my job. People don’t stop doing their jobs because some days are harder than others.”

“Currently, it isn’t your job at all.”

Will sighs and removes the eyepatch, using the few moments of vertigo as an excuse to bury his face in his hand. When it passes, he doesn’t look up, and directs his words at the floor. “I can’t stand
being this useless.” When that earns him no sympathy, he adds, frustrated, “I’m bored, Hannibal.”

Insisting that he is not placating Will, Hannibal enlists his help preparing dinner that evening. His job mostly consists of stirring things on the stovetop at intervals as per Hannibal’s instructions. It’s so thinly veiled an attempt to gauge Will’s present malleability, it’s insulting.

“Margot still finds your company soothing,” Hannibal comments after a strategically lengthy silence.

Will is immediately defensive. “Is that an accusation?” he asks the saucepans, not trusting himself to look at Hannibal without giving in to the urge to fling the contents at him.

“Not at all. I simply expected her to move on,” Hannibal says serenely. “I thought you had moved on as well.”

“When you press people ’til they break, Hannibal, someone occasionally has to pick up the pieces.” He says this carefully, because his blood is beginning to simmer at the same level as the sauce he is stirring. “I told you, it’s fine if you don’t care about her, but I do.”

Hannibal moves to stand across the island from Will, so that the slightest lapse of concentration will force Will to look at him. “I’m not suggesting you don’t.”

Will grits his teeth. “But you’d rather I didn’t.”

“What are you accusing me of, Will?”

Will does look up at that, and even makes fleeting eye contact. “Being disappointed that you haven’t managed to weed out everyone in my life who isn’t you.”

Hannibal’s eyes spark dangerously. “I see we haven’t moved past apologies and forgiveness.”

“We’ve moved past a lot of things. Don’t get greedy.”

“If something from our past is still unresolved in your mind, I wish you would speak to me about it.”

“There’s not much from our past – or our present for that matter – that’s resolved.”

If Will were still looking, he would have seen the slight narrowing of eyes and downward twitch of Hannibal’s mouth. “Then, my accusation would be that you have not been very honest in your actions.”

“What the hell does that even mean?”

“You still harbour ill feelings about certain events, masking them as frustration over your illness.”

“I am fucking frustrated. What do you want me to say, Hannibal?”

“Nothing, if you have nothing to say. I’d simply like you to admit to yourself that you are carrying around burdens we could instead discuss like adults.”

“Don’t you dare act like I’m being unreasonable... Christ, you are unbelievable.”

“How so, Will?”

“Making shitty comments about my interactions with people, as though you have the right to an
opinion. Do you not remember making Margot another pawn in the little game you were playing with me? You made what happened to her my responsibility as well. That’s all you ever did for her. And you still want to play. I can see it.”

In his vexation, Will ceases stirring the sauce and it starts to froth. Hannibal quickly rounds the island and turns off the stove, looking severely annoyed.

Will feels the way Hannibal looks, which, he observes momentarily, is on the low-intensity end of the spectrum of things he’s been feeling lately. “When you brought this up – brought Margot up – did you have a goddamn point, or are you just trying to wind me up?”

Having heard their entire exchange due to her habit of eavesdropping on Hannibal and Will whenever she senses an imminent fight, Abigail retreats to her bedroom and pounds the pillows with her fists for a while. The next day, she is so preoccupied, Margot has to tell her three times to go home. As soon as Abigail gets home that night, she carts Will off to Wolf Trap.

Saturday evening brings an appropriately contrite Hannibal to Will’s doorstep. Abigail opens the door for him.

“Thank you for indulging me,” he says, stepping over the threshold when Abigail stands aside.

“Will is sleeping. I’m just about to take the dogs for a walk.” She leaves him to cook whatever dinner he had planned.

He says, rather pointedly, that it won’t take long.

Her first thought is to take an extra-long walk just to make her own point, but this dinner is supposed to be about Will and Hannibal, how they’d both fucked up on Thursday, and how to amend that.

“The Academy called while you were asleep,” Abigail tells Will later, when they’re almost done dinner – another quiet affair. “I let the answering machine take it.” When she looks up, Will looks curious and Hannibal looks furious.

“What did they say?” Will asks.

“They want you to guest lecture at the end of summer, if you’re able to.”

Hannibal interjects before Will can latch on to the idea. “I don’t think that would be wise.”

“Why not?” Will asks, looking down at his plate. He thought he’d finished his meal, but there is still a slice of tenderloin and a pile of roasted root vegetables.

“Because the seminar is to be on the Dollhouse Murders.”

Abigail looks at Hannibal, surprised, not knowing that he’d listened to the message.

In fact, he had listened to and deleted it, but had neglected to talk to Abigail about it. Sloppy.

Will cuts into the tenderloin with the side edge of his fork. He has to wiggle it back and forth a bit before a piece comes away. “And?”

Hannibal says nothing and gives Will a blank look to convey his disapproval.
When Will realizes Hannibal isn’t going to answer, he mumbles, “I wasn’t crazy. My brain was bleeding.” He looks hurt at the apparent need for him to remind them of that.

Abigail doesn’t know what to do with her face. She doesn’t want Will to think they’re ganging up on him. Hannibal narrows his eyes, and looks away.

“What?” Will snaps. He gives up on his meal and lets his fork clatter to the table. He doesn’t care anymore if he’s eaten half of it, a quarter of it, or if he’d just imagined eating any of it and there’s still a full plate in front of him.

Hannibal’s voice is rougher than it’s been in weeks, each word clipped, each pause dangerous. His tone is outside the range he’s allowed since Will was hospitalized. “I don’t understand why you insist on keeping yourself close to trauma. You either relive some past trauma, or expose yourself to new trauma at every opportunity.” He waits a beat, perhaps expecting Will to argue that he’s not self-destructive, but neither he nor Abigail dares speak. “I’ve had enough, Will,” Hannibal says into the silence. “Excuse me.” He stands and takes his dishes into the kitchen, and then they hear the back door open and close quietly.

Abigail looks at Will. He pushes his plate out of the way and drops his head to the table. “I’m not trying to be difficult,” Will says. He sounds beyond miserable.

Hannibal stands still and silent at the edge of the back porch. He senses Abigail approaching and thinks she’s come to scold him. The walls go up.

He’s wrong.

With a touch of wonder in her voice, she says, “You really love him.”

Hannibal looks neither prepared nor willing to respond to her, and, though he’s as composed as ever, Abigail thinks this is the most undone he’s ever been.

“Go away, please, Abigail.”

She does go, because she loves him, and takes the sting of his words with her. When she looks back and sees him raise a hand to smooth back his hair, she notes, with a different kind of wonder, that it’s trembling very slightly.

It’s like watching the world end.

Hannibal remains on the porch for nearly twenty minutes before going back inside, armed with a new plan.

Will is still sitting at the kitchen table, looking much less angry than Hannibal had expected to find him. He sounds more wounded than anything else when he says, “You deleted the message. You weren’t even going to tell me, were you?”

Hannibal sits across from him with a genuine sigh. “No, I wasn’t,” he admits. “I meant well, but I should not have taken that decision from you. I apologize, and I would like to suggest a compromise.”

Will looks up, tentatively hopeful.
“I’ve decided to reopen my practice to those patients of mine who were unhappy with their referrals. They know I am officially retired, and that this is a temporary arrangement.”

“We already burned your patient notes.”

“Luckily, I have a good memory. My point is this: my office is still my office. I would like you to debrief with me after each of your presentations.”

“Okay.”

“Thank you, Will.”

Will shrugs uncomfortably.

“I know you weren’t crazy. You never were.”

“Okay,” he says again.

“Come here.” Hannibal makes the request without knowing whether or not to expect compliance.

Will doesn’t know if he’s going to comply or not, either, but he finds himself being pulled down onto Hannibal’s lap, and kissed with the heat of an unchecked fever. He kisses back, but it hardly seems to matter if he participates. Hannibal is suddenly all hands and lips and devotion. His mouth leaves no part of his face unkissed, and he only stops in order to press his face into Will’s neck and run his hands over his back, his arms, through his hair, and then he simply holds Will tightly like he is the most precious thing in the world.

Chapter End Notes

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03, @weesprigofzest on tumblr), who never tires of being a sad, gay nerd with me.

My tumblr
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Chapter Summary

Meet Liza Lake. She's a sweet baby angel. Also, here, have some disgusting crime scenes, sassy science, and, what the hell, ladder sex.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: gore, rough sex, disturbing imagery, fucked up nightmares, very poor mental health on Will’s part (and also rather poor physical health)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The relentless heat of the Virginia summer collects in the troposphere and comes crashing across the state in the form of a vicious thunderstorm that lasts through the night. The rising sun has difficulty penetrating the gloom until the finger-like funnel clouds start to curl back into the dark, dense fist of retreating storm clouds on the horizon. In the middle of an empty street just outside of Arlington, dawn lifts the curtain on a grim scene, almost spectral amidst an isolating haze. The concrete is only visible in patches, and those patches appear to be smoking, blanketing the rest of the pavement in rolling grey. Tendrils of early morning fog curl around the legs of a roughly hewn wooden chair. Like the vegetation at the roadside, the figure seated in it is wind-battered, and, like the road itself, is strewn with debris from the storm. Though it is naked, exposed to the elements, and dangerously situated in the path of Washington-bound traffic, there is nothing immediately grotesque about the figure. The display is eerily still and silent in the wake of the previous night’s gales.

“It’s a Catalan garrote,” Zeller announces proudly, folding his arms and looking very pleased with himself. “What?” he says in response to Price’s arched eyebrows. “I read…”

“You read more now. Boning up on death contraptions for when Will gets back?” It’s too early in the morning for his teasing tone to be properly warmed up. Price rubs his eyes and yawns before snapping on a pair of gloves and approaching what they are all assuming is the latest Carpenter victim. He ignores Zeller’s sour look.

Agent Mapp circles the scene while the yellow tape is put up and roadblocks erected. She’s come directly from her morning run along the Shenandoah River, an hour away, and is still in sweatpants and runners, a paper cup of drive-thru coffee in one hand. After her preliminary sweep, she returns to the cluster of vehicles to give directions to the techs as they show up.

When Zeller comes to present her with his initial findings, she is attentively nodding while another agent traces out the calculated wind path of the previous night’s storm on a map spread out over the hood of her car.

“Agent Mapp – Oh, hey, Liza. What are you doing out of the lab?”
The other agent smiles shyly at him. “I’m out of the lab more than in it these days… I’m just bagging evidence.” She looks back to the map and folds her arms – a pose similar to Mapp’s contemplative one, and Zeller’s smug one, but, somehow, she just looks like she’s trying to make herself smaller. Clearly, no one finds Mapp any less intimidating for her lack of pant suit. “I'll have to find some first in this case, though. Did you get anything off the body?”

Zeller brandishes a couple of capped vials containing rust-coloured cotton swabs, shrugging ruefully. It’s a weak harvest, but the wind had blown away anything that wasn’t stuck to the contraption in blood.

Mapp doesn’t seem discouraged. “Is there anything obviously missing from the scene?”

Price joins them and immediately puts in, “Rope.”

“The wrists were nailed to the arms of the chair, but there are rope burns around the ankles,” Zeller expands.

“And no rope in sight,” Price finishes.

Mapp follows them back to the body. The victim is a middle-aged woman who, at first glance, appears simply to have very good posture. At second glance, it becomes clear that she is seated this way because of a thin metal band shackling her neck to the wooden post protruding from behind the chair. At third glance, it becomes clear that the cause of death might be strangulation from the garroting itself, or possibly a broken neck. The collar digs so tightly into the victim’s throat, her flesh spills over top of it, an angry red dulled to a deep, dark purple.

Mapp pulls on a pair of gloves and feels over the front legs of the chair. The wood is smoothed down and shiny in stripes along the backs of each, and the chaffed skin of the victim’s ankles matches the mottled colour of her neck. “She was struggling to get her feet free for a while,” Mapp says aloud. “She broke skin in places. These smooth bits on the chair legs… From the rope rubbing against them?”

“Yup,” Zeller agrees.

“And the Carpenter doesn’t strike me as the reduce-reuse-recycle type,” Price remarks. “So I doubt he took the rope with him.”

“Hm.” Mapp muses for a moment. “Say the rope got carried off in the storm. Would it do you any good if it were found?”

Price is examining the iron nails driven between the victim’s radius and ulna, just above the lunate bone in each wrist. He beckons to the photographer and, while the victim’s injuries are further documented, says to Mapp, “We caught the Minnesota Shrike thanks to a bit of metal shaving, so… who knows?”

Mapp stands and waves Liza over. “Agent Lake, take a couple of your people and try and track down the rope, please.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Don’t spend too long out here, though. I’m sure we’ll need you in the lab this afternoon. If you don’t find anything after a couple sweeps of the route, pack it in.”

Liza nods and departs with another shy smile for Zeller.
Zeller and Price get to their feet as well, and, feeling accomplished, Zeller impulsively goes in for a fist-bump. Halfway through the motion, it occurs to him that Agent Mapp might not be the fist-bumping type, and he attempts to abort the gesture. He redirects his hand to his face and scratches his nose instead, hoping his jerky movements weren’t too obviously a cover-up.

His hopes are immediately dashed. Mapp shakes her head with a smile, and, although the laugh she lets out is not unkind, Zeller blushes bright red all the way to the very tips of his ears.


Mapp presses on, addressing the three of them remaining. “Let’s get her back to the lab. Coffee’s on me.”

Price is more awake now, and his tone is much more obviously teasing when he grumbles, “I hate it when you say that.” Still, the photographer frowns uncomfortably and looks to Agent Mapp.

She explains, wryly, “These two have deciphered my code.”

“Yeah.” Zeller recovers from his embarrassment enough to say, grumpily, “I’m buying means It’s going to be a long day, boys.”

“It’s going to be a long day, gentlemen,” Price corrects him. He offers Mapp a companionable smile.

It’s not the first he’s given her, nor the last, but Mapp finds herself appreciating them more and more as the day, and then the week, wears on.

It is still two weeks until the seminar begins, so an impatient Will works harder than ever during the day, wearing himself out with a rigorous physio routine and studying the Carpenter’s case file with a sort of frenetic thoroughness. He stops drinking, and then starts again when the absence of alcohol in his system doesn’t make sleep come any easier. When Hannibal gets home from various errands and consultations, Will fucks him desperately, usually over the desk in the locked study.

It is crude, and the desk certainly should not be used this way, but, whenever Hannibal sees the frenzied look in Will’s eyes, everything else seems trivial. Will’s fiery glares have always been fierce enough to reduce a lesser man to ashes and dust, but there is a new quality to them now. He seems continually struck with a loss of some sort – a dangerous, frightened animal. Beautiful. Hannibal feels the raw power when Will enters him, though what Will feels is probably chaos and distress. He wants it to last, if Will can handle it. Soon enough, they will discuss Will’s use of sex as an escape, but not yet. Not yet.

One evening, as the fronts of Will’s thighs are sliding against the backs of Hannibal’s, Hannibal reaches back and grabs Will’s hair roughly, pulling him into a kiss that is arguably more of a bite.

“How hard?” he growls into Will’s mouth.

In response, Will chokes down a moan and pulls out. He yanks Hannibal off the desk and all but drags him across the room to throw him against the bookshelf ladder. He pins him there by the wrists.

Hannibal twists in his grip, hardens at the sight of the veins standing out in Will’s forearms. He wrenches an arm away and clamps that hand around Will’s throat. It is a feigned bid for freedom. A feigned attempt to take control. He revels in the panicked fury he is rewarded with.
Breathing raggedly, Will flips him around and pulls Hannibal’s leg up so his foot rests on the fourth rung. High enough for him to feel the stretch in his hamstrings but not enough to be painful. He wonders if Will is even aware he’s being considerate. They establish a new rhythm, Will driving into him to the extra depth the position allows. Angry sounds that don’t half cover up his need escape Will’s throat with every thrust.

Hannibal feels each one of them vibrate against his flesh. It does nothing to stem the fluid leaking steadily from the head of his cock – but it is still not enough. “Harder,” he says again, with even more vehemence.

Will presses his whole front against Hannibal’s back and reaches around him and the ladder to clutch at one of the rungs. “Like this?”

“Like the first time.”

“Uhh... fuck.” He is unable to say more for a minute, trembling from trying not to cum. He licks Hannibal’s sweat from his lips. “The first time... I wanted to hurt you.”

“Want that again,” Hannibal commands, and shifts his legs wider apart, exposing himself further in a most sickeningly inviting way.

This mixture of dominance and submission renders Will helpless to his own lust. He brings his own leg up under Hannibal’s and reaches up to grab at the rung over his head. Hannibal is trapped from head to toe. Will shoves into him. He hits Hannibal’s prostate, but the force of it also slams his hips against the ladder hard enough to bruise spectacularly. Will isn’t sure what Hannibal’s cry is in response to. Both sensations, probably. Pleasure and pain. Give and take. Force and supplication. Always. He rams into him again, and Hannibal’s shout blends into a loud groan that almost finishes Will. He lets go of the ladder and snakes his bad arm around Hannibal’s waist so he’s as close as humanly possible.

“Touch yourself,” he demands, and Hannibal has time only to wrap his hand around his cock before Will is fucking him at full speed: hard, fast, and loud. Maybe the noises they’re making attune the other with their proximity to the edge, or maybe their need and want just naturally peak at the same time. Whatever the reason, they climax together, and stay connected until every last drop of cum pulses out. They collapse against the ladder, heaving and sweating and messy with semen, then slide onto the floor, where they lie, catching their breath between kisses, until they hear the front door and the clomping of Abigail’s heels.

“I don’t know when I started needing you,” Will says suddenly, voice sounding hollow, though his arms are still wrapped tightly around Hannibal.

“I can think when,” Hannibal muses.

“Not needing a doctor,” Will clarifies, though he’s sure Hannibal willfully misunderstood his statement. “Needing you.”

Hannibal untangles their sweaty limbs and stands, pulling Will up with him. He ignores how the sense of loss Will emanates is more potent than ever. Before he goes to clean up and recover his clothes, he wraps a hand around the back of Will’s neck, presses their foreheads together, and says evenly, sternly, “I need you, too, Will.”

Abigail is no less weary now, despite having cut her travel time in half. When she doesn’t stay late at
Muskrat Farm, she spends the evenings in Baltimore in her room, studying, or going for progressively longer walks. She doesn’t wait to be offered wine at dinner. She does, however, emulate Hannibal, making a show of sticking her nose right into the glass to scent it and pretending to enjoy his wine and food pairing more than she does.

At first, she’s only tired, and, when that stops being the case, it’s still easy to lie about it. She smiles and makes comments at mealtimes, but doesn’t make much eye contact. After about a week of this, she despairs of her own acting skills. She knows her misery must be showing through. She doesn’t realize just how palpable her anxiety is, however, until one evening it is reflected in Will. Left alone with her while Hannibal prepares dinner, Will lasts less than an hour before succumbing to a panic attack, no doubt brought on by the unease emanating from her in waves. She stays even later at work after that, so she can skip the family dinner charade altogether.

Almost out of habit now, Abigail avoids anything besides the most cursory of exchanges with Hannibal. She doesn’t trust herself not to say something inflammatory when he starts pressing her buttons, the way he always does. She finds she means the words she spat at Hannibal before pushing him down the stairs. She really doesn’t care how Hannibal talks to her anymore. Hannibal has been so good to Will since they’d disposed of Jack, and she won’t allow herself to spoil that.

Something happened to Will when he admitted his need. It was different than when he’d professed his love. He thinks Hannibal’s admission ought to have balanced it out, made it better, but, in the remaining days before he goes back to teaching, all he feels is fear. He’s afraid for both of them. Afraid of what will happen to Abigail when the inevitable occurs. Not for the first time, he can’t say what it is that’s inevitable. Only that it is.

Instead of being peppered with spits of flame, the arid landscape is run through with a wide river of fire that tapers to a point right before Will’s feet. Sinuous tributaries wind their ways to the horizon on either side. He feels an urgent desire to wade forward into the blaze, but, before he can take a step, he feels his palms blister in a sudden searing heat. He looks down to find the tar-coloured feathers clutched in his hands are singed around the edges. A moment later, they burst entirely into flames, and, though there is no breeze, the ashes dance on the air away from him.

“You’re dreaming, Will.” Hannibal’s voice against his shoulder is thick with sleep, seemingly having awoken at the exact moment Will had.

Will is sure, though, that he hadn’t been thrashing or screaming, or doing any of his usual nightmare-stricken activities. He’s sure because he can’t seem to move. He fights off the paralysis that has him imprisoned and mute, but a quiet sorry is all he can manage.

When he returns to the dream world, the river of flame has quieted into slow-flowing lava. As he watches, it hardens into a rippled pathway, black glass over a steady red glow that lights it from beneath. It looks anything but safe, but, once again, he feels that compulsion to move forward. He takes a step.

Suddenly, Dark Abigail is at his side, feathers rustling in the non-existent breeze. Despite the warmth of the blood beneath her obsidian skin, the look she gives him is cold as ice. She doesn’t take his hand as they begin walking down the path.

“What are you going to run again?” Will asks, after they’ve walked a short way in silence.

She doesn’t look at him when she retorts, “Are you?”
Then, she’s gone again, and he is alone amidst a pyrotechnic display that abolishes the path behind him. When the tephra settles and the aerosolized sulfates dissipate, he uncovers his head and looks about. To his dismay, he is once again in an ashen landscape that stretches away without end on all sides. Instead of ribbons of fire, innumerable tendrils of dark grey smoke waft up from the earth and unravel into gently rippling screens.

Frightened, he looks down at his hands, but they are empty of torn silk or charred feathers. He can’t look up – won’t look up. He can’t bear to witness any more tragedies. Eyes determinedly downcast, he doesn’t see the Ravenstag approach from his left, and doesn’t feel its presence until it roars in his ear. He stumbles sideways into one of the screens. It repels him and self-immolates as he falls flat on his back in front of it. All around him, the screens catch fire, and ash thickens the air until he’s choking.

He drops to the ground, trying to shield his eyes from the blaze, looking about for anything not alight. There is one in-tact screen not too far away, and he inches towards it on elbows and knees, keeping his belly close to the ground. He looks up when he feels silky under his palms, and finds himself face-to-face with the screen. Suddenly, he wishes everything were on fire –

Instead of escaping his nightmare, he’d crawled right into it.

This time, when he wakes up, he does scream.

They are eating breakfast in the kitchen, alone. Abigail has already left for work. Hannibal asks, almost casually, “What do you dream about now?”

As expected, Will is silent for almost a full minute. When he finally answers Hannibal, the crackle of a slash-and-burn accompanies his voice. “Hell,” he says simply.

“What does hell look like? Lakes of fire?”

“A waypoint. An intermediate plane between every other world.”

“And that is hellish because there is an unfathomable number? Because you experience infinity?”

“Because I see the worst possible worlds and, whenever I’m asleep, they exist.”

“And when you are awake?”

“I don’t know what I believe. But when I’m there... heaven and hell, God, reincarnation, alternate dimensions... I believe in all of it. It’s unbearable.”

Will is frustrated by not being able to read as quickly as he used to, but the act isn’t as nauseating as it once was, and he’s grateful to be spending less time looking at walls. He doesn’t need help exercising his bad arm anymore, though Abigail goes back to giving it a massage every evening. He thinks she does it to reassure herself that she doesn’t need to constantly worry he’ll burn, cut, or otherwise injure himself and not notice.

It’s even starting to feel like his arm again, as though it had been in a strange, isolated coma, and is now waking up – weak and clumsy, but alive. Except the hand. The hand remains a considerable source of discomfort for him, and that discomfort often borders on fear. He sees it as dead on good days, and demonic on bad days, as though the entire delusion he’d had about his arm is now
concentrated at its extremity.

Abigail and Barney develop an odd sense of kinship as Abigail continues to spend more time at Muskrat Farm and less in Baltimore. They feel a connection, one they trust to be true, though both know that the other is lying on some level about their respective pasts.

On Tuesday, Abigail makes one of her characteristic impulse decisions. They sit together on the couch, watching a Simpsons rerun and eating fruit salad. It’s too warm out to stomach anything more substantial for lunch. There’s an almost industrial-sized fan strategically placed to blow cool air directly in their faces, and the door is propped wide open to tempt in any potential breezes.

She waits for a commercial break, picks up the remote to mute the TV and faces Barney squarely. “Your timeline doesn’t add up.”

Barney doesn’t even pause in his chewing, and shows no signs of feeling threatened by her words. “Whadd’ya mean, Abs?”

Abigail shrugs. “I just thought you should know. If I figured that out, I’m sure others will.”

Barney leans back and stretches out his legs, then laces his fingers behind his head and looks at her with a thoughtful grunt. “What have you figured out?”

“Nothing, really. Just that you have a missing year in your story. Someone might get suspicious.”

“Huh. I thought my timeline was pretty accurate.”

“It doesn’t seem like you’re trying to tell me it’s nothing…”

“It’s not nothing. When is this missing year?”

“As far as I can tell, you’re either ly- wrong about when you stopped working at the hospital, or when you started working for Mason.”

“Thanks, girl,” Barney says, apparently unconcerned. “I’ll remember that.”

Abigail pulls her feet up and sits cross-legged, still facing him. She ignores the fact that the commercials are over. “You said it’s not nothing.”

“It’s not,” Barney confirms. “I’m not gonna tell you what it is, though.”

Abigail frowns and looks momentarily disappointed, but says, “Okay,” and reaches for the remote. “Still wanna be friends?” Barney asks.

“Sure.”

“Really? You know I’m hiding something. I’m not gonna change my mind about telling you, either.”

“I’m not scared of you,” she replies, matter-of-factly.

“That’s good. I’d never hurt you.”

“I get it,” she says, twirling the remote in her hands. “Secrets are secrets. I’ve got a few, too.”
“I’ll bet you do.”

Abigail doesn’t know what he means by that. He’s clearly made some judgment about her character, and she’s not confident it’s a good one. She says nothing, though, just unmutes the TV.

At the next commercial break, she asks, “No one’s ever questioned you?”

“Ms. Ingram did. She’s like you – got a head for details. Guess I forgot to fix all the plot holes before I met you.”

“Why didn’t she fire you?”

“I owned up to the truth.”

“I guess whatever it is isn’t that bad,” she says, though it seems more likely that Margot and Judy know they have Barney by the balls, and Barney knows it, too. This must be why Margot trusts him.

“What about you?” Barney asks.

“What about me?”

“Got any secrets you wanna share?” The question seems ridiculous at first, given that he’d just refused to share his with her, but there’s a follow-up comment. “You sure don’t seem to wanna go home these days.”

He’s not asking something for nothing after all. He’s offering to listen. In her head, she imagines telling him everything, and it takes her less than three minutes; she is surprised at how easily her troubles summarize. Out loud, she teases, “For an ex-Marine, you’re a real softie.”

The seminar begins. Will keeps his desk on his left – something solid to lean against when his body inevitably betrays him. He stops taking questions when it’s pointed out to him by an over-eager psychology graduate that half the class feels ignored. The student asks if Will is experiencing visual neglect, and openly stares at his scar. The look Will gives the trainee is less withering than it might have been if he weren’t slightly stunned. He’d really thought wearing the eyepatch was helping, but, now, a knot of fear is created in the pit of his stomach that only grows as the week goes on.

Will’s resentment towards the concept of therapy had been unambiguously resurrected during his hospital stay. However, in light of this setback, he craves the comfort and familiarity of sitting across from Hannibal, like he had done regularly what feels like a century ago. Sometimes, he even feels like talking.

On one such day, Hannibal asks, “Do you still dream, Will?”

Will chews on his lower lip. “No.”

“You sound unhappy. I would have thought that would be a relief to you.”

“I thought if I didn’t dream so much, being awake might be a little easier. Like I’d actually have the energy to make the most of it.”

“But you don’t.”
“I don’t. Not nearly.” Will is silent for a long while. “I feel unjustified.”

“Why do you think you feel that way? Surely you don’t define yourself by your dreams?”

“I go to sleep, and then I’m just… awake again. I think I’d welcome back the nightmares. This… this is bleak.”

Hannibal considers Will’s admission for a moment, but, instead of replying, he probes further. “Why did you want this so badly, Will?”

What might have seemed like a non-sequitur to anyone else is, to Will, a bridge between topics as solid as anything he’s ever felt beneath his feet. “You know why.”

“I’d like you to tell me anyway. You’re very good at knowing things but not admitting that you know them, even to yourself.”

To Hannibal’s surprise, rather than denying it, Will simply looks away and says, “I know.” His jaw works a little before he acquiesces. “I’m no use to anyone right now. It’s… I feel like an obstacle. Like I’m taking up more space than I actually am. Just this clumsy… thing, draining people’s time and energy.” He swallows and looks up at the ceiling.

Hannibal watches him and says nothing. There is more. There is always more. Will is a bottomless well of guilt, and weary from traversing the inner landscape of his mind alone. Alone, despite connecting with so many people. Eldon Stammets had it right. Will needs someone to reach back, or else all the connections in the universe have no meaning, and only serve to amplify the loneliness, rather than quiet it. Hannibal plans not only to quiet the loneliness, but to silence it altogether, forever. Eventually. Will needs his loneliness for a little while longer. He needs to empathize thanklessly for a little while longer, or else the guilt will chase him for the rest of his life.

“On top of that,” Will continues at last, “I’m always tired, and everyone can tell. So there’s always the potential to be more useless, more of a burden…”

Hannibal can see the tightness in his throat. He is still staring at the ceiling. “You’re talking about Abigail. Abigail can tell.”

“Abigail… and you.”

“Let us put that aside for the moment. It’s understandably more difficult for you to accept Abigail’s help.”

Will gives a short, soft laugh. “Oh, I have to accept it. There’s no arguing with her.”

Hannibal smiles small and hums in agreement. “How does that make you feel?”

Again, Will surprises Hannibal by not rolling his eyes, though perhaps that’s because they’re watering dangerously. “Not like a father.” Will stops there, and scrubs his hand down his face, excavating the tears before they can fall. He takes a deep breath and sits back. “So, the Academy calls, and tells me, essentially, that I can have my job back. I can’t do anything else, but I can stand in a lecture hall and talk about what I know for a few hours a day. I can do that, at least.”

Hannibal nods. The movement brings Will’s eyes to Hannibal’s face. He has a thought. One of those private, fleeting thoughts, the spirit of which flits across Will’s face too quickly to be properly interpreted.

“Do you understand?” Will asks, lip quivering like he knows the answer will break him.
Hannibal tilts his head and regards Will for quite a long time, seriously considering. Eventually, he answers, so softly he actually sounds remorseful, “No, Will. I don’t. Not in the way you wish me to.”

Will nods and gives another quiet, short-lived laugh. Though he smiles at Hannibal for a moment, his eyes travel back to the ceiling and stay there.

On Wednesday, Agent Mapp shows up as he is finishing his final lecture. She leans against the wall and motions for him to carry on. He clicks through the final slides and assigns his students a paper to be handed in on Friday. Since he hadn’t yet given them any homework, there is minimal groaning. He shuts his laptop and waits for the room to clear before shouldering his bag and walking over to Mapp.

“This feels familiar,” he says, a little more darkly than he’d intended.

Mapp gives him a smile that is sympathetic, but there is no trace of apology in it, nor in her words or tone. She doesn’t have time to shoulder burdens that, by their very nature, ought to be shared. “I have no intention of putting you in the field, Mr. Graham.”

Will screws up his face as they begin down the hall. “Would you mind not calling me that? You sound like one of my students.”

“Would you prefer Agent?”

“I’d prefer Will.”

Before she can respond, Mapp has to grab Will’s arm and pull him out of the path of an oncoming student.

It’s a humiliating way for his body to remind him that he’s simply not on top of his spatial awareness. He’s stopped bumping into things at home, but this apparently has more to do with familiarity of the space and placements of objects within it than any improvement on his part. He’s already learned not to pace during his lectures anymore, despite his ever-present nervous energy.

“Sorry,” he mumbles after the student passes.

“Not a problem.” She gives him a quizzical look. “Is this normal?”

He appreciates that her expression is void of pity. In his least bitter tone he answers, “Apparently.”

“Do you think you’re up for taking a look at some dead bodies?”

“I’m fine. You don’t have to tread so carefully. This was my job once, remember?”

“Hm.” The noise is non-committal. She holds the door open for him and they cross the quad in silence. When they reach the BAU headquarters, she recalls, “I meant to say before, I’m happy to call you Will, but I would prefer it if you continued to call me Agent Mapp. I realize that may seem strange, since most of you are on a first-name basis here.”

Will shrugs. “Not really.” He wants to say something about her professionalism being appreciated, but he’s getting tired.

Almost as soon as they join Zeller and Price – standing over a cadaver in the lab and having an
animated discussion about it – Mapp’s phone rings. She answers it brusquely and, after a moment, sighs heavily and excuses herself to take the call outside.

“How’s the seminar going?” Price asks Will brightly.

“Alright, I suppose,” he answers. “Lots of students taking it.”

Zeller hands him a pair of gloves. “Figured out which ones are there ’cause they’re actually interested in the subject matter?”

“Needles in a haystack, Zee.” Will smiles a brief, self-deprecating smile.

Price tuts. “You’re paranoid. The Dollhouse Murders are fascinating.”

Will covers his mouth to mask the unfortunately timed yawn stretching his face, then discloses, “I’m almost out of material, though.” He pulls on the gloves and looks down at the body.

It is prone on the autopsy table, so the hole in the victim’s mangled neck stares up at them. It is surrounded by fleshy swarf, dried out in the shape of a volcanic cone after recent eruption. Tendrils of skin and sinew spiral away from the hole like steel turnings – from a thick screw, Will sees, taking in the nearby garrote. It is especially dark and evil-looking in the brightness of the lab.

“Then what?” Zeller’s voice cuts across his thoughts.

Will shrugs.

“There are lots of other cases Will could talk about,” says Price, unconcerned.

“Yeah,” Will affirms lamely.

Zeller smirks. “Guess you could always lecture about your stint on the wrong side of the law. Scare ’em straight.”

Price frowns and rolls his eyes.

“Are we not laughing about that yet?” Zeller says when Will doesn’t respond.

Will looks up and raises his eyebrow. “Actually, Zee, that’s one of the funnier things you’ve said.” He walks over to the garrote and peers at the contraption. The screw has been removed for DNA testing, but the ligature itself remains. He runs his forefinger along the inside, imagining the back of his first knuckle digging into his own throat as the metal band tightens. He drops his hand. His arms would have been bound. He feels the first prickles of his inevitable frustration crawl up his neck. Think.

He’s relieved when Price starts speaking again. “We’ve got two working theories for this one.”

Will nods and gives him his full attention.

“See these abrasions on the victim’s legs?”

Will had seen them, and then forgotten about them. He drags his mind and body back to the table. Christ, he is off his game.

“They’re rope burns, but we didn’t find any rope. That means either the Carpenter left her alone in his workshop for a while, she nearly escaped, and he didn’t bother retying the ropes before he killed her, or she managed to loosen them enough that they blew away in the storm.”
“Meaning he killed her at the scene,” Zeller finishes excitedly.

“He’s never done that before,” Will says. It’s not a question, but the other two nod fervently and in unison. “What actually killed her?” he asks, more out of morbid curiosity than because it makes any difference.

“Yeah, we were trying to figure that out, too. We think she probably asphyxiated right before her spinal cord was severed.”

“I don’t know which way would be better,” Will comments.

Zeller and Price acknowledge the statement with a shrug of the shoulders and shake of the head, respectively.

Mapp comes back in from the hall and tells them to wrap it up, just as Agent Lake enters from the other side of the lab.

“I’m done with this.” The very young-looking agent deposits an evidence bag containing the screw on the desk near the garrote. She darts a glance at Zeller, then scurries away before any of them can say so much as a thank you.

Zeller clears his throat. “Where are we going, Agent Mapp?”

“Are we going somewhere?” Price asks.

“Local PD in Nokesville received an anonymous call from someone saying they think they found the Carpenter’s workshop. They handed it off to the Arlington Field Office, for some reason, and they gave it to us.” She speaks to Will specifically when she says, “It’s not a crime scene. We’re just checking it out, so you’re welcome to join us.”

Unsure which he needs more, sleep, or something to think about, he paces away from the others to call Hannibal, hoping to make up his mind as the phone rings.

Out of Will’s earshot, Price nudges Zeller and lilts, “This is fun. Liza has a crush on you, and you have a crush on Will. It’s like high school.”

“What? No.” Zeller’s face colours and he looks like he wants to strangle Price.

“Just like high school.” Price nods.

Mapp raises her eyebrows. “Goodness,” she says with a small smirk, “Then I expect nothing but your absolute best work. People to impress and all.”

Will takes one look at the open space – the machinery, the chains and hooks suspended from the ceiling, the work bench that runs around three walls of the barn, littered with tools – and says, “No.” He turns to leave.

“Hey!” Zeller chases after him. “You barely even looked!”

“ Barely a look is all it takes,” Will responds wearily.

Zeller is not satisfied. “I’ve had enough of your shit, Graham,” he says heatedly, moving to block the door. “Explain to me why the fuck we’re just going to abandon this without even waiting for the photographer.”
Will doesn’t even look indignant, much to Zeller’s annoyance. “Alright,” he agrees. He sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose. “There’s dust on everything. And cobwebs on top of the dust. This door doesn’t have a lock, and it’s never had one.” He closes his eyes, gestures to the floor behind himself, and continues. “Packed earth, completely undisturbed long enough to have moss growing on it. No drag marks, tire tracks, nothing. It’s just an old barn.”

Zeller looks something close to crestfallen. “Fuck!”

“Sorry,” Will mumbles.

Zeller makes a frustrated noise and runs a hand through his hair, but steps away from the door so Will can pass. He says, with unexpected sincerity, “It’s not your fault.”

Will doesn’t believe him. When Zeller kicks at the barn wall before returning to the car, Will feels it like a kick to the stomach.

The car is quiet on the way back to Quantico. Mapp lets Zeller drive. On the way up, they’d made silly jokes about being on Lonesome Road, but, on the way up, they’d though they had a lead. The air inside the car is thick with silence, the sky is beginning to darken, and Will falls into a tired stupor.

He doesn’t know how much time has passed, but he’s not quite asleep when Mapp’s voice cuts through his groggy haze with a sharp exclamation. “What the fuck is that?” Though none of the others were aware of the fact – because nothing had unsettled enough until now – it had always been her practice to curse heartily before taking up anything truly ominous. Her way of whistling in the dark.

They’re just about to pull onto the 619. Zeller swerves and brings the car to a stop on the gravelly edge of the road. Mapp leaps out of the car and Zeller and Price follow suit. “Will, please radio for backup,” she says urgently, before stalking over to the fresh crime scene.

Will does so, barely registering the ritual stab of humiliation at being left behind. He can see just fine from here: the silhouette of a man, draped supine over a stand, the way Cassie Boyle had been draped over her bed of antlers; the silhouette of the spit mounted about a foot above him over his middle, and the hand crank, now at rest; the silhouette of his guts, a bulge halfway along the spit, and the taut rope of intestines still connected to the man’s insides. He can see more than enough.

Of course, Will does join them by the body, eventually. He thinks how much the man’s innards look like how his head feels – spooling brain matter tightly around the Carpenter’s psyche, though he can’t quite grasp all of it.

Mapp registers his arrival and says, tone reproachful, “Since you’re here - tell me what this looks like to you.”

Will feels sick to his very core. “It looks like misplaced anger.” He runs a hand over his eyes and qualifies, “Like misplaced revenge.”

Chapter End Notes
I want to say thank you to Kate, again, not only for being SO HELPFUL about this chapter, but also for her general support and awesomeness, and her tender care of my fragile ego. XD

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03, @weesprigofzest on tumblr), with help from her vagina, whose opinion I also hold in high regard.

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Resentful as a Rule

Chapter Summary

Hannibal gives Will shit. Will gives Hannibal shit. Luckily, there are also early morning handjobs and a little shower therapy. Also, Abigail gives Barney shit, and shit continues to go down at the lab.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: graphic descriptions of torture victims

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Abigail’s tone is as a flat announcement of disaster. “I miss my mom.”

Barney studies her, her open face, her dropped gaze, the way her fingers pluck at the piping along the edge of the couch cushion. He has seen some countenances in his time, and has stayed alive by reading them. He sees that Abigail is telling the truth.

However, before he can say anything, she turns back to the TV and switches it on. “I just wanted to tell you ’cause of what you said yesterday, about me not wanting to go home.” She tucks her legs under her and leans against the arm of the sofa with her chin in her hand, eyes fixed on the screen. “That’s why,” she tells him, though there is clearly more to it than that. “It just doesn’t feel like home right now.”

“Sorry, girl.” Barney’s voice is kind. “That’s rough.”

Abigail sets the volume low, so they can continue talking, but it’s a few minutes before they do.

“You’re really nice,” Abigail begins out of the blue.

Barney actually guffaws. “A gentle giant? What about it, Abs?”

Abigail doesn’t laugh, or even smile. “Well—” she lets out a puff of air and barrels on. “I just don’t understand how you can work for Mason.”

“You know, technically, you work for him too.”

Abigail glares at him. “You know what I mean. And I do not. Mason has nothing to do with the company anymore.”

“C’mon, we both know the lines are pretty damn blurry. The company’s money is Margot’s money is Mason’s money. We’re all working for each other.”

“Judy is the CFO. I work for her.”

Barney sighs, and, though he doesn’t sound irritated, his next words are clearly the last he wants to
say on the subject. “Look, Abby. When I took his money I said I’d take care of him. While I work for him, I won’t do him any harm.”

Abigail decides she can content her self with that for now, as long as – “You wouldn’t hurt Margot either, would you?”

“’Course not. But I won’t help her hurt Mason.”

Abigail furrows her eyebrows questioningly at him.

“When she’s had enough, she’ll ask me to.”

_Hurt_ is definitely a euphemism. To kill Mason, Margot would need help. _Barney’s_ help. Even though they both know Margot has every reason to, Abigail wants to protest. “Margot doesn’t want to hurt Mason. She just doesn’t want to be hurt _by_ him anymore.”

“Well then,” Barney leans over to take the remote from her and turns up the volume on the TV. “Everyone should be just fine.”

Soon after that, there is a rap on the door frame, and Margot pokes her head into the small, crowded space. The colour had returned to her cheeks when Judy had returned to Muskrat Farm.

Barney stands and gestures to the empty space he creates on the couch. “Come on in, Ms. Verger. Have a seat, if you like.”

Margot shakes her head. “I won’t be long. I just wanted to talk to Abigail for a minute.”

Barney grabs his cigarette pack and steps outside to give them some privacy.

“If you’re not too traumatized from last time we had dinner…” Margot starts, biting the inside of her cheek so her grimace is less obvious. “Judy and I want you to come to Ella’s on Saturday.”

Abigail brightens visibly. She and Ella haven’t met in person, but they’ve spoken over the phone more times than she can count. Abigail likes the sound of her voice. “Yes, please!”

“I should get your exam results tomorrow. We can open them together at dinner and toast you properly.”

“You sound pretty sure I passed.”

“Aren’t you?”

Abigail shrugs off the question and changes the subject. “I’ve been wanting to get Ella a present – you know, for looking after the dogs so much. What kind of stuff does she like?”

Margot smiles her small, self-deprecating smile. “Come on, Abigail,” she teases. “You know you’re asking the wrong girl.”

“I offended Agent Mapp today.” Will sounds utterly dejected. “I was in a bad mood. I copied her phrasing, but was real dark about it. She thought I was making fun of her.”

“Why were you in a bad mood?” Hannibal asks.
Will sighs internally. Of course that’s what Hannibal would focus in on. “We were at a crime scene,” he admits reluctantly. “The Carpenter, again, already.”

“You shouldn’t be at crime scenes.”

Will reflexively opens his mouth with the beginnings of a half-hearted deflection, but closes it again almost immediately.

Hannibal crosses his legs and leans back. There is a warning in his voice. “We had a deal, Will.”

Will unconsciously mimics his posture, clearly uncomfortable. “What does it matter? Can’t we just agree that this is part of my job again? You know I’m going to talk to you about it anyway.”

True to form, Hannibal doesn’t give him a straight answer, but, instead, asks another question. “Did you apologize to Agent Mapp?”

“I thought that would make it worse.”

“Hm.”

“Everyone else was already uncomfortable. Zee suggested we all head to the bar for some stiff drinks. I don’t think I even answered him.” When Hannibal says nothing, he rubs a hand over his face and continues. “I thought the intestinal crank was as bad as it could get. I was wrong.”

Hannibal’s look begins to lose its hard edge at the evidence of Will’s distress. More gently, he prompts, “Tell me about it.”

“It’s called a revolving drum.”

“I’ve heard of that. Go on.”

“The victim was racked first – probably for hours. Then… basically shredded.”

“What did you see?”

Will inhales deeply, and, recognizing the need, reluctantly closes his eyes. The words come pouring out. “It’s not just what I saw. It’s what I heard, too. Joints dislocating… Christ, everything separating. Shoulders and hips first, then elbows and knees, then wrists and ankles…” He shudders. “By the time the spiked roller came into play, the victim couldn’t even scream anymore.” His voice drops to a whisper, and, when he opens his eyes, he doesn’t look up. “I don’t know what I said,” he concludes. “But it was dark, and probably pissed a lot of people off.”

Hannibal leans forward, clasping his hands in front of him. “This darkness,” he begins. “Your rudeness and antisocial behaviour – these are things you can maintain when the mirrors in your mind start reflecting others.”

Will shakes himself, trying to free his mind of the sights and sounds of the scene. “I don’t want to be rude to her. I like her.”

Hannibal cocks his head to the side. “I have seen you be unimaginably rude, even to those for whom you claim to care.” It is a simple statement of fact. “Why do you think Agent Mapp is different?”

“I don’t know,” Will exhales, slumping ever-so-slightly in his chair. “I just… don’t immediately resent her like I do everyone else.”

Hannibal makes another thoughtful noise, then stands and goes over to the bar cabinet. As he pours
their usual glasses of wine and scotch, he says, “It may seem nonsensical to you that I would bring this up now, but, I promise you, I have a point.”

Will gladly receives the glass handed to him. “You always do.” It is neither a compliment nor a complaint.

“Do you remember the dinner we had with Abigail, when we discussed personality – where you fall on the spectrum, and so on?” Hannibal settles back in his seat.

“Yes.”

“You said you considered Alana to be one of your psychiatrists during your incarceration. Why?”

Will grits his teeth a little. “Because she was acting like one.”

Hannibal waits in silence for him to elaborate.

“She tried to protect me from others, but she couldn’t just be my friend. She had her professional curiosity, which she couldn’t curb without forcing herself to draw her own conclusions. She made up her mind about my sanity, just like every other psychiatrist.” There is a definite note of bitterness in his voice. “In the end, she was no different from the rest of them.”

“And you resented her for it.”

“Yeah.” Will lets out a sharp, humourless laugh and takes a long pull of whiskey. “I sure did.”

“Agent Mapp has given you no grounds to resent her, has she?”

“No. She doesn’t pretend to understand.”

Hannibal nods. “You respect that. You respect her, as I do, and as I believe most of the BAU does.”

By way of agreement, Will drops his eyes back to the glass in his hand.

“That is not my point, however.” Hannibal scents his wine and takes a sip before continuing. “Your speech patterns, style... They can change from conversation to conversation, between your interactions with different people. But, if you are resentful as a rule, you can prevent your empathy from taking over entirely.”


“It’s a defense mechanism, Will. One I don’t fault you for employing. I think if others understood the fear you have to deal with – the ever-present possibility of being swallowed up by another’s psyche – they would be more forgiving of your antisocial, and even rude behaviour.”

Will lifts his eyes and the corner of his mouth slightly in tentative appreciation.

“However,” Hannibal says, ducking his head down to capture Will’s gaze with a playful smile, “I doubt they’d make the same mistake of asking you out for drinks.”

At the end of the next day’s lectures, Will receives a call on the lecture hall telephone saying Agent Mapp would like to see him in her office. Though he isn’t sure if she actually has the authority to summon him, he doesn’t consider for a moment that accepting her request might be optional.
Her office door is open, but he knocks on it anyway. Her expression is unreadable when she waves him in and motions for him to take a seat. She finishes whatever it is she’s doing and seals some papers in a manila envelope, crossing the room to drop it in the outbox by the door. When she returns to her desk, she leans against it in front of Will, folding her hands.

“I want to apologize,” she says, to Will’s complete and utter astonishment. Her voice is warm, and contains no trace of sarcasm. “Yesterday, at the crime scene, I took your attitude personally. It was unprofessional, and I’m sorry.”

Will realizes his mouth is hanging open. “I was the one with the attitude…”

“It’s still my responsibility to either chastise you, or simply send you home.”

Will can’t help but raise an eyebrow. “You’re apologizing for not yelling at me?”

The corner of Mapp’s mouth lifts. “Yes, I suppose I am.”

Will starts to smile back, but finds himself unable to fully form one. He drops his gaze bashfully and says, “I’m the one who needs to apologize. I was way out of line.”

Mapp hums in agreement. “I’m not formally your superior, Will. However, if you plan on accompanying us to future crime scenes, I expect you to behave at them as though I am. Agreed?”

Will nods. “Sorry,” he says, and means it so much it is almost physically painful for him.

She smiles easily after that, and holds out her hand. Will stands to shakes it, and she states, firmly, “Apology accepted.”

Will feels she would have said something like dismissed if he were, so he assumes she isn’t done with him. While she locks up her desk and gathers her things into her satchel, Will fills the silence awkwardly. “Hannibal said I should invite you over for dinner on Saturday, as a proper apology. Is that… I don’t know… Something you’d want to do?”

She looks pleased as she locks her office door behind them. “Absolutely,” she beams.

“It’s not unprofessional?” Will hopes she can tell he’s not being sarcastic.

She shakes her head and says, lightly, “Like I said, I’m not officially your boss.”

When Hannibal pulls into his usual parking spot, Will is waiting for him, and opens the driver’s side door for Hannibal instead of getting in on the passenger side himself. His explanation is concise. “Agent Mapp wants you in the lab.”

“Very well.” Hannibal gets out of the car with his usual elegance, and they walk inside together. Hannibal is surprised and pleased to find Will’s hand in his, though it doesn’t remain there for long. By the time they reach the lab, Will’s are stuffed back in his pockets.

In the hall outside the lab, they find Mapp eating a belated lunch from a glass Tupperware container while pacing.

“Agent Mapp, that smells delicious.” Hannibal greets her warmly.

Mapp covers her mouth with the back of the hand holding her fork as she chews and swallows. “Thank you,” she answers at last. “I’ve just been unpacking the freezer lately, though.”
Hannibal smiles. “I am now especially keen for you to accept our dinner invitation.”

“She already has,” Will says gracelessly.

“Then perhaps you’d care to sous chef?” Hannibal offers.

Ardelia shrugs and returns his smile. “I have a limited repertoire, but what I do, I do well.”

Will leans back against the cadaver cabinets, the blessed cool seeping through the back of his shirt, as Zeller and Price bring Hannibal up to speed on the latest victims. The first, a robust, athletic man in his early fifties, lying face up with his unwound intestines piled next to him on the gurney. The second, a young man no older than twenty-five, though it’s difficult to see this as he’s currently laid out face down. He isn’t overweight, but he has some extra flesh on him, most of it sits about his waist, sides and back. His back is now a red field of freshly tilled flesh, from neck to backside, and every joint is luxated like his limbs are collapsible tent poles.

“You found this one on the way back from investigating an anonymous tip?”

Zeller and Price nod in unison.

“And this one the very next afternoon?”

“Yes. Same time almost.”

Hannibal makes a show of pondering this for a short time, then suggests, “He wants to be caught, no?”

Zeller waves with both arms at the bodies before them. “That’s what it has to mean, right?”

“I don’t think he knows what he wants,” Will says quietly, off to the side.

Mapp walks in, then, and sets her empty lunch container on the desk with her fork balanced neatly on top of the lid. Without missing a beat, she asks, “What do you mean, Will?”

Will rubs his forehead, looking pale. “I’m starting to wonder if the reason I’m having trouble empathizing with him is because he’s just that confused. It’s like he started something, with a real purpose, and, at some point, that purpose was taken from him.”

Zeller, as usual, isn’t keen on Will’s musings, and makes this known. “What, are we supposed to feel sorry for him or something?”

“No, that’s not what I meant.” Discouraged, Will trails off and doesn’t continue.

Hannibal shoots Zeller a sharp look, though it’s really Will he’d like to hit. He isn’t happy with this reappearance of dilute Will. Every day, Will seems to lose himself a bit more – to surrender more ground to an imagined sickness and the ever-widening chasm of self-doubt.

Agent Mapp beats Hannibal to the punch. “Agent Zeller, please keep the commentary to yourself.” She turns to Will, the very soul of patience. “Please go on, Will.”

Severely uncomfortable, Will forces out the rest of his theory. Hypothesis. “Somewhere along the way, he fucked up. Killed the wrong person, maybe. I don’t know. He can’t take it back, can’t restart his mission. What else can he do but become what he’s made himself into? More twisted, more sadistic. An executioner, shedding his humanity. If we don’t stop him… it’s only going to get
“What’s this, Abigail?” Hannibal looks up from his tablet when Abigail sits down opposite him that evening and slides a cheque across the desk towards him.

Will sits at the other end of the library, mechanically marking papers. Abigail’s eyes flit to him momentarily and she gives a small, almost inaudible sigh of frustration. He’s wearing both the patch and the sling, which means something happened today to stir up his feelings of inadequacy, and his subsequent need to punish himself.

She returns her gaze to Hannibal. “I have a job now. I should be paying rent.”

Hannibal regards her shrewdly. She is sitting poker-straight in her chair, giving the illusion of added height. Her blue eyes are piercing as ever, though she subtly takes part of her lower lip between her teeth while she awaits his response.

“You should be doing nothing of the sort.”

“I thought you’d say that.” She gives him her best attempt at a teasing smile, but doesn’t quite achieve the desired effect. “I just want to, okay?”

Hannibal sets his tablet down but makes no movement otherwise, either to take the cheque or to return it. “I said I would take care of you, Abigail. I won’t take your money.” His tone brooks no argument.

“Will you please just hold on to it?”

She sounds so earnest, he consents to pick up the cheque and look it over. “For a rainy day,” he says, depositing it in his desk drawer. He shuts the drawer with marked disinterest, wordlessly underscoring that he never plans on cashing it. He folds his hands on the desk, and some curiosity returns to his expression. “You have a bank account.”

“It wasn’t hard. You did most of the work.” She crosses her legs and manages not to jiggle her foot up and down by tapping the arm of the chair with the pad of her forefinger instead. “I’m going to Ella’s for dinner tomorrow night. Is that okay?”

Hannibal cocks his head to the side as usual. “Of course,” he says.

She resists the urge to roll her eyes at the implication that it was a stupid question, when, not so long ago, she’d been in trouble for not asking permission.

“That works nicely, in fact. Ardelia Mapp will be coming here for dinner tomorrow night.”

“Oh,” Abigail is audibly surprised. Before she can help herself she asks curiously, “What were you going to do if the Ingrams hadn’t invited me over?”

Hannibal picks up his tablet and leans back in his chair once more, signaling the end of the conversation. “I hadn’t decided. Have you eaten yet, Abigail?” he asks pointedly.

“I was just about to,” she says, as quietly and politely as she is able. She even tucks her chair in before walking away.
“I know I said I never connected to the concept of family, but I’m pretty sure we’re not doing it right,” Will comments from his place by the mantle.

Hannibal sets down his reading again and turns in his chair. His face is impassive, but there is a suspicious glint in his eye. “How do you mean, Will?”

Will wishes he’d kept his mouth shut. He’s not nearly prepared for an argument. “You have a lot of power over Abigail.” It is the thought currently floating closest to the top of his mind’s chaotic whirlpool.

“As do you,” Hannibal counters.

“Not the same kind,” Will mutters, scrubbing a hand roughly over his face in exasperation.

Hannibal’s annoyance is barely hidden. “Where is this coming from, Will?”

“You dismiss her. She deserves better.”

“Yes,” Hannibal muses, to Will’s surprise. “She continues to prove that daily.” Having conceded the point, he returns to his reading, deciding no further explanation is required.

Will tries to return to marking, but, even though he can’t put a finger on it, whatever is bothering him is trying to claw its way into verbal existence. “Hannibal,” he says after a few minutes. “What would happen if she stopped proving it?”

With an audible sigh, Hannibal puts down his tablet. He doesn’t turn around, though. “I told you, Will. Abigail is a part of you.”

“So she’s safe from you as long as I am?” Will can hear how argumentative he sounds, but can’t seem to summon the desire to do anything about it. Hannibal apparently doesn’t feel the need to reply, and his silence eggs Will on. “Guess I’d better behave myself then.”

“Will, you are not my prisoner.” Hannibal actually sounds injured when he continues, “Nor am I your executioner. I thought we were in agreement about that.”

As he often does these days, Will feels sorry for his behaviour, and simultaneously annoyed at his own embarrassment. “I know.”

Hannibal sighs again and turns to face Will. His face is expectant, as though he is waiting for Will to continue his attack.

However, Will’s combative attitude has dissipated, and he is silent for a while before simply stating, “You promised we’d protect her.”

The two of them lock eyes. For a moment, Will thinks Hannibal might be as confused as he himself is, but his response is as self-assured as ever.

“I always keep my promises.”

Far from satisfied with the way the conversation had gone, despite having no idea what he’d wanted in the first place, Will bends his head back to his work. Frustration tightening his voice, he says, shortly, “See that you do.”

About three quarters of the way through marking, Will feels his head begin to ache. He puts
everything away in his briefcase to be dealt with tomorrow and tosses the eyepatch and sling on top. He sits for a moment, concentrating on the pinched nerve in his neck rather than the nausea. Then, he rolls his shoulders, stands, and heads to bed.

When he reaches the door of the study, he pauses, then turns back. Hannibal is still seated at his desk, though his attention has shifted from reading to drawing. Without saying anything—and, again, without letting himself think too much about it—Will goes to him, and, with his good hand on the arm of the chair for balance, he leans down and seizes Hannibal’s mouth with his own. That is all he does, but it lingers, unlike Hannibal’s desire to hit Will, which dissolves entirely.

The next morning, the two of them wake face-to-face, one arm flung over the other’s waist and no memory of how they got so close. So close their noses almost touch. Hannibal’s eyes are drifting open and shut, lids still heavy from sleep. When Will’s open and meet his, he lifts his hand to rest it against Will’s cheek, and lets his eyes fall shut again. Will turns his head and kisses the palm, then settles back into his previous position. He lets his eyes rove over Hannibal’s face, drinking in the features, appreciating the whole. So many times he’s seen Hannibal conduct a similar survey of Will’s own features.

The objective handsomeness and added wolfish curl of his lip, not to mention cheekbones that could do real damage to a person, are rendered almost tame by the shock of hair falling over his eyes. The danger betrayed in those eyes is somewhat contained when they are closed, but Will wants him to open them, so he whispers, “Hannibal.”

And there they are, dark and bright at the same time, deep maroon with a predatory glint that never quite goes away.

Hannibal evidently senses that Will hadn’t thought of what he wanted next. He slides the hand on Will’s cheek down his neck, over his shoulder and upper arm, and squeezes lightly just above the elbow. “Beautiful boy,” he murmurs.

Will’s eyes are as serious as ever, but perhaps slightly less stormy now, in the early hours of the day. His lips, with Hannibal’s name freshly fallen from them, are expressly kissable. Though Will’s jaw, stomach, shoulder, and back muscles are tense, as always, Hannibal resolves to take advantage of this relatively relaxed state.

He pulls Will against himself fully and brings their mouths together. “Beautiful,” he says again, voice soft and deep.

Will actually allows a whimper to steal past his lips. He slides his hand up Hannibal’s back and clutches his shoulder.

Hannibal clamps his hand on Will’s backside and presses their hips flush, so their erections throb against each other, then reaches down to play with the head of Will’s cock. Before long, he’s able to slick them both up and take them both in hand. He begins working them up and down slowly, Will sighing wordlessly into his mouth. When Will starts rolling his hips slightly, Hannibal groans lightly in satisfaction. He wraps his lips around Will’s earlobe and bites.

“You’re mine, aren’t you?” Hannibal breathes, hot and heavy into Will’s ear.

Will shivers with pleasure at the implication, at Hannibal’s asking him to confirm it. To say it, out loud. He opens his eyes and stares into Hannibal’s. “Your what?” he murmurs.
Hannibal kisses him fiercely. “My beloved.”

They continue rubbing against one another, neither urgently nor lazily, and eventually Will presses their foreheads together, closes his eyes blissfully, and affirms, “I want to be…”

Hannibal tightens his grip and grunts quietly. “You are… Will…” He noses against his cheek and kisses the side of his face so tenderly.

Will loses it. They finish that way, face to face, the other’s name on their tongues.

For an indulgent twenty minutes, they continue to lie there, holding on to one another. Then, they shower together – not to prolong the intimacy, but simply because it doesn’t occur to either of them not to.

Will continues to study Hannibal’s body as steam gathers around them. He wonders, as Hannibal reaches up to adjust the shower head, tilting it so that the water falls over both of them, if he would have ever considered Hannibal as a potential sexual or romantic interest at all, if their knowledge of each other had plateaued before the encephalitis had kicked in. If, instead of the elaborate frame job, Hannibal had continued just to be his therapist. Would he have found himself drawn to Hannibal at that shallow depth of understanding? On looks alone? Will closes his eyes and lets the water rinse away some of those thoughts. He doesn’t think he would have. The idea is terrifying, and lonely.

When he opens his eyes, he finds a bar of soap has materialized in his bad hand. He frowns at it. When Hannibal wraps an arm around his waist and pulls him in close, Will ducks his head away instead of meeting him for a kiss.

Hannibal doesn’t let go of him, but takes the soap and gently runs it over Will’s back. His other hand follows, rubbing the soap in and massaging the muscles that always seem to be aching. “What aren’t you telling me, Will?”

It takes a moment for Will to decide whether or not to be honest. At length, he sighs into Hannibal’s shoulder, “I think I might be sick again.”

“What are you experiencing?”

“I don’t know what’s real sometimes. And the nightmares are back.” He doesn’t like how frightened he sounds.

Hannibal doesn’t, either. “You don’t know what’s real?”

“I guess that’s not accurate. It’s more like realizing you haven’t been paying attention to something you’re meant to be reading, and, suddenly nothing on the page makes sense.”

“The obvious solution would be to go back a few pages.”

“Yeah,” is all Will says for several minutes. He rests his chin on Hannibal’s shoulder and follows the steady rivulets of water running down Hannibal’s back with his fingers. When Hannibal presses the soap back into his hand, he straightens up and turns it over in his palm a few times. Looking down at it, his face gives nothing away, and his voice is devoid of expression when he says, “You’ve been fucking with me, haven’t you?”

Hannibal lays a hand against Will’s face and rubs his thumb over his cheekbone. “I have, yes.”
Will sighs and closes his eyes momentarily before lifting them to meet Hannibal’s. “Why?” he asks, though he already knows the answer.

“Because I want you to fight back, Will. You’re not nearly as helpless as you think you are.”

“I’m pretty helpless.”

“Needing help is not the same as being helpless.”

Will just shrugs and begins dragging the soap over the rest of his body.

“You’re still disappointed with your progress.”

Without looking at Hannibal, Will nods once, then swallows and says, “Aren’t you tired of this?”

“Tired of what, Will?”

“Looking after me,” Will answers dully.

Hannibal’s hand hasn’t moved from his cheek. Now, it slides down and around the back of Will’s neck as Hannibal leans in to kiss him soundly. Hannibal murmurs against Will’s lips a gently chastising reminder. “You’re mine to look after.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta’d by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
A Grahamned Shame and a DeLecterbal Evening

Chapter Summary

Everyone is a pure emo bitch, but at least naughty car sex and bath time therapy are still things. A better chapter summary might happen when I, myself, am feeling less like a pure emo bitch.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: fucked up nightmares, gross descriptions of murder victims

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The day unfolds, and Hannibal watches with renewed interest as Will grows increasingly tense. Will finds himself gravitating to Hannibal often, and wandering otherwise. Though it’s no longer desperate, the deep sense of loss he feels persists, settling in his stomach like the dull ache one feels some months after a loved one has passed – bearable, but undeniably present.

At one point, Hannibal asks how he’s feeling. Will replies with, “Sorry about what I said last night.” Hannibal simply says, “You weren’t entirely wrong,” and then they are silent for a while, until Will asks what they’re making for dinner.

He finishes his marking, and feels much more tired than he should, though that seems to be the norm these days. He drifts off in his chair for a while. The next thing he knows, Abigail is waking him up to say she’s going shopping to find something to wear tonight, and does he need anything while she’s out? The next time he wakes, his head is resting on Hannibal’s thigh, and Hannibal has nodded off as well. His arm is draped over Will, and he’s cradling Will’s bad hand in his. Will squeezes his eyes shut and turns his head so he can bury his face in the fabric of Hannibal’s suit pants. The third time he wakes, he finds Hannibal has carried him back to bed. Feeling small and overwhelmed, but grateful nonetheless, he falls back asleep almost immediately.

That evening, Abigail walks down the stairs, gripping the railing tightly as she descends, and enters the kitchen feeling all kinds of uncertain. “I’m going now, okay?”

Hannibal looks up from spearing wedges of cantaloupe wrapped in prosciutto and arugula leaves, and appraises her swiftly. She forces herself not to fidget, and tries to look confident in the black patent leather pumps she’s only just figured out how to walk in. Her scarf is forest green, and she’s wearing a knee-length sleeveless dress in a chestnut brown that makes every one of her freckles stand out.
“You look lovely, Abigail. I’m sure the Ingrams will be charmed.”

She smiles, mostly because she doesn’t know what to say.

Will comes in from the dining room, where she can see he’s been setting the table – Hannibal will probably correct it before Agent Mapp arrives. He tucks her hair behind her ear and says, “You look beautiful, sweetheart.” Though he seems as subdued as ever, he manages a smile.

“Have a nice dinner,” she says, with genuine warmth, hoping that, at some point tonight, the smile will reach his eyes.

“You too,” he says.

Abigail’s phone vibrates in her purse. “My cab is here.”

She hugs Will extra tightly before she leaves.

Will apologetically retreats back upstairs in the hour before Agent Mapp is to arrive.

Sometime later, and alone, Hannibal opens the door for her and ushers her into the front hall.

“Welcome, Agent Mapp. Please, come in.”

“Thank you. Ardelia, please.” She hands him her wrap when he offers to hang up her things, but takes her phone from her purse before handing that over as well. “Please don’t consider me rude. I’m sure you’re aware that I’m essentially always on duty.”

“Of course. I do hope, however, that you will not be needed tonight.”

As they make their way to the kitchen, Ardelia confesses, “I didn’t bring anything. I imagine you have quite the wine collection already. I thought, instead, I could return the favour some time – have you both for dinner at my place?”

“That sounds much more appealing than a token bottle,” Hannibal agrees. He pours them both a glass of wine and they toast. “I’m afraid Will has been particularly tired today, and will not be joining us until later.”

Ardelia sips her wine appreciatively, scenting it somewhat secretively before it touches her lips. “I hope he doesn’t feel obligated. I consider Thursday’s matter closed. There’s no need to make amends.”

Hannibal’s mouth curves in a sly smile. “I’ll admit, I phrased it the way I did to encourage him to invite you at all.”

Ardelia gives an amused hum. “That’s rather manipulative of you, Dr. Lecter.”

“Hannibal, please,” he replies, eyes twinkling.

“Hannibal.” She places her glass on the counter and nods her head at the ingredients laid out. “So, what can I help with?”

“We are having risi e bisi, followed by roast pork belly with hazelnuts and radicchio, and grilled zucchini salad. You could start by shelling the peas.”

Ardelia takes the empty bowl he hands her and declares, with an easy smile, “I have a pretty speedy
technique.”

“I will try to keep up. Would you like an apron?”

“I’ll take anything your kitchen has to offer. It is very impressive.”

Hannibal ties his own, then needlessly ties hers as well, laying a hand lightly on the small of her back before moving away.

She doesn’t seem to mind the touch, though she doesn’t acknowledge it, either. “There’s an Italian theme to tonight’s dinner,” Ardelia observes. “Do you have some Italian in you?”

“I do not, no.”

“But you do speak Italian?”

Hannibal nods. “I lived there for some time as a young man. Also in France. I was born in Lithuania, however.”

“Goodness. How many languages do you speak?”

Hannibal pauses in his measuring of water into a saucepan. “Between seven and nine,” he calculates. He smiles at her arched brows. “My Spanish and Japanese could use refining.”

Ardelia only laughs, speechless.

“Tell me about your background,” he requests, setting the rice to boil on the stovetop. “I’m afraid I simply can’t tell where you hail from.”

“Go ahead and take a guess. I guarantee you’ll be at least partly correct.”

Hannibal studies her as she continues to shell fresh peas into the bowl. “I’d say Jamaica. However, you’re at least second generation American on one side.”

Ardelia nods. “My mother’s side is Gullah, which I’ll go ahead and tell you now is the only other language I speak.” She pushes the bowl of peas across the counter towards him. Plucking a couple out with her long fingers, she sheepishly admits, “I’m afraid I’m going to have to eat a few of these,” and pops them into her mouth.

Hannibal chuckles. “You’re a grazer.”

“Mm,” she agrees, and points to the bowl. “And the rest aren’t safe, so I suggest you give me something else to do.”

Hannibal gives her the task of rinsing the remaining vegetables, and observes how carefully she twists off her ring and how delicately she sets it on the window ledge before beginning. The light glancing off the shiny interior of the sink illuminates the engraving inside the band. In slightly italicized capitals are the letters AM-CS.

Once they are all washed, she brings the vegetables back to the counter on a chopping board, then replaces her ring. Hannibal offers her a large kitchen knife, handle first.

“I don’t want to pry,” Ardelia says, after several minutes have passed. “I understand that some things must be too personal to share… I am concerned about Will, though, and I’d hate for you to think I’m not willing to help in any way I can.”
“I don’t think that at all, Ardelia, and it’s very kind of you to say this. I share your concern,” Hannibal divulges. “Will has not been treated well by the FBI in the past.”

Ardelia nods in acknowledgement, then says, “I’m beginning to think Agent Crawford had more to do with that than you’ve let on.”

Hannibal arranges his face to appear conflicted. “Jack was a friend. I don’t wish to speak ill of him.”

“Will is your partner.”

“Yes.”

Ardelia gives him one of her sphinxlike smiles. “Tricky.” For a few more minutes, they simply slice silence. “It wasn’t that long ago I almost left the FBI myself. I understand if you’re maybe not altogether impressed with the Agency.”

Hannibal looks up in surprise, but she doesn’t elaborate.

“Will is awfully tight-lipped, from what I’ve seen. It wouldn’t surprise me if he were to take the full extent of his mistreatment to the grave.”

“Are you saying you wouldn’t blame me if I wasn’t aware that Will was being abused?” Though her current perception of him has been entirely engineered by himself, a note of indignation creeps into his voice.

“No,” Ardelia states firmly, unperturbed by his tone. “What I’m saying is, there is a reason I’m asking you as well as him if there’s anything I should be aware of. If I can provide a trigger-free work environment for my agents, I believe it is my job, and my responsibility, to do so.” She rests her knife on the counter and regards him squarely.

Hannibal nods, once, and Ardelia relaxes.

In a less fervent tone, and with the beginnings of a smile, she adds, “Relatively trigger-free. I’m not that naïve.”

Hannibal’s answering smile is warm and appreciative. “Thank you, Agent Mapp. Ardelia.”

Her dark eyes are still on him when she says, “There’s no need to thank me.” Then, she expels a long sigh, as though she’d been holding her breath. “That got serious very quickly.”

Hannibal laughs softly. “We’re discussing Will. It was bound to.” He slides the quartered and seasoned zucchini into the oven before continuing. “Without going into too much detail, or assigning too much blame…” He shuts the oven door and turns back to her. “Will’s inherent anti-social behaviour was aggravated by work-related depression, and, while he may not have the best interpersonal skills to begin with, much of his behaviour can be attributed to the lack of support that was available to him.”

“He was depressed, which made him antisocial, which led to poor social skills, which he was then criticized for? I realize that’s a massive oversimplification, but am I on the right track?”

“It’s a simplification that is appropriate for our purposes, which we seem to agree is the creation of a support network for him.”

Ardelia nods and takes the initiative in refilling their wine glasses. They toast the sentiment.
“I wish you’d tell me what happened,” Judy chides quietly, shaking her head as they roll to a stop beside Ella’s house.

It’s fairly isolated – though not to the level that Will’s is – with just over an acre of land allowing some privacy from the neighbours.

“I did,” Margot answers shortly.

“Margot, you know I’m not talking about the meeting.”

In lieu of a response, Margot simply removes her seatbelt and unlocks the door. She makes for the trunk to retrieve the flat of potted herbs for Ella, but suddenly Judy’s arm is around her waist, pulling her into the back seat. She tumbles on top of her and then they are kissing passionately, Judy’s hands lifting her skirt.

They switch positions awkwardly and, before they can even settle comfortably, Judy is shoving her fingers inside Margot, kissing and nipping at her throat. There is no teasing. Judy works her fingers steadily, breathing hard against Margot’s skin, and Margot’s hand steals up her shirt to pinch at her own nipples. A minute or so of Judy’s fingers roughly inside her, thumb rubbing circles against her clit, and Margot throws her head back and thrusts her hips up once.

Her hand clamps down on Judy’s shoulder, and, with a cry of, “Oh fuck, baby, I love you!” she comes.

Judy kisses her sweetly. She can feel both their hearts racing as she nuzzles her face back into Margot’s neck. “I love you, too, Em.”

Margot is tingling from head to toe and she feels slightly lightheaded, so she can’t be sure, but she thinks she feels wet eyelashes against her burning skin.

“You don’t have to look so suspicious,” Ardelia teases, eyes warm over the rim of her glass. “I’m not going to pretend we weren’t talking about you.”

Will gives a surprised laugh as he takes the wine Hannibal holds out to him. “Thanks. I think.”

“Feeling better?”

“I was just tired. Sorry.” He clears his throat. “So, am I allowed to know what you two discussed, Agent Mapp?”

“You can call me Ardelia outside of work, Will. I didn’t specify that because I wasn’t anticipating the opportunity to socialize with you.”

“Understandable…” He glances down. Hannibal’s hand is on his waist. He looks across the island at Ardelia, then to Hannibal. “Can I do anything? Or has everything been done already?”

“You can wash the dishes, if you absolutely must do something.” The fondness in Hannibal’s voice is definitely augmented for show, though not nearly as obnoxiously as it had been at Jack’s funeral.

Ardelia takes a seat on one of the stools while Hannibal checks the dishes, which are at various stages of cooking, and Will fills the sink with soapy water. “Where is Sarah, tonight?” she asks Will
“Tell me about her.” Ardelia rests her chin in one hand. She looks softer again now, and it’s not the summer dress and dangly earrings.

Will fumbles a little. “We’re still getting to know one another…”

“Well,” Hannibal offers. “We know she’s exceptionally bright. Very observant.”

Ardelia smiles playfully. “Perhaps she takes after you a little?”

Will lets out an awkward chuckle.

Hannibal continues, amused. “And she’s very opinionated about her observations, even to strangers.”

Will finally contributes. “Especially to strangers. When she meets people, she talks as though they already know each other, even if she decides later that she doesn’t like them.”

“That’s a sweet quality,” Ardelia muses.

“She is sweet,” Will agrees. “And incredibly bossy.”

Hannibal and Ardelia both laugh. Will smiles, although, for some reason, talking about Abigail like this is making him sad. He drains the sink and starts rinsing the dishes. He’s kept both hands in the sink so his whole dishwashing process looks vaguely normal.

“How does she feel about you going back to work?”

“She gives me shit about it all the time,” he confesses. “But, then, so does Hannibal.”

Ardelia finishes her wine and drums her fingernails against the side of the glass once. “I’d be a hypocrite if I said I’d never trampled on people’s advice when it came to things like that. I’ll just have to keep an eye on you, I suppose,” she admonishes mildly.

Will bristles automatically. “You really don’t.” He fights to keep his voice even, though he is already fuming a little.

“You have your hands full as it is, Ardelia,” Hannibal interjects smoothly, seeing the colour rise in Will’s cheeks. “With Jack’s unique filing system and so on.”

“You know, I used to like paperwork,” she replies, drolly, though her eyes remain worriedly on Will a moment longer.

Will feels her gaze, and forces himself to say lightly, “Well, Jack’s job will cure you of that.”

“Yes,” she sighs. “I may be fluent in Bureauese, but it’s not a language I enjoy speaking. Still, I can’t have everything my way, I suppose. If I had the chance to do things over, even knowing what I know now, I’d still take the job.”

“You would?”

She nods. “It’s nice not to have people immediately resent your authority. Being a thorn in the side of
the good-old-boy network was sucking the life out of me. Thank you,“ she adds, as Hannibal rounds
the island to refill her glass. After a couple of sips, she turns back to Will. “You asked what we were
talking about when you came in.”

Done rinsing, Will turns off the water and dries his hands quickly, anxious to get some wine in him
as soon as possible.

“I was expressing to Hannibal that I don’t see you the way I’m gathering Agent Crawford did. I’d
like us to draw up a contract that makes your affiliation with the BAU very clear, so your skill set
isn’t abused.”

“I’d… appreciate that,” Will replies slowly, slightly disoriented by the shift in conversation – not
drastic, but not relevant in any apparent way to what they’d just been discussing. He notices
Hannibal is positively beaming at her.

“Am I right in thinking you prefer teaching to field work?”

“It’s hard to say. I know it’s better for me. But Jack was right. When there’s killing going on that I
could have prevented, it sours the classroom for me.”

Ardelia frowns for a moment, then says, in the tone of a confession, “My rapturous view of Jack
Crawford has been steadily dismantled since I took over his position. It’s difficult to come to terms
with.”

Will nods for no reason.

“This is another reason I would like there to be a written agreement between us,” Ardelia continues.
“It’s all well and good for me to wag my finger at Jack Crawford’s ghost, but, how do I know that,
in the heat and pressure of an investigation, I won’t try and manipulate you into making my life
easier? I’ve read your work. It would be tempting to take advantage of you.”

“You’re assuming I’d let myself be taken advantage of.” Will knows it’s a stupid thing to say, given
his history of doing just that, but her observations are closer to the bone than he’d like.

She looks up from her glass. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to imply that you would. I’d like to hire a
resident profiler soon, and I’m slightly worried that, if you’re not contracted otherwise, I won’t be
able to help demanding that that person be you.”

Will manages a small smile. “That’s definitely flattering. I thought Hannibal was your resident
profiler, though.”

Ardelia nods, not in confirmation, but in acknowledgement. “His help on this case has been
invaluable. I sincerely hope you’ll be able and willing to consult in the future,” she adds, turning to
Hannibal. “For the position I’m looking to fill, though, a strong background in both forensics and
law enforcement is crucial.”

“Of course.” Hannibal bows his head graciously.

“Making Will an ideal candidate,” she concludes.

Will nods again, albeit distractedly. The dish cloth he’d been looking for has appeared on the counter
top in front of him. He knows Hannibal had put it there, but it still takes a moment for the unsettled
feeling to subside. “Please don’t do that tonight,” he mumbles under his breath so, only Hannibal can
hear him.
Hannibal lays a hand on Will’s bad one and squeezes gently. “I apologize.”

Will thinks he might even mean it, but seeing Hannibal’s warm flesh against his own clammy skin makes him feel ill. Thankfully, Ardelia has more to say.

“I don’t suppose either of you have any recommendations?”

Will almost suggests Alana, and shuts his mouth tight. Clearly, he shouldn’t be talking at all right now. He rubs his forehead with the back of a shaking hand, feeling saliva well up around his tongue. “Excuse me,” he says quickly, making for the chair in the corner before his body does something stupid, like collapse.

Hannibal follows him. After the ritualistic sweep of Will’s forehead, Hannibal asks, “Migraine?”

Will groans, “Imminent.”

Hannibal gets him a glass of water and, while Will swallows down some painkillers, turns back to Ardelia. “Perhaps the BAU could use more new blood. The department has vastly improved under your direction. Maybe you don’t need a recommendation so much as a keen intern.”

“Like Agent Crawford had, in Miriam Lass?” Ardelia sounds much sharper than usual all of a sudden.

Hannibal is careful not to be condescending in his pacifying her. “Not exactly. You are looking for a resident profiler, suggesting desk work, rather than field work… perhaps even an office. Four walls can do a lot in terms of safety.”

Ardelia shakes off the tension that had gathered so quickly in her shoulders at Hannibal’s suggestion. “I suppose the idea is worth considering. Will, are you alright?”

Will finishes his glass of water and stands, slightly wobbly. “Actually, do you mind if I leave you two? I feel like hell.” He expects Hannibal and Ardelia to exchange the meaningful look he’s so accustomed to seeing when people don’t know what to make of him. Price, Zeller, Jack – they always had not-so-covert uncomfortable glances to share. Ardelia and Hannibal exchange no such look. Under the fringe of pain, he feels slightly less like a freak.

With a smooth, I’ll be just a moment, to Ardelia, Hannibal also leaves the kitchen to help Will upstairs.

Sitting down heavily on the bed, Will groans, “It’s like my body is trying to reject me.”

“Your mind, anyway. Does anything else hurt?”

“Besides my mind?”

Hannibal sounds vaguely exasperated, but his eyes are still full of the affection they’d held for Will since this morning. “Besides your head, Will.”

“No. I’m okay.”

Hannibal kisses him gently on the forehead. He strokes his hair for a moment, nose buried in the soft locks, then bends down further to capture Will’s mouth. When Hannibal withdraws, Will unconsciously follows his lips with his own. It’s over so minute a distance – only a fraction of an inch – but the need Will conveys with this small loss of control brings Hannibal back in for another, deeper kiss.
“Apologize to Agent Mapp for me?”

“Of course.”

“I’m sorry for putting a damper on your evening.” Will pulls his legs up onto the bed and massages his temple. He looks genuinely embarrassed.

Hannibal simply shakes his head.

“Believe it or not, I was actually looking forward to socializing tonight.”

Hannibal chuckles. “I’m not sure I can believe that.”

An hour and twenty minutes away in Reston, Virginia, Abigail and seven others sit around Ella’s small dining room table. Elbows knock and hands reach over arms, passing dishes around in a disorganized clatter. The Ingrams are boisterous, friendly, and loud. Abigail is somewhat relieved, because the general noise forestalls any awkward silences.

Judy’s parents are here, as well as another one of Judy’s sisters and her husband. No one asks for her life story, as she feared they would, they just ask her what she likes to do. When she answers that she likes going for walks and reading, they ask about her favourite books. They are a well-read family, and they’ve all either heard of or read the books she lists. Abigail tells them she’s working her way through Will’s collection of Greek mythology, and that topic sees them right through to dessert.

All through the meal, Abigail gets the sense that the Ingrams are waiting for something. Anticipating. Their collective mood is festive. It isn’t until Margot uncharacteristically gets to her feet to make a speech, that Abigail realizes they are excited for her.

Margot slides an envelope out from under the tablecloth and opens it with a brief introduction. “We are celebrating Abigail’s success in differential calculus. She’s worked very hard, and I’m sure that is reflected in her exam score…”

Abigail is frozen in her chair, hands curled tightly around the seat.

“Ninety-three percent.”

Judy cheers, and Margot gives Abigail a quick squeeze and whispers, Well done, girl. Cheery congratulations erupt around the table.

Abigail grins widely, overwhelmed and relieved. Mostly overwhelmed, as a room full of strangers tell her good job and nice work, with such easy smiles, and light hearts – plenty of room in them to welcome one more into the fold. She pushes down the ugly feelings she’s been harbouring all day. The ones that sting, their origins in the recognition that neither Hannibal nor Will even knows she’d taken the exam.

Hannibal and Ardelia finish the cantaloupe hors d’oeuvres and plate their dinners. They do this mostly in silence, though not noticeably out of awkwardness. Once they’re seated at the dining room table, Ardelia jumps right back into their conversation. “I have something else to offer, though it would be more for your benefit than Will’s. You don’t need to be dropping Will off and picking him up every day. I’ll have someone drive him.”

“That is very kind of you, Ardelia” Hannibal replies. “Perhaps that someone could drive him to and from Wolf Trap?”

Ardelia nods. “It’s closer,” she comments, leaving room for him to expand or not expand, as he sees fit.

Hannibal simply inclines his head. “Yes.”

They say no more about it.

When they are finished with their risi e bisi, Hannibal begins his series of carefully constructed queries. “You said you recently almost resigned from the FBI. May I ask why?”

Ardelia dabs her lips with her napkin. She appears unsurprised at his asking. “I’d like you to be able to trust that my words aren’t empty. If my story helps you understand why I’m so concerned, I’m happy to share it.”

“I have a great deal of trust in you already, Ardelia,” Hannibal reassures her, and his tone is low and intimate. “However, I would like you to share your story, as a friend.” He smiles encouragingly, to complete the effect.

Ardelia takes quite a long sip of wine before beginning to speak. “A little over five years ago, my best friend – I would say soulmate if I was more in tune with the idea – she… disappeared.”

“And the FBI did nothing?”

“Kidnapping commands much more effort from law enforcement than a missing person’s case. There was no evidence of foul play, so there was nothing more than a cursory investigation before her case was dropped.” Ardelia shakes her head, as though she still can’t believe it.

“I’m sorry,” Hannibal says softly. “What was her name?” He adopts the past tense, since that is how Ardelia speaks of her.

“Starling. Clarice Starling.”

“Tell me about her.” Hannibal prompts.

Ardelia looks pained, but continues, in pursuit of what she must believe is a greater good.

They’d been friends since they were both recruits. They trained together at the police academy, lived together while they did their graduate studies, and became trainees at Quantico at the same time. “We both had a crush on our gunnery instructor at the Academy – Johnny Brigham. We’d try to read his tattoo through his shirtsleeve. Needless to say, we both worked exceptionally hard in that course. I was Combat Pistol Champion, and she was runner-up. She dated Johnny for a while after graduation.” She laughs quietly at the memory of something before she goes on to explain. “She called it her consolation prize, because the director named me valedictorian.”

Hannibal chuckles with her. “She sounds like a charmingly self-assured and very competent young woman.”

“She was,” Ardelia affirms. “It was what got her known within the Agency. What got her picked to head a composite raid team in Washington – and what should have gotten her on more than just fliers stapled to telephone poles.”
“What happened then, Ardelia?” Hannibal asks quietly.

“Well, I badgered everyone of influence. Even contacted Behavioural Science. I thought they’d be able to confirm that Starling wasn’t the type to just up and leave without a word to anyone. No one got back to me. I was so angry, I had my letter of resignation all typed out and signed…”

“But?”

“But, when I calmed down, I realized it would be better to stay. You don’t burn bridges with the people who are, at least, theoretically, on your side.”

Hannibal detects no obvious falsehood in her story, though he has the distinct sense that she’s leaving parts of it out. Her candor has taken on the quality of being rehearsed. It doesn’t trouble him. He is a patient man – he will get the whole truth from her eventually.

“She was one of our own, and she was my friend. She deserved more. So, you see, it’s become sort of a mission to make sure nothing like that ever happens again. Not under my command.”

Hannibal simply nods.

“It doesn’t matter whether or not Will considers me a friend. He is one of us, too – even if there’s never a piece of paper that says so. He was dismissed by the OIG so readily after his arrest; I think at least one department needs to look out for him.”

“It sounds like you’ve looked into his story a bit more.”

“I have… because I honestly didn’t know if it was a good idea to consult him. Or fair to him. Or even the right thing to do.”

“You have a great deal of conscience, Ardelia. It’s quite admirable.”

Unlike at their first meeting, Ardelia’s cheeks do colour at this compliment. Hannibal isn’t sure if it’s the wine, the relative vulnerability, or simple pleasure at the recognition. “I hope you’re not psychoanalyzing me too carefully,” she says. “You might come to the conclusion that I’m trying to save Starling by saving Will.”

“I take it you’ve been accused of something similar before.”

“Mm,” she agrees. “Hence the trampling.”

Hannibal pats his mouth with his napkin and picks up his wine glass, gazing into it as he considers his next words. “Will does not need to be treated like a broken pony. What he needs is more insight than Jack was able to provide.”

“About his gift?”

“You see it as a gift.”

“An uncomfortable one, no doubt, but, yes.”

Hannibal’s eyes glow warmly at her. “Already, you understand better. Jack had to be told as much.”

Ardelia is quiet for a moment, then finally nods. “As I said before, I’ve read Will’s work. I’m aware he’s good for more than his gift, and I imagine it’s frustrating for him to be called on just to dive headfirst into the minds of killers.”
“How do you mean?”

“Well, you don’t rise in the ranks to detective when you’re as young as he was just by having a vivid imagination. That takes hard work, and thoroughness, and all sorts of skills, like logic, and pattern recognition. I think he has a great number of less damaging skills that would be highly valuable to any law enforcement agency.”

“I agree.” Hannibal rises to clear the table, and they go into the kitchen together to prepare dessert.

Ardelia slices strawberries while Hannibal shaves dark chocolate onto twin slices of tiramisu.

“I’m glad we discussed this tonight,” she says as she garnishes the cake, delicately fanning the strawberry slices over the frosting. “I realize that shop talk in a social setting is a bit lame, but this has all been weighing rather heavily on my mind.”

Hannibal places a hand on her shoulder momentarily as he passes her to put the chocolate away. “I am more than happy to discuss these sorts of things, and honoured that you have shared with me what you have. Perhaps next time will be a bit more lighthearted, but I have no complaints about our evening.”

Ardelia tilts her chin and indicates Hannibal’s exposed wrists with her knife. “Wounds sustained on the battlefield of love?”

Hannibal is pleased with their unspoken quid pro quo arrangement thus far, so he looks down at them contemplatively and agrees, “Yes. I suppose you could say that.”

“There’s still a lot of talk at the Bureau about all that.”

“I don’t blame Will.” Hannibal makes deliberate eye contact, stressing the point. “He was outspoken about what he thought was true, and a very sick young man decided to act on what he believed to be Will’s behalf.”

Ardelia only nods. Hannibal can tell she understands that love often goes hand in hand with violence. In the brightly lit kitchen, the ring on her finger winks in agreement.

Will lies still, waiting for the painkillers to at least dull the edges of his headache. They do, eventually, but he is unable to shake the wretched feeling that has settled over him for no identifiable reason. At around 11pm, he runs a bath to try and wash the feeling off.

He doesn’t quite fall asleep, but, as he dozes, he dreams about Dark Abigail drifting past him in a whisper of feathers. He tries to follow her, but wind stings his face and his hair whips over his eyes. He steadily loses sight of her until he’s all alone in a grey landscape, with only the abating storm for company.

Ella’s front room is cozy, despite being so large. It comfortably fits the Ingram family and its adopted members, Margot and Abigail. Ella makes the rounds, refilling everyone’s wine glasses. Julia and Andy, the parents, sit with Judy, already deeply engaged in conversation just minutes after they’d all finished dinner. Abigail hears Judy ask how long they’ll be in Virginia, and if they’ll have time to come up to the farm. Then Jane, the other sister, and her husband, Mark, sweep Abigail back into book talk.
A short while later, Margot disappears for a moment, and comes back into the room carrying a large, flat, heavy-looking rectangular box. She presents Abigail with it. It looks like something from a fancy department store, all tied up with a thick black ribbon. Abigail giggles. “Did you buy me a tux?”

“Open it,” is all Margot says.

It’s a brand new laptop.

Abigail covers her mouth with her hands, speechless. “For me?” she manages to squeak out after a few moments.

For the first time in Abigail’s recent memory, Margot’s smile doesn’t look pained. “For you,” she affirms. “You deserve it.”

Abigail shakes her head, looking down at the slim silver lid of the computer. “Thank you,” she whispers. “I really don’t know what to say… It’s mine? For real?”

“Yes.”

“But you’re not to use it for work,” Judy puts in from her place on the sofa.

Margot nods in agreement. “There is some pretty sophisticated software on it I’ll teach you how to use at some point.” She smiles again. “For now, though, just enjoy it.”

“I will,” Abigail says, voice faint. “Thank you, Margot.” She doesn’t even have it in her to stand and give Margot a hug. She feels lightheaded, and the many different Abigails wreak havoc on her thoughts.

Margot goes to perch on the arm of the sofa next to Judy, and the chatter around the room resumes.

The exorbitance of the gift isn’t what has Abigail reeling. Margot has the money – she could probably buy Abigail ten laptops without batting an eye. She’s not sure what it is, exactly, that’s making her want to cry. When she’s collected herself a little bit, she scoots over to sit on the floor next to Margot and Judy.

Immediately, Abigail feels the uncertainty and tension she’d just pushed down resurface. The air between them lacks the usual warmth, and Judy doesn’t have her arm about Margot’s waist, stroking her side like usual. Instead, her hand rests lightly on Margot’s back, which – for them – seems downright cold.

“How are things, Abigail?” Judy asks, and, this close, Abigail can see the tightness around her mouth.

With two glasses of wine dissolving the few filters she does possess, she’s worried that she’ll say something dumb and insensitive. She comments on the other couple in her life that is behaving strangely, because it seems safer, somehow, than talking about herself. “I’m worried about Will. He’s acting really weird. Hannibal, too, but he’s always playing at something…”

Margot sips her water and Judy sips her wine. Despite the fact that they are obviously going through something, their movements sync naturally.

“Maybe you should take some time off,” Margot suggests. “Spend time with Will at home.”

“I’m worried about you, too,” Abigail blurts out.
Margot’s eyes drop to her lap. She doesn’t reply.

“I don’t want a vacation,” Abigail adds.

“You’ve been spending a lot of time with Barney Matthews,” Judy observes.

“Yeah. I like him. He’s funny.”

“Easy to get along with,” Judy agrees. “Look, Abigail, don’t take this the wrong way, okay?”

Abigail automatically tenses, but mumbles, “Okay.”

“Are you sure you’re not spending so much time at the farm because you’re lonely?”

Abigail shrugs, as though the words don’t cut deep. “I’m not lonely. I’m used to being on my own. It’s mostly always been like that, even before my dad…”

“Alright.” Judy looks skeptical, but simply says, “If you change your mind, you know, you deserve a vacation as much as a laptop.”

So, not at all.

It becomes clear, at last, in Abigail’s mind; the reason for her inner turmoil over the laptop, the dinner, the easy, inclusive conversation. She is an outsider – there’s no pretending otherwise – but she is a welcome outsider, sitting in a room full of people who occasionally look over at her with warm smiles, all their interactions genuine. Honest.

And here she sits, a liar from the inside out. They don’t know her. They will never know her – know what she’s done – and yet, it is them she is sharing her success with.

Hannibal kneels by the bathtub and rests his arms on the side, sleeves still rolled up to the elbows from his efforts in the kitchen. Will stirs and looks up at him.

“You are full of fear these days, Will.”

“These days?”

“More so.”

Will squeezes his eyes shut and grimaces. “It’s getting harder for me to tell which days are these days.”

“These days are beginning to mirror those days, when you were in the hospital. Before your surgery.”

Will nods slowly. “I was afraid then.”

“What were you afraid of?”

“I don’t know. Not of the pain. Not of dying.”

“What are you afraid of now?”

“Not knowing who I am. It’s been known to happen.” Will holds the rest of his body stiff and still, as
though that will counteract how wantonly expressive his face is. With curiosity grounding him a little, he asks, “What are you afraid of? Why are you being so careful with me?”

“Because I should have been careful with you before. If you are going to die, Will, it won’t be because of a medical oversight on my part.”

Will skims his good hand over the surface of the water, which is now only lukewarm. “I’m different...” he says quietly. “Aren’t I? Since it happened?”

“Only you can be sure of that.”

“But do I seem different?”

Hannibal cocks his head to one side and studies Will, while Will’s eyes follow the movement of his own hand. “Some of your characteristics have become more noticeable, but you don’t seem like someone else, if that’s what concerns you.”

“What characteristics?”

“Well,” Hannibal muses, now also tracking the movement of Will’s hand. “For example, before your stroke, one might simply have thought you the brooding type. Now, you have the most spectacular mood swings.”

The corner of Will’s mouth lifts slightly and he lets out a breath of laughter.

“You are chronically fatigued, where, before, you were simply tired and overworked. You were a little depressed before, understandably, but the depression appears to have grown much worse.”

Hannibal reaches out and catches Will’s hand in his own, forcing his gaze. “I would add that you seem more prone to adopting hopelessness.”

“I’d just started feeling better when it happened. I’m tired of getting fucked over by my own body.” He looks as though he might have more to say, but he simply lowers his eyes to Hannibal’s forearm and studies the intricacy of veins and the fine hairs there.

“Do you feel you are benefitting from our conversations?” Hannibal queries, when Will doesn’t continue speaking.

Will slides down in the tub until the water is up to his chin. “I recognize I’m better off than I would be if I didn’t talk about things.”

Hannibal chuckles softly. “That is certainly an improvement.”

Will manages a small smile, though he doesn’t lift his head. After a moment’s uncertainty, he whispers, “Honestly... I just want to go home.”

Hannibal’s voice remains soft. “I thought as much.”

Without raising his eyes, Will leans over slightly and rests his forehead on Hannibal’s exposed arm. “Sorry.”

Abigail is jerked out of her reflections by Julia asking, “What is your plan, Abigail? Do you know what you want to do once you finish your studies?” They don’t ask about her past, but it seems her future is fair game.
“I don’t know,” Abigail answers lamely, and means it. Her plans have been constructed, deconstructed, reconstructed, a hundred times over in the past few months. Her heart and mind ache for the simplicity of the goals she’d had when she first asked Margot to tutor her. She clears her throat and says, a little less mousy, “I’m still figuring that out, I guess.”

“You can do a lot of self-discovery with a few years on your own,” Margot puts in. “You’ll figure it out one day. There’s no rush.”

Abigail just nods. Margot is lying, too. She and Margot are liars, and the Ingrams are lovely, and she wants to go home, but Hannibal and Will are lying more than anyone.

A short while later, Margot offers to drive her back to Hannibal’s. The good nights happen in a tangle of hugs and kisses. Even Margot deals everyone a quick embrace, so Abigail lets herself become part of the scramble, and then the three of them – Margot, Judy, and Abigail – are outside in the warm, clear night air.

They don’t talk much on the way to Baltimore, but Abigail is too tired to try and discern if that’s because Margot and Judy are actually fighting. At Hannibal’s house, she gathers her purse and Margot’s gift for her, thanks them, and steps out onto the pavement. When she reaches Hannibal’s door, she turns and waves blindly at the figures behind the tinted glass.

She’s lying about not being lonely.

Chapter End Notes

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03, @weesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Distinctly Putrefactive (A Continued Perusal of Dead Bodies)

Chapter Summary

Will gets reacquainted with his old friend, whiskey. He and pretty much all of his relationships get better-worse, because why the fuck would anything be simple? Also, in case anyone has forgotten, we are reminded that Jack is THE WORST.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: graphic descriptions of crime scenes, disturbing imagery, fucked up nightmares, gore

Trigger Warnings: alcoholism, self-harm

In the weeks that follow, Will is shuttled back and forth between Quantico and Wolf Trap in a black SUV that rolls into his driveway early each morning. At the end of the day, some faceless agent drives him home again.

The fall semester begins. Will composes his lectures and pores over case files, just like he used to. On good days, he is even more productive than he used to be. Tests and assignments are marked immediately and thoroughly – extensive notes and corrections filling the margins, his commentary less scornful than it had been in the past.

On bad days, the material he chooses to orate is clipped on each slide, resulting in his lectures ending early, and the slightly desperate assignment of in-class work to fill the last half-hour. The most he asks his students to hand in are summaries and compact profiles – things he can easily check. He doesn’t make the same mistake he had with the seminar, of assigning full-length papers that took him hours to get through so that, by the time he was finished, so was the weekend. When he’s dropped off at home, he sits in a cold sweat on the porch, and the migraine that lies coiled in wait all day rips mercilessly through his skull.

Some nights he wakes up well after sundown, slumped against the railing with his diminishing store of whiskey close at hand. Furious with himself, he crawls to the door and opens it for the dogs, who either want in or out, and are hungry regardless. The guilt he experiences at seeing their forlorn faces adds to the ever-deepening well, but, though he vows every time to never let it happen again, it does.

Few days fall anywhere between good and bad.

Abigail comes to stay with him on weekends. Her concerns about Will staying in Wolf Trap alone continue to fall on deaf ears, and it usually takes her most of Friday night and Saturday morning to stop feeling prickly about it. She spends Saturday afternoons at Ella’s, helping her plant and then tend to her new herb garden.
The work week following Hannibal’s and Ella’s respective dinner parties is a particularly grueling one for Abigail. Margot and Judy haven’t resolved whatever it is they are in disagreement about, and Margot has regressed deep into her depression. Every other day, it seems, she spends the morning in Mason’s chamber, emerges stony-faced, and goes back to bed for the entire afternoon. She doesn’t work out with Barney, or eat lunch with Abigail. Judy picks up the slack, but she is already stretched thin, so Abigail ends up transferring fewer calls and taking more messages.

Abigail barely even sees Barney, whose free time is taken up carrying out Mason’s directions regarding some nefarious project or another. Apparently, Mason has sent for Cordell, and he’s expected to arrive in less than a month. Barney tells Abigail he’s simply securing his job. Abigail doesn’t ask for particulars. Her friendship with Barney is the only one that isn’t strained at the moment, so she doesn’t really want to know. They have a mutually-unspoken pact to ignore the worst in one other, in order to continue enjoying the best.

So, that Saturday, wanting nothing more at the end of the day than to make up with Will and sleep, she ignores the image her mind conjures of Hannibal’s disapproving face, and picks up a pizza on her way home from Ella’s.

“Want to watch a movie?” she asks Will when she gets in, holding the pizza above her head and shooing the dogs away with her free hand.

Will looks up from formatting an exam on his computer and blinks at her for a moment. “Sure,” he says, a little absently, turning back to his work.

“You okay?” She manages to get the door shut with the dogs outside in the hallway, and puts the pizza, now safe, down on the coffee table.

“Yeah,” he says, shaking himself out of it. “I’m just finishing up here. Give me a minute.”

While waiting, she goes to her room to retrieve her laptop and change into sweatpants. It seems like the appropriate attire for the lazy evening she intends on having. Back in the living room, she flops onto the couch next to Will and searches online for something to stream.

She flicks through a library of horror-comedies, thinking it a safe bet for their first movie-watching experience together. Something mindless and fun that might appeal to both their senses of humour. She queues up “Feast,” laughing quietly to herself, and is halfway through her first slice of pizza when Will finally closes the document he’s working on.

“Hey, nice laptop,” he comments, shutting his own off and sliding it under the sofa out of the way.

“I know, right? Margot gave it to me.”

“That was pretty generous.”

Abigail nods, not looking at him. “It was a present. Ready?”

“Yeah. Present for what?”

Abigail stretches her foot out and presses the space bar with her toe to start the movie. Then she slouches back down against the cushions with another slice of pizza. “For doing well on my exam.”

Will stops chewing and he’s thinking so loud she can practically hear each word before he says it. “I didn’t know you were all done. When was the exam?”
“A few weeks ago.” She shrugs. “You’ve been busy.”

Very quietly, Will mutters, “Not really.”

Abigail can tell he wants her to reassure him, to tell him it’s okay, but, tonight, she just doesn’t feel like it. She goes to the hall and tosses her torn up crusts to the dogs. They lick her hands appreciatively and make no further attempts to rush the door.

The opening scene – already fantastically gory – finishes. Will isn’t even looking at the screen. She feels a bristle of irritation at his expression. It’s definitely egocentric somehow. Whether it’s self-pity or self-loathing, she can’t be sure, but it doesn’t make much of a difference.

“Hey!” She snaps her fingers in front of his face before collapsing back onto the couch. “Get out of your head.” She wriggles down until she’s lying comfortably with a good view of the screen, unapologetically digging the balls of her feet into the side of Will’s thigh. She considers telling him just how well she did, but thinks it would probably make him feel even worse, and she doesn’t want to spoil her success. Her success.

He opens his mouth to say something, but she shushes him and jabs his leg with her heel, pretending to be interested in the dialogue, which is clearly unimportant at this juncture. About a quarter of the way through the movie, her knees start feeling stiff. One foot falls asleep and she shifts uncomfortably.

Will tugs her ankles up onto his lap so she can stretch her legs.

“Thanks,” she yawns.

He pats her shin bone and gives her a small smile. After a few minutes, he squeezes her ankle gently and whispers, “It’s really great about your exam.”

Her irritation rapidly dissolves into the customary fond exasperation. She doesn’t look away from the screen, but a cheeky smile spreads over her face. “Yeah, I know.”

“If you’re mad at me, you can say so.”

“I would.” She yawns again and rubs her eyes. “It’s just really hard to stay mad at you.”

In line with her plans for a restful evening, she’s fast asleep ten minutes later.

Will has almost entirely regained the use of his left arm by the second week of classes. During lectures, however, he keeps his bad hand in his pocket, to spare his students the sight of it. It is pale and clammy, like some sort of shellfish without a shell, and the odour it gives off when he’s required to use it for anything is distinctly putrefactive. He can barely bring himself to look at it. Once he decides what task it needs to perform, he averts his eyes and lets it be done.

One month into the semester, Agent Mapp summons him to her office to sign the contract she’d spoken of.

“Did Judy draw this up?” he asks, pinching one of the many red tabs between his thumb and forefinger. He frowns at the idea of the two of them discussing him and his work, especially in a legal capacity, as though he’s a disabled third party too inept to know what’s best for himself.

Mapp frowns at his frown. “She offered.”
Will sighs.

“But no, this is entirely my doing. A little flair added by the legal team, maybe.” Her frown disappears when she sees him fingering the red tabs. She is suddenly amused. “I may have picked up some of Judy’s bad habits in our time as roommates.”

Will continues to look suspicious. As he leaves through the contract, however, his suspicion morphs into embarrassment, and from embarrassment, inevitably, into guilt. Beyond an extremely generous fee-for-service arrangement, the contract includes continued transportation to and from Quantico, on the FBI’s dime, and requires Will to attend therapy at least once a week, also paid for by the Bureau.

At this point, Will looks up and opens his mouth to speak, but Mapp looks far away, so he decides against protesting. His aborted movements are enough to bring her gaze back to him, however, and, on seeing where his finger lies on the page, Mapp herself broaches the subject.

“You sessions wouldn’t be with Hannibal, of course. The Bureau won’t fund that, given your relationship.”

“I know.”

“You seem upset.”

“Never liked therapy.”

“This is not a part of the contract I’m willing to negotiate.”

“I figured.”

Agent Mapp is mute for a long time. When Will looks up, her long, elegant fingers are bunched together, massaging along her brow.

“I didn’t mean that to be as rude as it sounded,” he mumbles ruefully.

“I know.” She presses her fingertips to her mouth, contemplating something. “I don’t want to have this conversation again, Will,” she begins at length. “Because I’m not the most adroit at handling awkward topics. However, I need you to understand something.” As though to ground herself before speaking again, she lays both hands down, palms flat against the desk.

Will nods apprehensively, wanting very much to simply disappear. He feels a muscle twitch in his cheek and clamps his jaw down around it.

“I’m not insisting on weekly therapy sessions because I think there’s something wrong with you.”

Will clenches his teeth harder.

“I don’t think you’re delicate, or damaged, or unstable. I think there’s something wrong with the world…” Her voice sounds strained for a moment, then she straightens up and clears her throat. “And you know this better than most, because you do your job perhaps too well.”

Will’s throat is aching so fiercely, he can’t respond, either to agree or disagree. His molars grind against each other as his jaw tightens even more.

“Do you understand what I’m trying to say?” she asks, and, God help him, she’s now looking straight at him. Her tone borders on fervent when she concludes, “You’re not the problem, Will.”

Then, as though his traitorous body’s singular goal is to prove her wrong, he starts fucking crying,
right there in her office.

Will caves when Liza Lake offers to take him to Baltimore that evening. Even though it’s a much longer drive, she gives him the option every time she’s tasked with chauffeuring him, and, this time, he doesn’t have it in him to say no.

“I’m falling apart,” he announces flatly, as he and Hannibal sit at the dining room table, waiting for Abigail to arrive home. A signed copy of the contract lies between them.

Hannibal draws the papers towards himself. “How does Agent Mapp suggest we keep you together?”

“How do you think?”

“Therapy.”

“Surprise.”

“I assume with someone other than myself.”

“She wants the department to be able to pay for it.”

“That’s good of her.”

“She also said that it’s none of her business, but it would appear there is some strain on our relationship that might be alleviated by my speaking to someone else about work.”

“She’s right.”

“About it being none of her business?”

“Yes.”

“Is there a strain on our relationship?”

“When has there ever not been?”

“You’re not going to kill her for saying that, are you?”

“Don’t be absurd, Will.”

When Abigail finally arrives, the three of them eat in subdued silence until Hannibal brings up the contract again.

“I would like to discuss why it is you feel guilty at the suggestion of the BAU finally starting to take care of you.”

Will feels his nerves twinge like elastic bands snapping, hot and stinging, against his skin. “Jesus, do we have to?”

“Um, yeah,” Abigail says, narrowing her eyes at him.

Will pushes his plate away, appetite dissolved. With quiet finality, he declares, “I don’t deserve it.”
Abigail’s mouth opens, and she already seems on the brink of yelling at him, but Hannibal speaks first.

“May I point out that the only reason for you to feel this way is Jack’s near-constant implication of the idea?”

“How’s that?”

Abigail scoffs. “Have you forgotten how he always acted like he was doing you a favour?”

“So often I wish I could bring Jack back and slaughter him again for you.” Hannibal’s tone is superficially casual, but his gaze on Will is so heated, he looks angry.

“Why? Why do you two blame Jack for everything?”

“He was manipulative – and, before you say anything – he manipulated you with your best interests nowhere near his heart. He pretended he cared for you and considered you a friend, but he’d have had you believe anything if he thought it would improve your performance. He’d have kept you in the kennels with the police dogs, and convinced you that you deserve it.”

“I’m a grown man. I don’t need to be coddled.”

Abigail stands abruptly. “You’re being real irritating, Will.” Without even excusing herself, she picks up her plate and stalks into the kitchen. She doesn’t reappear.

Will swallows. “Look, I’m not an idiot,” he says, voice low but defensive. “Sure, Jack pretended he cared sometimes, but it was almost painfully transparent. He never had me fooled into thinking I wasn’t doing what I was doing alone.”

“Not consciously. You don’t have to form the words he is my friend in your mind in order to feel abandoned by that friend.”

Will shakes his head. “I’ve said it before, and I stand by it: abandonment requires expectation.”

“Sometimes that expectation is subconscious.” Hannibal pauses, and, for once, the moment of silence doesn’t seem strategically placed. “I wasn’t fully aware what I expected of you.”

Will loses the thread of the conversation after that. Why Hannibal would ever admit to being even a single step behind his own emotions is beyond him. His generalized uneasiness, and the bleak feeling that accompanies it, follow Will into his dreams that night.

The heavy rain does not put out the fires. It only obscures his vision so he can barely see the outline of Abigail, a few feet in front of him. Thunder rumbles, the sound pressing against his eardrums and resonating painfully inside his skull. It sounds discordant, like the flapping of wings trying to drown out the stamping of hooves. He looks over his shoulder, expecting to see the Ravenstag, but there is only the slick black pathway lined with quivering flames. He feels hollow.

He forces himself onward, squinting through the steam arising where thick raindrops crack against the road before him. He thinks he’s caught up with her when he sees a rippling silhouette not too far ahead. She’s waiting for him, and he’s so grateful, he almost collapses right then and there.

Her hand, held out to him through the elements, looks almost liquid. Afraid of losing her again in the storm, he strains forward to grab hold of it. He breathes a sigh of relief that is lost on the wind when
she squeezes his hand back, and grins when she squeezes a little too hard.

She doesn’t let up, though. Not when he laughs uncertainly and says, Alright, Abigail, Jesus. Not when he wriggles his fingers against hers and complains. Not when he stops smiling and the joints in his hand start to grind against each other, or when he tries to pull away. The grip of her hand is crushing and deadly for something that looks so fluid.

It tightens, and he fears his hand will actually break. Abigail! he gasps.

Hurry up! she yells from somewhere further down the road.

It isn’t her hand clasped around his, squeezing the life out of it. The blurry figure continues to ripple through the sheets of rain separating them, but he can see clearly, now, what has him manacled.

Not liquid.

Smoke.

Black smoke that doesn’t disperse in the wind that thrashes against them. It curls around his wrist, up his arm, and around his neck, though it only constricts his hand. Compared to the fractals of pain created where it tightens, the smoke feels soft, almost comforting, everywhere else.

When it has him all wrapped up, it simply holds him there, just as it had done in the water as Will approached his frigid death. He’s not in danger the way he had been then. It doesn’t matter if he’s stuck here for a moment.

But Abigail is waiting for him up ahead. Or maybe she’s gone on. Would she come back for him?

The Carpenter’s seventh kill is a complete mystery to Will. Found at low tide, kneeling on the breakers in shallow seawater, the victim is arguably not even displayed. He is trapped at neck and wrists in a pillory that had been constructed barely half-heartedly. The planks of wood are unfinished, and each of the posts is simply wedged between large rocks to keep the contraption stationary.

Will paces along the water’s edge, watching as the body is hauled onto the beach and waiting for the swarm of photographers and agents to disperse. Two techs in waders free the pillory with apparent ease, and Will finds himself looking down at the victim with disgust. Anger, even. Neither his hands nor feet had been bound. You could have gotten yourself out of this. He shudders at his own thinking.

That evening in Baltimore, Will fingers Hannibal to completion in the kitchen and swallows down every last drop of cum. He does it without the slightest pretense of romance. Hannibal says nothing, just lets him, but watches Will carefully for the rest of the evening. He is wound up tighter than ever, and barely manages the most skeletal of conversations with Abigail over dinner.

That night, Will startles awake with a violence that almost sends him over the side of the bed. He guiltily turns to see if he’d woken Hannibal, then crawls tiredly out of bed and walks with heavy limbs out of the room. Hannibal watching through his lashes. The door to the guest room clicks shut quietly. Off and on until dawn, Hannibal can hear muffled yells and the sound of limbs thrashing in sheets as though Will is wrestling himself in his dreams.
The next morning, Will prepares for work with a kind of maniacal efficiency and, when Hannibal and Abigail emerge into the kitchen, breakfast is already made.

Will is seated at the counter with his coffee and the case file, bags under his eyes but leg bouncing restlessly. “You’re coming in today too, right?” he asks Hannibal, with a hint of desperation in his tone.

“Yes. We will go together. I’ve already notified Agent Lake.”

“Stop that!” Abigail sets down the carafe of steaming coffee and reaches across the counter to slap Will’s hand where his nails are digging into the already irritated skin of his forearm. It looks like he’d scraped his wrist raw in his sleep. “What are you doing?” she demands sharply.

Will starts to mount a weak defense, but breaks down after only a few moments under her piercing gaze. He ends up simply shrugging uncomfortably and admitting, “I didn’t notice, okay?”

She rolls her eyes and continues pouring coffee into a travel mug. “I swear to God, you’re like a little kid sometimes. Are you going to stop scratching, or do I need to buy you mittens?”

Will can’t help but smile at the familiar precocious scolding. “Sorry, Mom.”

She sticks her tongue out at him as she goes to rinse out the empty glass beaker. She gives them each a kiss on the cheek, and breezes out the door, tossing the words “Have fun looking at dead people!” over her shoulder.

As they enter the BAU, they see Price coming out of the café carrying a drinks tray loaded with various caffeinated beverages. “Conference room,” he tells them, pausing to wait for them by the elevators. “Agent Mapp is briefing the entire department on the Carpenter.”

On the ride up, Will catches himself scratching at his own arm again and quickly rolls down his sleeves, shoving his hands deep into his pockets to remove the temptation.

Price, in his usual easy, friendly manner, gestures towards the empty chairs by Zeller. Zeller is chatting up a very pink Liza Lake. Will shakes his head.

“I don’t blame you.” Price puts the tray down on the table and waves his hand in front of Zeller’s face. “Coffee, lovebirds. You’re welcome.” He extricates one of the cups from the tray and walks off to deliver it to Agent Mapp.

Will retreats to the back wall and leans against it, too full of nervous energy to sit down. The meeting begins. Hannibal stands beside him, but, astonishingly, keeps his hands to himself. As the hour wears on, Will finds himself wishing he wouldn’t.

Mapp concludes her presentation with the latest series of crime scene photos. “This one appears to be a bit of an anomaly. Cause of death: water in the lungs. Awful, of course, but hardly in keeping with his recent pattern of escalation. Agent Price, Agent Zeller, your findings so far?”

“Subluxation at the radiocarpal and carpometacarpal ligaments was likely purposeful. It rendered the victim’s hands useless, so the Carpenter didn’t even need to tie him up.”

Will feels a stab of guilt, and simultaneously feels some of the nervous energy ebb away.

“Could it be the work of a copycat?” The query comes from a young agent Will recognizes as a
recent graduate.

Mapp catches Will’s eye. She hasn’t sat down, and her fingertips rest on the table top as she leans forward like a runner waiting for the starter pistol. Will can’t tell which answer she wants to hear, yes or no.

“We don’t think so,” Zeller says. He glances over at Will and clears his throat before continuing in a tight voice. “The more we look at it, the more Will’s theory makes sense…”

“Our guy is having a crisis of faith,” Price finishes for Zeller, who is now staring at the table, looking deeply annoyed at his own admission.

“For those of you who don’t know, this is Special Agent Will Graham,” Mapp announces, extending her arm to direct the team’s attention to where he’s standing. “Can you add anything, Will?”

Will shifts uncomfortably under the collective weight of their gazes. “No,” he says, looking slightly to the left of Mapp’s eyes. “Not right now.”

Mapp nods and switches off the projector. “Okay, then. The copycat theory isn’t off the table. Moving forward, though, we will treat this latest murder as one of the Carpenter’s. You have all been brought up to speed and, if it wasn’t before, this case is now your top priority. Questions can be directed to Agent Price, Agent Zeller, or myself.” As though she’d heard Will’s relieved exhalation, one corner of her mouth turns up and she adds, “If you have anything to discuss with Special Agent Graham or Dr. Lecter, you will please speak with me first. Thank you, everybody. Dismissed.”

The room clears quickly, the agents’ sense of purpose buoyed up after the briefing.

Hannibal turns to Will. “Shall we?”

Unsurprisingly, very little additional insight is gleaned from their continued perusal of the dead bodies.

Price motions them over to the latest victim. “Aside from the hands and wrists, there don’t appear to be any injuries.”

“All the other victims had at least some blunt force trauma going on,” Zeller puts in.

Mapp frowns down at the body. “Explain why this doesn’t point to a copycat?”

Zeller shrugs. “A copycat would want to replicate the murderer’s M.O. as closely as possible,” he answers, simply.

“Not necessarily,” Will says, after significant hesitation. “The style, maybe. Something obvious – an homage to the original killer.”

Observing Will’s general reluctance to speak, Hannibal injects a supplementary argument. “The cause of death, also, is often different, since the copycat may only be familiar with the end product of the killer’s design.”

The others look up at Hannibal with interest.

“That doesn’t refute the argument for a copycat – cause of death here was drowning. What am I missing, gentlemen?”
Zeller looks sour. “A hunch, basically.”

Price takes on the character of a doting uncle, patting Zeller’s arm as he explains to the others, “Zee is still coming to terms with the idea that human intuition has merit.”

Mapp flashes the two of them a brief smile before turning to Will, eyebrows raised expectantly.

He provides her with the best explanation he can muster. “There’s nothing celebratory about this kill. Whoever murdered this person wasn’t paying tribute to anything, or anyone.”

Hannibal’s phone buzzes audibly in his pocket, and he excuses himself to take the call. Will feels exposed and vulnerable when Mapp nods at him to continue.

He clears his throat nervously. “It still feels like the Carpenter. Maybe his heart just wasn’t in it this time.”

Price exhales loudly through his nose. “So, either this is the work of a terrible copycat – like, really terrible – or a serial killer who’s lost his chops.”

“That’s a pretty good summary,” Will agrees.

Zeller snickers. “You never say enough to warrant summarization.” He immediately looks to Mapp, expecting to be in trouble.

Mapp’s eyes are fixed on the body, though, and she doesn’t appear to have heard the jibe. Her arms are folded, and her expression is rather stormy and far away.

“What is it, Boss?” Price urges.

Mapp chews on the inside of her cheek for a moment before she sighs and says, “This may sound callous, but I prefer investigating crimes that have some logic, or at least passion behind them.” She sounds far from callous. Her tone is upset, bordering on angry. “A serial killer with no conviction, continuing to kill despite losing his chops…” Her hand travels to her mouth and her fingers come to rest against her lips like they do so often when she’s lost in troubling thoughts. She shakes her head and doesn’t continue.

Will feels as though he’s standing next to Mapp on the banks of her roiling mind, a river waiting to sweep them away, the currents of her darker thoughts waiting to pull them under. “It’s a waste,” he whispers. Thankfully, no one hears him.

The room is quiet for a few more moments. Eventually, Price attempts to reassure her. “Senseless,” he agrees.

Hannibal returns then, and pulls Will aside. “That was Abigail,” he informs Will in a low voice. “She plans on staying in Wolf Trap tonight, and wants to know if she should pick you up.”

Will is surprised at his own hesitation, and even more surprised when the word no falls from his mouth. For the rest of the day, he can’t bear to look Hannibal in the eye. His gaze does, however, come to rest often on Special Agent Ardelia Mapp – and the darkness that clouds her face when she considers this seventh kill.

On the drive back to Baltimore, Will regains some lucidity and suddenly blurts out, “I want to talk about something.”
“Please do,” Hannibal responds smoothly.

“We’ve discussed our philosophies and standards before,” Will begins. “If we get away—”

Hannibal doesn’t hesitate to interrupt with, “When we get away.”

Will doesn’t correct himself. “We’re going to need to make some adjustments.”

“How do you mean, Will?”

“You’d kill for me, yes?”

“Quite happily.”

“Would you do the opposite?”

“In your ideal world, I would stop killing.” Hannibal’s tone is light, as though they are merely hypothesizing about the morals of two abstract men, rather than attempting to form some understanding of what their future together will be like.

Will shakes his head. “I haven’t believed in ideals in a long time.”

“Then, what do you see as the opposite of killing?”

“Saving a life,” Will answers simply.

Hannibal is silent.

“Would you save a life for me?”

Hannibal’s tone darkens slightly when he answers, “I saved Abigail’s for you.”

“That’s a grey area. You saved her from yourself.” He takes a moment to study Hannibal’s body language. His expression is veiled, but Will can see tension gathering across his shoulders and his grasp on the steering wheel tighten. He’d rather not back Hannibal into a corner, so, after a moment or two, he clarifies, “I’m suggesting a compromise.”

Hannibal’s eyes don’t leave the road, but he tilts his head contemplatively. “For the sake of argument, let us say, yes, I would save a life, if that’s what you wanted.”

“Then this is what I propose. You changed careers once. If- when we get away, you change back.”

“From psychiatry to surgery.”

“Every time you take a life, you save another. I won’t ask who your victims are. I won’t stop you. A life for a life, that’s all.”

Chapter End Notes

Beta’d by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr).
My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Chapter Summary

Shit gets real with the Carpenter, so it's all hands on deck at the BAU. Will receives some hate-love from Zeller, and some well-deserved concern from Ardelia. Hannibal is a gigantic bag of dicks. Will puts one of those dicks in his mouth.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: crime scenes, disturbing imagery, graphic descriptions of gore, hallucinations, fucked up nightmares, blood (like, a fuck-ton of it)

Trigger Warnings: alcoholism, self-harm, semi-non-con

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal wakes to Will’s teeth scraping along his jaw and, before he’s even fully awake, their mouths are locked together. Will pulls his away abruptly with a wet sucking sound and noses roughly under his chin to expose his neck for similar treatment. He takes his mouth down his chest, over his nipples, his navel, dragging his lips along each of his ribs. He presses his face into his stomach momentarily, then sweeps down and takes Hannibal’s stiff cock in his mouth.

Hannibal groans, now fully alert. Will sucks him off feverishly, encouraged by the rough breaths that fall from Hannibal’s lips as he looks down at him.

He only leaves Hannibal’s dick alone for a moment to take each of his balls in his mouth then lick, apparently purposefully, over his hole. Then his lips are wrapped around him again and his fingers are thrust inside. Hannibal jerks in surprise and his lower back lifts off the bed. His fingers find their way into Will’s curls. Stroking down his face, he can feel that Will’s cheeks are flushed. He is gasping sloppily around Hannibal’s, breathing harsh and, clearly, not a priority. Will chokes a little, but works no less urgently, and his fingers twist inside him, pressing against as much of Hannibal as he can reach.

His need is incredible. As Hannibal’s thoughts coalesce, he is reminded of what a beautiful creature Will is. Hannibal has seen him caged, psychotic, abused, near dead, and, now, at the end of his rope. It is breathtaking, his desperation. Hannibal feels an exigent consuming desire to preserve him in this state. Perhaps even to relight fires he’d long ago put out. To draw forth everything that is destructive in Will and have it reside on the surface – a living display of entropy.

He is very near the edge by the time he makes his decision. “Stop it, Will.”

Will ignores his words and swallows him to the hilt.

Hannibal runs his fingers through his hair and strokes his cheek. “Will...”

Will shakes his head, as much as he can. He laves his tongue firmly from base to head, pausing there
to suck at the tip.

Hannibal hauls him up roughly by the hair, giving an involuntary grunt when Will’s fingers leave him. “Will, stop.”

Will collapses next to him, flinging his arm over his face, chest rising and falling rapidly as he catches his breath. He is completely flaccid.

Ignoring how painfully hard he is himself, Hannibal pushes Will’s arm away, cups his face in his hand and kisses him deeply. His hand then falls to Will’s neck, as do his lips, and he continues kissing him, regular and warm, until Will falls back asleep.

Then, he goes to the ensuite, locks the door, and finishes himself.

When Hannibal wakes the next morning, Will is stroking his chest with his fingertips. They comb through the hair there and track down to his navel before returning to the top of his sternum and making the journey again.

Will seems to know the moment he wakes up, though Hannibal barely moves and his eyes remain shut. “What did you mean when you said you need me too?”

“That is a heavy conversation to have first thing in the morning.” When these words are met with silence, Hannibal turns his head and looks up at Will.

Will’s eyes are brimming and fixed on where his hand has come to rest, against the flesh and bone over Hannibal’s heart. “I need you all the time now. What’s happening to me?”

“How flattering it would be if I were responsible for this vulnerability, this need.”

“Why don’t you just claim credit, then?” The tears still haven’t fallen.

“Because this killer is undeniably the greater factor. You’re working so hard to see the Carpenter; understand him; you don’t even know you’ve succeeded.”

“No, I know it. But it doesn’t matter now.”

“That is nowhere near the truth, Will. He has gone off track, certainly, but he hasn’t become a different person. He is the same Carpenter, only lost – perhaps even frightened.”

“I’m frightened.”

“You see? I wonder how much of the fear you feel is actually yours.”

“Does it matter?”

Hannibal reaches up and runs a hand through Will’s hair, which is once again wanting for a trim. “If it matters to you, then it matters.”

Will removes his hand from Hannibal’s chest and rolls onto his back. The tears have still not fallen, but they look ready and eager for gravity to have its way. “I can’t even remember what I wanted before you. I have to be near you all the time or I become... untethered. I can’t breathe. Everything hurts. But I don’t care, as long as you’re close by. It’s like you breathe for both of us – and I’m disappearing.” When he blinks, the tears get caught in his lashes, sparing his cheeks for a change. “I need to go home,” he concludes. “I need to see my dogs, go fishing, be outside...”
“You don’t need my permission, Will.”

“And yet I’m asking for it. See?”

Hannibal shifts onto his side, to study Will’s face further as he contemplates this. “I want you to be happy,” he says at length. “However, my tendency is to focus on the long game. What would make you happy right now?”

Will can’t answer because he simply doesn’t know. He finds part of himself – a larger part, this time – wishing Hannibal would take back the little control he’d given him. Stop him from doing anything, going anywhere, wanting anything, imagining anything besides their life together. But he can’t ask for this because he knows Hannibal would, and it would be cowardly, pretending to shrink from his duties because he’s not allowed, when it’s really because he’s afraid. Because he doesn’t want the responsibility. Because he just doesn’t want to do it anymore.

“I’m going to go home after my lectures tomorrow,” Will decides.

Hannibal lies back and is quiet for a long time. Will is about to say something – anything – to break the silence, when Hannibal suddenly, and somehow gracefully climbs on top of him, pressing his thigh against Will’s crotch provocatively.

“Very well,” he says softly into Will’s neck, before biting down and sucking. He pulls back to admire the teeth marks surrounding a quickly purpling bruise. “But you are here today…” He exhales breathily in Will’s ear when he feels him grow erect. “And you started something last night…” He bites slightly lower, then drags his teeth along Will’s clavicle. “Something that I intend to finish.” He presses their mouths together firmly.

“When did teeth come into play?”

“Roughly… now.” Hannibal lifts his head and smiles down at Will, baring those teeth.

Will swears for a moment that they glisten with blood, but Hannibal hasn’t even broken skin. His heart beats a little faster.

“I find it pleasing,” Hannibal continues. “The thought of marking you. Of giving you something to remember me by when you’re alone in your wilderness.”

Will moans, and they are both so hard so quickly, no response is necessary, or indeed possible for several minutes. “I thought you were going to lecture me,” Will says at last.

Hannibal is practically growling in his ear. “About?”

“Using sex… ah…” He grinds his hips against Hannibal’s. “…as an escape from…” He can’t finish the sentence; they are thrusting so heatedly against one another. Instead of trying to speak anymore, Will returns the favour and sucks some incriminating marks onto the flushed skin of Hannibal’s neck.

Hannibal hisses in approval when Will’s teeth graze his collar bone. “You’ll have plenty of time to consider that while you’re in Wolf Trap.” He grabs Will’s face between both hands. “I intend to be entirely selfish today.”

Any further discussion is too heavily punctuated with moans to be called conversation. Mostly Hannibal just murmurs, beautiful boy, and Will lets the misery he’d woken up with recede to the back of his mind.
The next day, Will is unable to go home right away as planned. Liza Lake – who had, in a moment of confident autonomy, appointed herself his official driver – is still in the lab running tests when he finishes his lectures. Unwilling to trouble anyone else for a ride, and even more unwilling to deal with the potential hurt doing so would cause Liza, he joins Price and Zeller in the adjacent morgue.

“Anything new?”

“Just an ID,” Price answers, shrugging. “Remember when that was helpful?”

“Just barely. It’s been a while.”

“This is insane,” Zeller grumbles. He’s frowning at the screen of his laptop, which is balanced on an empty gurney beside the seventh victim’s body. He doesn’t elaborate.

“Zee’s been re-cataloguing all the evidence for the entire case, to make sure that every possible test has been run on each piece. Once Liza’s done in there, we will have tested everything for traces of DNA, foreign material, particulates –”

“Three fucking times each,” Zeller adds hotly.

Will isn’t sure if he’s exaggerating, or if they really are so desperate for a break in the case, they’re chancing getting in trouble come audit time. “Could you send me a copy?”

“I’ll give you access to the entire goddamn database,” Zeller replies. For a change, his tone is crotchety but not decisively unkind. “Don’t count on being inspired by anything, though. We don’t have shit.”

A little while later, Agent Mapp enters, satchel and blazer in hand.

“Alright, Boss?” Price greets her.

“I have a meeting with the director of the Richmond field office this evening, and one at Norfolk in the morning, so I’ll be late getting in tomorrow.”

“You don’t seem very happy about that,” Zeller remarks.

Mapp is, indeed, wearing an irrepressible grimace. “Poor timing for this bureaucratic aside. Good afternoon, Agent Lake.”

Liza appears in the doorway and paces over to them with a handful of printouts. “Hi, Agent Mapp. All done.” She hands the sheaf of papers to Zeller, looking supremely unhappy. “I’ll just get my things,” she says apologetically to Will, and slinks out of the room again.

Zeller sighs. “Okay, I’ll add these in and email you a secure link later, Will.”

Will nods. “Thanks.”

“Hey, listen,” Zeller says, closing his laptop with the printouts folded inside.

Will looks up at him and raises his eyebrows.

“Sorry I’ve been ragging on you so much lately.”

Will tries not to narrow his eyes suspiciously. “You don’t have to apologize.”
“Yeah, I know. You’re a real prick most of the time, but I feel bad anyway.” He tucks the computer under his arm, salutes Agent Mapp, shoulders his way through the door, and disappears down the hall.

Mapp shakes her head, looking both exasperated and faintly amused.

“You have to admit, he’s getting better,” Price points out.

“I’m… baffled,” Will says.

“Actually, you’re bleeding.” Mapp indicates Will’s sleeve.

Will looks down and sees red seeping through the fabric covering his forearm.

“Lovely,” says Price. “Bandages in that drawer over there.” He nods towards the desk at the other end of the room.

Mapp sets her belongings down and follows Will over. “What happened?”

“I think I fell or something while I was sleeping,” Will mumbles. It might be true. Who could say anymore?

“Hm.” She rolls up his sleeve to assess the damage.

Will looks at the floor. “How bad is it?”

“It’s not great.” She doesn’t sound pleased.

Will continues to stare at his feet, feeling child-like and embarrassed. This is the second time he’s been called out on his apparent self-mutilation after failing to notice it himself.

She rips open an alcohol swab. “You’ve been scratching at it for days,” she observes sternly, cleaning the wheals on his arm and smoothing an adhesive bandage over the open one. When she’s finished, she says, quiet but firm, “I’d like to see that you’re taking care of yourself, Will. The jury’s still out on whether or not I should worry about you.” She gives him a covert smile before addressing Liza Lake, who has just re-entered. “Agent Lake, I’ll take Will home today.”

Lake looks puzzled. “Are you sure? He only lives fifteen minutes away from me...”

“I’m sure. I’ll be driving all over Virginia for the next twenty-four hours anyway, so it’s really no trouble.”

“Are you picking him up in the morning?”

“I’m afraid you’ll have to do that, Agent, otherwise he will miss his first lecture.”

“Okay. I’ll see you tomorrow then, Mr. Graham.” To Price, she says, blushing profusely, “I think I’ll go see if Zee needs help.”

“I thought we could do dinner next weekend,” Ardelia suggests, as they pull out of the near-empty parking lot. “At my place – my turn to host.”

Will yanks his sleeve over the bandage, twisting at the cuff with his fingers. “Okay. That sounds nice.”
“Will I finally get to meet Sarah?”

“She’s not very happy with me right now,” he divulges, staring out the front window, trying his damnedest not to sound too miserable. Abigail had been frigid with him since he’d declined her offer to pick him up the other day.

Ardelia hums contemplatively. “Are you sure it’s you she’s not happy with?”

He really isn’t. Her tone had seemed icier the past two evenings, but, if he’s honest with himself, Abigail barely talks to him at all anymore. He has no idea what to do, but is paralyzed by the certainty that anything he does will just make it worse. “There’s not a lot I’m sure of these days.”

“She’s a teenage girl,” Ardelia points out reassuringly. “She probably just misses her mother.”

Will chews the inside of his lip and is silent.

“I’m sorry,” she amends. “It was a loss for you as well.”

Will can’t think of anything to say in response. His organs feel like they are sliding past one another, rearranging themselves slowly and purposelessly. This conversation is bizarre. His head aches. He runs his hand along his jaw. He needs a shave. “Sarah’s tough,” he says after a while.

“Hm. Like her father.”

Will pinches the bridge of his nose.

“You don’t have to pretend it’s easy, Will. Even the most stoic of field agents lets a story or two slip when trying to balance work and a family life.”

“There’s no story.”

“You still haven’t been to see your new therapist. I’m not above annoying you into it.”

A small smile escapes Will at that. “Married too young and all. Isn’t that the usual story?”

“Well, if you think Sarah’s faulting you for that… You only have to wait until she falls in love for the first time.”

Will raises his eyebrows. “I’d rather she blamed me for the rest of her life than run away with the first boy she falls for.”

Ardelia sighs softly. “My sage advice might be the reason I’m still alone.” She chuckles. “I’d better stick to criminal apprehension, and leave father-daughter relationships to professionals.”

Will shrugs. “You’re trying to be nice. I don’t mind.”

They are quiet for most of the remaining drive. When Ardelia lets Will out at the end of his driveway, he stands there long after she’s gone, feeling utterly empty.

Over the next few days, Will’s appetite for sexual pleasure slowly returns to its usual state of near non-existence. He stops missing Hannibal. He stops wanting company. By the end of the week, things have almost gone back to the way they had been before any of this happened. Almost. He is frightened by how much time is passing, but can’t stand the thought of it moving any slower. He can’t pretend anymore – even to himself – that he isn’t just surviving. He can reach out and touch the
glass ceiling their family had been born under: it consists of every passing day in the limbo he’d promised Abigail they’d be free of. He’s tired, every second of every day. In the morning, when he can’t think of anything to look forward to (today, this week, next month, or any time in the future in which he is still alive), he has no choice but to shut his mind down in order to get the cumbersome machinery of his body out of bed.

Hannibal begins consulting at Quantico with regularity, and makes no secret of his intention to keep an eye on Will. He continues to take Will’s hand sometimes. That hand. Will knows he does it on purpose, knows, somewhere deep down, that he’s trying to help. He still feels embarrassed and repulsive. “I feel like I’m violating you,” he confesses on a particularly bad day.

The feeling doesn’t go away. Disgust becomes a fixture in Will’s palette of self-centered negativity. He has his arm back. It’s weak and largely uncooperative, but it’s his, and it’s normal. Does he really need the hand? He should have asked Miriam how she liked her prosthetic. Only, she wouldn’t have answered him. She knows he belongs in her place.

When Abigail can no longer stand Will’s vacant looks and delayed responses to her simplest attempts to engage him, she turns to Hannibal for answers. “Why is Will acting so weird?”

“I don’t believe Will is acting weird at all,” he says. “His behaviour is appropriate, given his circumstances.” Hannibal’s voice is light. It could be mistaken for soothing, were his words less condescending. “I’m not sure you’d understand, Abigail.”

She folds her arms and glares at him. By the time she realizes he’s looking to get a rise out of her, he’s already succeeded. “You think you know Will so well.”

“I do.”

“I know him too. I can tell when he’s acting weird.”

“You’re a child, Abigail.”

Abigail doesn’t allow his words to sting her into a retreat. Instead, she keeps her shoulders square, and shifts her weight so it’s distributed equally between her feet. “You don’t pay attention to what’s important,” she challenges him.

Hannibal’s eyes glint with cold, callous amusement. “How he doesn’t like to be called Mr. Graham, for instance? Is that the sort of important insight I lack?”

Abigail’s face colours, but she doesn’t back down. “It’s important that he really doesn’t like it. And why he doesn’t like it.”

“I suppose you know why.”

“I do, actually.”

“Tell me.”

“People always call him that when they first meet him, ’cause it’s polite and whatever. Meeting new people is stressful for him. It’s a negative association.” She hurries through the explanation, knowing she’s never been able to keep the wobble out of her voice for long once she starts getting worked up.
Hannibal’s emotionless smile doesn’t change. “Very astute, Dr. Hobbs. Perhaps you are the authority on Will’s psyche after all.”

The comment is absolutely dripping with disdain. As though to cancel out her thirty second stand, his words and tone reduce Abigail to the smallest and most insignificant she’s felt in a long time.

“I’m not trying to be an authority,” she mumbles, lowering her eyes to the floor. After a pause, she adds, almost inaudibly, “Why do you hate me so much?”

Hannibal doesn’t even bother to look at her when he says, “I can’t hear you, Abigail.”

A little louder, but still practically a whisper, she says, “Nothing,” and quietly leaves the room.

The tide is receding. With every wave, a little more of the rocky beach is exposed. In time, the rocks are smoothed into dark, glassy pebbles, which in turn degrade into a stretch of black sand. But the sand does not give way beneath his feet, and each step echoes against the glossy hardwood of Hannibal’s kitchen floor. It is littered with pools of deep red. Blood trickles from them in streams that loosely follow the grain, then branch into rivulets that mimic, horrifically, a network of human blood vessels. He hears the sound of water lapping against his shoes, but doesn’t dare look down.

It’s Friday, mid-October. Agent Mapp appears partway through his last section writing their midterms. She beckons him out into the hallway and produces a folder of freshly developed photos. She looks like she’s had some sleepless nights recently, but manages a wry smile when she hands them over. “In case you need something to pass the time in there.”

Will flips through them, already feeling tendrils of protective numbness spread throughout his chest in a likely futile attempt at insulating himself against this fresh horror.

A Catherine Wheel. The Carpenter is clearly back on track. It might even be his masterpiece. A heap of splintered wood and bone, splashes of red darkening the concrete surrounding it. There is the suggestion of a human form in the warped angles of broken limbs, but only that – just a hint.

“Body in Washington?” Will asks, his voice flat.

“No, it’s here.” Ardelia frowns slightly. “Do you need to see it in the flesh?”

Will shrugs. “Might help.”

Ardelia looks skeptical, but forces herself not to object. Instead, she calls HR and has them send someone down to invigilate in Will’s absence. They cross the quad in silence, but, as they near the science building, Ardelia speaks up. “I know you don’t like to be the subject of concern, but you don’t appear to be feeling very well. Have you had time to eat anything today?”

“I’ve had the time, just not the desire.”

“So, you’re alright?” When he nods, she simply says, “Alright,” again, and leads the way into the lab.

Will hesitates in the doorway. “Did you ask Hannibal to come?”

“I believe he’s on his way.”
Will doesn’t recognize the anxiety until it starts to dissipate. He wonders, again, when and why this need arose. As usual, he wonders without any real intention of looking for the answer.

The victim had been so badly beaten, that the sex, age, and features were initially indiscernible. It had been impossible to extricate the corpse at the crime scene, so the entire contraption now sits in the middle of the lab, with Zeller and Price attempting to scrape and lift the mangled body free.

Will digs his nails into his wrist subconsciously. He can see Liza Lake through the glass wall, working away at her bench, looking miserable. Everyone has a frown of some sort on. Zeller appears particularly testy, but even Price lacks his usual enthusiasm, and the smile he greets Will with is perceivably forced.

“Hope you gleaned something from all that data.”

Will’s fingernails scratch more insistently at his wrist. “Fragments of insight... Seems like he’s back on track...”

“Huh.”

“How much longer is this going to go on?” Mapp asks the question so quietly, she might have been asking herself.

Will stops scraping at his arm to rub his hand over his face and inhale deeply. “I’d intuit he’s nearing his magnum opus.”

“Yeah, well, I’m not gonna sit around and wait for the grand finale,” Zeller growls.

“How many more?” Price asks solemnly.

“One or two...”

Zeller becomes combative. “Based on your intuition?”

“Agent Zeller,” Mapp warns him sharply.

“I’m sorry, Agent Mapp.” Zeller speaks loudly, pulling off his gloves – one bundled inside the other – and throwing them into a biohazard bin with unnecessary force. “I’m sorry,” he repeats. “But this is getting old.”

Will’s sense of self stirs long enough to feel battered by the accusatory tone, and the inevitable accusatory words that will follow. He fights to keep his voice even as he asks, wearily, “What do you want from me, Zee?”

“A goddam explanation once in a while!” Zeller’s overly animated arm movements are, for once, not remotely amusing. “We’re in here, trying to peel an actual human being off a torture wheel, and you just stroll in and drop these insights – like you always do! You never give us reasons. You couldn’t even tell us why the shit we’ve been fixating on the coast.”

Price, who had appeared unsure about stepping in to pacify Zeller, speaks up at that. “Don’t be a dick, Zee. You figured that out ages ago.”

“Yeah, but he didn’t!”

“Gentlemen, enough.” Agent Mapp’s dark eyes glint dangerously, though she barely raises her
voice. “Agent Zeller, what exactly did you figure out?”

Zeller lets out a huff of air, his nostrils flaring. After a moment he starts muttering an explanation. “The Carpenter uses different kinds of wood, but all of it has undergone some level of delignification. That’s usually the result of salt water exposure. Mass spec confirmed the wood’s infused with salts in amounts consistent with expected atmospheric levels – wind and rain blowing inland from the water. It was in my report two weeks ago.”

“Yes, of course.” Mapp sighs and pinches the bridge of her nose. With eyes closed, she says diplomatically, “I remember. Thank you, Agent Zeller.”

In the silence that follows, Will’s wrist scratching becomes more frenetic, and his eyes dart from one door to the other, gauging the fastest route of escape. When no one else speaks, Will tugs his shirt sleeve down and mumbles, “Excuse me.”

He exits the lab as Hannibal is entering it, and Hannibal spins on his heel to follow him back out into the hallway.

Will leans back heavily against the wall and drops his face into his hand.

Hannibal takes his other hand – the bad hand – and folds it up between his own.

Will speaks to the floor. “We’re not going to catch him.”

“Of course we’re going to catch him. You are going to catch him.” Hannibal takes a step closer, holding their joined hands close to his chest.

Will shakes his head. “I haven’t got it anymore.”

“What, Will?”

“I’m going to be sick.” He takes his hand back and hunches over until the feeling passes.

Hannibal’s hand lies across the back of his neck, cool and reassuring. When Will straightens finally, he moves it to his cheek and repeats, “What haven’t you got anymore, Will?”

“Whatever I had before.” Will sounds beyond disappointed in himself. He sounds terrified. “I’ve missed so much. Shit I should have seen right away…” He drops his face back into his hand, and the words scratch against his throat when he rasps, “I don’t know what I’m here for anymore.”

Hannibal strokes the nape of Will’s neck for a little while, then says nothing more than, “Stay with me tonight. Please, Will.”

Will swallows loudly but his voice is still hoarse when he says, “Alright.”

As if on cue, Liza Lake rounds the corner and, with a much fainter version of her already timid smile, asks, “Where to this evening, Mr. Graham?”

Hannibal answers for him, giving the young agent a kindly smile. “Baltimore, please, Agent Lake, if you would be so kind.”

“Of course, Doctor. I need to put a few things away. I’ll be back in just a minute.” She scurries into the lab.

When she and Zeller emerge together a little while later, neither Will nor Hannibal has moved.
“Ready to go, Mr. Graham?”

Will nods into his hand and slowly pushes himself off the wall. Hannibal grips his shoulder as he steadies himself.

“We could use you in here, Dr. Lecter,” Zeller says, eyeing the two of them for a moment, looking away when Hannibal gives Will’s shoulder a squeeze. “Liza, you gonna wear that home?”

“Oh!” Liza shrugs out of her lab coat, blushing, and hands it to him. “Thanks. See you Monday, Zee.”

“Come out with us tomorrow. I’ll buy you a drink.”

“Um.”

“Aw, c’mon,” he cajoles as Price pokes his head out the door. “I owe you one for finding us that rope.”

Price nods in agreement and says, “God bless Liza Lake,” before catching Zeller’s eye and jerking his head towards the inside of the lab.

Zeller winks at the flustered young agent and, just before he disappears into the lab, grunts, “See you, Will.”

Hannibal only follows once Will and Liza are out of sight, and he can no longer hear the echo of their footsteps.

It’s diseased. He needs to get rid of it. It’s what’s making him tired, nauseated all the time. It’s obviously unsalvageable in its infection, and the toxins are going to get into his bloodstream if he doesn’t do something soon. It’ll only hurt a little bit. He’s been stabbed, shot, his head feels like it’s being hammered open on a daily basis – It’ll hardly hurt at all.

His hand is grey – grey as dust – except where weeping sores bloom on his palm. Those are a sickly yellow, and drip watery pus over his fingers and down the back of his hand. The whole thing is going to rot off right before his eyes. He can’t watch that. He’ll just get rid of it now, like he’s been wanting to – like he hasn’t been brave enough to. Needs must when the devil drives.

His knees are weak, but he makes it into the kitchen and grabs the biggest knife in the knife block. He thinks to go back for the bottle of scotch because his nerves are making everything pulse but, when he looks down, he sees that going back is not an option. The grey is metastasizing, slowly but steadily, creeping insidiously up his arm.

He slices into the back of his wrist, hardly feeling the pain. But the grey and the sores are still spreading. He hadn’t cut high enough. He picks a new spot, well ahead of the wave front of the disease, but as soon as the tip of the knife breaches flesh, the sickness – the rot – rushes up to meet the blade. The infection keeps climbing.

He tries several more times before dropping the knife, shaking in terror and covering his face with a hand slippery with blood. He’s hyperventilating. He might pass out soon. He has to finish this now. When he picks up the knife again, it looks too small. It won’t be good enough. He needs to do it quickly. Bones and all.

Where is the meat cleaver? The cellar, maybe. Or the basement. He checks his arm to gauge how
much time he has left. The sickness is almost at his elbow. He clutches his arm tightly, making a tourniquet of his fingers in a desperate attempt to stop it. The knife clatters to the floor, bouncing once before landing solidly at his feet. The sound it makes when it hits the hardwood makes him think of nails being hammered into coffins.

*I'm going to die.* The echo of that sound fills his ears. The sound of panic. Still clutching his arm, he drops heavily to the floor and leans against the island, gasping. He’s almost run out of time. *Now. Do it now. Use the knife, break the bone later. It's just the flesh that's diseased. Get it off. Get it off.* He takes as deep a breath as he can before letting go off his arm and shakily picking up the knife. His breath comes in shallow pants as he slices deep into the brachioradialis muscle.

*That* he feels. The pain is searing, and his vision blurs, but the sickness is still spreading – the arm has to go. Completely. *Now.* Adrenaline floods his system, and the strength with which he brings the knife down is fueled by blind panic. Stainless steel collides with bone, the impact rattling his entire skeleton. His mind checks out completely. The world goes black before his next breath.

Chapter End Notes

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (*asprigofzest* on A03, [@weesprigofzest](https://tumblr.com) on tumblr), with whom I am devastatingly homosexual.

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
An Inevitable Ceasefire

Chapter Summary

Abigail is like, *Shit, Will. Why you gotta always be nearly dying and stuff?* Hannibal is like, *I guess I'll try to be less of a bag of dicks.*

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: lots and lots of blood, disturbing imagery, psychological meltdowns, hardcore panic attacks, needles, first response procedures, nightmares

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The moment he walks in, Hannibal can smell the blood, sharp and metallic. Fresh.

He turns the handle of the door before shutting it so the latch doesn’t click, then quickly shrugs out of his jacket and removes his shoes. He takes the letter opener from the drawer of the phone table and creeps silently towards the kitchen, removing his tie as he goes.

The letter opener he does not need, but he’s glad of his tie when he sees how much blood, still warm, is pooled beneath Will’s arm. He ties it off, then quickly scoops Will up and carries him to the nearest bathroom. He unties the tourniquet immediately and presses a clean towel against the deepest wound. The other cuts are oozing slowly, but the large one just below his elbow is gushing bright red with no signs of stopping. Hannibal props the arm up on the edge of the bathtub and presses down hard. Will twitches. His breaths are shallow pants, his skin clammy, his pulse faint and slow.

“Will, I need you to wake up,” Hannibal says calmly, squeezing Will’s shoulder. “Come, now. You don’t need to open your eyes, but I need you to be conscious.”

Will stirs and moans softly. Hannibal takes his good hand and replaces his own on the towel with it. Will winces.

“I know it hurts, but I need you to press down as hard as you can. Just for a minute. I have to get my things so I can stitch you up.”

Hannibal’s hand curls over Will’s to show him how much pressure to exert on the wound. Will’s eyes follow his hand, but Hannibal deftly turns his face away by the chin. “There’s no need to look, Will. I’ll only be gone a moment. Keep pressing just like that.”

When he returns, he wraps a blanket around Will as tightly as he can while still keeping his arm exposed. He notes, as he rolls up his sleeves and dons surgical gloves, that Will’s breaths are still very faint. His head is lolling back and forth between his shoulder and his chest as he tries to maintain consciousness. His hand starts to slip off the towel.

Hannibal takes charge of that again and, after a few long minutes, the bleeding starts to slow. He injects a local anesthetic, but it won’t take effect soon enough to combat the worst of the pain.
Taking a syringe out of his case and filling it from a bottle of saline solution, he warns Will, “This is going to hurt.” He irrigates the wound several times in quick succession, blocking out the sound of Will gasping in agony. When he is satisfied that it is clean, he gets out a needle and sutures. “The worst is almost over, Will.”

Will nods jerkily, face still screwed up tightly in pain.

Hannibal uses the little finger of his left hand to lift a lock of hair away from Will’s temple, where it lies pasted in blood. He feels suddenly compelled to offer Will some comfort. “The others won’t be so bad,” he murmurs, before speedily stitching up the bone-deep cut.

Will’s face is ashen, his lips chalk-white. Having dealt with the most life-threatening of Will’s wounds, Hannibal deems it prudent to wait until Will’s arm is fully numb before tending to the others. He presses a glass of water to Will’s lips and he drinks around chattering teeth. When Will has managed a few painful gulps, Hannibal puts it aside and draws him into his arms. Keeping a firm grip about his shoulders, he pushes sweaty curls off Will’s forehead and kisses him gently.

Will tries to speak, but Hannibal hushes him. “Later, Will. Be still now.” Will pushes his face into his shoulder, shaking badly, a noise halfway between a groan and a sob escaping him. Hannibal feels his breath, warm and moist, through his shirt.

Within a few minutes, Will’s breathing becomes deeper and less erratic. Hannibal props him back up against the wall so he can clean the other wounds and stitch up the deeper ones. When Will’s arm is securely bandaged, they ascend the stairs with an unpleasantly familiar sluggishness. Halfway up, Will’s knees buckle, so Hannibal picks him up again and carries him the rest of the way. He runs a bath and Will just sits in it looking grey and woozy, so, taking care not to get the bandages wet, Hannibal washes his hair and scrubs the blood off him.

“I feel sick…” Will whispers.

“You lost a lot of blood. After this, you must lie down and try to sleep.”

“I feel crazy…”

Hannibal pauses, knowing that, even in his semiconscious state, Will will suspect lies. “I can’t tell you if you’re crazy or not until I know what happened. And you’re not going to tell me what happened right now because you are going to sleep.”

Will lets Hannibal towel him off, and crawls naked into bed.

Hannibal considers leaving to try and clean up before Abigail gets home, but decides to text her instead.

*There is a mess in the kitchen. Don’t be alarmed. We are both fine.*

Then he turns out the lights, sits back against the headboard on top of the covers, and strokes Will’s face until there is no more shivering, only quiet, regular breaths.

A little while later, there is a knock at the door. Hannibal had been only vaguely aware of the front door opening and closing. He feels that he is sharing in Will’s stupor – that their breaths are once again synced, and everything that is too much for one person to carry is being divided.

“Come in, Abigail.”
Abigail closes the door again behind her and pads quietly into the room. “There was so much blood... I know you said you’re both fine but I had to see...”

Hannibal nods in understanding and pats the bed next to him.

Tentatively, she climbs up onto the bed, looking utterly heartbroken when she sees Will. “What happened?” she asks, lip trembling.

Hannibal’s sigh is the same one she remembers from their first long night in the hospital after Will’s stroke. All his body language mimicking Will’s, his person suit fraying at the edges. When he answers, his voice sounds the same as well – tired and pained. Perhaps even remorseful. “Something bad.”

“What can I do?”

Hannibal takes her hand. “In the basement,” he begins, “there is a refrigerator with bags of saline solution inside. Take two of those and the collapsible IV stand stored next to it, and bring them to me, please.”

When she returns, he gestures to his case. “There is a catheter and needle in there.”

Abigail roots around in it and passes him the items one at a time, then closes the case and crawls back to his side.

Hannibal gives her a surprisingly warm look when he sees she also has some tape and gauze ready in her lap.

She barely manages to twitch her mouth upwards, and certainly can’t maintain a smile. Her eyes are wide and frightened.

“Fetch another blanket, please, Abigail.”

She goes to her bedroom and returns with a soft, fleecy throw. Hannibal is preparing the IV. When he’s done, she hands the blanket to him, turning away while Hannibal maneuvers Will into a sitting position between his legs – back against Hannibal’s chest, head against his shoulder, face pressed against his neck – and tucks the blanket around Will’s naked torso.

“Thank you, Abigail.”

She turns back to him and edges closer. Hannibal inserts the needle into the back of Will’s hand. Will flinches, and Abigail jumps slightly. Hannibal pats her arm and says, gently, “Gauze and tape, please, Abigail.” Once the line is in place, he removes the needle and passes it to her to dispose of, securing everything while she tidies up.

Everything just so, he loops his arm around Will’s chest, holding him snugly against himself. His free hand he places on Will’s wrist.

Abigail hesitates for a moment when she witnesses, for the second time, Hannibal passing a trembling hand across his eyes. Then she settles herself back beside him, once again afraid to even accidentally touch Will. She presses herself against Hannibal’s side and reaches a hand over to cover his.

Hannibal leans back against the headboard and closes his eyes.
When Will is able to slide out of his torpor long enough to register some fragments of reality, he takes in the line trailing from his arm, the bandages, and the protective spread of Hannibal’s fingers against his chest. He is suddenly and acutely aware of what he’s done. Bone-deep pain seizes his arm so quickly he’s almost sick, and humiliation floods his system.

It takes less than five seconds for Hannibal to sense the slight rise in the temperature of Will’s skin, and to shed his own stupor. “Will…” He lifts his hand to stroke the curls back from Will’s forehead, and Abigail’s hand slips off his own.

Will swallows but says nothing for a several moments, just inhales and exhales deeply. Eventually he closes his eyes again and whispers, “Please don’t put me back in the hospital.”

Hannibal continues to stroke his hair and is quiet, not immediately prepared to respond to such a plea.

“Hannibal?”

Hannibal removes the arm and leg encircling Will. Abigail doesn’t wake up. “Lie down, Will,” he instructs.

Will does as he’s told. After untangling the IV line and shifting down on the bed himself, Hannibal pulls Will close again. Will breathes heavily against the fabric covering Hannibal’s stomach, though there is nothing in the sound to suggest tears.

“You are ill,” Hannibal murmurs softly. “It seems it is beyond my ability to heal you.”

“Please.” Will presses his cheek against Hannibal’s abdomen and his fingers curl into the pleat of his suit pants, the cloth a kind of sensory anchor in his grip. “I’ll do anything you say, just don’t send me back.”

Hannibal rests a hand on Will’s other cheek. “I don’t want to.”

Will presses his face against him harder. He sounds petrified when he asks, “But you’re going to?”

Hannibal looks down at Will then, not entirely lost to the desire to reassure him – even when Will clutches Hannibal’s thigh, digging his nails in desperately, as though that, alone, will convince Hannibal not to leave him. Part of him wishes to know what will happen if he tells Will yes. He runs a finger over Will’s jaw, where the muscles are tightest. “I may have to…”

Abigail startles out of sleep at the sound Will makes in response. After a moment, Hannibal puts an arm around her. He doesn’t know if Will can’t see that she is in the room with them, or if he is simply so distraught he can’t contain himself, even to protect her.

“Don’t…” There are still no tears, but the abandonment and betrayal Will feels is so potent, it is felt by both Hannibal and Abigail like a physical presence. “Please don’t.”

Abigail curls right up against Hannibal and tucks his arm tighter around her, then hesitantly reaches over to touch Will’s shoulder. She tells herself this isn’t happening again. It’s all she can do without coming apart completely.

Will begins again to shiver slightly, his tangible despair hovering over them like a fog, oppressive and suffocating. The tremors don’t go away, no matter how tightly Hannibal wraps the blanket around him.
The night passes slowly. Hannibal doesn’t sleep much at all. In his arms are the two people who are steadily dismantling him. His chin rests atop Abigail’s head, her hair tickling his cheek as she dozes against his chest – any negativity she feels towards him forgotten, for the moment. Will lies in his lap, and it’s this that is truly tormenting.

He is so evidently exhausted – almost to the point of being comatose – Hannibal feels worn out just looking at him. He runs his fingers through Will’s hair. The few grey hairs – the ones Abigail had found so amusing – that intersperse the brown glint like silver filaments in the moonlight. The skin beneath his eyes is somewhat translucent, tiny veins showing through blue, in other places, dark and bruised-looking. Hannibal strokes a thumb over Will’s cheekbone. He flinches but, though his unconscious frown deepens, doesn’t wake up. His fingers twitch occasionally against Hannibal’s leg and, every so often, he lets out a minute sigh or moan, his dreams obviously troubled.

He is hardly the healthy, handsome, calculating creature who, when freed from prison a year ago, had wasted no time re-engaging Hannibal in their deadly game. And yet, he is as beautiful as ever. Hannibal detests the idea that Will can still hold sway over him even as he is this close to defeat. Several times over the course of his night-long vigil, he thinks to smother Will in his sleep.

The next morning, Abigail finds Hannibal in the kitchen, contemplating the bottles of Will’s remaining medication wearing a closed-off look. A coin is balanced on its edge between the pad of his forefinger and the countertop.

“What are you thinking about?” she asks timidly.

Hannibal looks up. She’d entered the room completely unnoticed by him. An impressive development in her stealth skills, perhaps. However, it is more likely that his preoccupation with Will’s situation has once again become all-consuming, dulling his peripheral awareness and making him vulnerable. He straightens up and slips the coin back into his pocket. This is not the time to address chinks in his armour. Certainly not in front of Abigail. Face carefully blank, and tone carefully measured, he answers, “I’m considering adding an antidepressant to Will’s regimen.”

Abigail comes to stand across the island from him. She tilts her head slightly, uncertain. She’s begun to despair of anything bringing Will out of his depression. “Will it help?”

“It will likely make him feel hazy for some time.”

They are edging towards the inevitable ceasefire that characterizes their relationship whenever Will is in need. Abigail raises her eyes to meet his gaze. “Is that good?”

“I think temporarily muting some of his thoughts will make him less of a danger to himself.”

“Okay.” Abigail nods. As an afterthought, she asks, “What’s the flip side?”

Hannibal momentarily considers disclosing his personal reasons for remaining on the fence about this. He considers a moment too long, however, and her expression clamps up until it’s just as obscure as his own.

Recalling their recent argument, Abigail resigns herself to being considered a child by Hannibal indefinitely. “Never mind,” she says flatly. However, her cheeks flush slightly and her tone betrays the worry lurking beneath the surface when she asks, “Will you come check on him?”

“Of course.” Hannibal nudges an errant pill bottle back in line with the others before circumventing the island. “Wait a moment, Abigail,” he requests as she turns to leave. He places a hand gently on
Abigail doesn’t tense up or recoil from the touch, but she does look somewhat detached as her eyes follow the movement. When he reaches his other hand up to stroke her hair, she doesn’t lean into his touch as she used to. Not for the last time, Hannibal thinks Abigail might as well be Will’s biological daughter. “I care for you very much, Abigail. I certainly don’t hate you.”

She blinks up at him, her eyes dry. This is long past the point when she would normally have started to cry. Hannibal waits for the floodgates to open but, although there is a distinct sadness shading the bright blue of her irises, she responds without any shedding of tears. She smiles a small, sad smile at him and says, “Not all the time.” It could apply to either of his statements. Perhaps both. She doesn’t clarify, simply shrugs and leads the way out of the kitchen and up the stairs.

Will is sitting up in bed, pale but perfectly lucid. He opens his mouth, then closes it again and simply watches Hannibal’s approach.

Hannibal rounds the bed and stands over him for a few moments, studying him intently and obviously. He takes Will’s chin in hand and turns his face this way then that, before looking him directly in the eyes.

Will manages to maintain the eye contact by making his face impassive and looking through Hannibal’s eyes, past them, as though trying to focus on the back of his skull.

Hannibal releases him and sits on the edge of the bed. As he reaches for the gauze on the night stand he queries, “How are you feeling?” His tone is professional – the doctor is definitely in.

“Well.” Will watches Hannibal’s hands fold around his left. One removes the line from the back of his hand and the other presses gauze over the vein.

Once he has disposed of the catheter, he takes up Will’s hand again. Gentler, this time. Less formal.

Abigail comes over from where she’d been rummaging around in the bottom drawers of the armoire. Sets some clothes down at the foot of the bed and asks, “How are you really feeling?”

Will gives a breath of a laugh. “Not great,” he admits. “You okay?”

Her arms are folded protectively across her chest, but her lips curve up in a full, warm smile for him, and she nods before leaving the two of them alone so Will can get dressed.

When he is mostly clothed, with only the buttons of his shirt left to do up, Will announces, “I feel like I can finally think clearly again.”

Hannibal is busy collapsing the IV stand and packing up his case, but he stops dead at Will’s words. He is still for several seconds before resuming his task, movements now somewhat stiff.

Will doesn’t dare comment on the lessened fluidity of Hannibal’s actions, but fear flutters against the walls of his stomach. He’s immediately sure it was the wrong thing to say.

At length, Hannibal replies monotonously, “I am happy to hear that.” He opts to return the supplies to the basement rather than remain and risk his face betraying his feelings.

When he returns, he is collected once more. Abigail is sitting on the bed with Will. Hannibal isn’t certain who is mimicking whom. Arms are wrapped around knees which are drawn up to chests; legs
crossed at the ankles. They are talking quietly. No doubt Will is trying to reassure Abigail. Hannibal wonders if it’s working.

With Hannibal seating himself to his right and Abigail settled on his left, faces solemn and drawn, Will feels for one absurd moment as though he is on his deathbed. He rests his head tiredly on his forearm.

Hannibal takes this opportunity to caress Will’s back and manages a tone that is soft and coaxing. “This would be the time for you to tell us what happened, Will.”

Will doesn’t protest, but he takes a long time to begin. Less time to explain. “It wasn’t mine. And then it was mine, but infected. The infection kept spreading, so I… thought I had to cut it off… That’s all.” He presses his lips together, apprehensive of their responses.

Abigail stares at him in silent horror. Hannibal says his name again and Will turns his face to him, grateful for a reason to avoid her eyes. “Is it still that way?” Hannibal asks.

At the cosseting word choice, Will becomes defensive. “You don’t have to do that. I know I’m fucking delusional,” he says roughly, averting his eyes to stare determinedly at the bedspread, rather than their faces.

“Will…” Abigail begins, sounding wounded. She trails off, clearly not having a follow-up.

Hannibal smooths back his own hair – an almost human expression of his frustration – closes his eyes momentarily before rephrasing. “Alright, Will. Does it still appear that way? To you?”

Will swallows hard, immediately remorseful. Shakily, he confesses, “I don’t want to look…”

Hannibal resumes his stroking of Will’s back, having previously paused in his exasperation. “That’s fine, Will,” he says, voice gentle again. “You don’t have to look. Not now.”

“Thank you,” Will whispers, laying his head back down. True to the cyclic nature of his moods, he is overcome with relief.

Hannibal doesn’t make him look the next day, either. He’d had to shake Will awake in the night to prevent him pulling off the bandages in the course of a violent dream, but he decides to maintain passivity, for the time being.

The same thing happens again Sunday night, so Hannibal informs Agent Mapp that Will is unfit to work and won’t be coming in the following day. Will seems to understand that he’s walking a razor’s edge and, terrified of what Hannibal might do, doesn’t fight him on the matter. He does, however, direct his newfound clear-headedness rather single-mindedly, spending Monday reviewing the entire Carpenter case.

Tuesday finds Will pacing back and forth in the study, equally focused, even more energized. His mind remains clear. Perhaps even clearer than before. However, his body soon betrays him. That evening, Hannibal discovers Will passed out at the desk, bandages torn off and blood under his nails. That night, Hannibal reluctantly reconsiders the antidepressant solution to Will’s self-harm problem.

He is unspeakably angry that it has come to this: purposely losing Will just as he is coming back to himself. Taking his sharp mind and actively dulling it. When Hannibal proposes the addition of new
medication, Will is maddeningly unhelpful in his reply.

“I said I’d do what you tell me to.”

Hannibal sighs, bored and annoyed by Will’s compliance. “We will start tomorrow, then.”

First thing in the morning, as though he’d heard Hannibal’s thoughts, a now very heavily bandaged Will demands to be allowed to go back to work.

“I can catch him,” he claims forcefully, ignoring Hannibal when he points out that Will had torn off his bandages yet again in the night. He is so fervent and insistent, it’s too much, and the charm wears off quickly, though Hannibal is pleased long enough to bend, slightly.

“You may go back to work, provided the medication works and you have a restful night.”

The medication doesn’t work. And the night is even worse. Worse than when Will tried to rip out his IV while in hospital. Worse than his seven-hour long panic attack the day before they killed Jack. Worse, even, than when he got so close to the Carpenter, the only way he had left to escape was through administering oral sex in the most wretched and desperate fashion. So wretched and desperate, it sparked in Hannibal the closest thing he’s felt to fear in a long time, causing him to do something he never imagined he would – that is, deny Will with no premeditated agenda. Still, it is worse. Much worse.

Will squints through the forest of flames. One licks at his arm, branding him. He recoils from the heat but the tendril of fire snakes around his arm and coils tighter. The burn is unbearable.

“Will.”

He tries to shake it off but it’s cutting into his flesh. In a panic, he tears at it, attempting to claw it off. For a moment he thinks it’s worked, and the fire fizzes out. Then he sees that his own nails have left burns, and his whole arm looks like a bed of coals that has been freshly raked over.

“Will.”

“Help,” he whispers. He looks for an opening in the wall of fire before him, but the flames have all melded together into one giant complex.

“Will!”

Will starts awake and finds Hannibal practically kneeling on his chest, hands around Will’s wrists to keep them far apart from each other. He’s torn his bandages off and underneath the white tatters he sees flaps of black, necrotized flesh. The bone beneath is yellow with infection. The fire is gone, but this is still a nightmare. He’s seized with terror so deep it batters his internal organs, and, when Hannibal’s thumb grazes the diseased tissue at the heel of his hand, Will turns his head and vomits.

Hannibal has witnessed delirium before. The unfocused eyes are not a surprise. The shaking and thrashing, also, are familiar. Whatever it is Will sees – a personal demon, an undead limb – is clearly so horrific, he’s unable to recognize anything else. What is shocking to Hannibal is the nature of the violence Will exhibits in response to being touched. It has always been defensive in the past, struggling against being restrained or against unsolicited soothing gestures. It is something else entirely when Hannibal sits Will up, and Will lashes out, striking him in the chin with unexpected
aggression and strength.

Abigail bursts into the room just in time to see it, and rushes to his side. Hannibal is momentarily stunned. Will is sucking in breath after breath without exhaling, tearing feverishly at his own arm. When Hannibal straightens back up, Will is trapped in a terrifying cycle of gasps and coughs. There is blood everywhere. Hannibal somehow manages to wrestle Will into a position that keeps his limbs locked behind him. Straining to keep him relatively immobile, Hannibal retrieves a syringe and vial from the bed stand and, out of sheer necessity, administers the contents straight into Will’s neck.

Abigail’s eyes have never been so wide and frightened. She has both hands pressed over her mouth, tears streaming down her face. “What can I do–?” She inhales sharply when her voice breaks into a sob on the last word.

Hannibal’s reply floats out on his next breath so quietly, she’s not sure she heard it at all. “I don’t know.” He lets the syringe clatter to the floor and drops his head, panting against Will’s shoulder.

After a tense minute that feels like an hour, Will’s limbs relax, and Hannibal feels his pulse begin to slow. The room is silent but for his own laboured breathing, Will’s quick, shallow breaths, and Abigail’s quiet sniffles.

Just before he goes entirely limp, Abigail hears Will murmur something pitifully. She leans down, ear against his lips, and catches the words, “Please… just cut it off…” He mumbles the appeal again as his eyes slip shut.

It is several hours before dawn when they bundle Will into the back seat of his station wagon. As soon as he lies down, the fresh dose of sedative kicks in and he’s unconscious again before Hannibal even shuts the door.

Abigail leans against the driver’s side door, anxiously jingling her keys.

“Are you going to be alright on your own?” Hannibal questions, holding out a hand to her, palm up.

She pushes herself off the car and puts a hand in his. He tightens his grasp and tugs her closer, placing his other hand on her shoulder. She meets his gaze. After a moment, she nods. He gives her another squeeze, then opens the door for her.

When she gets behind the wheel, she pauses before pulling the door shut behind her, chewing on a thought, unsure whether or not to verbalize it. “Do you ever tell Will you love him?” Her eyes are shaded and her face dappled with only the waning moonlight and glow of street lamps to combat the shadow Hannibal casts over her. It is impossible to read her expression.

He cocks his head to the side, adopting a stance so casual it seems forced – hands in the pockets of his pajama pants, shoulders caved forward slightly so that he almost appears to be slouching. “I don’t believe I need to.”

Abigail sighs and takes a hand off the steering wheel to start the engine. “You need to,” is all she says to him before closing the door and driving off into the night.
Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr).

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Let Me Have the File, Then

Chapter Summary

Abigail goes off and does Abigail things and Will essentially solves the case... But, most importantly, he and Hannibal have bloody, sweaty, sexy murder sex.

Chapter Notes

Content Warning: consensual non-consent

Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03 & aweesprigofzest on tumblr).

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Will opens his eyes to the pale blue familiarity of his bedroom in Wolf Trap. Sunlight edges past the dust that has collected on the window panes at an angle that tells Will it can’t be later than nine in the morning. The pain in his arm is white-hot. Examining it closer, he can see that the bandages have been recently changed. Any edge he might be able to pull at has been taped down, and his nails have been clipped so far back that the tips of his fingers feel sore. He flexes his left hand. The skin is warm and dry, slightly browned on the back, slightly rough on the palm. No sores, welts, or discolouration.

He gingerly moves the sheets aside and swings his legs over the side of the bed. Present, as expected, is the perpetual soreness that seems to have taken up residence in his bones, but his head throbs less insistently and that, in itself, is enough of a relief to get him on his feet. Looking out the window, he sees his car in the driveway, so he goes to find Abigail.

He can recall short segments of the night before – the sting of a needle in the side of his neck, Hannibal cleaning and bandaging him, Abigail insisting that they either cut off his nails or put him in an actual cast, and himself, faintly protesting. He remembers waking in the back of the car, being driven somewhere, and, later, Abigail taking most of his weight as they hobbled from the car to the house. The rest is a mystery.

He has the vague intention of explaining himself, and apologizing to her for the n\textsuperscript{th} time. Maybe she’ll even tell him how the hell she’s feeling. He misses the certainty that she’d tell him, eventually, if something were wrong.

He checks her room first. The bed is still made, but there is a slight depression in the bedspread where Abigail must have lain, not bothering to get under the covers knowing she wouldn’t be able to sleep anyway. The living room and kitchen are also deserted. No Abigail, no dogs. Instead, he is met with more dusty windows. The stale air is fantastically depressing.

Will opens the cupboard under the sink, but pauses in reaching for cleaning supplies. There isn’t
much in the garbage can, but, visible on top is a half-full packet of Abigail’s cigarettes. Tobacco litters the bottom of the bin. The remaining cigarettes are roughly torn – the packet itself clearly subjected to Abigail’s boot heel.

He straightens up, any notion of doing housework abandoned. Instead, he goes out the back door and surveys the flats. The sky is a uniform smear of cloud through which a weak sun casts witchy light over the landscape, making it seem emptier than ever. She must be down by the stream. Neglecting to seek out a jacket, he pulls on his boots and makes his way there in only his pajama bottoms and t-shirt.

Will finds Abigail on the banks of the stream, bawling her eyes out, cuddling Winston. Though it would probably be best to just let her get it all out in private, Will can’t bring himself to leave. Guilt tugs him forwards against his better judgement, and he has her in his arms before he consciously reaches out.

Abigail doesn’t let go of Winston, but she doesn’t push Will away, either. It’s a long time before she stops crying and, when she does, she still doesn’t speak. She presses a tissue to her nose and simply sits there, shivering in his hold.

“Abigail…” Despite all he wants to say, the only word that comes out is her name.

She buries her face in Winston’s fur, muffling her confession. “It’s so scary when you’re scared.”

“I’m not scared.” In his haste to reassure her, he says precisely what she doesn’t want to hear. “Not anymore,” he adds quickly, trying to amend the previous statement.

“Stop **lying**, Will. I know when you’re lying.”

Will’s response is a quick and defensive protest. “I’m not!” He swallows. He’s starting to panic. “I… I can’t help it.”

“How won’t Hannibal stay here?” she presses.

“He would. It’s my fault.”

She gawks at him, eyes still streaming. “Why won’t you let him?!”

“I don’t know.”

“Then you should let him,” she points out, a little of her old bossiness making its way around a hiccup.

Will stands and scrubs his hands over his face. Without realizing it, he starts pacing the bank of the stream.

Abigail follows him with her eyes and busies her hands giving Winston some well-deserved scratches behind the ears.

The words, “Has it always been like this?” are not necessarily directed at her. He might have been asking himself, trying to recall the last time all three of them were happy together.

“Like this…” Abigail repeats. “You mean, hard work?”

Will stops pacing, looking like he’s just been slapped.

She holds his gaze, though her eyes are brimming. “I’d do anything for you. But I don’t know what
“you need anymore.” Her voice trembles. “I don’t know what you want, and I don’t think you do either.”

“I don’t know how to show you I love you.”

Abigail starts sobbing again.

It feels as though the very earth between them is crumbling. He should reach for her across this widening chasm but, instead, he finds himself saying, “I should leave you alone.”

After a moment, Abigail puts her arms back around Winston and nods into his fur.

Will walks back to the house, heavy with the knowledge that he’d just handled that in exactly the wrong way.

The rest of his morning consists of numbly cleaning windows, sweeping up dog hair, and forcing both himself and Abigail to eat something. He goes out to the shed after lunch and simply stands in it for a while, looking over the collected motor parts. If he had more woodworking equipment, it might have been the Carpenter’s workshop. He eyes the chains that had once suspended Randall Tier’s suit from the ceiling.

Will makes dinner. Abigail lets him, and stays out of the way. It’s almost ready when he catches her, paused in the act of setting the kitchen table, staring at him with a sad frown.

His brow knits questioningly in response.

She lifts the corner of her mouth briefly then goes back to being ostensibly engrossed in laying out cutlery.

He clears his throat. “Did you really quit smoking?” he asks quietly.

“Yeah,” she replies, voice thin and strained.

“When?”

Abigail doesn’t make eye contact. “This morning.”

That much confirmed, he doesn’t need to ask why. Morbidly, he thinks to make a joke of it. *If I’d known it would make you quit, I’d have cut off my arm sooner.* However, Abigail still looks perfectly capable of bursting into tears at any moment and, after a few moments reflection, he really doesn’t find it funny anymore.

There’s a rift. The word Hannibal had chosen to describe the space between him and Will is now the only one Will can think of to define the space dividing Abigail and himself. Their exchange by the stream hadn’t left them with anything close to a sense of resolution. So often, in the past, just admitting to each other what they were thinking resulted in a speedy patch-up. Not this time.

As time goes on, Will feels as though he’s been quarantined. His isolation in Wolf Trap is an undocumented, never-spoken-of, experimental procedure meant, in theory, to cure him. It starts to rain heavily on the second day, further adding to his sense of being moored on the island that is his little house – where it now somehow bothers him to be alone.
Not alone. Abigail is with him, but not entirely present. She takes the car out several times a day. He doesn’t know where she goes. She’s not gone long enough to have even driven to work let alone to have worked, and she comes home empty-handed. Does she even work at Muskrat Farm anymore? He hadn’t known about her exam. What else had he overlooked? At this point, he feels there is no acceptable way to ask. He misses their easy reconciliations. Her instantaneous forgiveness.

He is hopeful, for the first couple evenings anyway, that Hannibal will change his mind and allow him to go back to work the next morning. On day three, that hope dwindling, he calls Agent Mapp himself. She refuses to send a car for him until the following week, citing Hannibal’s words – he needs to rest, and recover from the accident.

The accident. God knows what excuse Hannibal had cooked up for him this time. He can tell by her tone, however, that Hannibal’s story is immaterial, because she knows that whatever Will needs to recover from, he had done to himself.

Her disapproval acts as a paralytic – he’s practically glued to the sofa for the rest of that day, refreshing CrimeTimeNews.com every half hour. His mind is far from inactive, however, despite the fact that he barely moves.

Day four sees him at his desk, the contents of the case file spread out over the space his fly-tying gear once occupied. On day five, his vigilance is rewarded with news of an eighth victim. It spurs him on. When Hannibal phones, Abigail answers, and Will absently promises to call him back later. Hannibal calls again in the evening, while Abigail is out, and Will lets the answering machine handle it.

The next morning, Hannibal shows up at Will’s house, profoundly displeased and rather overt about it. One look from him quells any hope that he is here to drive Will to Quantico. Although he knows he’s in trouble, Will is distinctively less cooperative than he had been the last time they were together.

“I’m so close.” He gestures at his desk, where the file has been reassembled, with several pages of handwritten notes piled on top. “If I could just see the last one –”

“Will.” Hannibal cuts him off harshly.

“What?!” Will practically barks in return. “This is important! I can’t do anything more from here. Will you please just take me to Quantico?” He forces himself to stop pacing and take a deep breath. “Please.”

Hannibal crosses the room towards him purposefully. Will meets his eyes, wary but determined.

As though for examination, Hannibal takes Will’s arm and holds it in front of him. “Look,” he commands, voice biting. Keeping his eyes fixed on Will’s face, he somehow strips the bandages away. “Look at what this has done to you – what you have done to yourself.” Hannibal grabs him roughly by the chin and directs his gaze. “I said, look.”

It isn’t pretty. Though Hannibal’s stitches are impossibly tidy, the cuts are so erratically placed, and so varied in their depth and distribution, his exposed arm looks a complete mess. There is an absence of sores and rotting flesh, but the blood, the bruised and mottled skin, and the pain are all very real. Real, yet brought into being by his own insanity. He has no reply for Hannibal.

“Enough, now,” Hannibal says softly. Knowing intuitively the moment Will surrenders, Hannibal
releases his chin, and cups his cheek momentarily, before leading him to the couch.

While Hannibal rewraps his arm, Will implores him. “I can’t just let him go…”

“Give me what you have and I will bring it to Agent Mapp.”

“Okay,” Will agrees dully.

“Will.” Hannibal takes his hand in both of his own. “Trust that you have done all you can. Others can take it from here. Agent Mapp may not necessarily understand as you do –”

It’s Will’s turn to interrupt Hannibal. “I think she understands enough.”

Hannibal tilts his head slightly in curiosity, but decides not to pursue the matter at present. He means to say something innocuous and agreeable, but Will breaks the silence before he can do so.

“You’ll go today?” he asks quietly.

“Yes,” Hannibal affirms. “I’ll go now, if you like.”

Will nods.

“Let me have the file, then.”

Will returns to his desk and, not without reluctance, hands everything he has on the case over to Hannibal. At the door, he manages to mumble a thank you. Hannibal turns back, and Will pulls lightly at his shirtfront until he is close enough to kiss.

Hannibal rests his forehead against Will’s. With the hand not clasped around the case file, he runs his fingers over Will’s cheekbone, then up to and along the curve of his scar. Once again, he feels a flood of uninvited affection, as heady and invigorating as any curiosity, lust, or hunger he has ever felt for Will.

Another disarmingly gentle kiss, and Will disappears back inside.

Later, Will stands tense and still, staring out the window as though deep enough focus might cause Hannibal and Agent Mapp to materialize in his driveway, already walking briskly towards the house to deliver good news.

“What’s up?” Abigail asks mildly, toweling off her hair as she joins Will in the living room. It had rained all morning and she’d returned from one of her mysterious excursions drenched through to the bone.

Will removes a hand from his pocket to scratch at the stubble along his jaw. He turns his head and gives her a brief smile. “Nothing, sweetheart.” He pauses, then admits, “Just not sure what to do with myself,” he admits.

She perches on the windowsill and looks up at him. Her expression is studious and he colours slightly under her close gaze. “Hannibal hasn’t called?”

Will shakes his head. “I should know better than to expect an update within forty-eight hours.”

“Yeah, probably,” she agrees. She looks down at her lap, drumming her fingers against the wood frame.
Will puzzles over what more he can say to her. Though the overt hurt they’d each felt had started to ease, actually talking still doesn’t come easily. “I thought I’d get a call from someone,” he adds. “Agent Mapp, or Price maybe…”

“Well, if they haven’t called, that means they’re busy. That’s good, right?”

He nods once, then, realizing she’s right, nods again with more conviction and returns his gaze to the muddy flats stretching away to the trees in the distance.

After this they are silent for a while, Will returning both hands to his pockets, and Abigail swinging her legs, childlike. The snores of seven lazy dogs and the faint thump of Abigail’s heel hitting the wall are the only sounds not attributable to the rain.

“You’re a pain in the ass,” Abigail announces abruptly.

If her sudden declaration surprises Will, it doesn’t show. “I know…” he says. “Sorry.”

“No, you really don’t,” she replies, almost conversationally. “You’re not a pain in the ass the way you think you are.”

“‘Kay…” Will hopes she intends to expand on that.

She doesn’t. Instead, she takes a deep breath and says, “I didn’t mean to hurt you the other day.” This apology is clearly difficult for her in a way that all her other apologies haven’t been. It is sincere but strenuous – there being a wider gap to breach now than ever before.

Will shrugs lightly. “I had it coming.”

“Yeah,” she agrees. “But not in the way you think…”

She is back to stressing some truth that Will just isn’t able to put together. He gives her a contrite look.

It’s Abigail’s turn to shrug, seemingly unconcerned that he doesn’t grasp what she’s saying. Unconcerned, or detached, he isn’t sure which. That is, until she pins him with her bright blue eyes and transforms back into the Abigail he remembers from months ago. “I really love you,” she states, with rare dry-eyed affection.

After dinner that evening, Abigail barnacles herself to Will’s side. It makes reading and sipping tea awkward for both of them, but Abigail is apparently determined to cuddle. A few times, he lifts his eyes from his reading, expecting to find Hannibal seated in the armchair across from them, looking warm and fond, if perhaps a little patronizingly amused. The fantasy makes a part of him uneasy, and that part is relieved to see the chair empty each time. Abigail falls asleep with her arm looped through his and her head on his shoulder. Deeply surprised by his ability to do so, he carries her upstairs, laying her on the bed and folding the quilt over her. He tucks her hair behind her ruined ear before leaving, feeling a small ache bloom in his chest.

Will sees the headlights advancing from his position at the tree line. He’d left only one light on – an experiment to see if he can recapture the feeling of safety he once had, looking back at his little house. In the darkness, he can pretend that light is his whole home, and he’s just a little bit further out at sea than he’d thought. The approaching car puts it all back into perspective, and any comfort he
feels evaporates. Still, he chooses to linger where he is until a chill breeze picks up with the promise of the changing of seasons.

Hannibal has not let himself in and simply stands at the bottom of the stairs, waiting for Will to return.

“What are you doing here?” Will asks when his slow steps bring him within earshot.

Hannibal doesn’t answer until Will is close enough to touch. “I want to show you something.”

Will takes in Hannibal’s split lip and disheveled state – clothing crumpled and even torn in places, hair ripped loose from its customarily slick perfection. It falls in disarray across his face, which carries a slight sheen, as though he’d only stopped sweating moments ago. His eyes are gleaming with something powerful – triumph, maybe, over something achieved. Or someone punished.

He has never looked more beautiful to Will than he does in this moment. Though the realization twists like a knife in his gut, there is no denying it. He pictures this Hannibal sitting in the living room with him and Abigail, and, somehow, that image fits better in his mind. “What?” Will asks, taking a step back, as though that will break the spell.

“Blood,” Hannibal answers, a surreal amount of calm radiating from his person. “In the moonlight.”

“What’s blood?”

“I think you know.”

“The Carpenter’s.”

“Yes.”

“You killed him.”

“A life for a life. His life for yours. It’s over, Will.”

“It’s beautiful…” Will’s voice is little more than a whisper. “What is wrong with me?”

“Nothing.” Hannibal makes no movement, perhaps for fear of Will running – actually running – from him. He pulls at Will with his words instead, and his tone is darkly seductive. “Human desire runs the gamut from winsome to bestial. Who doesn’t dream of indulging every spasm of lust, feeding each depraved hunger?”

Will finally closes the gap between them. Tentatively, at first, and then entranced, he presses his hand against the bloodstained shirt, then studies his palm under the white celestial glare. It looks quite black. When at last he can tear his eyes away, they are drawn immediately to a spatter of blood high on Hannibal’s cheek. Before he knows what he’s doing, he can taste it on his tongue, and he finds himself pressing an open-mouthed kiss over the spot.

Hannibal’s hand is on Will’s waist, and he twists the fabric of the shirt there, breath coming heavy already.

Will clutches at Hannibal’s shirt front and presses their foreheads together. Screwing his eyes shut, he breathes an admission. “I want you so badly.”

“I could take you right now.”
“Don’t.”

“Stop me, then.”

They look at each other for a long, long moment. Neither of them says anything. At length, and without breaking his gaze, Will nods his chin at the house. Hannibal tilts his head in response and twists his torso ever-so-slightly, as though to say after you. Will simply stares and, eventually, Hannibal acquiesces. Will follows him up the steps, heart hammering. His thoughts are racing so fast he fears he will give himself a migraine before they are even inside.

He pauses on the top step to take one last look at his hand in the moonlight. When he rubs the slick tips of his fingers together, he is tugged momentarily into a waking dream. The sensation is so strong, and the scene so familiar, he swears he can see antlers out of the corner of his eye. He compulsively strains his ears, listening for the sound of feathers fluttering in the light breeze the clearing allows. It’s only a few seconds before the forest glade dissolves around him and he’s once again looking out at the flats. The only trees in sight are distant, spectral forms.

He turns back to the door being held open by Hannibal, whose face is obscured in darkness – save for the infernal glow of his eyes. He is sure that once he crosses the threshold, whatever happens inside will be memorable in some profoundly meaningful way. A rite of passage, perhaps. Or an irreparable tragedy. Despite the uncertainty, Will finds himself drawn into the shadows with no persuasion from Hannibal.

The latch clicks at his back with deafening finality. His fate sealed, Will advances on Hannibal and presses him against the wall, a dark, primal hunger growing steadily at his core. For a moment, Will just pins him there, breathing hard in excitement alone. Then he leans in and gives him an exploratory kiss – as though this is the first time their mouths have met. When the kiss breaks, Hannibal’s head falls back, exposing his neck, and his eyes slip closed. His mouth has dropped open slightly and he looks – relieved, Will thinks.

It makes Will want to ravage him. To strip him to the bone with only his teeth. He bends his head to assault Hannibal’s neck, jaw, and collar bones with bites, which are followed by kisses that might have been soothing were they not applied so roughly.

Distracted by the low, erotic hum that is Hannibal’s response to this treatment, Will fails to notice that his shirt is being unbuttoned, until nails scrape at his chest and he feels fingers working open the button on his pants. Will grabs Hannibal’s hair roughly, exposing his neck further, and bites down, almost, but not quite, breaking skin. The same can’t be said for Hannibal, who digs his nails into Will’s chest so savagely, he draws blood.

Will barely takes a second to assess the damage as he shrugs out of his shirt and tosses it on the floor. Then he’s pulling Hannibal flush against himself, staining his shirtfront further, albeit with his own blood now. He wraps a hand around Hannibal’s throat, palm pressed over the bite mark, and drinks in every micro-expression that flashes across his face.

“Will…”

Will cups his other hand against the back of Hannibal’s head, effectively trapping him, while he breathes deeply and tries to clear his head. His thoughts simply won’t settle. Not with this beautiful monster before him, standing in his hallway covered in blood – physically, metaphorically, metaphysically. This is the truth of Hannibal. Will imagines a series of Hannibals, stretching forward and backwards in time, and laterally, across every divergent world. When he eliminates all the Hannibals posturing as human, the remaining Hannibals before him are all the same. All covered in blood, no human veil shrouding the devil in their eyes.
Hannibal is straining towards him, even though it compromises his air supply. Will gives in, and the next few minutes are all violent kisses and hands desperately grasping at clothing, skin, hair. He simultaneously pushes Hannibal away and holds him vice-like, externalizing the calamity within. Hannibal wrestles back, though it always feels like he’s pulling Will closer rather than trying to break free. They end up on the floor, Will straddling Hannibal, kissing him so hard, he imagines the floor giving way beneath Hannibal’s skull. A *mongoose under the house. A snake slithering by.* Who is what in this very moment is muddled.

And then it doesn’t matter, because Hannibal is lifting his hips so that every part of them that can touch, touches. Feeling his stiff cock pressed against his own through the fabric of their remaining clothes, Will abandons the metaphorical and metaphysical and bites down hard on Hannibal’s lip. The already punctured flesh yields blood easily, and Will slides his tongue over the new lesions, tasting salt and iron fused with a distinct sweetness.

Will pulls away for breath, and Hannibal brings a hand to his mouth. When his fingertips come away red, he wipes them off on his shirt with apparent indifference.

Will fingers Hannibal’s bloodstained collar, and is suddenly accosted with urgent practicality. “Did you leave evidence?” he demands.

“No,” Hannibal replies calmly. “I took it with me.”

Worry still coats Will’s words. “You left *nothing* behind?” he presses.

Hannibal touches Will’s cheek gently. “I have done this before, Will.”

“I know,” Will breathes. Still astride Hannibal, he sits up and covers his face with shaking hands. “*Fuck*…”

Hannibal manacles Will’s wrists and pulls him back down onto his chest. He wraps both arms tightly around him and murmurs into his ear, “Pretend I’m giving you no choice.”

Will lets out something like a relieved sob against Hannibal’s neck before straightening up and all but ripping the remains of Hannibal’s clothing off. It isn’t difficult. He works with the tears that are already there, and grows hot with shame at the pleasure of wasting such finery. Buttons bounce against the floor.

Hannibal sits up and presses his mouth hard against Will’s, and then down his neck, under his chin, against his throat, working the zipper of Will’s pants down and slipping his hand inside.

A faint sense of their surroundings returns with the sound of the dogs stirring and nails clicking towards the door of the kitchen. Will helps Hannibal to his feet and they stumble gracelessly down the hall to his bedroom. Will has hardly closed the door before Hannibal turns him around and shoves him up against it. Will groans at the impact.

“I can’t think…”

“Don’t think then.” Hannibal divests them both of their now thoroughly ruined clothes. “You want me to touch you.”

“Yes…”

Hannibal covers his mouth. “Shh. It doesn’t matter. I’m going to anyway. It’s not your fault.”

Will bites down on his own lip so hard it starts to bleed, but the moan still escapes him.
“That’s right.” Hannibal drags his fingers up through Will’s hair to grasps the roots tightly and force Will’s gaze. “You might as well enjoy it, since you don’t have a choice.”

Will claws desperately at Hannibal’s upper arms, wanting so badly to surrender to the fantasy.

“Are you convinced yet?”

Will shakes his head vigorously.

“Hm.” Hannibal licks his lips. “I thought there might be a happy medium between being careful and being rough with you.” He bares his teeth and practically snarls, “Perhaps I was wrong.” With that, he grabs Will so hard around the waist he actually lifts him, then throws him onto the bed with a violence he hasn’t exhibited since their brawl at Muskrat Farm.

This time promises to be just as ruinous. Perhaps even more so.

“I need you,” Will professes, adrenaline making him high and loosening his tongue. “I need you so much... I could tear you apart.”

“Give yourself to me,” Hannibal growls. “You’re mine, remember?”

“Stop.” Will lies there stricken, the sudden panic making him gasp. “I’m yours, okay? You have me. Just don’t... you can have me any other way.” He swallows dryly. “I want you, but I don’t want that.”

Hannibal crawls up Will’s body and looms over him, hands framing Will’s head. He imparts such a deep-rooted, visceral power, Will isn’t sure there’s anything he could do if Hannibal chose to ignore his wishes. Hannibal’s eyes are soft, however, and he nods. He lowers himself, pressing warm skin against warmer. “I’ll give you everything you want,” he practically purrs, sealing his mouth against Will’s with a passionate yet tender kiss. It evolves rapidly, the passion overwhelming the tenderness, until they are panting and rubbing shamelessly against each other. “Tell me you’re mine again.”

Will’s energy suddenly spikes. He bucks Hannibal off and roughly rolls on top of him. He grabs his hair in both fists and swoops down to kiss him savagely. “You’re mine too.”

“Then let me make you feel good.” Hannibal grinds his hips up against Will’s and Will groans with need. “You think you don’t deserve it. I think you do. At least tonight, if only tonight, believe me. Let me win.”

Bent over him, breathing heavily, Will wars with himself once more. At length, he shakes his head. “I can’t…” he whispers, but there is a plea in his eyes.

Hannibal holds his gaze, and, for a minute, they just look at each other. Their breathing begins to regulate, until every inhale and exhale is perfectly in sync.

Hannibal raises a hand and deliberately curls his fingers over the bandage on Will’s arm, where he knows the deepest wound lies. Will winces and then, when Hannibal tightens his grip and twists his arm just so, collapses helplessly onto his chest with a cry of pain. Hannibal angles his head and murmurs in Will’s ear, “You need me to force you.”

Will turns his face so he’s not smothering himself with the pillow, and is able to meet Hannibal’s once more. There is such compassion in them, Will thinks he’s going to die. Hannibal twists his arm a little further – and it’s a gift. With a sharp exhale, Will squeezes his eyes shut, then swallows and, finally, nods once. His lips form the word please, though there is no air in him to make the sound.
Hannibal kisses him forcefully, pressing him onto his back. In a series of deft, fluid movements that Will is unable to recognize in isolation, Hannibal has Will’s dick in hand, condom-clad and lubed up generously. He guides it into himself and sinks down, all the while keeping a warning hand on Will’s injured arm.

Will’s eyes close and his mouth opens, and, forgetting himself for a moment, he grabs Hannibal around the waist with his free arm and presses up into him. Hannibal rides him ruthlessly. At some point, he roughly pulls Will’s leg over top of his own and adjusts the spread of his knees before grinding back down. The new position makes Hannibal so tight around him, Will can’t help but arch off the bed with a long, low groan.

Hannibal had underestimated how good it would feel. A sharp moan escapes him as he settles with Will fully inside. For a moment, all he can do is carve new marks into Will’s chest and absorb the flood of sensation. When he lifts up finally and grinds down a second time, Will almost comes. He pulls his injured arm out from under Hannibal’s token restraint and sits up fully, wrapping both arms tight around Hannibal, crushing both their chests and mouths together. Soon after, his guilt temporarily forgotten, Will starts thrusting his hips up every time Hannibal slams himself down, growling into Hannibal’s collar bone and penetrating deep and relentlessly until Hannibal very nearly shouts in pleasure.

Hannibal’s renewed grasp on the roots of his hair is tight and painful.

“Are you going to come?” Will asks shakily, arms sliding against the sweat of Hannibal’s back.

“Not like this. I still to take you… even if it isn’t entirely.”

Will has no idea what he means until Hannibal abruptly lifts off of him and then roughly shoves him down. When he flips him over, Will gives a closed-mouth scream. But Hannibal’s lips are against his ear, his hands soothing on his back. “Shh. I won’t.” A hand slides under him and pulls the condom off. A moment later, Hannibal’s fingers are slick between his thighs, and Will shivers, somehow even harder against the sheets.

For all their talk of Patroclus and Achilles, there had been an appalling lack of imagination with regards to their sexual problem-solving. The fact that intercrural sex had not been suggested as an alternative seems ridiculous in hindsight, and Hannibal is loath to admit to himself that it hadn’t been a purposeful omission to their repertoire. Conceding as much would imply that he’d been so eager to have Will, he’d settled for whatever Will was willing to give him, and, furthermore, that having Will inside him felt so good, he’d wanted nothing else until he could return the favour.

When Hannibal slides his cock between his legs, Will feels the murderer in Hannibal barely held in check. Wrapped all around him – always ready to take a life; sometimes willing to give it. He’s never been in greater danger, and he’s never felt safer. He doesn’t care if he is welcoming his own destruction. He doesn’t care if he’s standing in death’s foyer and Hannibal is the devil himself, asking politely, May I take your soul?

He feels warm breath on his back but can’t tell if Hannibal is kissing him, licking him, or biting him – and he has no idea how he’s responding. All he can hear is short, soft moans expelled from Hannibal’s lips on every thrust. He wraps a hand around Will’s cock and presses his forehead against Will’s cheek. His undignified grunts tell Will that the only thing Hannibal wants right now is to make Will come, and come hard, and everything else can quite frankly fuck off in the meantime.

Will feels, rather than hears, the groan that is ripped from him when he finishes. Hannibal’s fingers around him and dick slick against his hole and between his thighs all conspire to shock Will into a place where all he has to do is let his knees tremble and stinging, electric pleasure wrack his limbs.
His climax feels like it continues as Hannibal comes too, quiet and breathy, lips and teeth pressed against Will’s shoulder blade.

Their hips twitch when sensitive skin slides against equally sensitive skin as their sticky, sweaty hands grope to find each other. Hannibal raises his head and kisses Will’s temple, then gently drags his lips along the scar there. They fall asleep pressed against each other, and Hannibal does absolutely nothing about the mess.

Chapter End Notes

1 Yeah, Hannibal watched the opening sequence of "Quills" before he got all stroppy and was like, "This is historically inaccurate, and also I'm intimidated by Geoffrey Rush, therefore, this is crap." Then he threw it in the fire and went to go find some rude people.

(I fucking love that movie. Those were all his words, not mine.)

UPDATE: Will disclosed to Hannibal that "Quills" is one of five movies he's seen in his life, so Hannibal decided to give it another go... you know, for his beloved. Spoiler alert: neither of them are fun to watch movies with.

SECOND UPDATE: Will now knows everything there is to know about the real Marquis de Sade.

My tumblr
Our Etsy Store
Will is the first to wake the next morning. He gets out of bed right away, looking to have a moment alone to consider all the things he probably should have thought about last night.

Like, why Hannibal came here in such a state, blood-soaked and probably dripping evidence all over the interior of his car. He was so dishevelled; he couldn’t possibly have been wearing his bespoke murder-suit when he killed the Carpenter.

Will showers while he considers all the ugly variables.

How could he not have left evidence behind? A hair, fibres from his torn shirt, his own blood – no one is that good at cleanup. And if Hannibal had cleaned up, why was he still covered in blood? It was a lot of risk to take just for – *Just for what?*

*Why did you come here?*

*You mean, how could I have allowed such a mess? It’s out of the ordinary, to be sure. Why do you think?*

*You wanted me to... see.*

*And feel.*

*You were reckless.*

*Carefully so.*

*How do you know you took all the evidence with you?*

*You’ll see.*

Some questions he can’t find the answer to simply by imagining conversation with Hannibal. He considers that Hannibal might have done this to himself, just to see what Will would do. To see if Will could be baited by the very scent of so much blood. Blood that could have been harvested ages ago. Hannibal could have faked this, and easily.

Then, of all the mundane ways in which to have an epiphany, Will is brushing his teeth when he
suddenly realizes something: He doesn’t care.

In the grand scheme of things, it doesn’t really matter *which* grandiose gesture Hannibal had gone for. The intent was all the same. He knows Hannibal is going to spend the morning making blatant advances, and, right now, Will doesn’t give enough of a fuck about good and evil not to participate.

Back in the bedroom, Will finds Hannibal very much awake, and the dirty covers stripped from the bed, baring fresh sheets underneath.

Hannibal sits, naked but for his briefs, on the edge of the bed, and pats the space next to him. “Come, sit by me,” he invites.

“Why?”

Hannibal doesn’t answer but quirks the corner of his mouth up and subtly beckons with the forefinger of the hand lying on the bed.

Will shakes his head and very nearly rolls his eyes at Hannibal’s shameless flirtatiousness.

Hannibal smiles at him expectantly.

Will drops the towel wrapped around his waist and it lands on the floor next to their discarded clothing. The patches of dark red-brown on their shirts look odd in the bright sunlight that floods the room – and irreconcilable as blood. He approaches Hannibal dubiously, and Hannibal pulls him down onto the bed.

Will shifts closer, tentatively, and slides a hand up to the back of Hannibal’s neck. They kiss. Hannibal tugs him closer by the hips. They mirror each other – one leg hanging over the side of the bed, foot planted on the floor; the other leg bent at the knee. Hannibal slips his right leg under Will’s left to get him where he wants him. He kisses Will again, smooths a hand down Will’s injured arm from shoulder to wrist and holds it behind Will’s back, out of sight.

Will tightens his hand on Hannibal’s neck, momentarily unbalanced, but Hannibal squeezes his knee against the outside of Will’s thigh reassuringly.

“I have you,” he murmurs into Will’s ear, taking his kisses down Will’s neck. When their lips meet again, Hannibal slides his hand under Will between his legs.

He feels Will deepen the kiss when he moves it so the heel of his hand is massaging his perineum. He cups his hand along the curve and runs his middle finger between his cheeks. He does this a few times, enjoying the slight hitch in Will’s breath when he brushes over his hole. Then he slides it back towards him over Will’s balls, and pushes his thumb lightly against the base of his cock.

Will groans and Hannibal continues to rub small circles just there, squeezing very lightly at his balls. When Hannibal runs his hand up the length of Will’s shaft and explores the tip with his forefinger, Will breaks the kiss and starts mouthing his way down Hannibal’s neck.

Though he is tired, as always, Will is much less tense than the night before, and seems more than willing to let Hannibal’s hands roam freely.

“Better today?” Hannibal asks.

Will nods into his shoulder.
Hannibal combs through Will’s curls and pulls Will up to kiss him again. He wraps his other hand more firmly around Will’s cock and works his hand up and down at a lazy pace, stopping every now and then to stroke his balls and tease his hole.

Will’s breathing quickens when Hannibal breaks the kiss to take his middle finger into his mouth and coat it with saliva. He shivers when Hannibal rubs it around his hole. Will drags Hannibal back into a kiss and Hannibal smiles. It’s as good as him saying keep going. He wants the comfort of Hannibal’s mouth because he doesn’t want to stop – because, today, being touched this way is more exciting than it is frightening.

Will doesn’t pull his lips away, but does stop kissing him when Hannibal starts to press his finger in. He has to focus to keep himself from instinctively moving away from the touch.

When Hannibal’s finger is all the way inside, he again uses the heel of his hand to press into the area just below.

Will lets out a long breath against Hannibal’s mouth.

“Relax,” Hannibal breathes back.

Will starts kissing him again, his pulse noticeably quicker. When Hannibal drags his finger along his inside, Will gasps and reaches down to pull Hannibal out of his briefs.

“Just let me touch you,” Hannibal inveigles.

Will goes to say, don’t tell me what to do, but in the next instant he has to let go of Hannibal’s dick and bring his arm up over his back to clutch his shoulder, because Hannibal thrusts his finger in so hard he almost lifts Will off the bed with the force of it.

“Yes,” Hannibal whispers into his hair. “Just hold on to me.” He feels Will’s back muscles start to relax again, and finds his prostate with the one finger. He doesn’t press down, not yet, but he strokes at it lightly and Will shivers with pleasure.

Whatever transformation had begun to take place in the night is one step closer to completion. “Feels good,” Will mumbles, smiling against Hannibal’s mouth.

“Good.” Hannibal’s breath quickens to match Will’s and his cock hardens at the sound of Will’s enjoyment. He withdraws his finger and before Will can say or do anything in protest, lubricates a second and begins to press them both in.

Will’s hand, still on Hannibal’s shoulder, clutches down hard, and he stifles a moan by shoving his mouth roughly against Hannibal’s.

Hannibal moves his fingers steadily and massages Will’s ass cheeks with the other hand, sometimes wrapping that arm around his waist to steady him.

When Will’s moans are regular and irrepressible, Hannibal says, looking fully into Will’s face, “I want to use my mouth.”

“Oh fuck,” Will whispers.

Hannibal smiles. “You are never crasser than you are in bed.”

“Is that a challenge?” Will asks and, in the heat of the moment, grinds down on Hannibal’s hand.
Somehow managing to keep his fingers buried inside him, Hannibal slips off the bed to kneel between Will’s legs. Will adjusts himself and catches Hannibal’s shoulders before he starts to lean.

Hannibal wraps an arm tight around his waist. He can see Will’s lower stomach muscles clench in anticipation, the muscles in his jaw working. Will’s tongue stays plastered to his lower lip and he is all but panting.

Hannibal licks him and licks him, then closes his mouth tight around Will’s dick and sucks. He lets his breath be audible and his lips smack wetly against the head, correctly sensing that the more noise he makes, the more noise Will makes. He wants to hear him – hear him let go and surrender the pride and fear that keeps him locked up inside himself. He wants to be the one to ruin Will with pleasure. He will be the one. No one else will touch him, feel him, enter him, suck him, kiss him, or watch him writhe beneath them.

With low noises of pleasure and heavy breathing, he mouths Will’s navel while he gently slides Will’s hands off his shoulders. Will falls back on them, then down to his elbows when Hannibal lifts a leg over his shoulder. Will watches him intently, wanting perhaps to protest but, more than that, curious what will happen next. He bites his lip in nervous expectation when Hannibal meets his gaze, eyes smoldering with arousal.

It is unbelievably erotic how little Hannibal seems to care presently about paltry things like modesty. He manages to work his briefs off without removing his lips from Will’s skin. For a minute, he just burrows his face in Will’s midriff and strokes himself off, and Will can feel the exhales become moans against his stomach.

Once his erection is a match for Will’s he brings his mouth back down and continues to drag his tongue and lips over Will’s shaft. He reaches into the drawer of the bedside table and pulls out a bottle of lube and, even though Will is still watching, he doesn’t have time to say anything before Hannibal is shoving slicked up fingers back inside him.

Hannibal seems entirely immersed in what he’s doing, so Will tries to lose himself in the feel of it. “Oh my god,” he breathes, eyes falling shut.

Hannibal makes a pleased sound.

His fingers feel both exploratory and purposeful, and Will knows it’s never an accident when they graze against his prostate, nor when they press against it, forcing groans and other involuntary, guttural sounds out of Will’s mouth.

When two fingers become three, Will panics. “Ow, don’t,” he gasps.

Hannibal’s hand freezes and he slows the pace of his mouth on Will’s cock. He doesn’t remove his fingers, but doesn’t push them any farther. His lips migrate to kiss the insides of his thighs, over his stomach again for a while. He noses his way back down and brushes them breathily over his balls before licking back up his shaft and returning to the same persistent pace as before. His hand never moves.

The feeling of Hannibal’s lips all over him, of his insistent tongue on his dick, becomes unreasonably pleasurable. Will falls onto his back, finally, lifting his arms to cover his face. “Okay...” he mumbles into the crook of his elbow. He moves his hips slightly, giving Hannibal implicit permission to continue.

With a fairly wicked smile, which goes unseen by Will, Hannibal takes that permission and, with a
twisting motion, works his fingers all the way inside. Will’s breathing becomes erratic almost immediately and Hannibal finds his own movements become less controlled. He reaches into the drawer again, then removes his fingers and mouth quite suddenly. Will’s gasp at being emptied is the same as the one he gave at being filled.

Hannibal is moving up Will’s body, relentlessly pressing kisses against his heated flesh until his lips are at Will’s ear. “Let me,” he croons. “I’ll go so slowly.”

Will turns his head and breathes in the scent of Hannibal’s hair, his sweat, the lingering metallic smell of blood. The frantic need he’d felt last night has calmed, but he still wants. He takes a few deep breaths, swallows, then, in a voice that is timorous but no longer uncertain, again says, “Okay.”

Hannibal assaults his mouth, prying his lips apart with his own and almost biting Will’s tongue. His hands are busy with the application of condom and lube. Before he presses in, he looks into Will’s face and brushes the curls out of his eyes. He can feel Will hard against him, and the gleam in his eye is decidedly lustful.

He does go slowly. It’s a beautiful feeling. There is hardly any pain. Instead, it feels like a warm, full-bodied embrace, complete with synchronized heartbeats and equally heavy breaths. Hannibal’s eyes are gleaming. They look glassy, just as they had their first time, when he’d told Will to show him how it felt. Not glassy with unshed tears, however – just bright-eyed enjoyment at finally being allowed to have Will this way.

It’s effortless, once he’s buried in Will, to bring both of them to desperate panting just by thrusting his hips forward, barely pulling out, and then thrusting back in again. It’s rough and purposeful and provocative and loving, yet they are both barely moving. They press themselves against each other’s chests, legs tangled, Hannibal filling Will the way he’d never allowed before.

Hannibal is still making unabashed licentious sounds against Will’s mouth, and Will thinks he’s probably matching them – just as suggestive, more turned on than he’s ever been in his life.

“I want you like this all the time,” Hannibal breathes, pausing to wipe a bead of sweat from his temple before grinding his hips down and driving into Will as deep as he can. “How do you feel?”

Will trembles around the shock of such intense pleasure so close to his core, and only just manages to bite back a cry. Hot and testy with adrenaline, he snaps, “You know how I feel.”

“Tell me.”

“This isn’t therapy.”

“I disagree, Will.”

“How do you feel?”

Hannibal kisses Will deeply, lowering almost his whole weight on top of him as though he wants to smother him. Then, he flips Will over with a burst of sexual energy, drags him up against him by the hips, and shoves back in.

Will yells, then bites down hard on the pillow.

“I feel good,” Hannibal growls.

In the almost unbearable pleasure of it all, Will neglects to give an answer of his own. He knots his fingers in his hair and scarcely manages to breathe properly. As Hannibal fucks him, Will’s response
evolves into one long, uninterrupted moan that varies in volume with how deeply Hannibal penetrates.

“Let go, Will,” comes Hannibal’s voice from behind him.

“No, no, no."

Hannibal can see and feel Will’s back muscles tighten as he fights off the inevitable, refusing to give in to what he feels is undeserved. He allows his own pleasure to spread through him, curving himself over Will’s back. “Come for me. I want you to.”

Will issues another muffled protest into the pillow.

Hannibal straightens back up, grabbing Will’s hip with one hand and pressing down hard into his tailbone with the palm of the other. In a few more thrusts, he finishes, with a groan that he is sure will send Will over the edge. He’s right.

Will suddenly raises himself onto his hands and slams himself back against Hannibal with a low moan followed by, “Fuck. Oh fuck.”

They lie next to each other for a long time, eyes closed, pulses thrumming in their throats, breathing through their noses in an attempt to return everything to normal. Then Hannibal hears Will speak, quiet and matter-of-fact.

“You’re a manipulative bastard.”

When he looks over at Will, however, Will is smiling.

But the fragile bubble created that morning is fated not to last. It is burst, suddenly and completely, the following day.

Finally allowed back at Quantico, Will is in the lab with Price and Zeller, piecing the eighth victim’s death into the Carpenter’s methodology, when Agent Mapp enters.

She is dangerously close to Jack-level seething, and curt with her orders. “Pack up, gentlemen.”

“Christ,” Zeller exclaims, dumping his scalpel onto a surgical tray with a resounding clang. “Really? Another one?!”

Will, leaning against the cadaver cabinets with his hands in his pockets, sighs audibly, dropping his head to hide the fact that it’s a sigh of relief. Resolutions aside, some part of Will was still afraid Hannibal had lied to him.

“Hopefully the last one,” Mapp replies, but her clipped tone belies the optimism of her words. “Now, please, gentlemen.”

Will studies her face as they make their way to the parking lot. It gives nothing away but quiet fury. “You think he’s done?” It’s alarming how easy it is to put an uncertain spin on his words, to allow doubt to tinge his tone.

“I think he’s peaked,” Mapp qualifies, admitting, “I honestly can’t think of anything worse than this.”
When they arrive at the scene, the entire team is speechless. Price is the first to approach the body, though even *his* scientific objectivity is clearly being tested.

The tensile strength of Will’s nerves fails utterly – any moment now, they’ll snap.

Mapp takes one look at his blanched face and beckons over one of the junior techs. “Please escort Mr. Graham back to the lab.” She holds up her hand when Will starts to tell her he can handle it. “I don’t want to hear it.” She dismisses him, and ducks under the yellow tape without giving him another glance.

Burning with humiliation, he follows the tech back to one of the vehicles. They are barely five yards along the road when Will opens the car door without warning. The tech slams on the brakes, though it seems that Will would have been happy to just tuck and roll. He hops out without saying anything and stalks back to the body.

Zeller and Price stare at him. Mapp sees their looks and turns around to find Will approaching once more.

“Will–”

He ignores her and says quietly, but with no hint of uncertainty in his voice, “It’s the Carpenter.”

“Yeah, we *know*,” Zeller growls.

“No, I mean, *this body is the Carpenter.*”

Shocked silence greets his words. Eventually, Price ventures, “Then… who killed *him*?”

Will winces around the realization as it appears in his consciousness and is spoken aloud. “Someone worse.”

When Will gets back to Wolf Trap that evening, he closes all the curtains and utilizes the lock on his bedroom door for the first time ever. He crawls into bed, fully clothed and in a half stupor, and stays there. His entire body aches. He tries to sleep, but the pain only continues to intensify. When Abigail gets home, he doesn’t respond to her knock on the door, except to say that he’s fine – and, even then, only to end her confused, worried questioning. Much like the Dollhouse crime scenes had, the sight of the dead Carpenter has rendered him useless and immobile. This time, however, instead of the persistent lead weight of his limbs, it’s because he feels like the one who had been skinned alive.

Hannibal is in the basement, adding new charcoal, at long last, to his composition. The past few months had seen only the use of a pencil – the empty spaces of the mural transformed into a mere wish-list. Now, he sketches in dark curves, emblazoning the wall with the Carpenter’s final moments – flesh in tatters, the remaining skin being peeled systematically in narrow strips from the underlying tissue, face a tormented contortion of muscles contracted in the utmost agony. In a fit of whimsy, Hannibal draws one of the Carpenter’s arms outstretched, seized fingers reaching, both desperate and sinister, towards Jack Crawford’s slumped and gutted corpse.

The effect is, to say the least, pleasing. Absorbed as he is, the ringing of the phone seems much louder than usual, and he is jarred out of his wholly meditative state. Before he has the chance to even say *hello*, Abigail’s voice comes through the line, harsh and demanding.
“Why is Will all fucked up again?”

“Stay away from me.”

Night is falling and the ground is soft, but Will is nevertheless aware of Hannibal’s silent approach through the trees.

Hannibal’s voice is rank with irritation when he asks, “What is it now, Will?”

Will leans his head back against the bole of the tree he’s seated under. If he looks up at Hannibal now, he’s convinced he will kill him. He closes his eyes instead. When he opens them, Hannibal is looming above him, antlers blocking his view of the stream, every tine tapering to a lethal point that seems poised to impale him. He’d welcome it.

Hannibal reaches a hand down to him, just as the Wendigo had so many times in his dreams. Will stares at it. Instead of withdrawing it after a few moments wait, Hannibal reaches down lower to cup Will’s chin in his hand. Will fights his instinct to jerk away, or maybe even bite him, and, instead, stares up at him evenly. “I said, stay the fuck away from me.”

Hannibal tilts his head to the side, then very slowly drops into a crouch. He runs his fingers over Will’s lips and studies his drawn features. Will visibly shudders at his touch. Instead of looking hurt, Hannibal’s lip curls. “No,” he declares simply.

Will swallows, but the sour taste in his mouth won’t go away. “How long did you keep him alive for?”

“A very long time.”

Will sucks in a deep breath through his nose, like he might be sick. His bottom lip quivers. “Why?”

“For you.”

“Don’t,” he spits angrily. “I didn’t ask you to.”

“That’s not what I said.”

“I didn’t want you to.”

“That’s unfortunate, Will. I was hoping you’d be pleased.”

“Pleased?” Will’s voice would be incredulous if the volume were there, but it is little more than a whisper.

“Yes. You don’t always know what you want until it is given to you.”

Will tastes salt and feels wetness at the corner of his mouth. He drags a hand across his cheek. “You thought I’d want that…”

Hannibal wipes at Will’s other cheek. “You’ve become so in tune with your darkness.”

“That wasn’t dark. That was disgusting.”

Hannibal frowns. “It was a gift, Will.”
“I don’t want gifts.”
“A gesture then.”
“I don’t want those, either.”
“What do you want, Will?”
“Nothing.”
“Not even love?”
“Not from you.”

Will might as well have shouted it, the silence that follows is so absolute – and it takes a moment for the ambient noise of the woods and the water to permeate the steady whine in his ears. Out of the corner of his eye, he thinks he sees a feathered figure duck behind a tree. There is rustling, a heartbeat, and then it’s gone.

Abigail imagines their family as the shattered teacup Hannibal is always alluding to. It has come together again, but more like a porcelain house of cards – all the little pieces balancing against each other, almost perfectly. But there’s always one little piece left to place, and as soon as that piece is set, another piece falls out. She should just accept that the cup will always be chipped. Or, she should sweep the pieces off the table and let the chips fall where they may.

Not from you.

Rejecting Hannibal’s love is the last thing Will remembers with any clarity. They’d talked more. Perhaps fought. It could have been for minutes, or for hours. The little house is quiet and dark but for the porch light when they return, Hannibal trailing behind Will ten paces or so, all the way from the stream.

Something is missing. Will realizes his car is gone, and the guilt nearly overwhelms him. Once again, Abigail must have heard his and Hannibal’s exchange. He hopes that she’d been more mature than him and taken her phone with her. He also, for some reason, hopes she’d gone to Margot. A slight breeze stirs the night air, and a slip of paper flaps against the front door, affixed along the top by a single strip of tape. He hears Hannibal’s footsteps slow when his own do.

A chill races up Will’s spine as he climbs the steps, eyes glued to the note, though he’d rather look anywhere else. Abigail doesn’t leave notes. Abigail calls. Her tidy writing comes into view, the lettering broad and curved in a way that makes him think immediately of her smile. He tries to hold on to that image as the words come into focus.

Something collapses inside him. His ribs become quicksand, pulling the rest of him to be obliterated at his very core.

We’ve been given a rare gift, but you don’t want it.

Come and find me when you’re ready to be a family.
Beta'd by my beautiful murderwife, Kate (asprigofzest on A03, @weesprigofzest on tumblr), who has laughed and cried with me (mostly cried) every step of the way.

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