## The Sacrificial Lamb

by princesskay

### Summary

Five years after Hannibal and Will disappeared, they are located in Spain, where all evidence points to Hannibal holding Will as his prisoner. Circumstantial evidence isn't enough to prove whether or not Will was complicit in Hannibal's crimes. It's up to Alana and Jack to figure out if Will is suffering from Stockholm Syndrome or if his attachment to his accused abuser is true love. It's up to Hannibal to once more find a way out of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.

### Notes
banner created by the wonderful huntress1013!

See the end of the work for more notes.
Alana Bloom arrived at the FBI headquarters in Quantico at nine o'clock in the morning on a Friday. She hadn't stepped foot inside this part of the building in five years, as the duties she reserved herself to now were academic only. The austere steel and glass served only functionality, holding little cheer and hope for the future. She hadn't missed this place, only the people in it.

After receiving a temporary ID and clearance to enter the interrogation room, she stepped through the door of Room 3 to find Jack Crawford standing in front of the one way glass window. Even with his back turned, she could see he had aged quite a bit since their last meeting.

“Hello, Jack.”

He didn't turn to face her, “Thank you for coming, Alana. I know this is asking a lot.”

She ducked her head, drew in a deep breath, and tucked her shoulders back. Approaching the glass, she folded her arms across her chest and narrowed her gaze at the figure sitting at the table.

“We all knew this day had to happen.” She murmured, “But every day for the past five years, I kept waking up thinking, just let it be tomorrow. Not today.”

“This is a good thing.”

Jack finally looked at her. Lines crept deep like scars around his eyes and between his brows. His mouth was set in a firm, sloping line, and his dark eyes mirrored some of the fear in her own, overshadowed more by determination she had come to expect from him.

She pursed her lips and let her gaze drift from him to the person slumped over the table in the interrogation room. His shoulders sagged, and his face was clutched in his hands. Pain she had nearly forgotten suddenly pierced her chest.

“No.” She whispered, “Seeing him like this will never be a good thing.”

~

The latch on the door turned with a small shove of her hand. The steel was cold under her grasp, and as she entered, she felt a draft from the air conditioner like a winter chill. The interrogation room was dimly lit, giving it the look and feel of a damp basement.

She slid the door shut behind her and walked carefully to the desk. Her heart thundered in her chest, loud and obtrusive in the utter silence. A light bulb overhead flickered and hummed.

Pulling out the chair opposite the interview subject, she sat down and took her time arranging case files and a blank notebook and pen in front of her. He didn't look up. All she could see was the long, loose curls tumbling over his neck and forehead. She would've recognized him anywhere, no matter how many years it had been.

“Hi.” She whispered into the silence.

Her voice sounded raw and hoarse. She cleared her throat and tried again, but he spoke.
“Come to try your hand and interviewing me?”
She froze as he lifted his head from the cradle of his arms. Cerulean blue eyes cut straight to her without apprehension. His jaw was fixed, cheeks pale, eyes rimmed red. Defiant.

“I don't blame you.” He added, lacing his fingers together before him on the table, “Jack asked you to come, didn't he?”

“Yes.” She replied, lifting her chin, “He told me you wouldn't say a word to anyone.”

“He thinks I'll talk to you … because of our history.”
She paused for a moment, considering which course of action to take with him before she gave a brisk reply, “Will you? Because I won't waste my time. I'm a busy woman.”

“I'll talk.” He murmured, lifting his shoulders, “Maybe not about what Jack wants …”

“Talk about anything you like.” She gestured in a broad half circle.
His tongue flicked out and meticulously wet his lips. His eyes watched her, eyelids heavy and raw, but alert and clear. She felt a shudder at the base of her spine, a premonition perhaps. She could only guess what he had been through the past five years; even her worst nightmares wouldn't compare.

“You probably want to know ...” He said, leaning back in his chair, “... about the past five years.”

“Those past five years are a part of a police investigation.” She replied, “So yes, we would like to know.”
He seemed to mull this over for a moment before saying, “How's Margot? And your son? I hope they're doing good.”

“They're fine.” She said, cautiously, “Morgan is nine now. Do you want to see a picture?”
He nodded, “Sure.”
She pulled out her phone and entered her gallery. She had created a folder just for Morgan. She slid the phone across the table facing Will with the screen displaying a snapshot of Morgan at Christmas, his honey-blond hair askew, his blue eyes wide with excitement.

“He has your eyes.”
She controlled her smile, “And the Verger resilience and attitude.”

“He's beautiful.”
She retrieved her phone and tucked it back in her pocket.

“I've always thought about having children.” He said, quietly, “But now the concept seems … distant. Like it's too late.”

“It's never too late to give your love to someone who needs it.”

“Is that why you're here?” He asked, tilting his head to the side, “Because you think I need to be cared for?”

“You'll always be my friend, Will, and I want to help you.”
“What about Hannibal?”

“What about him?”

“He was your friend once. More than your friend.”

Alana pursed her lips. She’d spent more time than she cared to admit trying to smooth the dirt over the graves of her memories of Hannibal. She’d buried those skeletons deep, and covered them with the purity and overwhelming adoration of Margot's love for her. With one sentence, Will pulled back the dirt and roused the ghosts of years past. She could still remember in great detail what his hands had felt like, touching her with what she had once perceived as devotion. It made her shudder to think he might have been fantasizing about doing something quite different from sexual acts with her skin.

“That was before I knew what he was.”

“But you cared about him.”

A beat of silence before she decided to be truthful.

“Yes.”

“Does that make you a bad person?”

“I didn't know he was a killer then.”

He pursed his lips and sat back heavily in his chair. Under the too bright lights, his skin was quite pale, but in excellent condition. It occurred to her then that he didn't look abused, just tired.

Silence lapsed between them, and she glanced anxiously at the one-way mirror, in the general direction of Jack's overseeing gaze. She silently wondered if she had wasted her time driving a good hour from Muskrat Farm.

“Will, I didn't come here to talk to you about my relationship with Hannibal.” She said, at last.

He studied her briefly before asking, “What do you have in your file?”

She put her hand over the FBI seal on the front of the brown folder, and slowly pulled it in front of her.

“Evidence.” She said.

“Are you going to show me it, or is it here for affect?”

“I'll show you. It's a bit … disturbing.”

“Show me.”

She paused. His gaze was like flint, unafraid. She supposed it couldn't do anymore harm to show him the contents of the folder. He had lived it.

Flipping the folder open, she pulled free the most recent photographs added to the folder. She set them in a neat row in the middle of the table. All of the photographs were of bruised skin – blooming purple and pink impact wounds, deep to shallow cuts ranging from fresh to healing, and ligature marks standing red and swollen on pale wrists and ankles.
He observed them with almost cool detachment that made Alana's stomach begin to churn. The feeling of unease she had carried into the interrogation room began to evolve and grow into something much more unsettling.

“These photos were taken forty-two hours ago.” She said, softly, “When they found you in the house in Spain.”

“I know. I remember.” He murmured.

He pulled a photograph of his hand and wrist from the collage and stared at it for long, tense moments.

“He did this to you?”

It should have come out in an angry demand, but instead, the words emitted from her throat in a whisper.

“What does the report say?” He asked, suddenly defensive.

She caught a hot wave of anger from him, but not out of indignation for what had clearly been done to him. It was … protective?

“The report says that when the police were finally able to enter the house, they found you gagged and bound, drugged, and beaten. The report says that Hannibal attacked three police men before they were able to bring him down, and has since refused to speak to anyone. It says we don't need Hannibal to talk, that there was plenty of evidence on you to prove he's been holding you for the past five years out of some sick, twisted desire for amusement.”

Her voice rose to sharp, angry pitch. She could feel the blood rush hot to her face, igniting the resting anger that had been nesting in her chest. She expected a matching visceral reaction from him, but he remained motionless except for a tiny shift of his eyes from defiance to acceptance.

“Then I guess ...” He murmured, “... that's what happened.”

~

5 years ago

Red and blue lights flashed across the yard, reflecting in the stone and brick facade of the home of Bedilia Du Maurier. A dozen uniformed cops, plain clothes detectives, and CSU technicians milled up and down the front walk and into the house.

Daylight had barely broken along the horizon when the black SUV from the FBI pulled up to the curb. Jack Crawford, Jimmy Price, and Brian Zeller exited the vehicle and stepped underneath the yellow tape.

“What's the FBI doing here?” A short, balding detective in a rumpled suit and tie rushed to greet them.

“Jack Crawford, director of the BAU.” Jack said, pulling his ID from his jacket, “I have reason to
believe this scene is part of an ongoing investigation by my unit.”

“What investigation is that?”

“What did you see in there?” Jack asked, motioning to the house.

“It was a slaughter.” The detective replied.

“Missing organs? Mutilation of the body? Posing?”

“Yes ...” More slowly this time.

“You better let us through. I know who killed Dr. Du Maurier.” Jack replied.

The detective was too bewildered to continue protesting. Jack, Price, and Zeller swept past him without further argument and entered the house, where technicians in white, full body suits were processing the scene.

Bedilia Du Maurier had been strung from the ceiling like a marionette, dressed in one of her finest gowns. Her face was gaudy with makeup, completing the image of a doll – a bloodstained doll. She had been cut open, organs removed, and she was missing a leg.

The remains of her calf and foot were cooling on the dinner table. The table had been set for three, with wineglasses used at each setting, and plates smeared with a meal long gone. A candle burned low in the center of the table, combating the pungent smell of blood and death with a pleasant cinnamon scent.


“Get some photos.” Jack said, “Let the locals process the scene. I don't need any evidence or profiling to know who did this.”

“Yes, boss.” Price said, picking up his camera.

Jack walked a slow circle around the table. Signs of a struggle. Bloodied, ripped tablecloth, a meat fork covered in blood, a wineglass shattered on the floor, the chair at the head of the table tipped over. It was all easy to read, but the presence of not two, but three place settings made Jack stop cold.

They'd been combing the area around Hannibal's safe house for days. A videotape retrieved from the tripod set up in the house had revealed both Hannibal and Will's presence at the house when Francis Dolarhyde arrived, but became inconclusive for a concrete conclusion once the action moved outdoors. They had taken blood samples from all three men on the outdoor patio where Dolarhyde's brutalized body was discovered, but even that evidence didn't confirm Will and Hannibal's fate.

The idea that Will might be dead had occurred to Jack. It wouldn't be the first time Hannibal had tried to murder Will, and it seemed improbable that Hannibal was dead and Will was alive since Will's first course of action would have been to reunite himself with the FBI.

Up until now, it hadn't occurred to Jack that Will might be alive and uninjured, but acting in concert with Hannibal. Will was his friend, but the man had always been unstable. Jack wouldn't soon forget Randall Tier's end.

“What are you thinking?” Zeller asked. His frown suggested the same concern resting like a brick
on Jack's chest.

“We've got three place settings.” Jack said, “Clearly all used.”

“Yeah, they already tested the meat.” Zeller said, “It's human. Bedelia's missing leg, most likely. So we know whoever it was cannibalized her.”

“You don't have to dance around my feelings.” Jack said, “We know who this was.”

“And who was with him?” Zeller asked, gently.

“We don't know if this was consensual.” Jack said, bolstering his tone with false hope, “We don't know how Hannibal could be manipulating him.”

“Jack, there's a good chance Will helped Hannibal kill Francis Dolarhyde. We've both pulled apart that crime scene as well as it can be; it wasn't self-defense. It was a slaughter.”

“A slaughter of an evil man.”

“A slaughter nonetheless.”

Jack sighed and rubbed a hand over his mouth and jaw, “We won't know anything until they process the dinnerware. I don't want to jump to conclusions … again.”

“You sure you don't want to push this through our lab?” Zeller asked, “We can probably rush it a lot faster than the locals.”

“It's fine.” Jack sighed, “There's nothing here to tell us where he's headed.”

“My guess …” Zeller replied, “He's probably on a plane, far away from here by now …”

~

Their flight from Virginia to Paris left at midnight. When they landed, it was already the middle of the night in France, and most of the nightlife activity had died down. They took a cab from the airport to a hotel, which had been previously arranged. The clerk checked them in under the false names provided in the reservation and gave them the room key. Hannibal paid cash.

Will dropped his bags to the floor and glanced around the hotel suite at the expensive furnishings and Renaissance art on the walls. The suite had it's own kitchen, living room, master bath, and bedroom with two queen beds. He could only wonder how Hannibal had arranged such fine living quarters so quickly.

“What do you think?” Hannibal asked with a bright smile, “I've stayed here many times in my travels to France. I think you'll find the stay relaxing.”

“Speaking of staying … how long will we be staying?” Will asked, turning to level Hannibal with a serious gaze.

“A week at the most. I have quite the road trip planned for us.”

“This is a vacation?” Will asked with a mirthless chuckle.
“Don't you prefer that term to 'on the lam'?”

“I prefer the truth.” Will replied.

Silence swelled between them for several moments. Hannibal's gaze rested unwavering and dark on him, and Will felt as if he were being swallowed by that darkness. Hannibal reached out and touched his cheek, a brief caress against his jaw, before his fingers looped through Will's hair and pulled him forward. Their lips met in a brief, but firm kiss that made Will's heart jolt into race, excitement pursued by nausea.

When Hannibal drew back, reached up with his other hand touched Will's lips with his thumb, “That's the truth.” He murmured.
Jack stood in the corner of the interrogation room as an agent named Morrows set up the video camera. Alana sat across from Will, her hands clasped firmly in front of her, her chin lifted. Jack could see that she wasn't ready for this testimony.

He was. He'd been waiting five damned years for this testimony.

Yes, he was compassionate for what Will had gone through, but hearing it out of Will's mouth wasn't going to make it any worse for Jack. He was consoled by the fact that this time, they were going to lock Hannibal up and throw away the key. Will wouldn't be going back to him again for whatever twisted reasons he had done so during the Red Dragon case.

Morrows finished with the camera.

“We're ready.” He said, looking at Alana and Will first, Jack second, “Are you sure you want to be in the room, Agent Crawford?”

“I'm sure.” Jack nodded.

“All right.” Morrows said, “Just to remind everyone, this will be the official testimony by Mr. Graham and there shouldn't be any speaking except by Mr. Graham, and any questions Dr. Bloom has.”

“All right. Let's do this.” Jack waved a hand to expedite the process.

Morrows focused the camera on Will, “Ready, Mr. Graham?”

Will nodded.

Morrows pressed the record button and took his seat next to the tripod.

“Today is Friday, January 5th, 2020, the time is 11:52 a.m. I'm Dr. Alana Bloom, interviewing Will Graham for the case against Hannibal Lecter. With me in the room is Agent Samuel Morrows and Director of the BAU, Agent Jack Crawford.” She turned her gaze to Will, “State your name, and continue with the testimony.”

Will drew in a deep breath and gazed down the lens of the camera. Jack could see the screen on the back of the camera, recording Will's strangely calm expression.

“My name is Will Graham … victim of Hannibal Lecter, better known as Hannibal the Cannibal …”

Jack's eyes narrowed as Will's voice trailed off for several moments. Alana offered an encouraging smile, and tilted her head forward to urge him to continue.

“The day before yesterday, they found me in house in Spain where it appeared Hannibal had been … keeping me, for some time.”

“Will,” Alana interrupted, gently, “The arrest is a matter of record. You don't have to repeat it. Just tell us what's happened the past five years.”

“What's there to tell? We traveled a lot, and he fucked me a lot.”
Silence settled abruptly over the room. The tension settled, almost palpable.

Jack took an involuntary step forward, his revolting mind urging him to challenge that statement. Alana shot him a cutting gaze over her shoulder, forcing him to a standstill.

“That's the part we need to know.” Alana turned back to Will. Voice wavering, she pressed on, “We need to know what all criminal activity occurred during your time with him.”

“If you're asking me if I saw him kill anyone, the answer is no.”

“Could he have killed someone when you weren't present?”

“Maybe. My guesses and conclusions aren't concrete evidence.”

Jack crossed his arms, feeling a frown begin to pull tension across his forehead. Something was off. Will was off. This wasn't the man who had been so passionate about not only stopping, but also helping Francis Dolarhyde. He wasn't the family man that Jack had so coldly ripped from his home to hunt a killer.

“Will, what we really need to know about is the … the sexual assault and the physical abuse.” Alana said, as gently as possible.

Will's head lowered. The camera caught several long seconds of him breathing deeply and staring at his lap, unable – or unwilling – to continue with the interview.

“Will.” Alana said, leaning forward, “Would it be easier if I asked you questions, and you responded with yes or no?”

Will nodded his head, curls flopping across his forehead with vigor.

“Did Hannibal Lector force you to have … did he rape you?”

Will's head ducked tighter. His shoulders drew tight, and Jack could see that he was all but shaking, his hand curled into fists under the table. He couldn't be sure if Will was nodded his head yes, or simply shaking out of fear and trauma.

“Will, you have to give me a vocal answer for the record.” Alana said, softly.

Suddenly, the chair screeched back, and Will jumped up from his seat, shouting, “No!”

They all drew back, watching as Will paced out of the view of the camera and composed himself with both hands cradling his face.

Alana glanced at Jack, confusion and uncertainty etched in her wide, blue eyes.

“Maybe this isn't a good time-” Morrows began, reaching for the camera.


Will pulled his hands from his face and slowly turned to look at him, “I'm sorry, Jack. I can't give you what you expect out of me. I can't say this stuff.”

“Why not?” Jack demanded, “There's enough evidence here. It's open and shut. All you have to do is say 'yes' to some of Alana's questions.”

“You want Hannibal's head on a platter.” Will hissed, his hands clenching into fists at his sides,
“But I'm not fucking giving it to you.”

“But it's true, isn't it?”

“Jack, don't shout at him.” Alana interrupted, rising from her chair, “It could count as duress.”

“I don't give a damn.” Jack snapped, “We have Hannibal now, and we're going to indict him on as many charges as we can manage because he's a sick, twisted son of a bitch and he deserves to rot.”

“He's the victim here.” Alana exclaimed, sweeping a hand toward Will, “Can't you see? He's hurt, and possibly confused because Hannibal's been doing God knows what to his brain. You can't force things out of someone who's been traumatized beyond imagination.”

Jack drew in a deep breath. He felt some of his anger diffuse.

“I'm sorry. You're right.” He took a step back to his corner, “Continue, Dr. Bloom.”

She gave a firm nod and turned back to Will, “Will, please, sit down.”

He glanced at the table like it had claws, but slowly returned to his chair. He sat down stiffly, one hand rubbing at the back of his neck.

“Will, please ...” Alana said, reaching across the table to take Will's hand on hers, “Back up what I'm saying to Jack. Do you need more time to talk about this?”

Will's fingers tightened around Alana's, and for a moment, Jack thought he would break down crying. Instead, he withdrew his hand, and lifted his chin.

“This interview is over.” He said, his voice raw but glacially calm, “I want to see Hannibal.”

~

“It could be trauma, it could be gaslighting, brainwashing, any number of things that happen when a person is subjected to more abuse than they can process.” Alana said as she stood over Jack's office in the BAU section of Quantico, “Will is the victim, Jack. Don't forget that.”

“I've seen trauma and brainwashing.” Jack replied, “Will has the look of a man who knows what he's doing and saying.”

“Miriam Lass was sure it wasn't Hannibal.” Alana said, crossing her arms, “So sure that she shot Frederick Chilton in the head in this very building.”

Jack pursed his lips and glanced away.

“Did you get a good look at him, Jack?” Alana said, “He's clean, nourished, taken care of. Up until the moment Hannibal put Miriam Lass in that pit, he took care of her. She even told you that she was never afraid when he had her.”

“That's because he kept her sedated.” Jack said, firmly, “According to the tests they did at the hospital, Will had only one dose of the barbiturate Hannibal was using in his system. There were no signs of prolonged drug use.”
“Barbiturates aren't the only way to brainwash someone.” Alana argued, “What about the light therapy and hypnosis Hannibal used on Will all those years ago when they were in therapy?”

“Will was suffering from encephalitis then.”

“Hypnosis works on a normal brain, especially with someone who is experienced in hypnotizing people. My point is, Hannibal has a lot of different methods of brainwashing Will, or erasing his memories of abuse. He's not someone to be trifled with, Jack.”

“I know that. I just don't want to get tunnel vision.” Jack replied, “God knows we never saw it coming that Hannibal is who he is all those years ago.”

Alana sighed. She sank to one of the chairs across from Jack's desk and cupped her forehead in her hand.

“I hate to say it …”

“What?”

“What if it's Stockholm Syndrome?” She asked, her voice hollow and fragile, “Capture bonding.”

“You mean like Patty Hearst?”

“Oh Jaycee Lee Duggard, or the dozens of other documented cases of victims bonding with their captors. He's been with Hannibal for five years.” Alana said, firmly. Her eyes grew sad as she imagined those five years. “That's a long time to be worn down by constant abuse and threats.”

Jack pursed his lips, “I suppose it's possible. They were already close before everything happened, and he didn't seem at all opposed to the idea of seeing Hannibal again for the Red Dragon case. That kind of fixation on someone is easy to exploit.”

“Maybe Hannibal saw his chance, and pushed Will over the edge.” Alana said, her voice growing thick with emotion, “He already knew Will so well. It wouldn't be hard to find and use his vulnerabilities.”

“He did convince Abigail Hobbs to push you out a window.” Jack remarked.

“Jack, whatever Will says or does now, we can't blame him.”

“I think we should get someone objective in here for a psych eval on him.” Jack said.

“If he'll talk to someone else.” Alana shook her head, “He never accepted psychoanalysis before when he was relatively healthy. What makes you think he'll go along with it now that he's been Hannibal's prisoner for five years?”

“You're right, but it's worth a try. I want concrete proof that he could be suffering from Stockholm Syndrome.” Jack said.

They were silent for several moments. The clock on the wall ticked off the seconds like a time bomb.

“Are we really going to let him see Hannibal?” Alana asked, her voice shattering the quiet.

“If we did, it would be under supervision and recorded for court.”

“You're really considering it?” She asked, her tone rising sharply, “It could launch him into hysteria, seeing the man who's been torturing him for five years.”
“It may be our only chance to confirm the abuse if Will won't talk to us.” Jack said.

“It’s only been forty-eight hours. We have Hannibal in custody. I don't think we need to rush Will into talking. Let him rest, Jack. We can try to get him to talk in another day or two when he's been properly cared for and rested.”

Jack nodded, “You're right. Let's get him back to the hospital.”

~

Will's brief rest was interrupted by the slam of the interrogation room's door.

Alana entered like a breath of frigid air, skin snow white, eyes icy blue.

After his outburst, she, Jack, and the other agent had left for several minutes. The camera and pictures from the case file were gone, much to his relief. He wondered what they would do with the recording. It certainly couldn't be entered as evidence.

“Jack and I have agreed that we should get you back to the hospital so you can rest.”

“What about my testimony?”

“It can wait for another day.”

“I'm assuming you're not going to be relying on the recording you just made.” He remarked.

Her eyes narrowed slightly. She was trying to read him.

“No. This is a very fragile case.” She said, gripping the back of her chair.

Her hands were as pale and delicate as he remembered. A huge diamond ring flashed almost laughably on her small hand. He concentrated on the way the light shifted through the smooth cuts in the stone, the only bright, pretty thing in the room.

“We don't want any question of the validity of your statement.” She replied, “By now, everyone knows that this case is personal to a lot of people in the FBI. Especially Jack and myself.”

“They want an air tight confession.” Will concluded, “No chance of Hannibal the Cannibal getting away with it this time.”

“Not a confession. A testimony. You're not being accused of anything.”

Yet.

“But yes.” She added, after a pause, “It needs to be solid.”

She observed him with a cool gaze that was easily betrayed by the panic behind her eyes. Her eyes had always been so expressive, even when she maintained her composure. She was terrified for him. Perhaps terrified of him. Maybe she had good reason to be.

“Are you going to drive me back?” He asked.
“I can, yes.”

He offered her a forced smile, “I'd like that.”

“All right.” She smiled back.

He rose from his chair and followed from the room.

The walls of the FBI were just as he remembered them. Not much had changed here, especially Jack Crawford. He fully expected the director of the BAU to come at him with everything, even if he was being viewed as a victim for the time being.

Jack didn't concern him. But Alana did.

As Alana led them across the parking lot, Will asked, “Don't you have other things to do … I mean, besides driving me around today?”

“I can cancel appointments.” She replied, briskly.

He raised his eyebrows.

“I'm married to one of the richest women in Maryland. I can afford not to work; I just enjoy my profession too much to quit.”

She raised her key fob and the lights flashed on the black and chrome Tesla parked ten feet ahead. He smiled genuinely, and this time, it didn't hurt to express his amusement.

Alana waited until he was buckled in and relaxed before she pulled out of the parking lot. They drove in silence for several minutes before the question itching at the front of his thoughts found it's way to his tongue.

“What did Jack say about me seeing Hannibal?” He asked.

She cast him a quick glance before steadying her gaze on the road ahead, “It's a maybe.”

Will nodded, hoping to appear resigned.

“Why do you want to see him?” She asked, confused.

“To let him know I'm still here.” He murmured, turning his gaze to countryside speeding past them.

“You mean, that he didn't break you?”

“Something like that.”

“It's not a good idea, Will. You need to rest, regain control of your identity, start rebuilding.”

“Rebuilding what?”

“Your life. What you had before he took it from you.”

“What did I have? An old farmhouse and a pack of dogs … not much of a life.”

“But it was your life.” She insisted.

He could feel her gazing worriedly at him, but he didn't turn his eyes from the window.
“I remember when we saved Abigail.” He whispered, “I wanted to protect her too. I wanted her to take her power back. She was almost a victim of her father's madness, but we saved her. I wanted to fix her, but now I realize … It's not that easy.”

“I know I can’t fix you, Will.”

“You know it, but you don't accept it.” He turned his head against the leather head rest and gazed at her defiant profile.

Her jaw worked, and she flexed her fingers over the steering wheel. Her gaze flicked across the mirrors, resting anywhere but him.

“Are you going to go along with a second testimony?” She asked.

“I don't have much of a choice.”

“You do. It's your testimony. Your truth.”

“Usually the truth isn't as black and white as we'd like to think.”

“What about a doctor? Would you talk to someone besides me?”

“You mean a psychiatrist?”

“Yes. Jack's wants an eval.”

Will sighed and tilted his head back. The car ran smoothly over the asphalt, luring him towards sleep. He felt exhausted. The last thing he wanted was to talk to some stranger about the last five years, and his resulting condition – the condition they were expecting. Stockholm Syndrome; if only it were that simple.

“You know I've never let anyone evaluate me.” Will said.

“This time it's very important.”

“Well can't it be you?”

“Jack wants someone objective.”

“You can be objective.”

She shook her head, and shot him a quick, dubious glance, “Not with you.”

“Fine. No eval then.”

“Will-”

“At least not right now. I'm tired. I just want to sleep.”

She conceded, “Okay. Let's focus on rest for now. We can do this one day at a time.”

~
Alana leaned against the door frame and watched Will's sleeping figure. He was curled up on his side, sheets pulled up around his mouth. He'd fallen asleep quickly, in the short time she had been gone to speak with the attending doctor.

It felt odd to be standing here after five years, watching over him. Even more odd to remember it had been nearly ten years since she'd considered him romantically. She felt strangely protective of him, even if every other emotional response she'd had toward him in recent years had been wildly opposite. But now, as she watched him, it was as if no time at all had passed, and she felt the same need to help him as she had when he was suffering from encephalitis and was wrongly accused for murder.

She stuck her hand in her pocket and pulled out her cell phone. These bubbling thoughts had to go somewhere.

She dialed Jack.

“Hello.”

“Hi, Jack. It's Alana. I just got Will settled back at the hospital.”

“How is he?”

“He seems calm. Really calm.” She replied, easing the door shut so as not to wake Will with the conversation.

“Strangely calm?”

“Yes.” She said, pacing into an empty hallway, “Something isn't right, Jack. He asked about seeing Hannibal again, and I told him maybe. When I told him it wasn't a good idea and that he needed to focus on healing, he seemed to think his previous life wasn't worth anything.”

“More symptoms of Stockholm Syndrome?”

“Maybe. I haven't studied real living cases enough. The problem is that every case is different, and the attachment ranges from emotional commiseration to love, and even devotion. It's hard to tell what the extent of his feelings for Hannibal are.”

Jack's end of the line was quiet for several moments. Alana could hear him thinking, and she didn't like the tone of it.

“Alana, when Will admitted to calling Hannibal that night we all nearly died at his house, he said he'd done it because Hannibal was his friend and he wanted to run away with him.”

“Jack, what are you saying?”

“We can't rule it out, Alana.”

“Rule what out?”

“That Will being with Hannibal all these years was consensual.”

“No.” She snapped, “I refuse to believe it. Will may have had weaknesses when it came to Hannibal, but he's not a murderer. He's not accepting of murder, or cannibalism for that matter.”

“Are you sure?”
“Yes, I am sure.” She said, clutching her phone in a white-knuckled grip, “This is Will Graham we're talking about, Jack. Will Graham, our friend and colleague. Just because it's been five years since we've seen him doesn't mean the facts about him have changed.”

Jack gave a resigning sigh, “All right, what did he say about the psych eval?”

“He said no unless I do it.”

“Then it's not happening. I don't want your feelings for him to disrupt the evaluation.”

“Feelings? He's my friend.” She said, coldly, “At one time, I thought you were his friend too.”

She jabbed the end call button and shoved the phone back in her pocket. She was seething, and a knot had formed in her throat. She wasn't sure whether it was out of righteous indignation or a fear that Jack could be right.
Chapter 3

3 weeks ago

It usually happened on a Sunday at the end of the month, just when he was beginning to wonder if the torture would finally end. He didn't work on Sundays, even if a case was on his mind. Bella had always insisted they take at least one day to rest. These days, the last Sunday of every month wasn't the least bit restful.

Jack gave a resigned sigh as he flipped through his mail that Sunday and discovered the powder blue envelope, addressed to him in beautiful calligraphy, but with no return address. It was stamped from more than one location in Europe and one when it entered the US.

He didn't rush it to the FBI lab as he had done the first twenty-five times. He knew they wouldn't find anything.

With little ceremony or emotion, he ripped the envelope open and pulled out a 4x6 photograph and a lock of hair tied with a pink bow. The photograph was high quality, but it was dark, both figures in the frame caught in shadow. There was a slight blur of motion in the photograph, as the larger figure bent in concentration and pleasure over the smaller body. If it hadn't been so sick, it might have been artistic and beautiful.

Jack stared at the picture for a long time. He could make out Will Graham's face smashed into the pillow. Even in the dark, the face was unmistakable, as it had haunted him for nearly five years now. The other face, one which had haunted his darkest dreams, was turned to a profile, but was no less unmistakable.

Jack would've chased this devil to the lowest circle of hell – if only he had a starting point.

He toyed with the idea of throwing the mail away for several moments before picking up his phone and dialing Jimmy Price's number as he had every other time.

“Hi, Jack what's up?”

Jack was quiet, rubbing a hand over his face. He felt a sudden, unacceptable wave of raw emotion.

“Oh.” Jimmy murmured, “It's Sunday, isn't it?”

“Yes.”

“Do you want to meet at the lab?” Jimmy asked, carefully.

“We won't find anything, will we?” Jack asked.

“Maybe this time we will. We have to keep looking if that bastard intends to keep taunting you.” There was a dull buzz of silence over the line before Jimmy asked, “What is it this time?”

“A lock of hair, and a picture.” Jack replied, “Even if we test everything, I know what we'll come up with. It's Will's hair, but that's all that will be conclusive. No prints, no DNA, no leads.”

“Everyone is on this, Jack.” Jimmy encouraged, “FBI, Interpol, every cop in Europe right now … We know they're there somewhere. We just have to get one step ahead.”
“But we won't. He's too damn smart.”

“Bring the picture and the hair in anyway.” Jimmy said, “It's my job, Jack. Let me do it, even if it's fruitless.”

“Okay.”

Jack hung up the phone. The picture lay on top of the mail, teasing him. He had the urge to tear it up.

Picking up the lock of hair, he ran his finger through the delicate curl at the end. It was soft and freshly cut. When he dragged it beneath his nose, it smelled washed.

*Will, wherever you are … whatever he's done to you … we're going to find you.*

The thought alone kept Jack anchored in rage, his eyes fixed on the goal. Even if this chase wore him down to nothing, he had to stay strong for Will. He'd let the other man down too many times.

Well not this time. Even if it was Hannibal Lecter they were up against, Jack wouldn't let the games poison his mind. They would find Will, and when they did, Hannibal would have hell to pay.

~

**Present Day**

The gray, marble floors of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane created the perfect, pretentious tapping sound when paired Freddie Lounds's Prada heels. She marched with purpose down the hallway, past the rows of cells occupied by empty-eyed inmates, to the last cell on the left.

The cell was the only one with a glass partition – to keep dangerous hands away from flesh and blood. It was well-lit and clean. It's only occupants were a toilet, a bed, and the one man she had driven all the way from New York to look at.

He was lying prone on the bed, hands folded on his chest, eyes fixed on the ceiling. Thinking, meditating, planning?

She came to a stop in front of the glass, and adjusted her bag on her shoulder. A smile tugged at her mouth. It felt good to win, even if it were a deferred pleasure; deferred by five goddamn years.

He heard her, or smelled her, possibly both. He sat up and stared through the glass at her with his hollow, ink drop eyes with the most intense look of infernal hatred she had glimpsed in some time.

“So, you're not dead.” She announced, wringing every drop of triumph and amusement into her voice.

“Not nearly.”

She hadn't heard his voice in five years, and for a moment, it sent a chill down her spine.
"He's locked up, Freddie. Can't touch you. Nothing more than a de-clawed animal."

“Well, neither am I – obviously.” She smiled, “I wrote about you, while you were gone. Did you have a chance to pick up the hard-cover edition? It sold over 20 million copies. That's not counting the original soft cover.”

He regarded her with the same seething hatred, but said nothing. She didn't guess she'd get much from this first interview, but it was worth it to see him sitting there in the unflattering hospital uniform and none of his panache and high society furnishings. Robbed of class and good taste he enjoyed so much by his own sick urges.

“It was a number one best seller.” She continued, strolling closer to the glass, “I wrote a whole chapter about 'murder husbands'. I had no idea what kind of demographic I was getting into when I coined that phrase.”

He rose from the bed and crossed the cell, his eyes trained on her the entire time.

“If it's an interview you're looking for Miss Lounds, I must politely decline.”

She raised her eyebrows and let out an abrupt laugh, “That's all you have, Hannibal?”

“I have nothing further to say to you.”

The statement was made with grim determination, but she caught the creeping look of despair that bled into his gaze just before he turned his back to her.

Her gloating flagged. She had never seen true emotion from him. It caught her off guard, and most of all, it made her suspicious. Was this some ploy? A diversion? A game?

“I'm interested in writing a follow up book.” She said, “Any ideas of what I might fill the chapters with?” She paused for affect before adding, “I'm sure Will Graham will. He's my next stop.”

His shoulders drew taut, but her words garnered no other reaction.

“The first time I met you, I had no idea what you were. I was just interested in getting information on Will Graham.” She said, letting her tone ease out of journalist's wit and into the territory of friendliness, “I actually kind of liked you even though you made me delete the recording of your session with Will. I'm willing to paint you in a kinder light than I did in my first book.”

It was tasty bait for him, she was certain. After studying Hannibal Lecter for several years, she was confident in the fact that he was a narcissist, full of deluded ideas of grandeur and an inflated god complex that made Jesus pale in comparison. He would love it if she wrote a book glorifying him and his twisted and bent view on life.

“What a time we live in, when even my impulses and actions are glorified by a world so often trapped by morals.” He remarked, a dim smile crossing his face, “You belong in here just as much as I do, Miss Lounds.”

She returned his smile and got as close to the glass as she could, “We're all a little crazy, a little neurotic in our own ways.”

He pursed his lips briefly, and his tongue peeked out to moisten his lips. It was like watching a snake extend it's forked tongue.

“Tell Will Graham … the clock hasn't run out of time just yet.”
Her eyes narrowed as he paced back to his bed and laid down. Folding his hands over his chest, he closed his eyes and became as still as a marble statue.

She could only imagine what that statement meant.

“Miss Lounds.”

She spun around when her name echoed down the corridor. Jack Crawford marched toward her, a look of disbelief and annoyance on his face.

“I'm not going to begin to imagine how you got down here before I did.” He said, as he drew closer, “But I have to ask you to leave. Starting-” He glanced at his watch, “- now, this is an official interview of a prisoner by the FBI.”

“Agent Crawford, so nice to see you again.” She smiled, sweetly, “You never liked me much, but I have to kindly warn you – he's not exactly a Chatty Cathy today.”

“All due respect, he never liked you either.” Jack said.

“At least he never tried to stab me in the throat.”

Jack's gaze darkened, “I'm not below asking security to escort you out.”

“I know where I'm not wanted.”

She swept past him, a smile spreading across her face. She didn't have to be present for the interview to know Hannibal Lecter wasn't going to talk to Jack. Whatever had gone wrong and landed him in prison, he wasn't gloating about it like the last time he'd stayed at here. He was outright angry, and she had feeling it had a lot to do with Will Graham.

~

“Hello, Jack.”

Hannibal's voice echoed softly in the steel and stone cavern of the basement of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. No expansive cell with paintings and books this time. They'd stuck him in the deepest, darkest corner they could find.

“Hello, Hannibal.”

Hannibal opened his eyes and peered across the tiny cell to see Jack standing at the glass, his hands shoved in his pockets, his chin lifted in a look of utter determination.

Good for Jack. Not giving up all these years despite the mail Hannibal had enjoyed posting to his home.

“I suppose you'd like to cut past pretense and pleasantries, and ask me about Will.” Hannibal said.

He rose from his cot and clasped his hands behind his back. He didn't meet Jack at the glass; he could smell the frustration and rage from here, and it soothed his own roiling emotions well enough.
“I would.”

“How is dear Will?”

It took all his self-control to make that question sound like a taunt and not a yearning inquiry.

“Unstable.” Jack said, “Thanks to you.”

“Will has never been entirely sane.”

“Alana seems to think he has Stockholm Syndrome.” Jack said.

That remark was enough to make Hannibal's lips twitch in a smile.

“What did you do to him for the past five years?” Jack added, more stridently this time.

“Are you thinking of Miriam Lass, Jack?” Hannibal asked, tilting his head back as he recalled the trainee's wide, frightened eyes and softness of her hair, “Wondering if you let another one of your responsibilities wander carelessly into the lion's den?”

“I've accepted my mistakes.” Jack replied, “And I'm doing my best to remedy them. And, just to let you know, Miriam is doing fine now. After she shot Dr. Chilton, the court released her from responsibility due to incompetency. She's been through a lot of rehab, but she's going to be just fine. I wouldn't call it a win on your part.”

“On the contrary, I'm pleased to hear she's doing so wonderfully. I always enjoyed her company. Lovely girl.”

Jack's silence rumbled in the distance like a growing storm.

Then, he seemed to compose himself and said, “I didn't come here to talk about Miriam.”

“You say Alana has returned.” Hannibal said, “Will I perchance get a visit from her?”

“I doubt it. She came for Will … Speaking of Will-”

“You want to know what I did to him.” Hannibal finished, “You should ask Will.”

“I have.”

“I think my Sunday gifts in the mail told you well enough.”

Jack's frown deepened, “You were sexually abusing him.”

“I wouldn't quite call it abuse. You should have heard him moan.”

Jack's fist slammed on the glass, so loudly that it awakened a prisoner a few cells over who began to howl like a terrified animal.

“You are going to pay for this.” Jack seethed, his breath steaming the glass, “We're going to lock you away in this little cell and throw away the key. No books, no drawings, no favors, no Will Graham. It doesn't matter if you talk, you see. You're already guilty as hell and no court in the world is going to judge in your favor. I hope you enjoy the smell of mildew and the odor of all the other basket cases down here because it's going to be your home for the rest of your miserable life.”
He turned to march away, his broad shoulders drawn tight, his head down like a charging, enraged bull.

Hannibal smiled as he departed. Jack's rage was a brief respite from the dissatisfaction swarming in his brain.

He went back to his cot and laid down. Closing his eyes, he cut off the sounds of the hospital, the other prisoners moaning and talking to themselves, and the dull thump of his heart. The shutters of his mind opened to the golden beauty of the Norman Chapel, where the skeleton blazed from the floor, and Will waited for him with open arms.

~

When Will woke up, his mouth was bone dry and his body felt stiff. A glance at the clock told him that he had been asleep for twelve hours. He wasn't sure what had woken him until he realized his eyes were burning from a flash of light.

Freddie Lounds stood at the end of the bed, a Nikon camera cradled in her hands.

“My apologies, ahead of time.” She smiled.

Will's mind rotated through a dozen replies before he pushed himself up against the pillows and said, “Freddie, I see not much has changed. You're still sneaking into places you're not wanted and taking pictures like some kind of stalker.”

“It's fodder for the masses.” She said, pulling the camera strap from around her neck and putting the camera back in it's bag, “They eat that kind of thing up.”

They stared at each other distrustfully for several moments before she said cocked her head, “You look like shit.”

“You don't look like a million bucks either.”

“I drove all the way from New York last night when I heard Hannibal had been caught.”

“What do you want, Freddie?” He asked, annoyed.

“Just a comment.” She said, pulling out her notebook and pen, “I'm not doing journalism much anymore since my book was published, but I write an article here and there. My friends at Tattlecrime would love for me to make a guest appearance.”

“Here's your comment.” He said, “I read your book, and it was trash. Where did you get half of those statements? Did you twist them around, or did you just plain make them up?”

“It doesn't much matter does it?” She asked, chuckling, “The public loved it. Enough to buy over 20 million copies.”

“I'd like for you to leave now.” He said, reaching for the button to call his nurse.

“Just one more thing.” She said, gathering her bag and putting her notebook away, “I got in to see Hannibal and he asked me to tell you something.”
She paused long enough to gauge his reaction. He was sure she saw curiosity and hopefulness in his eyes, and instantly cursed himself for being so transparent.

“What?” He asked, fighting to keep his tone neutral.

“He said, the clock hasn't run out of time yet.” She said. Her head tilted and her eyes narrowed, trying to see through him.

Will spread his hands to motion to the hospital room, “Well, apparently it has.”

She nodded, and turned to leave. He leaned his head back against the pillow to rest, but she paused at the door.

“I don't know if this matters to you anymore,” She said, turning to look at him with a much softer gaze, “But I never wrote about Abigail, just like you asked.”

He stared at his lap. “Thank you.”

“It wasn't easy, leaving her out of the narrative.” She remarked, “But I thought she deserved it.”

“She did.” He said.

～

Alana was curled up in front of the fire in her pajamas when Margot brought hot chocolate with marshmallows into the living room.

“Thanks.” Alana said, taking her cup.

Margot gave her a brief kiss on the cheek, “Do you want to talk about today?”

Alana clutched the warm mug just below her mouth and blew out a sigh, “I probably shouldn't keep it bottled up.”

“I'm not the psychiatrist out of the two of us, but even I know that.” Margot said, “What happened?”

“After all these years of wondering and worrying, I wasn't ready to see Will like that.” Alana said, “I haven't considering him romantically in forever, but I still care. I don't want to see him hurting – and right now, he is in a world of hurt. I can tell, even if he doesn't talk to me.”

“You think Hannibal hurt him?”

“I don't know.” Alana sighed, “I think he's traumatized by something, and I think he's feeling more than he's telling. I want to believe it's Stockholm Syndrome, but-”

“But what?”

“I don't know, there's a feeling I can't place.”

“As someone who was the weaker dynamic in an abusive relationship, I have a place to say I understand what Will might be going through.” Margot said, softly, “Just because someone has
hurt you, doesn't mean you don't care about them anymore.”

“You hated your brother.”

“I did. But before that, he was my brother and nothing could change that. It wasn't until he took my chances for a child that I cut the last ties to those feelings.”

Alana thought for a moment before nodding, “A large percentage of cases of Stockholm Syndrome are in a domestic relationship where one party is being abused. Most of the time, it's a husband or boyfriend beating the woman. The woman keeps going back even though she's being hurt because she's been conditioned to think her husband or boyfriend isn't all bad or that he's not completely responsible for his actions. It's not an active form of thinking; it forms over time as a defense against the trauma of systematic abuse.”

“If you think Will is suffering from Stockholm Syndrome, I believe you.” Margot said, “And I don't think you should doubt your prognosis as a psychiatrist. I was in therapy with Dr. Lecter, and I can tell you that he is a very persuasive person.”

“I was in bed with him.” Alana said, rubbing a hand over her eyes.

“Don't beat yourself up. You didn't know.”

“Jack thinks Will might have been with him voluntarily.” Alana said, “I just can't accept it.”

“Then don't.” Margot said, “You're good at your job, so do it. Assess him, and prove that he's innocent. He deserves it after everything he's been through.”

Alana leaned over and kissed Margot firmly only the lips, “I love you.”

“I love you, too.” Margot smiled.

“Thank you for not letting me doubt myself.” Alana murmured, nuzzling her forehead against Margot's.

The ding of a notification on her iPad drew Alana's attention to where the device sat on the table next to the couch. When she picked it up and looked at the notification bar, she saw that Freddie Lounds had written an article for tattlecrime.com mentioning Hannibal Lecter.

She gaped as she read the headline.

HANNIBAL THE CANNIBAL BEHIND BARS WHILE PARTNER IN CRIME LANGUISHES FREE IN THE HOSPITAL
At eight o'clock sharp the next morning, Jack assembled himself, Alana, Jimmy, and Brian in his office for a serious run-down of the situation.

The faces looking back at him were grim as he read parts of the Freddie Lounds article aloud. When he finished, he set his tablet aside and interlocked his fingers on the desk in front of him.

“This is serious and damaging.” He said, “The hotlines were flooded last night after this article came out. Everyone wants to know why we haven't taken a dangerous criminal like Will Graham into custody.”

“That's bullshit.” Alana said, her cheeks rosy with anger, “Will is no criminal. That's never been proven.”

“Evidence doesn't matter when the public has Freddie Lounds feeding them lies.” Brian said.

“Can we arrest Freddie?” Jimmy asked.

“Unfortunately, Freddie has freedom of the press on her side.” Jack replied, “And we all know we can't get her rescind those statements.”

“Then we have to prove her wrong.” Alana said.

“I think that's going to be up to you.” Jack replied.

All three men looked at her as if she held all the answers to the investigation. She silently swore her friendship with Will Graham.

“I can try to talk to him.” She said, “But the last time we spoke, he didn't seem interested in defending or criminalizing himself.”

“We need the psych eval, we need the testimony, we need something to prove he's innocent.” Jack said, firmly, “What card do we have to play?”

“I hate to say it-” Alana shook her head.

“What?” Jack asked.

“Hannibal.” She sighed, “Will wants to see him. That was his main condition when I asked him if he would do the psych eval or the testimony.”

“That's crazy.” Brian said, “Isn't that crazy, Jack? Letting him see the psycho who's been abusing him for five years?”

“Maybe. But it seems like it's the only choice we have.”

Jimmy and Brian stared at Jack agape.

“Why in God's name does Will want to see Hannibal?” Jimmy asked, “I've seen everything the bastard mailed to you, Jack.”
“What did he mail to you?” Alana asked. This was the first time she'd heard about Hannibal's little Sunday gifts.

Jack sighed and scrubbed a hand over his face, “Sporadically, for the past five years, Hannibal would send me things in the mail. Locks of hair, photographs, flowers from the country they were in … that sort of thing.”

“Hair?”

“Will's hair. And photographs of Will, sometimes … sexual photographs.”

“Oh my god, why are you just now telling me this?” Alana demanded, jumping up from her chair.

“I didn't think it was necessary.”

“Necessary? Jack, I want to see those photographs right now.” Alana said, stabbing a finger toward the floor, “They could provide me valuable information about Will's state of mind and insight into what's been done to him. This could help seal my case for his Stockholm Syndrome.”

“All right.” Jack conceded, “Jimmy has them at the lab.”

“I'll get them for you.” Jimmy said. He ducked out of the room, quietly, to avoid Alana's wrath.

Alana paced the room, holding a hand over her forehead, whispering, “Unbelievable.”

Jack cleared his throat, “At present, the DA isn't interested in bringing charges against Will. There's not enough concrete evidence. But as they build the case against Hannibal for murders abroad, kidnapping, and his abuse of Will, they'll certainly be investigating his condition thoroughly. I don't want these questions from the public and the media to start clouding the investigation.”

“As soon as I see the photographs, I'll talk to Will again.” Alana said, “But I already have a feeling they will serve to support my theory even more. I refuse to believe Will was a willing part of this.”

Brian and Jack was silent. They didn't dare question Alana's firm beliefs, even though they harbored a dozen misgivings of their own.

~

Over the past five years, Hannibal had mailed over 40 packages to Jack. The envelopes were stamped from post offices all over Europe, and even a few from Africa and Asia. Their travels had taken them all over the world, like some sort of all-inclusive vacation instead of an escape from the authorities.

Many of the packages contained trinkets specific to the country they were mailed from, taunting Jack with a broad location but not anything specific. One had even contained a human thumb. It was still not identified who the thumb belonged to.

The locks of hair, however, had been identified as Will Graham's.

Wearing a pair of surgical gloves, Alana went through the trinkets before turning to the stack of photos. They were in sealed bags, dated, and labeled with a case and evidence number. The stack was in chronological order.
She drew in a deep breath as she gazed at the first picture.

Will sat in shadow, his head turned to one side. A beam of sunlight highlighted his eyes, making them stand out stark, ocean blue against the darker elements in the photo. He looked tired, or perhaps drugged. He wore no shirt, but a slender gold necklace rested against his throat.

The photo could have won a contest it was so aesthetically pleasing. It just served to make Alana sick.

She flipped through the photos, gritting her teeth as her objectivity deteriorated. The snapshots became increasingly intimate. Some of them didn't show his face, just swaths of skin, bright with bruise and suck marks.

She could see why Jack had been so enraged by these gifts. Nothing in the photos gave any indication to where they were at. Most of them were taken in a dark room with bland walls, or on a bed with plain, white sheets. The photos were printed on regular paper distributed and printed by thousands of companies in Europe.

Every time Jack had called the local police and scrambled them to a possible location, they'd come up empty. More than once, he'd sent them on a wild search to the neighboring area, knocking on doors, questioning the employees at the photo centers where the pictures were printed. All to no avail.

Alana paused as she gazed down at a photograph which had captured both Will and Hannibal. They were sitting on a bed in a plain room. Will gazed straight into the camera, jaw firm, as Hannibal clutched his face from behind, and pressed his mouth and nose against Will's cheek.

The look on Will's face could have been described as defiant. If she squinted just right, she saw the tiniest glint of satisfaction in his wide, blue eyes.

She looked away and sucked in a deep breath. Jack's doubts were meddling with her brain, distorting her clear view of Will's innocence. He didn't want this. He couldn't have wanted this.

In a handful of photos, Will was tied up and gagged. Some people might have enjoyed that, but not Will. She was sure. She had never been so sure about anything in her life.

Alana gave everything back to Jimmy and stripped the gloves from her hands. She had to talk to Will.

~

Will was pulling a plain, black t-shirt over his head when Alana knocked on the door. A nurse was stripping the sheets from the bed in preparation for the next patient.

“Hi.” Alana said as she slipped inside, “They told me at the desk that you're being released.”

“Yeah.” Will said, “And being admitted to a half-way house for crazies.”

“It's for your own good.”

He shrugged, “Sure. Did you come to drive me?”
“No, but I can.” She smiled, “I actually wanted to talk to you about some of the things we discussed the other day.”

“The psych eval?”

She nodded.

“I worked plenty of cases to know that psych eval's are not anywhere near as important as physical evidence. In fact, psychological profiles can get pretty murky when it comes to police investigation.”

“It’s for your own good, not the investigation.”

“I just want to be treated and released.” Will said, “I don't need someone tinkering with my head. There's people who have gone through a lot worse than me and come out on the other side just fine.”

“Have you read Freddie Lounds's article about you?” She challenged.

“Yes.”

“The FBI tip lines got inundated by calls last night thanks to that article.” She said, “The public is worried you're an accomplice.”

“Can the police prove it?” Will asked.

“No.” She shook her head, “All they have is circumstantial evidence from the Francis Dolarhyde and Bedilia Du Maurier crime scenes.”

“Then they shouldn't worry about what the public thinks.” He said. He regarded her with a cool gaze before adding, “If you want, I can tell you what happened with Francis Dolarhyde. The rest the police will have to prove.”

“What happened?” She asked, crossing her arms.

“He attacked me with a knife, and he shot Hannibal. We defended ourselves.”

“I see. You'll have to testify to that eventually.”

“I'll be glad to.”

She observed him in silence for a moment. He looked much healthier than the last time she'd seen him, and once again, it struck her how nourished and well kept he looked. Hannibal had taken good care of his plaything, like a little girl washing and combing her favorite doll. The comparison made her shudder.

Will slipped his feet into his shoes and headed for the door, “I'm ready to go if you are.”

“Sure.”

She followed him out into the hallway. He carried himself with a long, confident gait. She filed all these observations in her brain and considered starting a journal about the case. Writing things down had always helped her tremendously when dealing with a tough case.

She signed the release forms at the front desk, and she and Will walked out to her car.
She knew the way to Port Haven Psychiatric Facility; it was the same place Abigail had stayed upon her release from the hospital when she survived her father's attack.

As they drove, she divided her gaze between the road and Will's stony profile. He sat in the passenger's seat, his hands folded loosely in his lap, his eyes straight ahead. She'd studied psychiatry long enough to know he was using the calm, collected facade to hide some weakness or secret.

“Will, can I ask you a question?” He asked.

“That depends what the question is.”

“You were a profiler once. You could understand anyone and any crime. But you never profiled Hannibal for us.”

“I profiled the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“I want to know what your assessment is of Hannibal Lecter.”

“I don't work for the Bureau anymore.”

“No, but I'm curious.”

“Is this your sneaky way of trying to evaluate me?” Will asked, a smile tugging at his mouth.

“Consider it off the record.”

Will sighed through his nostrils and settled his head against the head rest, “He operates on a completely different level than most people. He doesn't think like you or me, or anyone, for that matter. When we see dark and evil, he sees the light. Beauty, life, a chance to risk it all and come out on the other side happy and satisfied. It's a walk in through the roses every single day.”

“You make it sound like it's a good thing.”

“Maybe it is.” He shrugged, “Maybe if more people thought like Hannibal Lecter, the world wouldn't be such a sad, depressing place to live in.”

“If more people thought like Hannibal, half the world's population would be dead.” She said, sharply.

“You asked for my assessment.”

“Criminally.” She insisted, “Why does he kill?”

“He can't stand to look at something ugly or rude. It's as simple as that.”

“What about the cannibalism?”

“It's only murder if you're equals. Being presented at his dinner table is an … elevation. Pigs being transformed into art.”

Alana fixed her gaze on the road.

“You don't sound concerned by that type of thinking.” She said.

“It's not concerning – if you see it from his perspective.”
“Do you?”
“Do I what?”
“See it from his perspective.”

She glanced at him instead of the road longer than she should have. She tried to catch the full meaning of the calculating look on his face. He was trying to decide what to say.

“I think my original opinion of the Chesapeake Ripper was all wrong.” He replied, at last, “And that's all I'm going to say off the record.”

Alana didn't push. She knew if she pushed, he would close up tighter than a clam and she would be spending the next several days prying him open again.

He was relaxed with her now, but she knew he was not the same Will Graham she had befriended many years ago. He had defenses now. A moat about his castle. Guards standing at the door. Had Hannibal Lecter done that to him? She wouldn't stop until she knew.

~

After getting him settled at Port Haven, Alana asked him one last time, “Will you let us record your testimony?”

“Will you let me see him?” He asked.

She bit her lip, “I'll talk to Jack.”

~

Jack wasn't satisfied to let Alana have the final say over Will's state of mind. She was biased and emotional. Even if he did have faith in her assessment, normal court and police procedures required more than one evaluation of someone's mental state to make it absolute.

It was 1:00 in the afternoon when he stepped inside the office of Helena Mortise at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. He'd met her briefly the previous day when he visited Hannibal. It had been the only pleasant part of his visit.

Helena was the acting director of the hospital. Acting because Frederick Chilton, who, despite his various injuries and health problems, insisted that he would one day return to his duties at the hospital. Due to his declining health, his doctors had mandated a forced sabbatical, a sabbatical which had been implemented for the past five years.

Jack had to admit, dealing with Helena was far more pleasing and relaxed than dealing with Chilton. She was a tall, slender woman with porcelain pale skin, and white-blond hair tied in a taut bun at her nape. Her eyes were clear, honest blue, and when she spoke, she didn't beat around the
bush. Jack liked her instantly.

When he entered her office for the second time that week, she waved him in with a smile.

“Agent Crawford, please come in.”

He shut the door behind him, “Thank you for having me. I'm sorry to interrupt your work again.”

“It's perfectly fine.” She flashed a smile, “Sit down. Can I get you some coffee or tea?”

“No, I'm fine, thank you.” He said, taking a seat across from her, “I came to ask you a favor.”

“Certainly.”

“It's about Will Graham.”

“Ah.” She nodded, and leaned forward, interested, “I read the tattlecrime article.”

“I think everyone in the country has read it by now.” Jack said, shaking his head, “Unfortunately, Freddie Lounds and tattlecrime.com are free to publish what they like as long as it's not obstructing the investigation.”

“I've never held journalists in high regard.” Helena agreed, “What can I do for you?”

“I'd like you to assess Will Graham, and his relationship to Hannibal Lecter.”

“You want me to determine whether he was complicit in the crimes or not.” She concluded.

“Yes. Obviously, you catch on quickly and are an expert in your field.” He said, “I think you're more than qualified to give me the answers I'm looking for.”

“I would be more than willing to do it. But, from what I hear, Will Graham isn't talking to anyone.”

“He's talking to Alana Bloom. Unfortunately, Alana isn't the most objective person to be reviewing his mental state. They have a … history.”

“I'm surprised you're letting her into the investigation at all, if that's how it is.”

“She's the only one he'll talk to.” Jack said, “I can't do much about her involvement. Don't get me wrong, Dr. Bloom is a talented psychiatrist and a wonderful person in general, but I don't trust the objectivity of her opinion.”

“What is her opinion, may I ask?”

“She thinks he's suffering from Stockholm Syndrome.”

“It's highly likely, from what little I understand about the case.” Helena said, “The original case of Stockholm Syndrome occurred over period of only five days, and Will Graham was in Hannibal Lecter's clutches for five years.”

“I know, and I don't want to discount it because Will was my friend. I just want an objective opinion.”

“If I'm going to assess Will Graham, I'll have to know everything about the case.” Helena said.

“That's perfectly fine.”
“Would you like for me to come by Quantico, and review everything?”

“That would be great. When are you free?”

“I can leave here early tomorrow.” She said, “Will you still be there by four o'clock?”

“I'm sure I'll be living and sleeping there twenty-four seven by the end of the week.” Jack said, grimly.

“All right.” She chuckled, “It's a date.”

~

It was the middle of the afternoon, but Hannibal dozed restlessly on his cot. He found that being locked underground in this infernal institution wreaked havoc with his sleep schedule, and even when the lights went out, his eyes stayed wide open.

The halls of his memory palace were his only comfort. He stayed there behind his eyelids, reconstructing the villas and chateaus he and Will had inhabited during their five year escapade through Europe and Asia. Every time he was close to re-imagining Will, the texture of his curls, the smell of his throat, and the softness of his skin, the memories fled like shadows before daylight.

Will was too good for his memory palace. Unlike all the other people Hannibal had left behind, Will wasn't content to sit in the walls of an imaginary room and wait for Hannibal's return. He demanded reality, flesh and blood.

The blare of the buzzer alerted him to the fact that someone was entering the last, lower chamber of the hospital. He stayed in his position on the cot, but listened as the footsteps approached. He closed his eyes and drew in a deep breath. The scent drifted through the small holes in the glass partition before she even reached the glass.

He opened his eyes.

“Hello, Dr. Mortise.”

“Hannibal.”

There was a pause as she waited for a reply that would never come.

After several moments of silence, she rapped on the glass, “Aren't you interested to know why I came down here?”

“Not in the slightest.” He said.

“I'll tell you anyways … I just got a visit from Jack Crawford.”

Another pause. Hannibal sat up and regarded her with guarded gaze.

“He wants me to assess Will Graham.” She said, tilting her head to one side, “You know what that means.”

He clenched his jaw. She was even worse than Chilton.
“Anything you'd like me to tell him for you?” She asked.

He rose from the cot and walked toward the glass with measured steps. He saw her gaze waver and tremble. She took a step back despite the thick, impenetrable glass between them.

“Whatever I have to say to Will Graham, I prefer to say it in person.” He said.

“What makes you think you'll being seeing him?”

“Would you still like to evaluate me?” He asked, cocking his head, “You're aching to know what makes me tick, aren't you, Dr. Mortise?”

She glared at him and nibbled at her lower lip, “You would be willing to let me question you?”

He gave a curt nod.

“No games, Hannibal.” She said, “I'd be doing you a big favor.”

“I'll answer your questions. I'll even let you strap a monitor to my penis and see how I react to violent imagery.”

A muscle below her eye twitched. She'd love to strap something to his penis.

“Fine.” She said, briskly, “I'll let Jack Crawford know that he should definitely allow Will Graham to visit you.”

He smiled, “Thank you, Dr. Mortise.”

“Politeness.” She scoffed, “Why do you even try?”

“Because,” He smiled, “I cannot express how much I loathe the rude.”

She shook her head, and turned away from the glass. He watched as she marched back down the hallway to the locked door at the end. He decided then, that Dr. Helena Mortise was very rude. Given a chance, he would eat her – but not quite in the way she wished he would.
Chapter 5

The bright sunlight of the clear, winter day didn't penetrate the gray, outer shell of Quantico that morning; the hallways and rooms were as dark and melancholy as ever.

Jack and Dr. Helena Mortise stood on the observation side of the one way glass that looked into the interrogation room. Alana sat across from Will, who was bent over one of the questionnaires meant to determine his mental state.

“After he finishes the quizzes, Alana will ask him a series of questions to determine where his thoughts are at.” Jack explained, “I'd like you to observe him, and also read his answers on the questionnaires.”

Helena stood close to the glass, chin propped on her knuckles. She scrutinized Will's posture and demeanor, truly curious about this new assignment. She'd read most of the articles about the case when he'd gone to trial, and subsequently kept up on the articles and news segments when he and Hannibal had disappeared. She'd watched it all as a spectator, not as a psychiatrist. Now she had her chance to evaluate the subject of so much speculation up close, and she wasn't sure where to start.

“I've read all the details of the case, but I think I would understand it better if I heard it from someone involved.” She said, glancing at Jack.

“It's a long story. Besides, I think the situation would benefit from an unbiased point of view.”

“You're treading carefully. Don't want to accuse Will Graham of something he didn't do again?”

She could tell those words stung him, and wondered again just how close he had been to Graham before he and Hannibal's disappearance.

“No.” He murmured, “I want to say he isn't a murderer, but if there's one thing that fiasco taught me, it's that you can never truly know someone.”

“But he was acquitted of those murders.”

“He may not have killed those people he was on trial for, but he did show me a side of himself I hadn't seen before.” Jack said, “He will to fight tooth and nail for his survival, and he's not afraid to retaliate when threatened.”

“You think he's dangerous?” Helena asked, stepping closer to the glass. She wanted to be in that room interviewing him herself, but from what she understood, he would close up tighter than a drum if she attempted to question him.

“In certain situations. But who isn't?”

“He doesn't look like what I imagined.”

“What did you imagine?”

She shrugged, “You told me I was going to observe someone who had been in Hannibal Lecter's clutches for five years. I expected the trauma to be more apparent.”

“That's why I asked you to come.”
“Dr. Bloom thinks he has Stockholm Syndrome.” Helena said, “She also nearly dated him.”

Jack tilted his head at the coldness in her tone.

“Have something against Dr. Bloom?” He asked.

“College.” She said, briskly, flashing a casual smile, “We weren't in many classes together and we didn't talk. But we did have one thing in common.”

“What's that?”

“We were both fascinated when Dr. Lecter lectured.”

“I didn't know you knew Hannibal previously.”

“I didn't know him, per se.” Helena said, lifting her chin a notch, “I wanted to, at the time. Now I'm ashamed with myself for thinking that.”

“No one knew.” Jack replied, “Not even people like me, who were friends of his.”

“No even Will Graham?” She asked, turning back to the glass.

“He saw it before any of us. If we had listened sooner, we might not be standing here having this conversation.”

They fell quiet, each observing Will with their own thoughts rattling through their heads.

Helena calculated what she could reveal to Jack without telling him outright that she'd already had more than one telling conversation with Hannibal. She thought Will Graham was guilty as hell, but she couldn't say that after only having observed him for ten minutes.

She settled on an astute observation, “He's twitchy. Scratching, biting nails, picking skin is all signs of anxiety. The more obvious, the more anxiety.”

“He's always tiptoed along the spectrum.” Jack said.

“But he's never been diagnosed?”

“No, this is the first time he's allowed anyone to test him besides Hannibal's observations during their initial therapy sessions – and those weren't exactly accurate.” Jack said, “Frankly, I'm shocked he's allowing this at all.”

“Is he smart enough to out think the tests?”

“I'm sure he is.”

“Then what's the point?”

“Maybe he can fake the written tests, but you can't fake your own thinking. Your own fears. Alana is a pro at seeing those nuances. She'll be able to tell what he's thinking.”

“But you don't trust her observations?”

“She's a gifted psychiatrist, don't get me wrong.” Jack said, “But she's willing to squint at the answers to see Will in a light she's satisfied with.”
He stepped closer to the glass, abreast to her. Helena observed him from the corner of her eye. His jaw was taut, his expression like stone; but a hint of pain and regret shone through his eyes. She wondered what he was thinking, and if when he looked at Will, all he saw was the years of trauma, and all the cases they'd left behind – blood, sweat, and tears.

“He looks nervous.” Helena said, “Afraid we'll see something.”

“He's hiding something?”

“Possibly. I'd have to talk to him.”

“You can't. You'll just have to listen to he and Alana's conversation.”

She pursed her lips, “You're protective of him.”

“No offense, Doctor, but let's stick to your professional views.”

“Of course, Agent Crawford.”

Will pushed the last questionnaire across the table to Alana. He let out a long sigh through his nose and sat back in his chair.

“Is that all?”

“I'd like to talk to you for a bit before you go.”

She clasped her hands on the table in front of her as she observed him. Her back was straight, jaw firm, eyes clear and determined. He wondered again if he could have gotten his visit with Hannibal without having to go through this evaluation.

“I'd like to talk to you about Hannibal.”

“What about him?”

“I'm just concerned with how he's been treating you.”

“He treated me fine.” He said, then, before she could go on, sharply asked, “Do you want to set up the camera again and see how that goes?”

“This isn't a testimony.” She said, “I'm just trying to determine-”

“You're trying to determine if I was a victim.”

“Partially.” She said. Then more gently, “How did he treat you?”

“You saw the pictures.”

“I want to hear it from your mouth.”

“You want to hear that he hit me, raped me?”
She swallowed hard. Moisture gleamed against her lower eyelids.

“You've known Hannibal longer than I have.” He said, leaning forward and tapping his finger on the table between them, “Have you ever known him to get what he wants through violence?”

“I don't know.” She said, stiffly, “I suppose I didn't really know him at all since I didn't realize he was a murderer.”

“He doesn't like the victim to be scared.” Will said, “It makes the meat taste bad.”

“But he didn't want to eat you.”

“How do you know?”

Her eyes broke away from his. Silence swelled between them as the suggestion hung in the air.

“Did you ever try to escape?” She asked, at last.

“I thought about it.” He replied. It was the first honest thing he had admitted during the evaluation.

“But didn't act on it?”

“No. I knew I couldn't leave.”

“What measures did he take to keep you there?”

“I knew if I left, I wouldn't be gone long.”

“Why not?”

Will sighed and scraped a hand through his hair. He knew the things she was fishing for, and some part of him wondered if Hannibal had broke through the wall of his consent and latched onto his subconscious. He hadn't thought about developing Stockholm Syndrome because he'd always been so sure of himself – more sure than his morally based misgivings.

“He told me I needed it.” He said, at last, “And that with him was the only place I could truly be myself.”

“What version of yourself is that?”

“The shadow version … The version that can be brutal and uncaring and selfish.”

“Does that version include murder?”

The conversation stalled. Alana gazed at him with flint-like eyes, her chin set. He could feel her sharp, blue eyes piercing through him, searching for answers, daring him to lie to her. She wasn't going to play games with him for the rest of the evaluation.

He drew in a slow breath and let it out. “No.”

He could almost see the flood of relief break through her, followed by a creeping shadow of doubt across her eyes.

“He told me …” Will murmured, staring down at his hands, loosely clasped before him, “we didn't have to kill until I was ready.”
Alana’s gaze rested heavily on him, waver ing with concern, scared he was about to implicate himself.

“So you didn't?” She asked.

He shook his head.

“Did he? By himself?”

“That I don't know.”

“That's why you stayed?” She asked, squinting at him, “Because he didn't ask you to kill anyone?”

“I stayed because I care about him, Alana.” Will said, meeting her wide-eyed gaze, “Because there was no where else to go, and because he understood me better than anyone else I had ever met. For a long time, I would wake up knowing I was going to spend hours in someone else's head, feeling their emotions more than mine. And for a long time, I was okay with it, because I was saving lives. I didn't think about a version of my life where I wasn't just a mirror for the feelings and motivations of psychopaths.”

“You're talking about your empathy disorder.”

“Empathy implies sympathy.” Will sighed, rubbing a hand over his eyes, “Eventually, I started to get to a point where I couldn't bring myself to care about the person's feelings.”

“But you cared about Hannibal's?”

“I could never see the Copy Cat, or the Chesapeake Ripper because it was the same person. It was him. He doesn't invade my emotions, and maybe that's because there's no emotions to feel, but for once in my life … God, I-”

He cut off, swallowing back the tears threatening to strangle him. He should be sitting here telling Alana how Hannibal had kept him indoors, controlling every aspect of his life, making sure he didn't escape, brainwashing him into staying. Backing up the black and blue proof in the photos from Spain.

“Do you need a minute?” Alana asked, softly.

He shook his head, and rubbed the moisture from his eyes.

“At first, I was afraid.” He murmured, “Afraid that staying made me a terrible person. That going with him meant I was insane.”

“What changed that?”

“He never hurt me physically after that. Whatever he had done before, whatever had happened between us, he was going to do his damnedest to make up for it. I'd never seen him be so kind … so human. I kept searching for the game, the manipulation, but it never happened. And for awhile, when we couldn't go out of the house and risk being seen, all we had to do is talk; and he talked about how every day is a chance – a chance and a gift to see the beauty in this world, even in the darkness and death. He told me the tragedy in life isn't to die, but to be wasted – and he hadn't wasted a single second. It sounded too good to be true.”

“Do you think that's a healthy mindset?” Alana asked.
He shrugged, “Maybe not healthy. But it is satisfying.”

~

When Alana stepped out of the interrogation room and saw Helena Mortise watching Will through the glass, she sent Jack a scathing glare.

“What's she doing here?”

“I asked her to come.” Jack said, holding up a hand to quell her objections, “I thought a second opinion would be a good idea.”

“In other words, you don't trust me.”

“Yes and no.”

“Will only submitted to this evaluation because it was me. Only me.”

“What Will doesn't know won't hurt him.”

“It's a matter of trust, Jack.”

“Well, we're here now.” Helena said, stepping in with a smile, “Since we are, why don't you tell us your theory on his mindset, Dr. Bloom.”

“Just Alana, please.” Alana said, turning her cutting gaze to Helena, “I remember you from college. You don’t have to act like you've never seen me before.”

“We didn't exactly run in the same circles.” Helena smiled, curtly.

“We do now, apparently.”

“Your theory?” Helena asked, expectantly.

“I'll have to look at these questionnaires more, but I think what Will said in reply to my questions about Hannibal is very telling.”

“Such as?” Jack asked.

“For instance, when I asked Will why he didn't leave, I got very mixed answer. He didn't seem to know exactly why he stayed, just that he never left. One attribute of Stockholm Syndrome is fixating on the idea that you cannot leave the relationship without compromising your physical or mental well being. And yes, I would like to view it as a personal relationship, not just a relationship between captor and victim. It may not be a romantic relationship like most cases of Stockholm Syndrome, but he and Hannibal know each other intimately. He feels an attachment to Hannibal because they were once therapist and patient, and later friends. As he stated, Hannibal understands him like no one else does. Will knows that some of what Hannibal tells him about himself is true, but he can't tell manipulation from honesty any longer.”

“We do know that Will was the one who called Hannibal and warned him the night we tried to take Hannibal in.” Jack remarked.
“He told you Hannibal was his friend, and that may be true. It is possible to have real feelings for your abuser, but those often get muddled with the emotions that are being contrived by constant stress and abuse. Will is afraid. He doesn't want Hannibal to be caught for his crimes because he thinks their being separated could do irreparable damage to himself. Perhaps he thought if he left he wouldn't be able to make sure Hannibal continued to go free.”

“That sounds pretty calculated to me.” Helena said, crossing her arms.

“It may not be.” Alana said, "An abuser perpetuating Stockholm Syndrome isolates their victim from the world, and from other viewpoints, blinding the victim from seeing the logic in leaving his abuser. Being on the run with Hannibal meant being in his company twenty-four seven. If you listened to what Will said, Hannibal all but indoctrinated Will with his thinking. It's a type of brainwashing – the victim begins to view their abuser as a victim in their own right, somehow justifying their actions because of a bad upbringing, childhood trauma, and so on.”

Helena lifted her shoulders, “You might be right. However, as Jack and I were standing out here, he was telling me that Will is smart enough to fake these tests. You don't think he's smart enough to tell you what you want to hear?”

“Will isn't a murderer.” Alana insisted, “He's a deeply empathetic person who is easily disturbed by the injustices in the world. Sometimes, he carries the burden of righting them all on his own. Maybe he thought he could change Hannibal if he stayed with him.”

“He said he wasn't a murderer.” Helena said, “We're not expecting him to come out and say he's a murderer. We're asking the question – is he purposefully going along with Hannibal's twisted ideals? Was he staying willingly? How far will he go to protect a psychopath?”

“Jack, are you listening to this?” Alana objected, “You know Will.”

“I thought I did.” Jack said.

“He tried to kill Hannibal, for God's sakes.” Alana said, “He doesn't love Hannibal. He's just afraid of upsetting the balance.”

“It's really amazing, how quickly hate can turn to love.” Helena said, turning to gaze at Will through the glass, “It's a fine line, and Will has the look of a man who doesn't know when the lines have blurred.”

“You don't know him like I do.”

Helena smiled, coolly, “Maybe that's to my advantage.”

~

Jack drove Helena back to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. The car ride was quiet, but in the background, there lingered the muffled roar of their thoughts.

At last, Jack spoke the idea that had been haunting him for months, years even.

“We know Hannibal killed Bedelia Du Maurier. Officially, on paper, she's his last known victim.”
“How do you know?”

“He ate her leg in front of her.” Jack said, “We found saliva and fingerprints on the utensils, and blood on a meat fork we think Dr. Du Maurier tried to defend herself with.”

“What does Miss Du Maurier have to do with Will?”

Jack pursed his lips before exhaling a long breath. He said, “We found his fingerprints too.”

“That's damning.”

“Not necessarily. He could have been forced.”

“Do you think Hannibal could control two people like that at once?” Helena asked.

“Physically, the only one he would have had to restrain was Bedelia.”

“Why not Will?”

“Hannibal has this sort of … thrall over Will.” Jack said, shaking his head, “I can't explain it. It's definitely psychological. I blame myself for ever letting Hannibal root around in his head. He didn't just peek in and take a look. He climbed inside and took up a permanent space there.”

“Are you supporting Alana's theory now?” Helena asked.

“Not entirely.”

“I don't understand.”

“Remember how I told you it was a long story? Well, I'll make it short. Almost ten years ago, I asked Hannibal to evaluate Will's mental state so that Will could go back into the field. After the evaluation, they continued to see each other, unofficially as doctor and patient. It wasn't until much later that we found out Hannibal was using Will's encephalitis along with light treatment and hypnosis to induce seizures, blackouts, that sort of thing. That's how Will came to be on trial for murders he didn't commit.”

“My God, that's terrible.”

“At the time, I couldn't believe that Hannibal would do such a thing. When Will accused him, we were all still seeing the version of Hannibal that he wanted us to see. He played having a soul very well.”

“That type of abuse doesn't heal quickly.”

“No, it doesn't. Will was a mess for a long time, but he regained his sense of self, so much so that he tried to send someone to kill Hannibal on his behalf. That's why I can't go along with Alana's theory that Hannibal abused him and trained his subconscious to continue loving and supporting him. The last time I spoke to Will before he disappeared, he was completely rational and capable of making decisions for himself.”

“It was never released to the public that Will sent someone to kill Hannibal. I'd hate to see the public's reaction to that bit of information in light of the tattlecrime article.”

“It's never going to be released. But to me, it's proof that Will knows what he's doing, even under duress.” Jack said, “Even when Will was still recovering from encephalitis and locked behind bars, he was clear-headed enough to come up with a plan to kill Hannibal.”
“That's quite a turnaround from the devotion we just saw.”

“It's a complete 180, but it's not beyond Will's range of emotions.”

Jack pulled the car into the parking lot of the mental hospital, and pushed the gearshift into park. Helena didn't move.

“What is it?” He asked.

“Will you send me copies of those questionnaires?”

“Of course. I'll scan them, and send them to you as soon as I get back.”

“You said he can fake them, so they're not as important as his conversation with Alana.” She said, “I already think you should allow Will to see Hannibal.”

“Why?” Jack asked, frowning.

“We can't tell what he's faking and what he isn't. Put the two of them in a room, and I think it'll be much easier to determine.”

“You really think so?”

“Yes. And, if it hasn't sunk in for Will already, they won't be spending anymore days together in their little house in Spain. He has to get used to the idea that they'll be separated and Hannibal will be behind bars for the rest of his life. Maybe it will empower him to break free of this thrall you mentioned.”

Jack mulled it over for a moment before nodding, “All right, Doctor, I trust your judgment. I'll set it up, but if it goes south, it's on you.”

She cast him a sly smile before getting out of the car, “And I'll gladly take full blame.”

~

Jack called Alana as she was walking Will back to his room at Port Haven. Will waited patiently as she spoke in quiet, yet strained tones with her back turned to him. She finished the call with a snappy good-bye and lowered the phone with a great sigh.

“What is it?” Will asked.

She turned slowly. Her cheeks were flushed from a surge of anger, and the blue of her eyes held ice.

“Jack and Dr. Mortise have agreed to let you meet with Hannibal.” She said.

Will pursed his lips and swallowed back ecstatic emotion. He struggled to find the right words to meet Alana's anger before settling on, “Well, good. I did do the evaluation with that stipulation in place.”

She gave a curt nod, “Yes, you did.”
“I hope you got what you wanted out of it.” He said, “I won't do it again.”

“You won't have to.”

“Good.”

Silence settled between them. Alana gazed at him, expression guarded. Still looking for signs of weakness, anything to convince her his mind had been polluted.

“When can I see him?” Will asked, at length.

“They're setting it up for tomorrow.”

“Will you drive me?”

She nodded, “I'd like to be present, if you don't mind.”

“You don't have to ask me. It's not my decision to make.”

“I'm asking you out of respect.”

“You can observe all you like, Alana.” He said with a wave of his hand, “Maybe you'll see something to pad your case with.”

Her brow furrowed. “What if Jack and Dr. Mortise see something to pad their case with?”

He shrugged, “Then it'll be up to astute doctors like yourself, or a court room to decide.”

“You're okay with that?”

“No, but my only demand is to see Hannibal. I'll be satisfied when I do.”
Sunlight slanted through the open blinds, casting a lined pattern on the bed spread.

Will stood before the mirror in his room, pulling a gray sports jacket over a black oxford. The outfit was casual enough to not draw attention, but also nice enough to suggest he was dressing up for the occasion. He didn't want to imply either suggestion to those who would be observing today. Hannibal's opinion was the only one he cared about.

He ran a comb through his hair, parting it and smoothing back the fly away curls at his temples. He had shaved this morning in the shower and his face looked naked after three years of wearing a beard. He looked more like the Will Graham of the past; that was for Alana and Jack. The rest was for Hannibal.

A soft knock on the door drew his gaze from his reflection.

When he opened the door, he found Alana standing in the hallway, dressed in a black pantsuit and a hunter green blouse with a loose bow at the throat. Her hair and makeup was immaculate, but he could see the subdued panic in her eyes.

“Ready?” She asked.

He nodded.

They walked out of Port Haven in silence. The sunlight was brilliant this morning, reflecting off the pavement and new snow. The air was wintry and fresh, and it filled his lungs with cool energy when he drew in a deep breath. His heart hammered against his ribs, and sweat gathered on his palms. Schoolgirl excitement.

They got in the car and headed for the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Conversation continued to lull. Will focused his gaze on the window, watching as scenery and houses flashed by.

He would have preferred to have this meeting earlier, and the longer it had taken to arrange it, the more nervous he became. He'd spent a better part of the night awake and staring at the ceiling, imagining different scenarios of how the meeting would go. Reminding himself which things to say, and which things to avoid. Hoping he could communicate his feelings to Hannibal without revealing too much to the authorities.

When at last they arrived, Jack was waiting in the lobby. Alana's annoyance rolled off her in waves when Helena Mortise stepped through the door to join them.

“The meeting will take place in the visitation area. Hannibal will be in one of the cages, and he'll be wearing the mask to prevent biting.” Helena said as she lead them through the hallways, “He'll also be handcuffed. These stipulations are non-negotiable.”

“He's already in a cage. Isn't that enough?” Will asked.

Helena glanced over her shoulder at him, “He's already bitten two nurses. It's necessary.”

“He won't bite me.”

“At this point, we're not willing to take those chances. The rules are as follows: he will be in the
cage, and you will either take the chair or stand, whichever you prefer, behind the line. You will not pass him anything, you will not touch him, you will only speak.”

“I thought that line was for pissers.” Will said, his tone darkening.

“The line is for your safety.” Helena replied, “Agent Crawford says you are being treated as a victim in this case, and so we will protect you as such. Hannibal Lecter is a dangerous, violent psychopath, Mr. Graham. If he gets the chance to attack, he will.”

Will fell silent as she pulled open the doors to the visitation area. He could think of a dozen arguments and demands, but he knew they would all fall on deaf ears. He did his best to push all the hopes and scenarios in which they were able to touch from his mind. This was reality; this was prison. They weren't free to do as they pleased anymore.

His breath caught as they neared the only occupied cage. Hannibal sat on a stool behind the bars, wearing the white anti-biting mask, hands manacled in front of him. The handcuffs were attached to a chain around his waist that led down to the cuffs around his ankles. His eyes, sharp and intuitive, gazed over the mask, taking in each member of the party with distrust before settling on Will. Here, his eyes softened and his hands pulled softly at the cuffs.

Will took a few rushing steps forward before reminding himself to stay composed. He stood directly on the line, silently cursing the three feet of distance that suddenly felt like a chasm between them.

“Hello, Will.” Hannibal's voice was muffled, but familiarly soft and non-threatening.

“Hello.” Will said.

He glanced self-consciously over his shoulder. He could feel their eyes on him, watching and waiting for what he would say to his suspected abuser.

“You look well.” Hannibal said, rising from the stool, “How are they treating you?”

“Like a victim.”

Hannibal gaze seemed to swallow him up, and suddenly, Will found it hard to breathe around the lump in his throat. He ducked his head and discreetly pressed his fingers against his tear ducts. The pressure did little to quell the overwhelming flood of emotion.

“How are they treating you?” He choked out.

“Like a violent psychopath.” Hannibal replied, a note of amusement in his voice.

Will tried to match his strength. “I can see that. It's probably smart.”

“They haven't gotten much wiser since my last stay. I got my pound of flesh before they recalled this useful mask.”

Will gave a weak chuckle. “You should have exercised some restraint. Now I can't see half your face.”

“What's seeing worth without touching?”

Will nibbled at his lower lip. A dangerous mix of emotion roiled through his head. Anger, yearning, pain, and frustration all urged him to rash decisions he knew he couldn't make, the
strongest of which was the most foolish – to run up to the bars and rip the mask off Hannibal's face so that their lips could meet.

“Put your chin up, Will. This isn't the end.” Hannibal said, softly, “You and I are the rarest birds; if one of the pair dies, so does their legacy.”

“It looks like you're strong enough on your own.” Will said, lifting his chin, “But I don't know if I am.”

“I've always done my best to save you, Will. This time, you'll have to save yourself.”

“What if I can't?”

“Then it truly is over. Can you live with that outcome?”

“No, I can't live with any of this.”

“So, change the ending.”

Will gazed at Hannibal, struggling to wordlessly communicate the emotions churning through his head. Vague references to endangered birds, and thinly veiled suggestions weren't enough to shore up his inadequacies. He wanted to feel the caress of Hannibal's hands against his skin, the muted reminder that everything would fall into place, that they would find their places next to each other.

“The police have their ending.” Hannibal said, “Jack and Alana have their endings, and Dr. Mortise has her ending too. All of their endings strongly include you, which means your ending is the most important of all. How do you see it, Will?”

“Right now I see it as you're going to rot in here for the rest of your life, and I'm never going to have a normal one again.”

“That's their ending.”

“No, it's the only ending there is.” Will said, his voice rising to the level of a shout. The words echoed off the stone walls and high ceiling, and left them in quivering silence.

Will was acutely aware of Jack, Alana, and Helena shifting uncomfortably behind him. Their minds were most likely racing to interpret this conversation. He was too upset to be worried about those interpretations or what he should say to recover them to an acceptable outcome.

“Life deals us the cards, Will. It's our choice how we play them.” Hannibal said after several beats of silence.

“All these cards are shit.” Will whispered, scraping a hand through his hair.

“There's always a wild card somewhere.”

Will sniffed and scrubbed his hand across the back of his neck. He didn't see any damned wild card that worked in their favor.

“Will.” Hannibal murmured.

Will lifted his gaze to meet Hannibal's, and saw the beckoning in the dark depths of Hannibal's eyes. Ignoring the consequences, he broke away from the line and rushed to the cage, wrapping his fingers around the bars to lift himself toward Hannibal's face. There was shout from behind them, and the rush of footsteps, but Will ignored it as he and Hannibal's faces came within inches.
“Don't lose hope.” Hannibal whispered, “I have a plan.”

Before Will had a chance to contemplate that remark, two pairs of hands grabbed him by the shoulders and yanked him back from the bars. He resisted momentarily before Jack swung him around, planting himself like a brick wall between Will and the cage.

“Will, what the hell?” He demanded.

“I think this meeting is over.” Alana said, casting a withering glare at Hannibal.

“She's right.” Helena agreed, “Mr. Graham, if you can't follow the rules, we can't allow these meetings.”

Will slapped Jack's hand away from his chest and paced several steps away, scraping a hand through his hair, and practicing deep breaths.

“I'm sorry.” He said, “That was stupid of me.”

“It was very stupid.” Jack said, “We're leaving.”

“We just got here.” Will said, spinning around to face the three people who now stood between him and Hannibal.

“This was a bad idea.” Alana said, “I don't think we should be here in the first place.”

“I'm sorry I approved this.” Helena said.

“Let's go.” Jack said, putting a hand on Will's elbow.

Will pulled his arm free, “I can walk by myself.”

He glanced over his shoulder as the three of them led him, catching one last gaze of Hannibal before the door shut behind them.

Hannibal pressed his face against the bars, eyes grabbing onto Will's as his voice echoed through the empty room, “Goodbye, dear Will. I'll see you again soon. Don't be long, and don't let them crush you. Now is not forever.”

~

Alana was shaken as she drove Will back to Port Haven. Her knuckles blanched as she gripped the steering wheel, and she could feel her stomach beginning to churn with nausea. It was the first time she had seen Hannibal with her own eyes since that last meeting five years ago when he had threatened to kill her child.

The very sight of him sent a chill of terror down her spine. The nausea originated from recalling the moments of tenderness he had exhibited when they had became romantically involved all those years ago. She berated herself for having not seen it. Maybe if she had, Will would have never fallen prey to his clutches.

Her faith in Will had serious fissures in the foundation. Listening to he and Hannibal's conversation, she had tried to convince herself that it was the deranged dialogue of a captor and his
prey, but the more she rehearsed the moments in her mind, the more genuine they sounded. Her
tory was hanging by threads.

“What do you think of Dr. Mortise?” Will asked, jarring her from her thoughts.

“What?”

“Dr. Mortise.” Will repeated, “What is your impression of her?”

Alana considered the question before deciding to be honest.

“Well, I actually met her many years ago when I was in college. We had a few classes together, but
we never spoke. I remember her mainly because we were both in attendance at all of Hannibal's
lectures.”

“Hannibal has met her before as well?”

“It's likely they had a few conversations during and after classes.”

“So, it's fair to say she enjoyed his lectures and looked up to him as an expert in the field?”

“Yes … Will, why are you asking me this?” She asked, sliding him a curious gaze.

“I'm confused by her involvement.” Will replied, “I don't understand why she agreed to letting us
meet.”

“She's curious. She wants to know why Hannibal is so focused on you …. We all are.”

Will tilted his head back against the head rest and let out a low chuckle, “I never wanted to be the
object of scrutiny by anyone. I liked being alone with my dogs, away from the world.”

“You can thank Hannibal for messing that up.” She pointed out.

He didn't reply for several moments. She could see the thoughts working behind his eyes. Part of
her wanted to scream at him to be honest. Another part desperately wished she could maintain the
pure image of a victim.

“I just wanted to be happy.” He added, softly.

“Were you?”

“I don't think I can honestly answer that question since you'll probably be called in as a witness in
the new trial. And there will be a trial. The State is going to bring a dozen charges of kidnapping,
false imprisonment, and assault against him. You're going to be their strongest witness, with your
Stockholm Syndrome theory and all.”

Alana turned her gaze back to the road, and focused on the yellow and white lines flying beneath
them. He couldn't answer because it could implicate him. God, she wished she hadn't asked.

“You didn't answer my original question.” He said, “What do you think of Dr. Mortise?”

“I don't know her very well.” Alana replied, “But it always seemed to me she was chasing after
prestige and applause in the field. I don't think she's unhappy at all that Hannibal fell into her lap.”

Will nodded, but didn't remark on the observation. Alana kept her questions to herself. She thought,
maybe it was better if she didn't know the truth after all.
Five years ago

They stayed in Paris for two weeks. Plans for further travel were delayed because of short notice, Hannibal reported. He spent several hours on the phone, and Will only partially listened to the plans.

His own mind was turning with a hundred thoughts, conclusions, calls for action. A dozen times, he’d thought of escaping the hotel room and running to the nearest phone to call Jack. Each time, a voice in the back of his head told him going back wasn't an option. Every time he closed his eyes, he saw Francis Dolarhyde's death playing like a movie on the backs of his lids. Next up was Bedelia Du Maurier, a showcase of cruelty and sadism. Her death had felt good, too good.

And so, during their two weeks in the City of Lights, Will hid behind the door of their suite and hardly uttered a word to his companion, deciding that no action was a better alternative to choosing between two actions.

Hannibal didn't seem concerned by Will's silence. He ventured out daily to purchase ingredients for dinner, and made use of the small kitchen each night to prepare the final remains of Bedelia Du Maurier. At night, he poured wine and stretched out on the couch in the living room with a book.

It was their last night in Paris when Will came out of the bedroom and sat down on the chair next to the couch where Hannibal lay.

Hannibal let the book rest open on his chest, “How are you, Will?”

“Confused.”

“Everything is moving swiftly now. You must feel like a piece of driftwood in the ocean, being pulled along by the tide.”

“That's exactly how I feel.” Will murmured.

“You may leave at anytime. You're not my prisoner, Will. I never want you to feel that way.”

“I don't.” Will replied, “I am … my own prisoner.”

“Imprisoned by what you've done … what you wish to do?”

Will glanced at Hannibal as the other man sat up and set both his book and wineglass on the coffee table in front of them.

“Free yourself, Will.” He said, reaching out to take Will's hand, “Remember how it was when we killed Francis Dolarhyde.”

“I can still remember it in crystal clear quality.” Will whispered, haltingly, “I can smell and feel his blood on my hands, and hear his dying screams.”

“How does it make you feel?”
Will pursed his lips and focused on the paisley pattern in the rug, “Powerful.”

“I once told you to remember that feeling, after you killed Randall Tier.”

“I remember.”

“I told you to remember that feeling because I wanted you to use that sense of power when you began to question yourself. Use it now, Will.”

“I want to go with you.” Will blurted, suddenly, “Part of me is always going to be afraid of the consequences. Part of me is always going to find the safety of running away from this appealing. But I don't want safe anymore, Hannibal. I want—” His voice faltered as the confession brimmed at the back of his tongue. He ducked his head and rubbed a coarse hand over his face. He could feel his cheeks burning.

Hannibal slid off the couch and knelt in front of Will. He took Will's hands in both of his and gently pulled them from Will's face.

“Will,” He said, softly, “From the moment I first saw you, I knew you were different. I knew you were unique. I could see the pain in you, and the longing to be free of it. I saw the resting power in these hands. I saw fever that was making you weak.”

Will slowly lifted his head. Hannibal's eyes caught onto his, not letting go.

“I saw the potential for greatness, and the potential for a friendship that could rival that of Achilles and Patroclus. It became my deepest desire, but I knew you weren't ready for it. I had to mold you. I had to help you become.”

“You had to break me before you could fix me.” Will said.

“Yes.” Hannibal murmured, his mouth tipping in a smile, “And look at you. The lamb become the lion, so fierce. …” He reached up to touch Will's cheek, his fingers lingering warm and yearning, “So beautiful.”

Will swallowed hard. His heart fluttered, on the verge of stopping altogether. They hadn't spoken about Hannibal kissing him their first night in Paris, but Will wanted to discuss it now – with an in depth study that required thorough reenactment.

“You have become everything I wanted … and more.” Hannibal added, “I had huge faith in you, and I was rewarded generously. Even if you decide you cannot stay, I—

“Hannibal, shut up.” Will whispered, pressing his fingertips over Hannibal's lips, “Shut up, I'm staying.”

Hannibal blinked in blank shock for several moments before a smile spread across his face, “Good.”

“I threw us into the ocean, and we survived.” Will whispered, “I think fate is trying to tell me something.”

Hannibal began to form a reply, but Will leaned forward and replaced his fingers with his mouth. He slipped off the chair, pushing Hannibal back against the coffee table and then down to the floor. They rolled to the carpet, lips joining with hungry passion, arms wrapping tight about each other and not letting go.

Will didn't protest as Hannibal pushed him onto his back and peeled his clothes from his body. His
hands fell listless above his head, twisted up in his partially removed t-shirt. His pants caught
around his ankles, and he was loosely bound by clothing as Hannibal had his way with his body.
Will had never felt so satisfied.

~

Helena was not slow to claim her side of the bargain. Not an hour after Hannibal's meeting with
Will was broken off prematurely, he was trussed up in a straight-jacket and mask and brought up to
the ground level floor where a room was set up for the evaluation.

Two nurses strapped him to a chair in the center of the room, and one stayed for safety measures
while Helena set up a projector.

“I'd just like to remind you that you agreed to this conversation.” She said, “And that not
cooperating could result in necessary punishment in accordance to hospital rules.”

Hannibal gazed at her, mute and defiant. The meeting with Will wasn't much of an exchange for
having the fumbling and horny Dr. Mortise try to evaluate him. It had lasted barely ten minutes,
with no physical contact and no privacy.

“Good.” She smiled, as if he had responded positively, “I'm going to put some images on the
projector and you're going to tell me what you see.”

Hannibal smiled broadly beneath his mask. He was familiar with the Rorschach inkblot test, and
all the other picture-association tests psychologists often used. He'd never put much stock in it
since the tests were far too basic and specific. His view of people's minds was much broader and
not so easy to define.

Helena put up the first image and turned to him expectantly.

“What do you expect me to say, doctor?” Hannibal asked, “That I see genitalia in the inkblot? Or
that I see some sort of monster that will devour me?”

“You can tell me whatever it is that you see.” She said, crossing her arms.

“It looks like an inkblot, because that's all it is. Do you really think you can understand me with
this blunt little tool?”

She blinked, and flushed the color of rose wine. She was so dull it amused him greatly, and he
would have preferred to fall from the chair laughing. Unfortunately, he was strapped down, and he
had an even greater urge to continue toying with her.

She snatched the image and replaced it with another.

“What about this one?” She asked.

He looked at it then cocked his head, “Well, that one does somewhat resemble genitalia.”

“Did I forget to remind you that I can make your life very difficult?” She hissed, stepping closer to
him, “Your existence is in my hands.”

He slowly turned his head to look her straight in the eyes, “I'll be even more specific. It looks
somewhat like male genitals.”

Her jaw grew taught, and her nostrils flared. After several beats of silence she asked, “Will Graham's?”

“Perhaps. If so, this inkblot is not a very good representation.”

She withdrew, her mouth forming a rigid line. He could smell the bubbling anger on her. It didn't even occur to him what kind of “punishment” she had in mind. Whatever it was, he could simply block it out with a trip to his memory palace.

She turned sharply on her heel and took the image from the projector. She replaced it with another, and he gazed it with a tilted head. To be honest, he saw nothing in the images. The test was below him. However, prolonging the conversation was to his advantage since it amused him, and there was nothing quite as interesting in the four walls of his cell.

“None of your crimes were sexually driven.” Helena said, “So you can drop the bullshit about seeing genitalia. I know it's not what drives you.”

“What drives us cannot be defined by an inkblot test, Doctor. You and I both know that.”

“Why cannibalism?” She asked, propping her hands on her hips, “If you hate people so much, why not just kill them?”

“It's only cannibalism if we're equals.”

Her eyes narrowed, “All right. By that logic, have you ever committed cannibalism?”

“Not that I can recall.”

“What if you ate Will Graham?”

He turned his head back toward the projected image. At a glance, it looked like the gaping maw of a devil. That idea made him chuckle.

“Perhaps it's a bat.” He said, “Or a butterfly. Maybe it's a cat.”

Helena switched the projector off with a stab of her finger. The image disappeared and the room descended into darkness. A moment later, the nurse standing in the corner flipped the light switch. Helena was standing in front him, arms crossed.

“You didn't answer the question.” She said.

“I said I would give you the chance the evaluate me. I didn't agree to speak about Will Graham.”

“But he's part of your psychopathy, isn't he?”

“Will Graham was nothing more than a toy, for my amusement. You can tell that to your friend, Jack Crawford.”

“I can't. Doctor-patient privilege.”

“I'll give your written consent to discuss me.”

“Why would you do that?”
“Because, you have absolutely nothing that will better or worsen my case. I've already been to court and declared insane. The case this time will be open and shut. I have no fantasies about my future, Dr. Mortise.”

“I'm not interested in discussing you with Jack Crawford.”

“You want to understand me, is that it?”

“You're the dream patient for a director of a mental institution.” She said, approaching him until her toes almost met his. She leaned forward, bracing her hands on the arms of his chair, “You come with celebrity, intrigue, press, books, interviews, the whole package. If I don't try to understand you, I wouldn't be fully appreciating my situation.”

He cast an expressionless gaze down the front of her shirt before looking into her eyes, “What part of me do you want to fully appreciate?”

She smiled, “Still interested in having a monitor strapped to your cock?”

“Not entirely.”

“It might not be up to you.”

“Then, by all means, give it your best shot.”

She bit at her lower lip before straightening and smoothing her hands down the front of her pants, “I'll arrange it.”

“Not today.”

“And why not?”

“I agreed to this conversation because you agreed to tell Jack Crawford that Will and I should meet. The meeting didn't go so smoothly, wouldn't you agree?”

“He's a little flighty.”

“I agreed with the presupposition that our conversation would be longer and more private. It was disappointing, to say the least. If you'd like to strap a monitor to my penis, you must arrange another meeting. This time in the privacy room, with no one listening.”

“I don't know if that's possible. I had to back Jack up today when he said the meeting was over.” She said, shaking her head, “I would be going back on that if I told him you should have more privacy.”

“You're smart, Dr. Mortise. I suggest you come up with a reasonable explanation.”

She paced away, turning her back to him. He could hear her thinking, reasoning, bargaining with herself. She was truly dull if she was going to play this game with him. He wondered how far she would go, and if he could simply talk himself out of straight-jacket and mask, and even this hospital.

At last, she turned to face him, “All right. I'll do my best. But if Jack doesn't go for it, we'll have to come up with a different agreement.”

“The one we made is non-negotiable.” He said, “Don't ruin your chance.”
She pointed a finger at the nurse, “Take him back to his cell. And don't breathe a word about this conversation to anyone.”

The nurse dipped his head, “Yes, ma'am.”

Hannibal complied as the second nurse brought in the stretcher to take him back to his cell. He had a more elaborate scheme unfolding his brain than the trite amusement of biting off his handlers' faces.
An entire week passed before the doctors at Port Haven released Will from their care. He'd been kept under strict observation, but since he exhibited no signs of trauma that would inhibit him from caring for himself, he was free to go home.

Jack came to pick him up the morning of the eighth and final day at Port Haven. He signed the release papers and waved for Will to follow him.

Will had no belongings besides the extra clothes Alana had brought him a few days ago. He carried them out in a paper sack. He wondered what was left for him here in Virginia.

“I know you sold the house in Wolftrap when you left, but I found out it's not occupied right now. I put it on retainer as part of an FBI investigation. I thought some familiar surroundings might do you some good.” Jack said as they got into his SUV, “We can find somewhere else if you don't want to go there.”

“I don't have much of a choice, do I?”

Jack didn't answer that question. He started up the engine and steered the SUV from the parking lot and onto the open road. The heaters on the dashboard blasted warm air to combat the stinging cold of winter.

Three inches of snow had fallen the night before, and the world was a still, smooth wonderland that glistened in the sunshine. Will had trouble accepting it for beauty. The world was tasteless and empty now that he was alone.

“Why couldn't Alana come?” He asked, at length.

“She has a job, Will. And a family. She can't drop everything just because you were found.”

Will nodded. He kept his focus on the landscape speeding past.

“What about Hannibal's place?”

Jack frowned for a moment before replying, “Since he was committed to an institution for life, the house was repossessed. It's been sold, and for a hefty price, I'm told.”

“What happened to all his things?”

“Sold.”

Will sighed, and scrubbed a hand over his face, “I guess I should be glad I wasn't institutionalized. I still have a home.”

“Will, Hannibal Lecter doesn't deserve all of his lavish possessions. He's a cold-blooded killer and a psychopath.”

“I know what he is.” Will snapped.

Jack flexed his fingers over the steering wheel and hardened his gaze at the road. Concern rested heavy in his chest. There had been a time when he would have defended Will to his last breath. He'd believed in Will because he had seen the good and innocence in his acts of righteousness. That faith had been shaken loose time and again, but now, he thought it might have crumbled for
“Are they charging him?” Will asked, softly.

“The DA is still gathering evidence. The investigations in Spain aren't done.” Jack said, “I'm sure there will be charges of kidnapping and false imprisonment . . .”

“What's a few more years to a life sentence?” Will muttered.

“It's the law. He'll be convicted on every count he's guilty of.”

“Will I have to testify?”

“If you're subpoenaed, then yes. These are questions for a lawyer, not me.”

“Do I need a lawyer?”

“You're not being charged, Will.”

Will looked up, catching Jack's gaze. The word 'yet' hung unsaid in the air between them. Will's eyes narrowed as he wondered just how guilty Jack considered him. Not enough to bring charges, obviously, but he was one for hunches.

Will evaded conversation until they arrived at his old house on the edge of the woods. The farmhouse sat dark and desolate, it's black windows like empty eyes staring across the barren landscape. Will drew in a deep breath as the truck rolled up the driveway and shifted into park.

“Nothing's hooked up, I'm sure.” Will said, leaning forward to gaze at the house.

“Oh the contrary, Alana took on the task of arranging for all of the electric and phone lines to be reconnected.”

Will smiled, briefly, “Tell her I said thank you.”

“You can tell her yourself.” Jack said, firmly, “Just because you're being released from Port Haven doesn't mean we're abandoning you. If you need anything, you should call us.”

“You're a good friend, Jack. I disappear for five years, and you snap right back like I was never gone.”

“You didn't mean to be gone that long . . . I'm sure.”

Will felt Jack's gaze penetrating through his temple. He tamped down his defenses, knowing Jack could see his hackles rising even without a verbal retort.

Will shoved at the car door, but paused with it unlatched.

“Just one more question . . .”

“Yes?”

“I'm not in police custody anymore, or government custody.” Will said, “If I try to go see Hannibal again, will you be there to monitor me?”

Jack pursed his lips. “No. That decision will be up to Dr. Mortise.”
Will pushed the car door open, letting in a rush of cold air and snow flakes.

“Thanks, Jack.” He said, and stepped out onto the driveway.

He slammed the door shut behind him and stomped through several inches of snow to the porch. He tried the single key that Jack had given him, and found that it was the same old locks.

When he stepped inside, the house was dark and musty. It smelled stale from years of no ventilation and disuse. No one had bothered to cover the furniture, and so it was thick with dust and cobwebs.

He lowered his head as he recalled the sound of paws across the wood floors, the warm, wet noses poking eagerly at his hands for treats, and the eager kisses when he stooped to greet his only family. Suddenly, he missed his dogs like hell. Loneliness crept through his veins, into his bones, and straight into his heart, an old enemy he hadn't seen in years.

He cranked up the heat, laid down on the couch and buried his head in the blankets. He didn't sleep; he just thought about the pair of arms that should be around him, the assuring caress of fingertips, and the steady, relaxing voice which he had come to rely on to lull him to sleep.

~

Jack had just stepped into his office at the BAU when the telephone on his desk began to ring.

He snatched the receiver with one hand and stretched to hang up his coat with the other.

“Crawford.”

“Hello, Agent Crawford. This is Ricardo Lopez, with the Madrid police department.”

“Ah, Detective Lopez. You're the one who's dealing with the Lecter case?”

“Yes. This is a courtesy call.”

Jack froze, the receiver clutched to his ear. In police discourse, courtesy calls meant all hell was about to break loose.

“What is it?” He asked.

“I've been following up every lead in this case thoroughly, as you asked. I detailed some of my guys to check into unsolved homicides involving mutilation and organ extraction. We didn't find anything promising until now. Our system flagged an owner of a fine grocery who went missing several months back. He was later discovered in a butcher's freezer. He'd been cut open, organs missing. I immediately requested street camera footage as well as security tapes from the store. Lecter was caught on camera there more than once As you know, Lecter was living under a false name in Madrid, but after combing through the security tapes and receipts from the grocery, we discovered he was using another identity for these purchases. The name has subsequently popped up in other receipts from various grocers throughout the city.”

“Is there any forensic connection between the dead grocer and the house?” Jack asked.

“Yes, we've been testing all of the meat in the freezer in the house. We've gotten the results back,
and some of the organs match that of the grocer. Several others have been identified as human remains, but we have no DNA matches at present.”

Jack sank to his chair and rubbed his forehead.

“This is now a murder investigation.” Lopez added, somberly, “I suggest you question the victim once more, this time about murder instead of just kidnapping.”

“Thank you, Detective.”

Jack hung up the phone and sat back in his chair.

He knew Hannibal Lecter wouldn't stop killing just because he was on the run. Eight years ago when he had fled to Florence, he'd killed a handful of people from the same social circle, hardly trying to cover his tracks. Jack wasn't in denial that the situation would turn into a murder investigation; he was simply hoping to avoid dragging Will into an investigation which would likely uncover evidence Jack would never want to believe.

~

Helena Mortise startled when the door of her office swung open and Jack Crawford stormed inside.

“Jack, I wasn't expecting you.” She said, rising from her chair to greet his agitated stance.

“Forgive me for not making an appointment.” He said, though not sounding at all sorry, “This is urgent.”

“What is it?”

“I'd like to interview Hannibal. Now.”

“You seem upset. Do you think that's a good idea?”

“This is a murder investigation now, Doctor.” Jack said, “Let me see him.”

“Murder?” She echoed.

“Madrid PD has a body and human remains on the premises.” Jack replied, hastily, “It's vital that I interview Hannibal immediately. He may even confess and save us a lot of trouble.”

“Why would he do that?”

“He's been caught; there's no point in lying. And vanity. He loves to boast, especially to me.”

“Why you?”

Jack might have contested the question, but Helena was already reaching for the phone.

“There was a time when I valued his friendship. Before we all saw what he was. There's nothing he loves more than throwing how he blinded us in my face.”

Helena dialed the phone and brought it to her ear.
“Hi, Elliot. I need you and Jason to get Lecter suited up. He has a visitor … Yes, right away. Thank you.”

She put down the phone and turned to Jack, “They're bringing him up. Shall we go wait in the visiting area?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Helena locked her office door behind them, and Jack could only wonder what was in the office that she considered so valuable. He'd brought Helena into the investigation to be an unbiased eye, but despite multiple conversations with the woman, he couldn't decipher her interest in the case. As director of the hospital, she enjoyed the attention of having Hannibal the Cannibal in her custody, but it wasn't glory that flashed in her eyes.

“I have to say,” Helena remarked, “I can't imagine seeing him as an ordinary human being. He's one of the most reprehensible patients I've ever treated.”

“He wore a very well-tailored mask.” Jack said, “Will was the only one who saw through it for a long time.”

“He seems to have cast aside the charade completely.”

“He has. Now he's enjoying watching the chaos he created. That's why I knew I had to come here immediately after receiving the call from Madrid. I have to maintain the momentum to push him.”

“Push him? How far?” She asked, casting him a curious gaze.

“Push him past the pretentious gloating and gluttonous vanity. I need him to talk to me about what happened in Spain.”

“You mean what happened with Will Graham.” She said, her mouth curving slyly.

Jack hesitated a moment before saying, “Yes.”

Helena let them into the visiting area. The rows of cages sat empty, at present. The room was hollow and cold. Jack bolstered his courage, and his rage. He dug deep for the anger he'd used during that altercation in Florence years ago; but brute, physical force was so much easier to manipulate someone with. He had to be cunning and quick with Hannibal now that it was words, and not fists between them.

“I think I should stay.” Helena said.

“I was hoping it would be private.”

“He's my patient. I shouldn't allow the authorities to question him without someone guarding his well-being present.”

“If you think I intend to harm him, I can assure you–”

“I don't think that.” She said, waving a hand, “But someone might speculate that you could.”

He sighed, “I understand.”

They didn't wait much longer before the door at the other end of the room swung open and the orderly, Elliot, rolled Hannibal into the room. He was locked onto the cart in a straight-jacket and bite prevention mask. His eyes cut like ink-dipped arrows into Jack's skull, holding all the malice
and cunning of Lucifer.

Jack drew in a deep, steady breath. The last time they'd spoken, there had been a sheet of glass between them. This meeting felt far more tangible.

The two nurses worked in a seamless team effort, unlocking the cage door and moving Hannibal inside. Hannibal complied, as if his ostentatious sensibilities weren't offended by his restraints and the indelicate handling by the orderlies.

When they were finished, the two men locked the cage and stepped out of the room. Hannibal sat on the edge of the stool, his feet planted firmly on the ground.

Jack stepped forward, mentally fishing through a dozen different openings to the interrogation. He had to come at Hannibal just right. Hannibal had so far refused to speak to any authorities, and the only reason he might speak to Jack was because of their history. It was his only card to play.

“Well, Jack ...” Hannibal's voice slithered through the small ring of holes in the mask, “You have me all trussed up and dragged from my quarters. The least you could do is tell me what you want.”

“I've gotten news from Spain.” Jack said, offering a cool smile, “They know what's in your freezer.”

“Ah.” Hannibal murmured, “So they're catching on. Quite dull, that lot, don't you think?”

“They're effective enough.” Jack said, “They've identified one victim. It's only a matter of time before they figure out who the rest of the meat is.”

“What do you hope to gain from this interaction?” Hannibal asked, leaning his head closer to the bars. The mask clinked softly against the metal, and his cheeks bunched above the plastic in a bright smile, “A confession? … Need I remind you, I've already been declared insane.”

“That declaration still stands, true.” Jack said, “I'm hoping you'll save Will some pain and suffering.”

Hannibal's delighted expression faded to translucent concern. It was subtle, but Jack was quick enough to see it before Hannibal straightened and rearranged his expression to one of cool composure.

“What of him?”

“I think we have a common interest in seeing Will go free.” Jack said, stepping closer to the cage. He was past the line now, but Helena made no effort to stop him. “You may hate me. You may wish to continue my suffering, and maybe you think I'm dull and stupid for not having seen you for what you are. But I think we can agree that Will Graham was a victim in all of this, not an active part.”

Hannibal regarded him distrustfully. Jack was saying everything he wanted to hear.

“Were you feeding Will those people in your freezer?” Jack asked, “Did he know they were human remains?”

“I've always said nothing at my table is vegetarian.”

“Hardly. Did Will help you capture your meals?”
Hannibal's eyes narrowed.

“I could take your answer as a 'yes'.” Jack said, “Not everyone is entirely sure Will is innocent.”

“No.” Hannibal said, rising suddenly from the stool.

Jack cocked his head, “No?”

“No, Will did not help me.”

Jack nodded slowly. He let himself smile in brief victory. He had to savor the fear that was apparent in Hannibal's eyes; it was the first scrap of emotion he'd glimpsed in the man in quite a long time.

“Are you willing to go on record saying that?”

Hannibal settled comfortably on the stool, and drew in a composing breath. “Yes,” He said, “You're aware I haven't attempted to conceal my kills since you bravely, but foolishly, attempted to trick me into attacking you.”

“Good. You'll give a full confession.”

“As long as you and Alana will be present.”

“We will. You know you're doing yourself favors by cooperating with the investigation.”

“What's another few years to a life sentence?” Hannibal asked.

It wasn't until Jack left the visiting room that he remembered those words verbatim coming out of Will Graham's mouth.

~

Helena caught Jack before he headed back to Quantico to arrange for Hannibal to be brought in to record his confession.

“I thought I should let you know that Hannibal has added Will to his visitors list.” She said, ignoring the anxious nausea starting up in her stomach.

Jack waved a hand. “Don't ask me, Doctor. He was released today. It's up to you who should be allowed to visit with Hannibal now.”

Helena concealed her shock and excitement.

“Oh, well … Hannibal is my patient, and I take his treatment seriously. I'll consider all the pros and cons of allowing him to visit with Will.” She said.

Jack nodded, wearily. She could see the stress seeping out of his pores.

“Well, thank you for letting me see him, Doctor. You should be getting a call from Quantico in a couple of hours to arrange for Hannibal to be brought in for the interview.”
“You have my full cooperation.” She smiled, amiably.

When he was gone, she went back to her office and sank into her chair. Her mind spun in disorganized circles for several minutes before she sat up and opened a Word document on her computer. She began typing as rapidly as she could. The letters sprinted across the page, telling the story of a psychopath in love.

~

Hannibal laid on his cot in a meditative state for an hour after being brought back to his cell. Jack’s visit was forcing him to reevaluate his planning. The world’s legal system meant nothing to him, and thus, a court considering Will guilty had no effect on Hannibal’s morale. A conviction, however, would land them both behind bars, making escape much more difficult. He had no interest in sitting in this institution for three more years if Will being on the outside was not present to motivate him.

The din that dinner caused in the basement had just begun to die down when the horn to alert the gate at the end of the hall opening blared. Immediately, the loonies in the other cages began to moan, shout, and pound on the bars.

Hannibal attempted to tune out the noise for a few moments before growing curious and rising from his bed. He went to the front corner of the cell, where, at this angle, he could glimpse a sliver of the aisle between the rows of cells.

An inmate was strapped to a cart and wore a straight jacket; the same treatment Hannibal received with the exception of the muzzle. The orderlies rolled him all the way down the aisle until they reached the cell right next to Hannibal’s.

The scent of a familiar person, and the recognition of the darkly smirking face reached Hannibal’s brain at once. The prisoner was a former employee, and the same man who had attempted to kill Hannibal several years ago; one Matthew Brown, a killer but not a psychopath. Hannibal wondered what kind of stories his lawyer had spun to get an insanity plea.

Their eyes connected for a brief moment before the orderly grabbed the cart and pushed Matthew into the cell next to Hannibal’s. Hannibal knew without a doubt that Matthew had recognized him.

Hannibal waited patiently by the glass as the orderlies unstrapped Matthew and locked up the cell. As their footsteps departed, Hannibal watched as a pair of slim hands reached through the bars and laced together in a casual position.

“We meet again, Dr. Lecter.” Matthew's voice echoed softly through the cavern of the basement.

“What strike of fate accorded this reunion?” Hannibal asked.

“I violently attacked another inmate.” Matthew replied, “They stuck me down here for safe keeping. I must have been really believable. I'm in good, bloody company.”

“What did you do?”

“I choked him and chewed half his nose off.”
Hannibal chuckled aloud. His mind drew the comparison of a monkey in the zoo attacking onlookers.

“T’im glad it amuses you. What did you do?”

“I think you know.”

Silence settled on the basement for several moments. Hannibal heard Matthew sniff, and then cough quietly. The anxiety and curiosity worked itself from his brain and through the wall between them. Hannibal smiled, content to wait for the string of questions.

“You've been gone for five years … With Will.”

“Yes, I’m sure by now you know that Will was not responsible for those murders he was on trial for, and that I was the one who killed the judge and effectively ended the court proceedings.”

“I've known for a long time you're the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“It will excite you to know that your faith in him was not misplaced.”

Again silence. Matthew was weighing his words, searching for lies. Again, Hannibal waited. He had no interest in gaining Matthew's trust, just his loyalty.

“He killed with you?” Matthew asked, softly.

“I can't elaborate here.” Hannibal said, “You never know who might be listening.”

“That indicates you intend to elaborate at some point in time. Why would you be interested in sharing details about Will? I did try to kill you.”

“You were protecting Will. In that right, I cannot blame you.”

“Hmff.” Matthew muttered, “You're a strange one, Dr. Lecter, but I can't complain. I haven't stopped thinking about him even after all these years.”

“He's quite unique and … enchanting.”

“You wanna fight for him?”

Hannibal gave a low chuckle. “I doubt such an antediluvian form of ownership would effect Will's final choice.”

“You think he's loyal to you? He's the one that asked me to kill you.”

“Time changes many things.”

“Well, if that's not the most sappy, ridiculous crock of bullshit I've ever heard. You say it like time changes people. Nothing changes people. You should know that as the revered psychiatrist that you are.”

“Will doesn't want to kill me. That, I know.”

“So what do you want from me?”

Hannibal licked his lips. He'd successfully baited the hook. It was time to guide the hook into Matthew's unsuspecting lip.
“While I’m not interested in fighting for Will, I am interested in finding my way back to him. Are you?”

“A game?” Matthew asked, sounding quite like a delighted child at Christmas.

“Yes. Winner take all.” Hannibal said, stretching out on his cot, “Loser is a rotten egg.”
Chapter 8

Racing thoughts kept Will awake until the cold, dark hours of the night. When at last he slept, he slipped in and out of a dream world, startling awake each and every time Hannibal entered his subconscious, only to find it wasn’t real. It wasn’t until the pre dawn hours that he his exhausted body relaxed, and his mind cycled into REM sleep.

He jerked awake to the sun slanting through his window and the sound of a car door slamming shut outside. His mouth was cotton dry and his mind disoriented. When he glanced at the clock, he discovered that it was just past noon.

Swinging his legs over the head of the bed, he stretched out an arm to swipe the curtains back from the window. Alana's immaculate, black Tesla sat ostentatiously in the snow-covered, rustic landscape of his front drive.

“Fuck.” Will muttered.

He stumbled out of bed and managed to pull on a pair of sweatpants just as the doorbell rang. He combed his fingers through his unruly curls, and quickly gave up on his unkempt appearance on his way to the door.

The storm clouds hanging stubbornly over his head departed within seconds of his opening the door. A familiar, whiskered face and two eager paws pushed at his screen door, begging to be let in.

Will yanked the door open and sank to his knees as Winston came barreling through the front door and into his arms.

Alana smiled and let go of the leash. She stood in the doorway, waiting patiently as Will gathered Winston in his arms and murmured loving words into his furry neck.

“You kept him?” Will looked up at her with tears in his eyes.

“I knew he would be unhappy without you, and he knows me so I thought that would at least make him comfortable until ...”

Will paused from rubbing behind Winston's ears.

“You thought I would come back?”

She pursed her lips and shrugged. “There's always possibilities, right?”

“Well … I'm glad you did.”

Alana pushed the door shut behind her. She pulled a paper sack out from behind her back. “I picked up some bagels on the way here. Maybe we can talk over breakfast.” She suggested.
Will noted the somber tone in her voice. He nodded and rose to his feet. "Okay."

Winston scampered behind them, nose nudging at Will's legs, as they walked to the kitchen. Will put on a pot of coffee while Alana opened the sack and set out the bagels. When the coffee began to brew, Will took a seat across from her and took a bite of the bagel. He was famished, but he held onto his composure and ate in small bites. He didn't want Alana to think he was falling to pieces out here by himself. Truth be told, he'd only taken the time to drive down to the gas station, but she didn't need to know the only things in his refrigerator were bread, lunch meat, and milk.

They ate in silence for several moments before Will said, "Why do I feel like you came here to deliver bad news?"

Alana set her bagel down and wiped her mouth with a napkin. She cleared her throat. "I didn't want to throw it at you all at once."

"Just tell me."

"Jack got a call from Madrid yesterday. They identified the meat in the freezer as human, and they have a positive ID on one of the victims."

Will chewed in silence, not meeting her gaze.

"We already knew it would be, but this is officially a murder investigation now." Alana continued, "Jack will probably want to question you again."

"I can already tell you, I don't know who they are."

"You have to tell them that. Officially."

"The last testimony didn't go so well."

"It's up to you how it goes." Alana said, gently, "Will, this is very serious. If they even think that you were involved in these murders, they will arrest you and charge you. You're already very close to an aiding and abetting charge that could land you in jail for several years."

"Aiding and abetting means I knew about a crime and concealed it, or helped him escape. I did none of those things. I was just along for the ride."

"It's not much of a distinction. Not to the FBI. Especially when you won't give us a straight answer about what happened. We can't help you if you don't help us."

"Fine." Will said, putting up his hands, "I'll come in give my testimony. But it won't change anything. It won't change what you or Jack or anyone else is thinking."

"I don't think you're guilty."

Will met her gaze for the first time during the conversation. There was a cold cynicism in them that made her teeth grind. She didn't understand his apathy, especially when there was so much on the line.

"You think I have Stockholm Syndrome." Will said, giving a mirthless chuckle, "So, either I'm a criminal who helped Hannibal kill and eat people, or I'm a helpless, mentally ill victim who helped Hannibal kill and eat people. Neither are very appealing."

"None of this is appealing. That's not the point. It's about whether you can move on with your life,
“A person not wanting to spend the rest of their life in prison is about their quality of life, and whether it's important enough to keep on living as free man. What do I have to live for in the free world, Alana? Winston? Fixing boat motors out here in the middle of nowhere? Living with my thoughts and trying not to remember everything I've been through? Where is the quality in that?”

“So you're just giving up? Is that it?” She said, jumping to her feet. Her face flushed red with anger, but it didn't seem to rattle him that she was angry.

“I'm giving in.” He said, calmly, “Because the time, effort, and care it would take to do otherwise just isn't worth it.”

She crossed her arms and blew out a frustrated sigh, “I thought I knew you better. The Will Graham I knew wouldn't give up just because it got tough. He would keep going because he was motivated to do the right thing.”

“The Will Graham you knew hasn't been here for five years.” He said, rising from his chair, “Thanks for the bagels, but if you'll excuse me, I have some errands to run. I haven't been home in a long time, and the house is a little empty.”

She watched in disbelief as he breezed past her. Winston tagged after him, ignoring her as if she hadn't been caring for him faithfully for five years.

~

Just after 2:00, when the inmates had finished lunch, the orderlies, Elliot and Jason, came down into the basement with the cart, straight-jacket, and mask.

“Good afternoon.” Hannibal said, rising from his cot, “What's the occasion?”

“You have a visitor.” Elliot said, as he unlocked the door. As usual, he held a taser in one hand as Jason approached with the straight-jacket.

Hannibal complied, giving Elliot no reason to use the taser.

“May I ask whom?”

“Your friend, Will Graham.” Jason said, pulling the straight-jacket buckles tight across Hannibal's back, “Just do me a favor, and don't jizz yourself. I don't get paid enough to clean that up.”

Hannibal smiled, coolly.

They put on the mask and strapped him to the cart. It was another five minutes before the procedure of taking him upstairs to the visitor's area was complete. Much to Hannibal's satisfaction, they rolled past the cages and to the private room. Helena stood waiting outside the door.

“Dr. Mortise, my faith in you has been rewarded.” Hannibal said.

“You have half an hour.” Helena said, “I'll be standing out here watching the whole time. If you do anything stupid, Elliot will be through the door in a second and taser you in the throat.
Understood?"

“Clear as glass, Doctor.”

“Good.”

She motioned to the orderlies. The door swung open, and Elliot pushed the cart into the privacy room. Will was already seated at the table. He was wearing hunter green shirt and jeans, and his hair was combed. He hadn't shaved since their last meeting. Their eyes met in silence, and for a moment, the movements of the orderlies unstrapping him from the cart and moving him to the chair faded into nothing. Hannibal swallowed thickly and silently cursed the damned muzzle strapped to his face. He wanted to lean across the table and kiss Will passionately, if only for a moment before he got a taser in his throat.

Elliot and Jason removed the straight-jacket in exchange for handcuffs that linked him to the hook in the middle of the table.

“Would it be acceptable to remove the mask?” Hannibal asked.

“If I see one glimpse of teeth, I will put this taser in your crotch.” Elliot said, putting a hand over the weapon strapped to his hip.

“I understand.”

Elliot unstrapped the mask, and took it and the straight-jacket out of the room with him. The door slammed shut behind him, descending the room into silence.

Will gazed at him from the across the table, his lashes beating softly against his cheeks. Hannibal took in his face, absorbing every tiny detail, down to the moisture on his lips.

“You look … better.” He said, reaching across the table for Will’s hands.

Will accepted Hannibal's hand with one of his own. The hand was limp and chilled, palm dewy with nervous sweat.

“Jack can't stop me from coming here anymore.” Will replied, softly.

“You look pale. Have you been taking care of yourself?”

“I haven't slept good.”

“I haven't either. Living in a basement isn't conducive to proper sleeping habits.”

Will leaned forward and grasped Hannibal's other hand. His grip was strong, but it trembled in desperation.

“Did they tell you about the new evidence in Madrid?” He asked.

“Yes. Jack questioned me. It seems new charges are imminent. I'm not concerned for myself as I am already condemned to this hospital for life, but I won't stand idle if they intend to lock you in here as well.”

“Don't do anything stupid.” Will murmured despite the affectionate smile that crossed his face.

“I wouldn't dream of it.”
Will licked his lips and glanced at the one way window, “They're watching, aren't they?”

“Yes. They always will be. I'm too dangerous to be left alone.” Hannibal said, his lips curling in a smirk.

Will shook his head, slowly, “It's not sexy when you gloat, you know.”

“I always thought you liked it.”

They shared a brief moment of levity before Will sobered.

“I might be here to do something stupid.”

Hannibal frowned, “What are you thinking of doing, Will?”

Will glanced at the window again before he shoved a hand in his pocket. When he put his hand back on the table, it was curled in a fist. He held onto Hannibal's gaze for several moments before he opened his hand and let something fall onto the table. There was a clink of metal on metal, and Will drew his hand back to reveal two gold bands.

Hannibal blinked in confusion for a few brief moments before the implication struck him.

“Will, this is … incredibly stupid.”

“I don't care.” Will said, gripping Hannibal's hand tighter, “I don't care what happens today or tomorrow, or if I'm convicted for whatever charge they can make stick. This morning, Alana reminded me that the reason to avoid jail is that you have something you want to live for on the outside. I don't have anything like that; all I have is on the inside, behind the bars of this hospital. My quality of life, whatever it is that I need to keep breathing … it all comes back to you. Whatever happens, I want the world and you to know what's important to me. So, I'm asking you right now – will you marry me?”

Silence settled between them. Hannibal's gaze darted between the rings glinting on the table in front of him and Will's face staring anxiously back at him. The room blurred as sudden emotion squeezed his chest.

“Yes.” He whispered, “It's perhaps the worst decision we could make right now, but I cannot say no.”

Will broke into a smile. He plucked one of the rings from the table and held it out. “May I?”

Hannibal uncurled his fingers. His hand trembled as Will slid the ring into place. It fit perfectly, and rested comfortably on his hand as if it had always been there. Meeting Will's gaze, he took the second ring and slipped it onto Will's finger.

Their gazes held for several moments, both of them wide-eyed and trembling, chest pumping with newly blooming love, bursting with adoration that had been slowly being crushed with fear since their arrest in Madrid.

Ignoring the rules, Will jumped up from his chair and leaned across the table to cradle Hannibal's face and join their mouths in feverish, yearning kiss. The chains of his handcuffs pulled taut as Hannibal reached up to clutch Will's cheeks. He held on the brief, swift seconds, memorizing the softness of Will's skin, the texture of his hair, the sweet taste of his mouth, knowing it would all be over in a few short moments.
They held on as the door slammed open as Elliot warned them to stop touching. They were ripped apart as Elliot and Jason grabbed Hannibal by the shoulders and forced him back into his chair. Elliot warned Will back with a raised hand and gruff admonition.

“Next time it's the taser.” Elliot said, pointing a finger at Hannibal, “You have fifteen more minutes.”

The orderlies left again.

Will and Hannibal gazed at each other in silence for a few moments before Hannibal spoke.

“There’s some paperwork that will have to be filled out.” Hannibal said, “Requisition it from Dr. Mortise, and if she gives us any trouble about it, I'll take care of it.”

“What can you do? It's her choice whether to approve the license or not.”

Hannibal smiled, and took Will's hand, “I have more of an upper hand than you might think, darling.”

~

Hannibal prepared for gloating, anger, and demands from Helena during their session, but she was strangely quiet as Elliot and Jason sat him before the projector and hooked him up to the polygraph machine.

“I'm not interested in whether or not you're lying.” She said, approaching his chair, “I just want to know how you react to certain images.”

He watched her from the corner of his eye as she hooked up her laptop to the projector and opened a slide show of images.

“No monitor for my cock as we discussed?” He chuckled.

“Let's cut through the bullshit.” She said, poising her hands on her hips, “That type of crude experimentation isn't worthy of bona fide psychology.”

“I wasn't aware we were discussing psychology when you brought my penis into it.”

“Don't flatter yourself.” She rolled her eyes, “You're not my type.”

He smirked. She didn't know he could smell it on her.

“Watch the slide show.” She ordered, pointing at the images being reflected on the wall.

He tilted his head back against the chair and observed only a few of the images before growing bored. She was showing him violent images, most of which were so gaudy that they had to have come from the most basic Google search.

“You're not going to ask me about my engagement to Will Graham?” He asked, turning his head against the chair to look at her.

She stood just a few feet away, her arms crossed, her gaze focused on the wall where the images
were displayed. She was watching intently, and he wondered if she enjoyed some type of twisted, sexually violent fantasies. He had no doubt he could work the truth out of her if he had the motivation.

“It's a ploy, isn't it?” She said, not breaking her gaze from the wall, “To keep him from testifying against you?”

“While spousal privilege does allow him to refuse to testify, that is not the main reason for the engagement.”

“Don't try to convince me you really care about him.” She said, snorting a laugh, “You've been spending the last five years abusing that poor guy, and now he's deluded into loving a monster. It's all very dramatic and poetic, but I'm a Ivy League educated psychiatrist. He clearly suffers from Stockholm Syndrome.”

“Don't forget I am also an Ivy League educated psychiatrist. And Will has been my patient for many years. I know him intimately.”

“You're saying he's loyal to you of his own volition?” She said, turning a skeptical eye to him, “Please, Hannibal, now you're the one who's deluded.”

“As always, your opinion means nothing to me.”

“Then why did you ask?”

“Jealousy is an intricate part of the brain, and it registers without realization or expectation. However, it is one of the easiest of the human emotions to recognize.”

“You think I'm jealous of Will Graham?” She asked. She tilted her head back and let out an abrupt laugh, “You should have been a comedian, not a psychiatrist, Dr. Lecter.”

Hannibal smiled, unperturbed.

“Watch the slide show, or I'll start it over.” She said.

Hannibal directed his gaze to the images, which were just as banal and ineffective as before. None of these crimes were his work, and all of them lacked his finesse and flourish. A waste of good meat.

Helena watched the monitor tracking his heart rate and scribbled notes on a pad of paper.

The slide show went on for several minutes before the images abruptly changed tone and source. Hannibal's hands curled into fists as an image of bound and gagged Will, most likely taken by Madrid PD, popped up on the wall.

Hannibal closed his eyes. He wasn't sure what the monitor was reading now, but it wasn't a steady baseline any longer.

“I can only imagine who you manipulated to get these pictures.” He said, maintaining an even tone, “Was it Jack and the FBI, or someone from Madrid?”

“I have some clout with the police.” Helena said, scribbling furiously in her notebook.

The images continued. Close up photos of Will's hands, wrists, and ankles, and the massive bruising on his throat and hips displayed in high quality and larger than life on the wall.
“As a psychiatrist who has studied more than one case of physical and sexual abuse, what do these pictures tell you?” Helena asked.

Hannibal clenched his jaw. It was only the thought of cutting her open and ripping out her heart that made his pulse ease to a steady pace.

“One does not have to be a psychiatrist to interpret these images.” He said.

“You were raping him.” She said, rising from her chair and circling her desk to stand in front of him, “Of all the people I studied, I didn't expect that kind of uncouth and antiquated behavior from you. You're not a sexual predator, no matter how much you're trying to convince Jack Crawford and the FBI that, in Will Graham's case, you are. You're a different animal entirely.”

“I'm not one to go on without something I desire.” He replied, forcing a smile to his lips.

“You wanted him, you got him, and now he wants to marry you. What's the angle? You've never been married, you don't have any children, and of all the people who have come forward claiming to have slept with you, none of them have mentioned a long term relationship. You're not the type to be held down by responsibilities and commitments. So what is it about Will Graham?”

“What kind of reading did you get?” He asked, tilting his head, “A spike in heart rate can mean many things. What's your interpretation, Dr. Ivy League?”

She shrugged, “Maybe I was wrong. Maybe you do care about him.”

“Are you going to share that interpretation with Jack Crawford?”

“I have no interest in sharing any information from these sessions with anyone – at least, not until I'm ready to. Of course, when I do, it won't be to Jack Crawford's benefit.”

Hannibal narrowed his eyes momentarily. He slowly began to smile, “I have a new proposal, Dr. Mortise.”

“Let's hear it.”

“As I understand, Jack has no say over whether Will visits me now. That's in your hands, and you've already proven to be cooperative in that situation, therefore, our previous agreement about these observations is no longer advantageous to either of us.”

“Cut to the chase.”

“What I'm proposing is quid pro quo.” He said, spreading his hands, “You tell me something personal, I tell you something personal. If you play your cards right, you may get everything out of me that you want to know.”

Helena crossed her arms. He could see the wheels spinning behind her eyes. There was a bit of a flush on her neck and cheeks. What did she have to hide?

“All right.” She said, at last, “I agree. But if I tell you something and you reply with bullshit, it's over.”

“No bullshit.” He said, “I'm giving you my word.”
Matthew leaned against the bars of his cell as the two orderlies brought Hannibal back down into the basement.

He had never worked with Elliot or Jason during his employ at the hospital, but he could tell they were a couple of idiots. Macho men with no real experience who didn't respect the job or the inmates. They handled Hannibal as if he were an everyday, run-of-the-mill inmate, not a dangerous, experienced killer who could rip their faces off in under a minute given the chance and the desire.

Matthew, on the other hand, knew exactly what Hannibal was. He wasn't an imbecile. He knew Hannibal was trying to play him for Will Graham's hand. He wouldn't be used. When all of their planning and conniving came to a head, he was walking out of the facility, hopefully with Will on his arm.

Hannibal thought he was a stupid, harmless man, blindly devoted to Will – but no, Hannibal Lecter had finally met his match.

When Elliot and Jason were gone, Matthew said, “How was your visit with, Will?”

There was a moment of silence before Hannibal replied, “Too brief.”

“How was he?”

“Healthy.”

“How's his morale?”

“Also healthy. He proposed to me.”

That gave Matthew some pause. Breaking the two apart wouldn't be easy. He had to find a foothold with the Will Graham he had met many years ago. He was sure that side of Will still existed; as he had said before, people never change. The world around them changes, forcing them to change tactics or means of survival; all that meant was that Matthew had to change Will's world, and thus, his motivations.

“Will they let someone in the loony bin get hitched?” He asked.

“It appears Dr. Mortise will approve the license.”

“What's your angle with that bitch?”

“She's the key to our release.” Hannibal said, “The directors of this institution have never quite been on par.”

“What do you need me to do?”

“I assume you know the routines of the hospital.”

“Yeah, I mean it hasn't changed much. I even know some of the fucks who still work here.”

“Advantageous.” Hannibal said, “Tell me everything you know.”

Matthew proceeded to outline the daily routine and the floor plan of the hospital. When he finished, Hannibal grew quiet.
“What am I getting out of telling you all of this?” Matthew asked.

“If you’re looking for immediate fulfillment, I’m afraid you’ve entered into the wrong type of agreement. The reward is the final conclusion of our agreement, when we both walk out of the doors of this hospital as free men.”

“I want to see Will.”

“Then, by all means, make your best effort to do so. I, however, am in no position to assist you.”

Matthew huffed and shook his head. Hannibal was a stubborn, arrogant prick, and Matthew had no idea how Will had fallen for him. What likable qualities were there? Sure, he wasn’t bad looking for an older guy, but if anyone deserved to be in this godforsaken hell hole, it was Hannibal Lecter. He was ice cold. Matthew could offer Will so many more things in life than the soulless psychopath inhabiting the cell next to him ever could.

Hannibal said nothing further. He seemed to have lain down on his cot and begun to doze from the sound of the steady breathing.

Matthew laid down on his own cot and mulled over different versions of their escape. He had no doubt he could break out of the facility, but he had never had reason to before. On the outside, he was a quiet, awkward man who could hardly hold a job or a relationship. The hospital provided him with routine care, medication, food, a roof over his head, and most importantly, status. Most of the inmates here were afraid of him. He didn't think anyone would cross him for awhile since he'd bitten off that idiot's nose.

The only thing more important to him than his position here at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane was Will Graham.

He laid back and jerked off thinking about Will, hoping Hannibal would wake up and his groans of satisfaction.

~

Most of the lights were out in the hospital when Helena finally saved her work on her computer and turned it off. She stretched her back, suppressed a yawn, and glanced at the clock. She'd been at work nearly all day. A few cups of coffee had rejuvenated her after her meeting with Hannibal. Around all of her other duties, she had managed to write five more pages on their latest session alone. She felt she was just touching the surface.

A soft tap on her door drew her attention from her work.

“Come in.”

The door opened and Elliot stepped inside. He had changed out of his white uniform and into casual t-shirt and jeans.

“I'm glad you're still here.” He said, crossing the room. His hands shifted from his pockets, through his hand, over the back of his neck in an anxious pattern, “I thought we could ...”

She looked him up and down for a few moments, letting the tension rest heavy. She waited until he
got nervous and began to back out of the room.

“Lock the door.” She said.

His eyes brightened. A smile played on his lips as he pushed the door shut and flipped the lock.

She rose from her chair and slowly circled around the desk. He stumbled forward, enthralled. She grabbed him by the front of the shirt and yanked him to her, smashing their mouths together. He pushed her onto the edge of her desk, his hand immediately delving beneath her skirt. She could feel the rigid bulge of his cock pushing against her crotch, and she ground against it, eager and horny.

Her pencil holder tipped over, scattering the pens and pencils, as he pushed her down on the desk and pulled her panties off. After only a few moments of fumbling, he got his jeans open and boxers out of the way. He fucked into her without any further prelude, and she moaned in satisfaction, her hand flailing through the air to grab onto his hair and t-shirt.

He thrust into her relentlessly for several moments before turning her over and pushing her face into the hard wood surface of the desk. Shoving her skirt up around her waist, he entered her again, hips slamming against her ass with each thrust.

She closed her eyes and enjoyed his rough, enthusiastic fucking – but her mind drifted away from him. He was young and attractive with his thick, black hair, square jaw and intelligent blue eyes. An all-American hunk, but he wasn't her type. She was a liar, she thought, as she imaged it was Hannibal Lecter fucking her from behind.
It had been a week and a half since the police raided the house in Madrid. Jack devoted nearly every waking moment since then to the investigation. It was ten a.m. on Wednesday when Jack gathered what he had once considered his core investigative team, with a few exceptions, in his office.

Jimmy Price and Brian Zeller occupied the chairs across from his desk while Alana paced nervously behind them. Jack stood with his hands on his hips in front of the cork board he had brought into his office to detail Hannibal's movements over the past five years.

“So far, this is all we have gathered on the investigation.” Jack said, “Using the packages Hannibal sent me through the mail, I've been able to create a rough time line.” He ran his finger over a map of Europe, which took up half the board, “Each of these red push pins mark the locations Hannibal stayed at during the last five years. Blue push pins indicate which locations have been linked to mysterious deaths involving organ removal and mutilation.”

“Have we teamed up with the local police departments to get evidence and DNA info?” Brian asked.

“Not yet. So far we've just combed the databases for cases matching Hannibal's MO.” Jack said, “I'm planning on contacting each of these departments in the coming days. It's going to be a lot of work, and I need everyone engaged.”

“I don't officially work for the FBI, so I think I can say this.” Alana interrupted, “Isn't this a little redundant, Jack? Hannibal has already been declared insane and committed to the mental hospital until he's rehabilitated – which, knowing Hannibal, will be never.”

“This is our job.” Jack said, “It's our duty to give the families of the deceased closure. So, no, I wouldn't say this investigation is redundant.”

“I hate to be the one to say this, but we still don't have solid, scientific evidence about whether or not Will was involved.” Jimmy added, cautiously.

“You need science to tell you that?” Alana asked, “We've been through this before. The last time we all rushed to the conclusion that he killed Abigail and all those other people, and he was completely innocent.”

“The past doesn't speak for the present.” Jack said, “We can't rely on our gut feeling or our need to protect Will. That's not how the FBI works. We need hard, tested facts.”

“When I saw Will yesterday, he told me he would come in to give his official statement. I suggest you set it up so we can move on from these ridiculous assumptions.”

Jimmy and Brian ducked their heads as a standoff formed between Jack and Alana. She was the only one who ever got away with yelling at Jack, but that didn't mean Jack would take it lying down. The investigation was going to be a rough ride if the two of them couldn't agree.

“We will set it up.” Jack said after several moments of tense silence, “And let him know that he should come in prepared this time. I don't want him losing his cool and walking out halfway through again.”

“He understands. It was just too soon after.” Alana said, “He's a victim, Jack. He's been hurt. It's
going to take a long time for him to trust again, even if we were his friends before all of this happened.”

“Unfortunately, I can't operate as a friend in this instance. I have to operate as the director of the BAU, and in that position, I have to look at the situation objectively.”

“I'm a psychiatrist, looking at it objectively, and I'm still not convinced he's guilty in any way.”

“The investigation will tell.” Jack said, “Let's get back to the facts.”

A sudden, urgent knocking on the door turned their attention from the board. Before Jack could answer the door, it swung open and a woman rushed inside, clutching a yellow envelope in her hand.

“I need to speak to you, Agent Crawford.” She said, rushed and out of breath, “Why the hell am I getting served divorce papers from a man I haven't seen in five years?”

Jack was momentarily struck speechless. The situation had just become one hundred times more complicated. The woman was Molly Foster.

~

The women in the Foster family had never been known for their tenacity or resilience. When Molly's father left them when she was twelve, she had spent the rest of her teenage years watching her mother fold into herself, withering away in self-misery and loneliness. Molly had decided right then and there that she wasn't going to follow in her mother's footsteps. In response, life had thrown her a dozen curve balls, as if to challenge her vow.

When her first husband succumbed to cancer, she held her chin up and moved on. She spent the next three years raising Walter by herself until she met Will Graham. He was the most beautiful, sympathetic, passionate man she had ever met, and she was head over heels in love with him. Then one day, Jack Crawford had appeared on their doorstep, asking for Will's help, and things had never been the same.

The last time she saw Will, he'd told her they were going to back home after everything with the Red Dragon was over. That everything would be okay. Then he had disappeared.

It had taken her the first two years after his disappearance to accept that he wasn't coming back. She spent the subsequent three worrying about him, questioning his motives, growing distraught, and at last, angry at him for abandoning her.

Just as she felt herself begin to rebound, the news broke that Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham had been found, hiding out in Spain. A week later, the divorce papers arrived. Will Graham wanted to sever their marriage vows. She could have everything. He didn't want an argument.

She didn't know why her first reaction was to drive to Quantico, and go storming into Jack Crawford's office. As soon as she was through the door, she regretted the decision. All of the things she'd planned to say during her drive here deserted her. She had never met the other three people sitting in Jack's office, but from the looks on their faces, they knew who she was.

She came to a stop, her fingers wrapping tight around the envelope in her hand. The paper wrinkled
against her sweaty palm.

“Molly … I'm sorry, I'm just … I'm surprised to see you here.” Jack said.

“I'm sorry, too. My crazy first reaction was to come here and demand answers.” She said. The cork board with photos and a map caught her eyes, “It looks like you have some of the answers.”

“Yes, um, please, sit down and we'll talk.” He suggested.

“We'll get out of the way.” One of the agents sitting in front of Jack's desk rose from his chair and tugged the other man along. They skirted around her, leaving her alone with Jack and a woman whom she'd only seen in pictures. When Molly put most of the dogs up for adoption, a representative from the Verger estate had arrived to take Winston to Muskrat Farm. Part of Molly had been relieved she wouldn't have to lay eyes on a woman Will had admitted to having feelings for. Part of her had hoped to confront Alana, as if she had some secret knowledge of Will that could lead to his discovery. Now, seeing the other woman standing across from her in her black suit, radiating cool confidence, Molly felt a wave of frustrating intimidation wash over her.

They all sat down, and Molly pushed the envelope across the desk to Jack.

“It came in the mail this morning.”

Jack opened the envelope and pulled out the document. A sticky note was attached to the first page.

Molly, I'm sorry I let you down and disappeared without letting you know what was going on or if I was okay. I still care about you, but we can't stay married. Please don't contest this; it's not in your best interests to continue being my wife. - Will

Jack leafed through the papers. It was short for a divorce document, but he could see they hadn't jointly owned much of anything.

“I had so many ideas about what would happen when they found him.” Molly whispered, feeling emotion begin to knot in her throat, “I had this fantasy that they would find him, and it would turn out that he'd been held against his will. I was going to save him ...”

“We still can.”

Molly looked up to see Alana gazing at her sympathetically. She hadn't expected a camaraderie with Will's old flame, and she wasn't quite sure she wanted one.

“Can you tell me what's going on?” Molly asked, wiping her eyes.

“Of course, we can't reveal anything about the ongoing investigation,” Jack said, softly, “However, I can tell you that it doesn't necessarily look good for Will.”

“It's not determined whether or not he was complicit in Hannibal's crimes.” Alana added, swiftly, “He may be suffering from Stockholm Syndrome.”

Molly blinked, hardly understanding what Alana was saying for several moments.

“You mean … He's … in love with that psychopath?” She whispered, breathless as if the wind had been knocked from her chest.

“We're still trying to determine what his mental state is.” Alana said.
“What does that mean?” Molly demanded, “His mental state? Is he crazy?”

“Will isn't crazy.” Alana said, “He may just be … confused.”

“Is that why he wants to divorce me? Because he's in love with Hannibal Lector?”

When neither of them replied, Molly jumped up from the chair and paced away, rubbing her hands over her face to suppress an engulfing wave of emotion. Her throat swelled into a knot, and her eyes burned; but she refused to let the tears fall. She had to be strong.

“Part of me wants to sign those papers immediately.” She whispered, “Part of me wants to refuse because I still love him, goddamnit.”

“We can't advise you on your marriage.” Jack said, “All we can do is give you the facts. And sadly, the facts are that Will isn't the same man we used to know. At least not that I've seen.”

Molly felt a soft touch at her elbow and looked up to see Alana at her side.

“Why don't you sit down, and I'll get you some water.” Alana suggested with an encouraging smile.

Molly didn't have the will to argue. She sank to the chair across from Jack while Alana stepped out to get the water.

“I want to see him.” She murmured.

“I don't think that's a good idea.” Jack said, shaking his head.

“Why not?”

“Will isn't ready to be reintroduced to his old life. He seems numb right now, and that may be a coping mechanism. We have to be very careful in rehabilitating his state of mind. He's been in the clutches of a madman for five years.”

“But maybe I could help him remember.” She said, hopefully, “Remind him of how he used to be happy, and that there's still people here for him.”

“I've spoken to him.” Jack said, “I don't think he wants to remember.”

“Is he in your custody?”

“No.”

“Then you can't stop me from seeing him, right?”

Jack sighed, “No, but—”

“Where is he?” She asked.

“Molly, I'm asking you to reconsider before you go off—”

“On paper, I'm still his wife.” Molly said, “It's my right to see him. Now tell me where he is, or I'll go file a complaint right now.”

Jack rubbed a hand over his mouth. She glared at him at him as he mulled it over for several quiet moments.
At last, he conceded, “He's at the house in Wolftrap.”

Molly stood up and grabbed the divorce papers from Jack's desk. A strange sense of calm, like the still seconds before a storm, washed over her.

“Thank you for your time.” She said, politely as she could manage.

Clutching the papers in her fist, she marched out of his office.

~

Will startled awake to Winston's alert, high-pitched barking. He sat up, disoriented, and realized he had fallen asleep on the couch. He caught barely four hours of sleep the night before, and much to his frustration, his body would rather collapse into sleep during the day when he should be facing his responsibilities instead of during the night.

Winston was at the window, his eyes trained on the front yard, his ears perked forward on high alert. A car door slammed.

Will pushed himself up from the couch with a groan. He wasn't in the mood to talk if it was Alana again.

He swept back the curtains, and reached down to soothe Winston with a scratch behind the ears. He froze when his eyes came to rest on the truck parked outside, and the figure stomping through the snow to the porch.

His stomach dropped, and a cold, sick feeling gripped his chest.

No, no, no. I'm not ready.

His head told him to move, to make some action, but he remained paralyzed until the door chime began to ring relentlessly.

“Shit.” He breathed out.

Winston whined and darted to the front door. Will could hear his nails scratching at the door.

He drew in a deep, steadying breath, and swallowed back the nausea churning in his belly. He walked unsteadily to the door. He stared at the door for several moments until the shrill ring of the door bell jarred him into motion.

He wrapped his sweaty palm around the door handle and pulled the door open. Only the screen door stood between him and Molly. She was the last vestige of his old life he hadn't been able to let go of completely.

When he saw the papers gripped in her hand, he almost slammed the door shut again.

She looked him up and down, her face rigid and pale. He couldn't be sure whether she was angry, dismayed, sad, or desperate. Had she come here to punish him? Or to beg him not to go through with the divorce?

“Can I come in?” She asked, stiffly.
He unlatched the screen door and pushed it open, his movements mechanical and slow. A gust of winter air entered with her as she stepped onto the door mat. Her boots were caked with snow, and her skin was rosy with cold.

She unlaced her boots and took them off by the door, letting the silence between them grow. Will stood back, watching her from the corner of his eye, and trying to work up what he was going to say. Every explanation he cobbled together sounded like the ravings of a lovesick lunatic.

Winston nosed at her legs, panting and whining as he recognized her smell despite not having seen her five years.

“Hey, buddy.” She murmured, rewarding him with a scrub between his ears.

“Do you want some coffee?” Will asked, hoarsely.

She straightened and looked him in the eye. “I won't be staying long.”

Will drew in a shallow breath. He shoved his hands in his pockets and nodded to the papers in her hand. “I see you got my mail.”

She nodded, slowly. “I have to admit, I'm a bit confused.”

“Not angry?”

“Maybe a little.”

“Should we sit down?” He asked, motioning to the couch.

“Sure.”

She sat down on the edge of the couch cushion and he took the recliner across from her.

“What happened?” She asked, spreading her hands, “I thought you were … hurt. Maybe even dead.”

“I guess it's the going assumption that he kidnapped me.” Will said.

“Meaning it's not the truth?” She asked, her brows furrowing deeper.

“I can't discuss what happened.” Will said, “I can't until the case is closed.”

“Why not?”

“They have to prove what they can, and I have to go along with it.”

“What does that even mean?” She demanded.

Will sighed and rubbed a hand over his face. “It means … They think I have Stockholm Syndrome and that’s how it has to stay.”

“But it's not true?” She asked, crossing her arms, “Will, what did you do?”

“Nothing.” Will said, firmly, “And that's exactly the problem.”

“Are they going to charge you? Did you help that maniac get away?” Her voice rise higher and louder, and an angry flush burst across her cheeks.
“Molly, please-”

“I've been sitting here for five years – five years, Will – wondering, worrying, fearing for your life. Thinking you were going to come home a wreck, and then thinking you weren't going to come home at all. I defended you to police, to our friends, to Walter. I told them, the Will Graham I knew would never willingly help a monster like Hannibal Lecter. He's a good man, I told them.”

Her voice began to shake and she cradled her face in both hands to muffle a guttural sob.

Will focused on the carpet, keeping his jaw locked against the wave of emotion that battered his foundation. God knew he'd been selfish and stupid a hundred times in his life, but never like this. He hadn't given Molly, and what she might be going through, much thought when he was falling into Hannibal's arms.

“I'm sorry.” He whispered.

She looked up, her face red and streaked with tears, “You're sorry?” She snapped, “You're sorry, Will? That's all you have to say?”

“I'm sorry I put you through all of this.” He added, his voice thick and quiet, “I never meant for it to end this way.”

“I'm sure you didn't, but the choices were there and you made them.”

“And now I have to live with them.”

“Damn straight. I hope they figure out you're lying.” She said, jumping up from the couch, “Getting caught for aiding and abetting a federal fugitive can get you just as many years in prison as Hannibal will.”

“Molly, wait.”

He followed her as she marched toward the front door, barely catching her arm just as she reached for the door handle. She spun around, yanking her arm free. Her eyes spit fire, and her hands were curled into shaking fists at her sides. He took a step back, held up his hands.

“Molly, please, you have to understand. I'm asking you, as someone who still cares a great deal about you. As someone you used to love – I'm begging you.”

She glared at him for a few moments before relaxing her stance.

“How can I understand?” She asked, softly, “You're in love with him, aren't you?”

Will focused on the floor until his vision began to blur. He pinched the bridge of his nose hard, forcing back the tide of emotion that waited poised at the floodgates.

“Yes.” He whispered.

“God ...” She murmured, clasping a hand over mouth, “That's ... insane.”

“I know, but ...” He lifted his gaze to her's imploringly, “I can't stop it, Molly, anymore than I could have stopped falling for you all those years ago.”

“Well, apparently you did stop it, seeing how you abandoned me and all.”

“I still care about you.” He insisted, “I just ... I can't be with you anymore.”
“You expect me to be okay with this? To just sign these papers and walk away?”

“I’m expecting you to know me. You understand me, Molly, more than most people do. You know what’s going through my head, don’t you?”

“No.” She cried, throwing up her hands, “No, I don’t know what the hell is going through your head, Will. This is more screwed up and insane than I ever thought it could get. God, I wish I had never told you to go back to the FBI to help with the Red Dragon case.”

“It wasn’t just the Red Dragon, Molly. Hannibal and I knew each other for years before Dolarhyde. On some level, I always knew how connected we were, but I wasn’t ready to accept it. It took … so much blood and sacrifice to realize I was never going to escape my feelings or his commitment.”

“So, it was meant to be?” She asked. A tear darted from the corner of her eye and she wiped furiously at her cheek.

“Maybe, if I even believe in that kind of thing. He does.”

Her eyes shone and her lips trembled. The divorce papers sat crumpled between her loose fingers.

“No matter how you feel about me and Hannibal, you don't want to be married to me anymore.” Will said, quietly, “You deserve better.”

“Don’t turn this around on me.” She said, her voice choked and angry.

“It's just as much about you as it is about me. I don't want you to be unhappy. I don't want you to hang onto me because you're angry.”

“What if I do?” She snapped, “What if I never sign these papers? What are you going to do?”

“There's nothing I can do, but I'm asking you not to do that. It's self-preservation, Molly. The bitterness can poison your whole life.”

He gazed after her hopelessly as she shoved her feet back into her boots and threw her coat over her shoulders.

“I have to think about this.” She said.

He thought of working up another plea, but she slipped outside and slammed the door shut behind her. A few moments later, the truck engine roared to life and snow crunched underneath the tires. Then she was gone.

Will walked back to the living room and sank to the couch with his head between his hands. He wondered if he had made a mistake in telling her the truth.

He jolted when the telephone began to ring. He hadn't had occasion to give many people the number since the telephone company had been out to connect the lines.

Frowning, Will picked up the phone.

“Hello?”

An automated voice greeted him, “An inmate from the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane is calling you. If you would like to accept the call, press 1. If you would like to decline the call, hang up.”
Will smiled, and wondered how Hannibal had managed to get phone calls.

He pressed 1.

“Hello?”

“Hello, Will.”

The voice on the other end of the phone wasn't Hannibal's, but it took Will only a few moments to place the low drawl.

“Do you remember me? It's Matthew … Matthew Brown.”

“I-I remember you. How did you get this number?”

“Your boyfriend.” Matthew said, giving a low chuckle.

“Hannibal?”

Will couldn't conceive of any reason why Hannibal would hand out his phone number to someone who had tried to kill him.

“Yeah, Dr. Lecter told me to say hello.”

“I don't believe you.”

“You can ask him yourself.” Matthew said, “But I don't want to talk about him. I called because I added you to my visitor's list. Will you do me the pleasure giving me a visit?”

Will's brain scrambled to come up with a plausible reason for Matthew having this number. The only people who had the number were Jack, Alana, and Hannibal. None of them were interested in handing out personal information to Matthew Brown.

“One visit. It's all I'm asking.” Matthew added.

“Fine.” Will said, “Only because I want to know what the hell is going on.”

He hung up and slammed the receiver onto the cradle. He blew out a frustrated breath and tried to think calmly. His brain was still in a tangle from Molly's visit, and yet, the blasts from the past did not cease.

He thought for a few moments before picking up the receiver again and dialing the number for the BSHCI. When he reached the call center, he went through the automated steps to make an appointment. He scheduled for that evening at 5:00, the soonest he could get. After hanging up, he paced for only a minute before dialing again and following the same steps to schedule an appointment to see Hannibal right after Matthew.

~

At 5:00, Matthew was in the cage in the visitation area, handcuffs on his wrists and ankles. Will walked slowly toward the cage, observing the former orderly with distrust and gnawing curiosity.
“Please, take a seat.” Matthew said when Will remained standing for several moments.

Will ignored the offer.

“Why did you ask me to come here?”

“I wanted to see you.” Matthew said, leaning closer to the bars, “I haven't seen you since the trial. I've missed you.”

“We barely know each other.”

“Not true. We're kindred souls. We understand each other. Remember the camaraderie we had?”

“I asked you to kill Hannibal.” Will said, “I was using you.”

“It was a friendly favor.” Matthew argued, “Even if I didn't kill him, I left some scars on him that are going to be there forever. That, I think, we share.”

“Hannibal and I have hurt each other in the past, but it's all different now. I don't need you.”

“Oh, but Hannibal does.” Matthew said, a smug smile spreading across his lips. He waved a finger through the bars, “Oh, how the tables do turn.”

“What are you talking about?” Will asked, frustrated.

If it weren't for Matthew having his home phone number, he might think these comments were the delusions of a madman.

“Come closer.” Matthew whispered, hooking his finger at Will, “I don't want anyone to hear.”

Will sighed, “Okay, but if you attack me, I will make you bleed.”

“I wouldn't think of it.”

Will crossed the line, but stopped within a foot of the cage. With the chains around his waist and ankles, Matthew couldn't reach him through the bars form this distance.

“Have you ever seen the *The Great Escape*?” Matthew whispered.

“Steve McQueen? Yeah.”

“That's what we're planning.” Matthew said, “A good, old-fashioned prison break.”

“What? You mean you and Hannibal?”

“M-hm.”

Will began to shake his head, “You almost killed Hannibal. Why would he work alongside you?”

“Because I know this place inside and out. And I'm still on good terms with some of the other orderlies. Besides, a good prison break requires more than one participant. It's all about diversion.”

Will considered it briefly. It made sense to use someone who already knew the layout, routines, and employees of the hospital, but Hannibal would rather kill someone like Matthew than help him.

“If you don't believe me, you can ask him.” Matthew added, “He's salty about it, to be sure, but he's
a smart motherfucker. He knows I'm the right choice.”

“So, if this little escape plan is true, what do you want out of me?” Will asked.

Matthew threw his head back and gave a low, grating laugh. When he sobered, he looked Will up and down and smirked, “You're the prize, of course.”

~

Days ago, Matthew had put in a request to change the staff who dealt with his transfer around the hospital. Somehow, he managed to get the laziest orderlies assigned to him. Hannibal had to be honest – he was impressed with Matthew's ingenuity.

When Matthew returned from his visit with Will, Elliot and Jason were taking Hannibal from from his cell. Matthew's newly assigned orderlies didn't have the practiced, foolproof routine his previous handlers did. They took off Matthew's cuffs before putting him back in his cell, and Matthew seized the moment to attack. Elliot and Jason were forced to help Matthew's orderlies, as they were both, at different times, thrown to the ground and bloodied.

It was just enough time for Hannibal to pick pocket. He smoothly retrieved a pen from one of Matthew's orderlies during the tussle and dropped it down the front of his jumpsuit. It lodged uncomfortably just above his boxers, but getting a hold of the pen was well worth the minor discomfort.

When the orderlies finally got Matthew back into his cell, Jason and Elliot returned to their duties with Hannibal. They strapped him to the cart, put on the muzzle, and wheeled him out of the basement.

Hannibal tilted his head back and smiled against the mask as he relished the gentle prick of the pen against his belly.

~

A loud crack cut through the silence of the privacy room as Will's hand came into swift contact with Hannibal's cheekbone. Hannibal's head swung to the side under the force of the blow, and he gazed placidly at the table as his cheek burned.

“What the hell?” Will hissed, “You're making deals with Matthew Brown, and I'm just now finding out about it?”

“Will, I can-”

“Stop. I don't want to hear you right now.”

Will paced away, scraping his hands through his hair.

Hannibal pursed his lips and waited. He had expected this reaction. Matthew wasn't a good choice when Will was involved, but in BSHCI, Matthew was the only choice.
“You two are conniving to escape, and what? Whoever gets out first wins me?” Will said, throwing his hands up in dismay, “I'm not some fucking doll you two sissies can fight over.”

“Matthew is dull.” Hannibal said, calmly, “I told him you were the prize because it is the only thing that would motivate him to assist me. I have no intention of giving you over to him. You belong to me and-”

“I don't belong to anyone. I chose you. Let's get that straight first.” Will growled.

He prowled around the small room, a shivering bundle of nerves.

“What happened?” Hannibal asked.

“What do you mean?”

“You are extremely agitated and speaking to me in a rude fashion. What upset you?”

Will glared at him briefly, before letting out a sigh. He lowered his head and rubbed his forehead, “Shit.”

Perhaps if you sat down and explained to me what has happened, you will relax.” Hannibal suggested, motioning to the chair across from him.

The chair legs screeched loudly across the floor as Will pulled it from under the table. He sat down heavily and let his hands fall across the table to Hannibal's.

“I'm sorry.” He said, quietly, “You're right, that was rude.”

Hannibal nodded an affirmation, “I accept your apology. Will you tell me why you're upset?”

“Molly … She got the papers and came to my house. I wasn't expecting her to show up. I should have known she would try to dissuade me, but I wasn't ready.”

“She was angry with you.”

“Yes, and hurt, and confused, and a hundred other things. All understandably, since I did leave her without notice.”

“Will she sign the papers?”

“I don't know.” Will groaned.

“You're her husband.” Hannibal said, “She will want to fight for you as long as she has a good reason to.”

“Right now, her reason is that she's angry and she wants to stop me from being with you.”

“Sometimes rage can motivate us more than love. What are you motivated by to change her mind?”

“I'm not mad at her, if that's what you mean. If you left me and I found you with someone else, I would be just as upset.” Will reasoned, “I don't think there's anything I can do to change her mind.”

“Deep under layers of anger and confusion, there lies a root cause, her opinion of you. She still sees you as the man she married. You have to change that view.”
“What do you expect me to do?” Will asked, “Hurt her? I can't do that.”

“I don't expect you to hurt her. That would be cruel of me to ask that of you. I'm asking you to show her your true nature. As long as she continues viewing you as the empathetic and non violent man that she married, she will continue to fight to reclaim you. To her, you are a victim, and I am the monster who ripped you away. Even if you tell her that it was your choice, she will reason with herself and find a way to distrust your claim.”

“I can't show her my true nature without implicating myself.” Will said, “You're the one who decided to take the fall for everything and make me look like your victim. Now you're asking me to undermine that plan?”

“No. Not at all. Jack Crawford thinks you're guilty. If Molly knows this, she will not be inclined to share whatever you tell her to the police. You must find the balance between persuading her to let go and still caring enough about you to avoid implicating you to the authorities.”

“That's a very fine balance.” Will said, shaking his head, “I don't know ...”

“Will,” Hannibal smiled, gently. He reached up to touch Will's cheek, “You are a gifted profiler, and the smartest man I've had the pleasure of knowing. I believe you will find a way.”

Will smiled despite the dread bearing down on his shoulders.

“You're right.” He murmured, “And the end reward is you. We always promised each other if we were caught we wouldn't stop fighting for our freedom to be together, even if it meant looking at each other through prison bars.”

Will leaned forward and they kissed briefly, knowing the orderlies were watching through the window.

“I'm sorry I hit you.” Will whispered, touching Hannibal's cheek.

“It barely stung.” Hannibal murmured, “But, believe me when I say, I will find a way to repay it in full.”
Chapter 10

2 weeks ago

The day began as any other, with the exception of the unusually warm temperature of fifty degrees Fahrenheit (ten degrees Celsius) for a winter in Madrid.

Hannibal drove into the city for fresh groceries as he did every three days. His kitchen wasn't as large or equipped as his house back in Baltimore had been, but he prided himself in cooking with only the finest ingredients.

He and Will had established a routine. Hannibal rose early, before seven, and drove into the city to the grocery just as it was opening. He was usually gone for an hour and a half, as he frequented several different shops to find specific ingredients. By the time he returned, Will had woken up, showered, and had breakfast prepared. They had it so well timed out that Will was almost always just pulling breakfast off the stove when Hannibal pulled into the driveway. This was the only meal Will cooked, and despite his shortcomings compared to Hannibal's cooking skills, he was quite good at making eggs and bacon.

This morning, as Hannibal was returning home with a dozen brown paper sacks labeled with various shops' names loaded in the backseat, the routine was irreparably interrupted. He was three blocks away, driving at a leisurely pace, stereo humming low notes of classical, when he glanced in the rear view mirror and saw a police car turn onto the road behind him.

Hannibal didn't jump to conclusions. Staying calm and thinking clearly was the best route one could take when dealing with the authorities, as the cops usually relied on the element of surprise and fear tactics to drive a case to the finish. It wasn't the presence of the police car that disturbed him as much as it's behavior. It followed him for an entire block, staying back in a way that the driver thought was inconspicuous, but was to Hannibal, in fact, highly conspicuous.

Hannibal made a split second decision and turned left instead of right, taking them away from he and Will's home. The car followed. A sense of irritation crossed his mind. He considered pulling over and waiting for the cop to walk up alongside the car so that he shove a pencil into the cop's jugular. That fantasy quickly disappeared when he turned onto the next street and saw a second cruiser idling at the curb.

When Hannibal and the first the cop car passed, the second cruiser pulled onto the road. Hannibal knew for certain this situation was no coincidence.

The most obvious chance of escape was to lead the police on a merry chase and lose them on back roads or the highway. He could then ditch the car, appropriate new transportation, and slip away unseen. The only flaw in that plan was that it would mean leaving Will behind.

If he returned to the house, he would be surrounded and arrested. The chances of negotiating his way out of that situation or slipping out of the house unseen were slim to none. The only good thing about going back to the house was Will.

Hannibal curled his fingers tighter around the steering wheel and glanced in the rear view mirror. The cops followed at a safe distance. By now, they had enough time to run his plates, get a response on the owner of the vehicle, and pull that string until it gave them the location of the
Hannibal pursed his lips and let his foot bear down on the gas pedal. He should leave now. He had to. He had to give Will a chance. Will was the purest, best thing in his life, and he couldn't drag him down into the dungeon of Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane with him. He'd already put Will in that hospital once, and the results had been disastrous. It had taken him years to regain Will's trust.

But, the thought of Will waiting at home for him, cooking him breakfast, wondering when he would return … How would Will fair if the cops came knocking at his door, and dragged him back to the United States so that Jack Crawford and his lackeys could grill him about Hannibal's whereabouts? He would never know where Hannibal had gone, and eventually, he would come to the conclusion that Hannibal had abandoned him when the situation became difficult.

“Damnit.” Hannibal said in a sudden, unusual burst of frustration.

He pulled the wheel hard to the left, taking him through a screeching turn onto the road leading to he and Will's house. He pushed down on the accelerator, speeding through the residential area at a dangerous pace. The cop cars fell behind momentarily, and he used the advantage to reach the house, lurch to a halt in the driveway, and march to the front door at a fast clip.

Just as he reached the front porch, he looked down the road to see another three cop cars coming in the opposite direction. They sped up the road to the house, squealing to a halt at the curb as Hannibal pulled the front door open and stepped inside. He pushed the door shut behind him and threw the lock and two deadbolts he'd had installed when they moved here.

He yanked the curtains in the living room shut and moved swiftly and efficiently through the house, closing up everything and turning off lights. When he came back the living room, Will was coming out of the kitchen in pajamas and an apron, his cheeks rosy from the heat of the oven. Three dogs, mutts that Will had adopted despite Hannibal's protests, swarmed at his feet, yipping at the smell of bacon on Will's hands.

“What's going on?” He asked.

Hannibal paused and gazed at him, overwhelmed by sudden emotion. He took in the damp, tousled curls, the bright, expectant, blue eyes, and the crooked bow of those lips. It was the last he might see of them in awhile and he wanted to commit every tiny detail to his memory palace until they could be together again.

“What?” Will asked, a shadow of dread crossing his face.

“It's over.” Hannibal said, quietly, “The police are outside.”

Will's jaw slackened and his eyes grew wider. He swallowed hard, “Are you sure?”

“Yes. They followed me home. They'll be breaking the door down any moment now.”

“Wh-what are you … are we going to do?” Will stammered, rushing across the room to the curtains.

“Don't.” Hannibal ordered.

Will pulled the curtains back an inch and peeked.
“Don't do that.” Hannibal repeated, “Get away from the window before they start shooting at you.”

Will backed away from the window, his eyes the size of teacups. His face was ghostly wide.

“I think the whole precinct is out there.” He whispered.

They both jumped when the sound of a voice coming through a bullhorn interrupted their conversation.

“We know you're in there, Dr. Lecter. Come out with your hands up.”

Will scraped his hands through his hair. “Shit.” Then louder, “Shit!”

“Don't panic.” Hannibal said, grabbing him by the waist. He put a hand on Will's chin, guiding his eyes to him, “Listen to me. It's going to be okay.”

“How? How is it going to be okay? We're surrounded. God, how did they find us?”

“We cannot question how this happened, or what would be if it didn't happen. All we have is the cards before us and what moves to make to produce the best result.”

“Hannibal, I was a cop. I was an FBI agent.” Will said, “I know how these situations end, and it's not good. They will come in shooting if they have to.”

“No they won't. Not if I have a hostage.”

Will's gaze flickered with confusion and his lips trembled. Hannibal could see the conclusions coming together in his head.


“I won't allow you to martyr yourself for what I've done.”

Will yanked himself out of Hannibal's grasp, his eyes now flashing with anger, “Martyr? I'm just as much at fault as you are. I went with you willingly. I knew the risks and what could happen. I'm not going to lie down and watch them drag you off to God knows where.”

“Unfortunately, it's not up to you.”

“Yes it fucking is. I won't be your victim, and I won't let you take the fall for this by yourself.”

A fist pounding on the front door shook the entire house. The noise startled the dogs, who began to bark and howl. One of them scampered to the front door, pawing at the noise coming from the other side.

“Hannibal Lecter, surrender now or we will break down this door!”

Hannibal grabbed Will by the arm and pulled him down the hallway into the bedroom. The shouting of the police was distant but still shockingly clear and present.

“We said we were going together.” Will argued as Hannibal dragged him down the hallway, “Get off of me!”

He swung with a poorly formed fist that glanced off Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal spun around and struck before any misplaced regret could stop him. His hand struck the side of Will's face, over his ear, and full on his cheekbone. Will sagged as his ear exploded into ringing din and his cheek
throbbed and debilitating pain.

“I'm sorry, but you are making this difficult.”

He grabbed Will by the waist and hoisted him up over his shoulder. Will struggled weakly, delivering more of the appearance of a flopping of a fish on land, than the fight of a enraged lion.

One of the dogs ran after them, barking in misplaced excitement at it's owners' actions. When he reached the bedroom, Hannibal shoed the dog out of the room and shouldered the door shut behind them. He marched across the room and swung Will down from his shoulder onto the bed. Will landed with a bounce and Hannibal straddled Will's hips to keep him down. Recovered from the slap, Will resumed his struggle, hands slapping and groping at Hannibal's chest, hips twisting in an attempt to unseat Hannibal.

“Will, stop.” Hannibal ordered.

He caught Will's wrists and pinned them to the bed. He let his weight bear down on Will, crushing his hips into the mattress.

“I said, stop.”

“I won't let you do this.” Will said through clenched teeth. His wrists strained against Hannibal's grip, but his struggling was to no avail.

The shrill ring of the telephone on the night stand beside them interrupted their fighting. They both froze, eyes turning from each to the ringing phone.

“I'm going to answer it.” Hannibal said, glancing down at Will, “Lie still.”

Will glared up at him, but let his body go limp.

Hannibal picked up the phone. “Hello?”

“Dr. Lecter, hello. My name is Detective Lopez, with Madrid Police Department. You're surrounded. I suggest you surrender now.”

“I have a prisoner. Would you like to talk to him?” Hannibal asked.

He put the phone to Will's mouth. Will glared up at him for a few moments before resuming his struggling and panting, giving his performance extra drama with several pleas for help.

Hannibal put the phone back to his ear, “I hope you see now that you're on my timetable, Detective, not yours. If you want Will Graham alive, I suggest you stay off my front yard.”

“What is it you want, Doctor? In exchange for the prisoner?”

“I want you to stay off my front yard.”

He disconnected the call and placed the phone back on the cradle.

“I've bought us some time.” He said to Will, “Will you allow me produce the best result from these cards we've been dealt?”

Will remained limp, but he kept his face turned to the side, eyes fixed on the wall. His ear and jaw were red and tender. Hannibal bent and kissed there. He squeezed his eyes shut for a moment, and reminded himself that what he wanted and what he could have were two wildly different things. He
wanted to stay with Will here in Spain, or wherever in the world that they wouldn't be hunted. What he could have was a prayer that Will might not be implicated in his crimes.

He straightened and climbed off the bed. Will stayed, his eyes focused on the wall.

Hannibal left the room and gathered the necessary tools from around the house to stage the tale of imprisonment and abuse. It was a poor plan, not at all his style – but it was all he had at the moment.

When he returned, he was carrying two extension cords, a scarf, one sock, and a small medical bag containing a syringe and a bottle of barbiturate.

Will sat up slowly, appearing dazed.

“What do you want me to do?” He asked, softly.

“Undress.” Hannibal said, quietly.

Will blinked slowly, his eyes growing moist. He bit at his lower lip and sucked in a breath. He took off his the apron first, then his t-shirt and pants. He paused and looked up at Hannibal with steely, yet wet eyes.

“There has to be another way. We can get out of this. We can ...”

“No. You said yourself you know how this ends.” Hannibal said, touching his cheek, “It could end in both of us dead, and it could end with both of us arrested. I am not satisfied with either outcome, and that is why I must change the ending.”

“In a couple of weeks, this is going to splashed across every newspaper and blog in the world.” Will said, thickly, “Everyone is going to see our relationship as abuser and victim. I don't know if I can live with that.”

“I can live with it if it means that you are not indicted again.” Hannibal said.

“Can you?” Will insisted, “The Hannibal Lecter I met all those years ago would have never sacrificed himself for anyone.”

“No one else was worthy of my sacrifice.” Hannibal smiled, and pressed a kiss to Will's forehead, “I watched you – the lamb becoming the lion. Perhaps I am now the lion become the lamb, prepared to go to the altar.”

Will tilted his head up to kiss Hannibal, but Hannibal stood back. He cleared his throat and waved stiff hand to Will, “Undress completely.”

Will gazed after him with moist eyes, but complied. He wiggled out of his boxers and laid back against the mattress as Hannibal prepared the syringe.

“What is it?” Will asked.

“Just something to make you relax.”

Will sniffed, and stared at the ceiling. “Like Miriam Lass?”

“Yes.”

Will pursed his lips as Hannibal sat down on the edge of the bed and tied the scarf around his
bicep, pulling it tight to make the veins stand out. Moisture ebbed at his eyelids, but he clenched his jaw and didn’t let them fall.

Hannibal cast him a smile as he tapped the vein to make it rise. “I’m so proud of you, Will. I know the future does not look bright now, but I promise you, your faith will not go unrewarded.”

Will bit his lower lip. “You shouldn’t make promises you don’t know you can keep.”

Hannibal pushed the needle through the top of the bottle and drew out a small dose. He eased the needle into Will’s arm, releasing the drug into his bloodstream. Grabbing a kleenex, he held it to puncture as he removed the needle. He bent Will’s arm at the elbow to hold the tissue in place, and gripped his wrist, to test Will’s pulse. The flow of blood spiked against Hannibal’s fingertips before slowing down under the influence of the barbiturate. Hannibal cradled Will’s cheek, turning Will’s heavy, moist eyes to him.

“Look at me.” He whispered, bending closer to gaze into Will’s eyes. “I always keep my promises.”

Will’s eyes dilated with the drugs, his lids drooping and fluttering. A lopsided smile touched his lips.

“I … love you … you know.”

Hannibal pressed his lips to Will’s forehead. “I know.”

Will’s eyes rolled back and he mumbled something Hannibal couldn’t understand. Hannibal put a hand over Will’s forehead and cheek. His temperature was good. He was relaxed.

The phone began to ring again. Hannibal ignored it for five rings before snatching it from the cradle.

“Yes?”

“Detective Lopez here. I’ve spoken to the authorities in the U.S. They are interested in making a deal with you if you let Mr. Graham live.”

“What kind of deal do they have to offer?”

“Re-institution at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Your books, drawings, even a window. They are even talking about allowing you walk outside in the gated area of the grounds.”

“It sounds very promising, Detective. Unfortunately, I’m a bit tied up at the moment. Take this time to get Jack Crawford on the line. I want to speak to him directly if they are truly offering this deal.”

“I need you to let Mr. Graham go for the deal to be good.”

“For the deal to be good, I would like to hear it from Jack Crawford’s mouth. And, Detective, if you consider breaking down the door and storming this house, I will snap Mr. Graham’s neck.”

He hung up abruptly and turned his attention back to Will. Will was barely lucid, his eyes heavy, his skin moist and flushed. His head lolled from side to side, and he mumbled half strung together words.

Hannibal rolled the sock in a ball and gently pushed it between Will’s lips. Will gagged briefly
before accepting the sock into his mouth. Hannibal took the scarf from his arm and tied it over his mouth, effectively trapping the sock and any sounds of protest in his mouth.

He worked without emotion, looping one extension cord around Will's wrists and the other around his ankles. When he finished, he pulled on them both to test their tightness and the strength of his knots. The cords had little to no give; they would leave bruises on Will's skin from being bound so tightly.

“Will.” Hannibal said, taking Will's face in his hands. He shook Will gently to pull him into a half lucid state, “Will.”

“Hammimml....” Will mumbled his name around the sock and blinked slowly.

“I'm going to hit you. Once here.” Hannibal said, touching Will's ribs, “It will hurt, but the drug should dull the pain.”

Will's muffled response was incoherent. Hannibal braced a hand on Will's shoulder, pinning him to the bed, and struck with his fist as quickly and harshly as he could. His knuckles slammed into Will's ribs, and Will lurched, moaning against the sock.

Hannibal drew back, flexing his fingers against the dull pain that shot through his knuckles. He observed the damage and decided it would bruise nicely. It wouldn't cause any long term pain, but Will would likely remember the strike with more resentment than if Hannibal had done more damage out of a true desire to hurt him.

The phone rang shrilly.

Hannibal drew in a long, deep breath, and picked it up.

“Hello?”

“Hello, Hannibal. It's Jack.”

Hannibal smiled in a brief moment of levity. One of the last time's he'd laid eyes on Jack, he had alerted Francis Dolarhyde that the police were listening to their conversations. Jack was the type of fellow to think he could control situations when really, all he did was allow himself to be pulled along with the tide. This situation wouldn't be any different.

“Hello, Jack.”

“Is Will still alive?”

“He's very alive. And he will remain that way if you tell the police at my front door to stay back.”

“How do we resolve this?” Jack asked.

“Is your deal with the hospital real or imagined by the the Madrid PD?”

“It's real. On several conditions.”

“Let's hear them.”

“One, Will Graham lives. Two, you surrender without a fight. Three, you cooperate fully with the investigation.”

“Sounds just peachy, Jack. Let me think it over.”
He hung up. Silence settled over the house. The police weren't yelling any longer.

He touched Will's head and pressed a soft kiss to his temple. He rose from the bed and walked through the house, looking into each room and associating memories of Will with them. He filed them in his memory palace, down to the shade of the carpet, the tiny cracks in the wallpaper, and the pine scent of cleaning supplies that Will scrubbed the house with.

He doled out a stroke on the head of each dog, a faint smile touching his lips. The mutts were an extension of Will, a pure facet of him that had not changed despite years of transitioning under Hannibal's guidance. In this moment of cold acceptance, Hannibal could not despise the dirty, slobbering animals as he once had.

He stopped in the doorway of the kitchen. Breakfast sat on the table, growing cold. The coffee pot steamed with liquid that had finished brewing minutes ago. This room was the perfect image of their domestic life together.

They hadn't agreed on many things, but they came back to each other time and again despite the bruises and blood from the last fight. Countless times, Hannibal had retreated to this room to think, cooking more to relax himself than because they needed more meals in the freezer. A few hours later when Will entered, either penitent or demanding an apology, one of them always gave in. The fight ended in a mutual agreement to put the hastily said words and careless anger behind them, and a long, slow kiss that took them to the bedroom.

Hannibal lifted his chin and turned his back on the kitchen. They were good memories, and there was no use in crying over it's end or what could have been. The chance was gone; fickle fate had intervened and here they stood. On the brink of loss and destruction.

Just then, there was a deafening thud from the door, and wood showered in a rain of tiny splinters from the center of the door. With another swing, one end of the battering ram came bursting through the door. The wood buckled before the deadbolts, causing the door to split in two pieces, but letting the authorities inside all the same.

Jack hadn't kept his promise, and so Hannibal wouldn't keep his. He lunged into the faces of the policemen, teeth bared. There would be no easy surrender for the Chesapeake Ripper this time.

~

Present Day

“Do you know how we caught you?”

Jack glared down at Hannibal, who was seated at the interrogation room's steel table, his hands manacled to the center hook. He was wearing the bite prevention mask, and above it, his eyes were eerie, holding a silent, veiled threat. He had promised to come in and give his confession; Jack wasn't convinced.

When Hannibal didn't answer the question, Jack pulled an 8x10 print from his folder and slid it across the table.
“Recognize that?”

Hannibal gazed blandly at the photograph.

“That’s the last photo you sent to me.” Jack said, “It’s kind of blurry, but there you can see Will with a face in the pillow, and you on top of him.”

Hannibal shifted his gaze back to Jack. His silence continued, unsettling.

“That isn't the interesting part. Behind you, you can barely see through the curtains. Magnifying this area was the hard part, but thanks to you using high quality film, we were able to clarify the street and part of the house across from yours. See there-” Jack pointed to the sliver of quite house, and the blur of a street sign, “-it took our labs a week. But cross checking the location your package was mailed from and the street name, we were finally able to narrow it down to several different locations. After that, it was checking off names and matching your profile to residents. That took another two weeks.”

Jack stood back to gauge Hannibal's reaction. Hannibal gazed at him without blinking, undisturbed by the information.

“Well, if you weren't such a vain, self-serving narcissist, maybe we wouldn't have ever caught you.” Jack said, chuckling.

Hannibal didn't reply for several moments. When he did, he spoke in a slightly muffled voice from behind the mask, “Dr. Mortise said I was to brought here today to give a full confession. Perhaps she was mistaken.”

“No.”

“Perhaps if you weren't such a self-serving narcissist, Jack, I would have already given my testimony, and I would be back in my cage at the hospital already.” Hannibal said, tilting his head.

“I just thought you'd like to know you have yourself to thank for being in this position.

“I'll remember that when I'm giving my confession.”

“All right, usually there's the option of a verbal or written confession, but we don't trust you with sharp objects, so we'll be setting up the video camera.”

“I prefer verbal as it will be succinct and to the point.”

Jack turned to the one way window and motioned for another agent to bring the camera in. The door swung open and agent named Summers brought the camera in. He set up the tripod and told Jack to hit record whenever he was ready.

When they were alone again, Jack sat down across from Hannibal. He waved a hand to the camera, “Whenever you're ready, state your name and the date and proceed.”

“We may begin.”

Jack pressed record and sat back with his arms crossed.

“My name is Hannibal Lecter. It is the 19th of January, 2020. I am here with Agent Crawford today to record my confession of the events which occurred when I escaped custody five years ago and went to Europe with Will Graham. It was Will Graham's opinion that the best way to catch
Francis Dolarhyde was to fake a prison escape of myself as bait for the Red Dragon. The transfer did not go as planned. Francis attacked the transport caravan and I escaped in earnest. I took Will Graham with me at gunpoint to one of my houses, which was by the sea. Dolarhyde attacked, and I killed him. I took Will with me and proceeded to kill Bedilia Du Maurier, my former psychiatrist. I booked a flight to Paris, and took Will with me. He was not complicit, forcing me to drug him. I spent the next five years breaking him down and using him for my personal amusement. During this time, I killed several people. That is my confession.”

Jack gazed at him in disbelief. He jabbed the record button again, ending the tape.

“You do realize that lying to the police could add to your sentence. And that if you continue on with your fictional story to court, it's perjury.”

“I understand the nature of perjury entirely.” Hannibal said, “However, I am not perjuring myself. What I've stated to the camera is what happened.”

“You're telling me Will had nothing to do with Dolarhyde's or Dr. Du Maurier's death, and that he did not go to Europe with you willingly?”

“Yes, I believe that's what I said.”

Jack sighed and rubbed a hand over his forehead. A headache lapped at the base of his skull, threatening to transform into throbbing pain. Hannibal was the type to peacock about his accomplishments. Jack hadn't expected to hit such a solid, stone wall with the interrogation. All the theories he'd been spinning for the past two weeks amounted to nothing if Hannibal refused to talk. Courts took taped confession much more seriously than they should, considering half of them were false. And Jack knew for certain that Hannibal's confession was false. He had known Hannibal for years, and despite what Hannibal thought of him, he wasn't stupid. He understood Hannibal more than Hannibal thought.

“I want names.” Jack said, lifting his head. “Names of the victims.”

“Jack,” Hannibal said, condescendingly, “Please, it's been five years. I cannot remember every single name.”

“Can you remember if there's bodies left?”

“Of course. I only took the best parts.”

“Then give me locations.”

Hannibal sighed and began to shake his head, “No, Jack, I think it's going to take me awhile to remember all of them.”

“What?” Jack demanded, rising from his chair.

“My memory isn't what it used to be.” Hannibal said, “It's going to take some doing to recall all those names and locations.”

“What kind of doing?”

Hannibal paused for a moment before smiling against the mask, “I have a splendid idea.”

“I'm sure it's far from splendid.”
“Offer me your original deal.” Hannibal said, “I believe the detective mentioned my books, pencil and paper to draw, a window?” He chuckled, softly, “Walks in the yard with sunlight on my face.”

“You son of a bitch.” Jack whispered, his hands curling into fists, “I am not going to negotiate with a psychopath.”

“Oh, but you will.” Hannibal said, leaning forward and pinning Jack with a smug gaze, “The job of a police officer, and of an FBI agent, is that of a civil servant. You serve the public, you serve the families of the victims. It will tear you apart if you can't give them closure, and more than likely, it will tear them apart. I was a therapist, Jack. I've seen how grief works. It's not pretty. It's like the Black Plague, coming through and wiping out everything it touches, poisoning it's whole world.”

“You son of a bitch.” Jack repeated, lunging toward the table, “I should unplug that camera right now and see how my fist jogs your memory.”

“Oh, I wouldn't do that if I were you.” Hannibal chuckled, “Then your superiors would truly and earnestly advise you to offer me a deal.”

Jack pushed away from the table and paced to the other side of the room. His hands flexed into fists at his sides, trembling with the tempting desire to pummel Hannibal's smug face.

“What do you say, Jack? Hmm?”

“It's not my decision to make.” Jack said, turning around much calmer, “I have to get approval from the hospital, the prosecutor and the director.”

“Ah, so you can only offer it to me when it's to your benefit. Tsk, tsk, Jack. No one respects a liar.”

“I would have found a way to get it approved had you gone along with the plan.” Jack said.

“Would you?”

“I'm a man of my word. Even you know that.”

“I'm also a man of my word. If you get me the deal, I may remember the names. No more living in the basement, Jack. It's tasteless.”

“Fine.” Jack bit off, “I'll see what I can do.”

He left the room and told the orderlies to take Hannibal back to the hospital. Then he went to the office and swallowed three Advil.

~

Freddie Lounds had just gotten out of the shower when her telephone began to ring. She was in a hurry to get to an important meeting for a story, but she was in the type of business that didn't thrive from ignoring calls.

“Hello?”

“An inmate from the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane is calling you. If you would like to accept the call, press 1. If you want to decline the call, hang up.”
Freddie began to grin. She jabbed 1, and eagerly held the phone to her ear.

“Hello, Miss Lounds.”

“Hannibal Lecter, what could you possibly want from me? The last time we talked, you ran me off with barely a lead. I had to make up half that article.”

“I have a lead for you. Better than the one you made up.”

“What is it?”

“Perhaps it deserves a visit.”

She didn't have to over think the request. Hannibal the Cannibal was still big news after all these years. She could clinch another book deal if Hannibal started talking to her.

“When is a good time?” She asked.

“I'm absolutely free. Come at your leisure.”

“I have a meeting today, but I can come tomorrow.”

“Please do. Simply make an appointment, and I will be ready and waiting.”

“All right. I suppose I'll see you then.”

“Good day.”

The line clicked, and he was gone.

Freddie put the phone down and stood there grinning at the receiver for several moments. She had feeling that by the time the world woke up to read the news a day from now, she would have written a front page story that was going to shock the hell out of everyone.
Chapter 11

Amid the storm of telephone calls that began pouring in the moment Freddie's article hit the Net, she picked up the line from Jack Crawford with a smile on her face. She was pleasantly surprised when he asked if it would be possible for them to meet; a civil conversation over coffee. She agreed.

The coffee shop she suggested was a cubbyhole in downtown Baltimore. Small and cozy, it offered them the privacy a journalist and an officer of the law required for an off-the-record meeting. When Freddie arrived, she saw that Jack was already seated in the corner sipping what was probably a black coffee and reading the day's newspaper. She ordered a double espresso. The staff was snappy. She had her drink in under five minutes.

“Well, I see we've matured from two kids kicking sand in each other's eyes on the playground.” She said as she approached Jack, “A civil meeting? I was expecting you to storm into my apartment and put me in zip ties again.”

Jack regarded her with simmering rage. “Sit down, Miss Lounds.”

She pulled up a chair, and cast him a smile that was both cold and sweet, “I suppose you want to ask me to recant all of these claims I've made.”

Jack held up the newspaper. The front page blared bold, capital letters HANNIBAL THE CANNIBAL: MONSTER … OR VICTIM? Underneath, in smaller, but no less damaging font, it read: Exclusive interview with America's most terrifying serial killer reveals a tale of a misconduct and police brutality.

“This is bullshit, and you know it.” Jack said, slapping the paper down, “Hannibal Lecter is a dangerous psychopath who can defend himself with or without a weapon. He put two policemen in Madrid in the hospital when they tried to arrest him.”

“Sadly, the public loves the story of a dirty cop.” Freddie said, “They don't care if Hannibal is dangerous or a psychopath. News and media is all about the drama, real or imagined. The damage is done, even if I did step up to the plate and say these claims are false.”

“I'm not asking you to recant.” Jack said with a weary sigh, “I know that won't fix my problem. But this is turning into a circus, and my investigation can't continue properly without at least some of the rings managed.”

Freddie cocked her head. She had never expected defeat out of Jack. To see him so exhausted and unwilling to fight made her feel … sorry for him? God, she was losing her touch with all the fancy book deals, first class flights, and top floor hotel rooms in New York. The tough, gritty journalism she had fought tooth and nail for before Hannibal had launched her true crime career seemed like another life.

“You seem to have found a rapport with him. I won't try to guess how it happened.” Jack said.

“You want me to talk to him? For you?” She asked, laughing in disbelief.

“I can't.” Jack said, putting up his hands, “He just wants to play with me, and I can't let my objectivity be compromised by frustration. I'm asking you to keep writing about Hannibal, but to veer away from the police brutality line.”
“Jack, it's good newspaper fodder.” Freddie said, shaking her head, “Even if I wanted to, the platforms willing to publish my work at this time wouldn't agree to it. Unfortunately, they would rather see the police fall from glory than rehash the story of how brutal Hannibal the Cannibal is. They already know what Hannibal has done. Now they want to see another side of him, and he's given them the most dangerous side of all – a human side.”

“That man is not human.” Jack said, firmly, “He's a pure psychopath that has no emotion. If you think he's not using you too, you're sadly mistaken; so, you might as well use his games to your advantage while he's still entertaining himself with your so-called news reporting.”

Freddie gave a short laugh and began to stand up, “I can see this was a waste of my time.”

“Whatever Hannibal is offering you to get you on his side, I can tell you, the police are much more invested.”

“A bribe?” She asked, crossing her arms, “That's funny. I write an article about police misconduct and you back it up by trying to bribe me into casting the cops as the good guys in my next article.”

“We are the good guys.”

“In this case … maybe.” Freddie shrugged, “It's a dog-eat-dog world, Jack. Nobody is the good guy. In media, there's no black and white, just green – I'm following the trail that leads to the money.”

“I'm not offering you money.” Jack said, “I'm offering you inside information.”

Freddie paused. She was ready to leave this sad excuse for a meeting, but nothing got her attention like the phrase “exclusive rights to the story.”

“Getting you on board for the Red Dragon case segued your career into your book about Hannibal.” Jack reminded her, “Maybe we can make another deal where we both come out on top.”

“Can you promise me rights to this story?” Freddie asked, “I don't want to find out you make deals like this with every problematic journalist who writes about Hannibal.”

“Freddie, you're the only journalist I tolerate.” Jack said.

“I also want an interview with Will Graham. And only Will Graham. No supervision, no moderator, no one telling him what to say.”

“I can't promise you that. It's up to Will Graham to talk to you, as he is not in police custody at this time.”

“What you can do is talk to him and advise him it would be a smart idea.”

“I can't advise Will to do anything. You know that. He's a loose cannon these days.”

“Well, give me a telephone number or address and I'll convince him myself.”

Jack grabbed a napkin from the table and scribbled two lines in pen. He handed it over to her without a hint of misgiving in his eyes, “Here's both.”
Hannibal was locked to the table in the privacy room when his lawyer, Byron Metcalf, entered carrying a briefcase. The man hadn't changed much in five years; just a few more gray hairs, a few more frown lines. Hannibal admired Byron's tailored suit. Though he preferred much different colors and fabrics, he had to enjoy the artistry of a fine wardrobe in comparison to his prison jumpsuit.

“Hannibal, you're looking pleased with yourself.” Byron said, his ever present, self-satisfied smile plastered on his face.

Hannibal had gone through a dozen lawyers before his original trial, firing one after the other in quick succession, before settling on Byron. He felt that Byron understood him on some level, and that they had a kinship in that they were both predators. Byron was a shark; he could smell blood in the water, or rather the flaws in the prosecutor's strategies.

“You've created quite the media storm.” Byron said. He pulled the day's newspaper out of his brief case, “This is a piece of journalistic beauty. Freddie Lounds should be winning awards.”

“I believe she did, when she wrote her book about me.”

“I applaud her.” Byron said, “She gave us just the right mixture of terror and human sympathy to launch our brand new strategy.”

“I haven't gotten a chance to read it.” Hannibal said, “May I?”

“Please do.” Byron said, sliding the paper to him, “But, I have to say, the tattlecrime.com version is even juicier.”

“Yes?”

“She makes some wild speculations about your time abroad, but it really impacts how she cast your return to the mental hospital in a sympathetic light.”

“Speculations?”

“Let me bring it up.” Byron said, scrolling through his iPad.

Hannibal skimmed through the newspaper article, smiling as he read several direct quotes about the invasion at his house in Spain, the supposed police brutality, his being denied a call to his lawyer, and being questioned by the FBI without his lawyer present. It was damning, and carried
much more weight when it came out of the mouth of Freddie Lounds. In the last five years, she had transformed herself from garbage-spewing, hate-mongering internet journalism trash to skilled, award-winning, respected author of true crime. Having a PR department had done her wonders, Hannibal thought with amusement. He knew for certain she hadn't recreated her public image all by herself.

“Ah, here.” Byron said, putting the iPad before him, “Most of it is the same, but she added this homoerotic bit for the tattlecrime crowd.”

Hannibal leaned forward to read the added paragraph.

In recent years, there has been a montage of speculation about the relationship between our favorite cannibal and the FBI agent fallen from grace, that is Mr. Will Graham, formerly a professor at Quantico, and a man acquitted of gruesome murders. This reporter has done extensive research, and having special access to a few case files, I have drawn conclusions of my own. Hannibal Lecter wasn't just Will Graham's former psychiatrist. He was a close friend, and some would speculate, Graham's dirty little secret. Indeed, it's a well-known fact that the two men absconded together to some unknown location abroad, and that the police were hunting them as a pair.

To the side, Freddie had inserted a picture of the wanted poster from the FBI, which showed both Will's and Hannibal's photograph and a description of them both. The poster said they would be traveling together.

The FBI's wanted poster doesn't suggest whether Graham was complicit in Hannibal's escape, but perhaps the lack of suggestion is what roots the idea in the minds of the those following this case. Will Graham's daunting past doesn't stir up any valid arguments in his defense either. And so, the question remains – when the authorities in Madrid broke down Hannibal Lecter's front door, were they interrupting a case of unlawful kidnapping and repeated abuse, or were they unveiling a love nest, where two of America's most notorious true crime figures found solace in the the kinship of their corresponding, dark and sordid murder fantasies?

Hannibal sat back. He gave a low chuckle.

“I for one happen to be one of the people following this case who is questioning these accusations.” Byron said, watching Hannibal's profile curiously.

“Tattlecrime.com is unreliable journalism.” Hannibal said, “She took that segment out of the real newspapers because she knows she cannot back up her claims. Every priest and faith church attendant would be knocking down the newspaper's doors if these speculations were published.”

“Yeah, of course it's pure speculation-”

“As my lawyer, I don't believe you're entitled to the details of my sex life.”

“So there is a sex life?” Byron laughed. When Hannibal refused to answer, he shrugged, “I suppose there is a Beauty for every Beast.”

“I would like to make one last remark on this article.” Hannibal said.

“What is that?”

“During our conversations with the police, and subsequently the court proceedings, I would like you to leave Will Graham out of the picture of my crimes.”
“I’m not his lawyer,” Byron said, “I wouldn’t think of questioning his innocence or guilt before a jury.”

“That’s fair.” Hannibal nodded, “What this article purports about my relationship to Will Graham was not something I asked Freddie Lounds to include. Will Graham is innocent. He doesn’t belong in the Baltimore State Hospital.”

“If Will Graham is charged, are you asking me to defend him?”

“I have the means to pay you,” Hannibal said, “However, if all goes as planned, Will Graham will never be charged.”

“Is there something you have for your defense that you’re not telling me?” Byron asked.

“I operated in this area for several years without drawing the authorities to my door,” Hannibal said, “I was careful. Leaving the country hasn’t changed that. The police won’t find one scrap of evidence that links Will to any murder. Even if I give them every location of the bodies and they search the remains with a fine tooth comb, there won’t be any solid, forensic evidence to suggest Will assisted me. They have everything for their case except evidence that would hold up in court. Should Will ever be charged, it would be for aiding and abetting, a charge which could easily be explained away with my conflicting charges of kidnapping and assault.”

“You’ve really thought this out, huh?” Byron said, scratching his chin.

“My only stipulation about this situation is that Will go free.”

Byron nodded, “I’ll do my best.”

The door of the privacy room swung open to admit another guest. Hannibal didn’t recognize the young man dressed in a dark suit, with sunglasses tucked in the front pocket, but labeled him as an errand boy from the FBI even before he pulled out his credentials.

“I’m Agent Morrows. I’ll be going through the agreement with you today. Jack Crawford couldn’t make it.”

“Too busy saving lives, no doubt.” Hannibal said, dryly.

Morrows hesitated, as if searching for either sincerity or sarcasm in the words. He took a seat and began to leaf through the papers until he had set out two copies of the document, one for Hannibal and Byron, the other for himself.

“This agreement is coming down from the director of the FBI himself.” Morrows said, “It’s final and non-negotiable. Once I leave this room, if you haven’t signed, it’s off the table. If you do sign it, you’re making an agreement to recant your claims of police brutality and violation of rights.”

“I understand.” Hannibal said, “Simply let my lawyer read the terms and advise me.”

Morrows pursed his lips. There was a slight flush on his neck and the smell of nervous sweat was apparent even before the sheen on his brow. The harsh, white lights installed above them didn’t cast his inexperience in a kind light.

“A bit wet behind the ears, aren’t you?” Hannibal observed, leaning forward, “How long have you been with the feds? Long enough to realize this type of errand running is for the entry-level children, the backwoods boys who got here in their daddy’s good name and penchant for going on against the grain. You know, it’s the Harvard and Brown University alums who have a chance at
being director one day, not a good ol' boy from the South like you. They have taste, etiquette – the type of things boys like you will never have, or be able to fake.”

Morrows flushed hotter, but a rift of anger cours ed across his expression, “I got here by my own merits, thank you very much.”

“I'm sure you did. I'm sure you worked like a dog to get through college, working two jobs, and trying to support your mother back home. Where is it? West Virginia, Tennessee? You know that cheap suit and loafers aren't fooling anyone. I smell the hills, a bit of snuff under your lip—”

“Mr. Metcalf, I'd like to ask you to restrain your client.” Morrows said, casting a dark gaze to the lawyer, who hadn't once looked up from the agreement.

“My client is hospitalized, but he still has freedom of speech, doesn't he?” Metcalf asked, looking up at Morrows over the top of his silver-rimmed glasses. He cleared his throat, “Now, according to this paragraph, the new rights will be implemented in one week's time from my client giving you his information.”

“That's right. One week exactly. That will give the hospital staff enough time to arrange everything to Mr. Lecter's liking.”

“Doctor to you.” Hannibal interjected.

“All due respect, but your license was revoked once you were declared insane. You're no doctor anymore.”

A smile slid across Hannibal's lips like the slither of a snake; Morrows couldn't tell whether he was amused or offended by the remark.

“Well, my client won't be telling you anything.” Byron said, “Am I to assume that we'll be taking a little trip down to Quantico for that sort of exchange?”

“Yes, that's on page four.”

“I see.” Byron said, flipping through the pages. He marked the paragraph with red pen, “Jack Crawford is to oversee those interrogations.”

“Yes.”

“Good, good.”

Byron hummed nonchalantly as he skimmed through the document, occasionally marking various parts in red, blue, and black ink. He read for five minutes before he straightened the papers and sat back, satisfied.

“Everything seems to be in order.” He said, sliding the papers to Hannibal, “Would you like to read it before signing?”

“I know I'm in good hands, Byron.” Hannibal smiled.

He took the pen and signed his name on the last paper with a flourish. He slid the pen and paper back to Byron and smiled at Morrows.

“Well, that's that.” Byron said, “We'll be in contact with Agent Crawford shortly to arrange the exchange of information.”
Morrow nodded. He rose from his chair and headed for the door.

“Oh, Agent Morrow,” Hannibal said.

Morrow turned slowly and cast Hannibal an irritated gaze.

“Be sure to tell Jack Crawford I’m so glad he could find a way to make it work. With a bit of persuasion on my part, I knew he would pull through.”

“Okay.” Morrow said. He grabbed for the door handle, eager to go.

“Good boy.” Hannibal called after him as the door shut on Morrow's heels.

Byron sat back on his chair and let out a chuckle, “You’re an asshole, you know.”

Hannibal's smile widened.

~

Bathing at BSHCI was a long, meticulous process. Since the most dangerous residents were never allowed to be out of their cells unattended, a guard was present during the washing process. There were no showers. Six ceramic tubs, arranged end to end in a rectangular bathroom, each one bolted to the floor, served for bathing. The brass claw feet suggested they had been in use for some time.

For Hannibal, three guards were present, He wasn't bothered by their presence. Bathing was an important and necessary part of life, and so were the guards. They could stare at him getting soapy in the tub all they liked; the shower hall wasn't an ideal place to stage an attack. If he were to make an escape attempt, he would be sure to do it in a time and place which gave him the highest guarantee for success.

They had just completed the bathing process when the order came down from Helena to bring Hannibal to one of the observation rooms in the left wing of the hospital. He went straight from the shower hall to the other side of the hospital, where a room with a chair and restraints were waiting for him.

Helena watched from the corner of the room as Elliot and Jason moved him from the dolly to the chair and strapped down his arms and legs. Hannibal was keenly aware that Elliot wasn't entirely focused on his job; his gaze kept wandering to Helena and her long legs and red high heels. Hannibal wondered briefly if he simply had a crush on his boss, or if Helena had been unprofessional enough to start up a fling with a subordinate. Perhaps it was something that would come up during their quid pro quo conversations.

When the orderlies left, Helena wandered around the chair, observing him quietly until she came to stand fully in front of him.

“How are you feeling today?” She asked.

Hannibal cocked his head, “Is that truly what you want to lead with? I've given you permission to ask anything you like in exchange for a bit of personal insight.”

“These transfers are recorded.” Helena said, “I have to give some sort of reason in the log for why
I'm continually bringing you into an observation room. I've made a note that you have requested personal interaction with me to further your therapy.”

“Ingenious. It's true, I do have huge faith in one-on-one therapy.”

She snorted, “Hannibal the Cannibal with a conscience. Right. The log is just a measure that's in place to combat abuse of authority, and *quid pro quo* situations, just like the one we're having. No one keeps track of them on a daily basis. So, answer the question, and I can pretend like we actually did therapy today.”

“I'm feeling in rather high spirits, Dr. Mortise.” Hannibal said, “I'm sure the FBI informed you of the deal they made with me.”

“The deal you forced them to make.”

“Some would say that.”

“I heard. I imagine you'll be moving back up to your old room in another week or two.”

“My old room would be splendid. It has a view of the sky.”

“That's all of the outdoors you'll see. Both the director and I agreed walks outside are too much freedom.”

“Ah, yes. I knew Jack's nose might be growing over that one. It's all a part of the haggling. If I had submitted my terms with lower expectations, I would still be sitting in the basement.”

“You're a manipulative bastard.” Helena said, shaking her head, “You sit here and spin your little webs, pull the strings on all the puppets, just to watch them slam into each other and fall to the ground.”

“Are you interested in understanding why?”

“Of course. You make me very curious, Dr. Lecter.”

“Then this is where our agreement begins. Why do you find me so interesting?”

“Everyone finds you interesting.” She said, “You're an enigma. You've stumped all of the psychiatric community, and even though you're a deplorable human being, the media and public are still enthralled.”

“I'll be more specific, then. Why are you drawn to me?”

She paused, “I don't know if that's-”

“You best not lie to me.” Hannibal said, leaning forward as far as the straps would allow him, “Dishonesty isn't a pretty color on you.”

She pursed her lips and paced away for a moment.

“If you cannot handle the simplest questions I have, I suggest you dissolve our agreement now.”

“I can handle it.”

He let his head fall back against the chair. He closed his eyes and let out a slow breath, “I'm waiting.”
“Fine.” She drew in a breath, and smoothed her hands down the front of her skirt. The anxiety was crawling all over her like spiders. He could hear the little tapping on her skin.

“I’ve always been drawn to violent men.” She admitted in a whisper, “Powerful men. I never knew my father, and some people would say that's it. I say that's pedestrian psychiatry.”

“We are more than a set of influences.”

“Exactly.”

“You find me powerful?”

“Don’t bullshit. You're well aware of the power you have. I understand you enough to know how much consideration you give yourself; I know it's a lot.”

He smiled, briefly, “You've always dated powerful, violent men?”

“Not all of my boyfriends were violent. But I've slowly become more and more aware of my proclivity toward certain personalities over the years. It's part of why I went to college for clinical psychiatry. Ailments of the mind almost always invite violent behavior. I thought perhaps studying those proclivities in a clinical setting would curb my curiosity.”

“And did it?”

“Not exactly.”

“Do those proclivities extend to sex?”

Hannibal opened his eyes when she didn't reply immediately. He slid his gaze over to see that she had taken a seat on a stool near the wall. She was staring at his profile, fingernails between her teeth.

“Do you enjoy BDSM? A man choking you, forcing you ...”

“I think you need to hold up your end of the bargain.” She said, her cheeks flushed.

“As soon as you answer me, I will.”

“Yes.” She whispered.

“I can't hear you.”

“I've done it a couple of times, but it's not the only type of sex I have. I'm not a crazy dominatrix in leather.”

“Well, that's comforting, seeing that you have the authority to keep me restrained in a secluded room.”

“If you intend to mock me, I can end this conversation right now.” She said, sharply, “I can lock you up in the basement forever, FBI deals be damned.”

“Oh, I wouldn't do that if I were you. Don't you want to know what makes me tick?”

“Yes. So answer the goddamn question.”

“The short answer, Helena, is that I’m curious. The world is a vast place, the universe even more
vast. The possibilities are quite literally endless. Pull one string a person had not intended to pull, and you've altered the world as they knew it. It's amazing what begins to happen should you start pulling a dozen other strings within the same sphere of influence.”

“You think time is fluid like that? Some people are certain that everything happens exactly as it should and as it will. There's no other possibility because it's pre ordained.”

“Such a belief is rooted in the faith that God has set out the universe in an exact, rigid order before our birth. An ordered, unchanging universe suggests we do not have free will; that we are simply robots, programmed to follow a specific set of actions and decisions chosen by an all-seeing, ever-present God. I find that belief system rather boring, don't you?”

“Boring has nothing to do with it.” She said, “It's a matter of science, whether it can be proven or not.”

“And yet, perspective, not science, rules our life, our emotions and motivations. If I believed the world was held alight by a kind, generous God, I would be blind to the flowers that blossom in darkness. No, God gives and takes, so we, too, should be free to feed our passions as they arise.”

“You're comparing yourself to God?”

“If I had a God complex, I would be no better than those firemen who set fires just to save the victims, or a doctor who steps into the ER for the thrill of raising the dead.”

“You were an ER doctor, many years ago.”

“Yes that's true, but I was not like those doctors who were excited by saving lives. I was only cleaning up someone else's mess. Someone else's feeble attempt at playing God. I wanted to orchestrate those wounds which brought a person to the mercy of a emergency room surgeon.”

“But you do consider everyone else below you.”

“I've never considered it. I simply know it to be true.”

Helena frowned. She scribbled a few notes, then tapped the end of the pen against her chin, considering her next question.

“If you intend to question me further, you have to tell me something else.” Hannibal said, “A fair trade.”

“What do you want to know?” She asked.

“You told me that you never knew your father.”

“Right.”

“Did your mother remarry?”

“Not until I was a teen. She dated throughout my childhood though.”

“Do you remember them all?”

“No. Some of them were only around for a month or two. Some of them lived in with us for a time.”

“What were they like? Did your mother gravitate toward violent men like you do?”
“Some of them were okay.”

“But?” He pressed.

“But most of them were not interested in being with a women who had the burden of a child dividing her attention. They didn't want to be fathers. I wasn't close to any of them.”

“Did they ever hurt you?”

“If you mean sexually, no.”

“Interesting your mind should go right to rape. I asked if they ever hurt you.”

He slid his gaze to her. She glared at him, her blue eyes cold like ice. He'd touched a nerve, perhaps not directly, but his question had found it's way to a sensitive memory.

She cleared her throat. “There was no abuse, physically, verbally, or sexually.”

“They were deadbeats, poor replacements for the real thing. Your mother wanted companionship, and she wasn't looking very far.”

“I don't hate her.” Helena said, sharply, “She did the best she could. And she reminded me to work hard, get an education, and get out of our grimy little town. She didn't want me to end up like her, so she pushed me.”

“And here you are.”

“Yes.” She said, quietly, “Here I am.”

She was quiet for a few moments before she drew in a deep breath, and came back with a more professional tone, “So, I told you about my mom. Tell me about your parents.”

“They're dead.”

“That's it?”

“Yes, they were killed when I was quite young.”

“That type of information is a matter of public record. Tell me something the authorities don't know about you.”

“There isn't much they haven't uncovered. They've turned my life and history inside out searching for clues.”

“There's plenty.” She said, “Personal details and experiences that aren't recorded. Memories from childhood.”

“You said you want to understand me. Ask me questions about my psyche, my fantasies, and my murders.”

“Childhood shapes us all.” Helena insisted, “If you think it didn't motivate you in some way to become who you are, then you're lying.”

“Nothing motivated me. Nothing shaped me.” Hannibal said, coolly. He averted his gaze and became like stone before her eyes, “I made me, and that is all you need to know.”
Will set out dishes of food and water for Winston before he left the house. He wasn't sure how long he would be gone, but the drive was at least an hour one way.

The sun was going down when he stepped out of the house. The sun had come out that day and melted several inches of the snow, leaving the rest in a mess of mud and slush. He picked his way across the driveway, avoiding the gaping holes which hadn't been properly repaired since he'd left the house behind eight years ago.

As he pulled out of the driveway in his truck, he glanced at the gloves and ski mask sitting on the passenger seat. His stomach began to churn a familiar, anxious rhythm. It was a bad idea, but it was his only idea.

He drove in silence, knowing the radio would only serve to distract him. He practiced a few breathing exercises and bolstered his confidence with a reminder of how vital his goal was. The plan was crazy, but maybe it was just crazy enough to succeed in expediting the process, he reasoned.

Several times he nearly pulled over and turned around. Every time he began to brake and coast toward the shoulder of the road, Hannibal's disappointed expression crossed his mind.

When he finally reached the house, he parked on the street and jaywalked with the gloves and mask in his fist.

His long stride came to an abrupt halt at the front door. His heart pounded wildly. His palms were sticky with sweat as he tugged the gloves and mask on.

Glancing around the front yard, he noticed a tall, blue urn by the front door. The urn was familiar, a long standing hiding place for the spare key. He lifted the urn and searched the ground. Finding nothing, he tipped the urn upside down, and was pleased when the key dropped out to the dirt at his feet.

He let himself in and eased the door shut behind himself. It took several moments for his eyes to adjust to the darkness of the house. He made out the living room furniture and TV, and across the room, the entrance to the kitchen. The adjacent wall opened to a hallway that ran into a flight of stairs to the second floor.

Stepping lightly, Will made his way upstairs. He paused when he reached the first door. Holding his breath, he put his ear to the door and listened. All he could hear was a buzz in his head and the hammering of his heart. Gripping the knob, he carefully eased the door open a few cracks to peek inside. The figure in the bed was indistinguishable with the covers pulled over the head, but Will noted implements of a teenage boy's bedroom.

He ducked his head briefly, and mentally chided himself for even considering going inside. It was foolish. He hadn't seen the boy in years, much less given his stepson a passing thought. He suddenly felt like a terrible person. Pulling the door closed, he put a hand over his face to conceal raging emotion.

_get it together. You're doing this for Hannibal. For us._
He sniffed quietly and lifted his chin. Proceeding down the hallway, he checked each room, locating the closet, a bathroom, and a spare bedroom, before finding the room he was looking for. It was the last room at the end of the hall; not the most strategic position for a foolhardy kidnapping.

As he looked into the bedroom at Molly's sleeping figure, he pulled the knife out of his pocket and slowly flipped the blade open. The metal glinted maliciously in the dim lighting, and his imagination added drops of blood.

He closed his eyes. The image of the room stayed in his brain as he imagined his actions in the next few minutes. He planned each movement, each word. If he didn't, the entire expedition could go terribly wrong.

When he opened his eyes, he pushed the door aside and rushed across the carpet to the bed. He clapped one hand over her mouth and pressed the knife loosely under her chin. She startled awake immediately, her eyes going white and round in the near darkness. She bucked under his weight, throwing the full force of her terror against him. Her screams were muffled under his palm. When she tried to bite, her teeth clamped around the leather material of the glove.

“Shh, shh.” He urged, pressing the knife a bit closer, “I don't want to hurt you.”

He lowered his voice, hoping she wouldn't recognize him right away. It had been five years. Perhaps his image in her mind was as faded as his was of her.

She objected against his gloved hand and struggled again to free herself.

“I don't want to hurt you, but I'll cut you if I have to.” He threatened.

His threat had a quieting affect on her. She lapsed against the sheets and gazed up at him, wide-eyed and scared. He squeezed his eyes shut as the warmth and texture of her pliant body beneath him absorbed into his mind. Vivid imaginations of blood spilled across the clean, white sheets filled his brain, so effective in their creation that he could almost hear the gurgle of blood in her wheezing lungs.

His head throbbed with heat and exhilaration underneath the ski mask. It took all his strength of will to crush the violent thoughts to the back of his mind, and focus on the task at hand, the identity of the woman beneath him.

“I know your son is sleeping down the hall.” He said, “I haven't touched him, and I won't if you come with me.”

Her eyes flared. He could see another scream building in her throat, and he pressed the knife just hard enough to sting her throat. His fist quivered around the knife, so close to slipping forward.

“He's safe.” He added, eager to get her up out of the bed. “Get up and come with me.”

He sat back, testing whether she would obey. She did. He kept the knife against her back as he led her out of bedroom and down the hallway. They made slow progress down the stairs. He could sense her wanting to lash out, and part of him wished she would put an end to this asinine endeavor with one well-aimed elbow to the midsection. If she struck, he would have reason to strike back much more violently than she could.

He led to her to the door and motioned to her shoes, “Put them on.”

“Where are we going?” She whispered.
“Outside. I don't want your son to hear.”

She shoved her feet into the boots and grabbed her coat. They stepped outside where the illumination of the moonlight cast her hair in a flaxen glow. Even with a the ski mask, he feared she might recognize him at any moment.

“What do you want?” She asked as he led her down the driveway.

“I want to talk to you. Someone wants something out of you.”

“Someone?”

“He needs you to do something for him.”

She glanced over her shoulder. The spark of recognition lit bright in her eyes.

“You mean Will? Will Graham?”

He took a step back, but not before she fling an angry fist at him. Her knuckles glanced off his chest, and he dropped the knife in order to restrain her by the arms.

“Stop!”

“It's you isn't it?” She shouted, pawing at his chest.

His grip slipped. Her hand darted out and grabbed a handful of the mask, tearing seams in the material as she rent it from his head.

“I knew it!” She shouted.

He took a step back, breathing hard and panicking. The situation was quickly spinning out of his control.

“You broke into my house and held a knife to my throat?” She shrieked, “What the hell is wrong with you?”

He bent down and picked up the knife, causing Molly's angry rant to come to a shuddering halt.

“What are you going to do with that?” She asked, taking a step back. Her eyes were moist in the dim light of the moon, and her lips trembling with swelling fear and horror.

“I need you to sign those papers.” Will said, stiffly, “And I need you to do it now.”

“You're threatening me?” She asked in a harsh whisper, “I could bring charges against you for doing this.”

“I think that would be a mistake.” He said, “It would drag you and Walter into a legal battle that could go on for years. If you sign the papers right now, I'll be out of your life forever.”

“You think I want that?” She asked, a tear escaping down her flushed cheek.

“The truth is, I don't know what you want. Not anymore. I haven't really been your husband since that I day I left your at the hospital and went off to catch a killer.”

“But you are.” She insisted, “You are my husband, Will, even if you are doing something so incredibly stupid and crazy like kidnapping me in the middle of the night.”
“I think it's best if we parted ways.” Will argued, “For both our sakes.”

“So you can go off with Hannibal, a psychopath.” She said, crossing her arms tightly, “Will, you have to see that this is absolutely insane. I love you. I care about you. I would never put you in the kind of positions he's putting you in. I would never ask you to do something like this; something that could get you put in jail for a long time.”

“He didn't ask me to do this.”

“But you are doing it for him. Because he has some kind of sick hold on you.”

“He doesn't have a hold on me. I chose him, all by myself.”

“That's what you think.” Molly said, shaking her head, “I've spoken to Alana Bloom. She thinks you might have Stockholm Syndrome.”

“Well, she's wrong.” Will said, firmly, “And if you don't sign these papers, I'm going to show her exactly how in control I am.”

Molly drew back, her face twisting with fresh emotion. Tears spilled down her cheeks, and she turned away, cupping her hand over a moan, “I can't believe this is happening ...”

“Believe it. Accept it. Move on. It's as simple as that.”

“It's not simple!” Molly shouted, spinning around to search his face with wide, helpless eyes, “It's not simple, Will. The man I loved, the man I married, is holding a knife to my throat, and forcing me to do something I don't want to go through with.”

“That's exactly it, Molly. I'm not the man you married, or the man you loved.” He sighed, and scraped a hand through his hair. He added, quietly, “That man is never coming back.”

“Is that what this is?” She asked, motioning to the mask and knife, “You're trying to show me how dangerous you are? How crazy you are?”

“Is it convincing you?”

She paused, her lips pursed over an enraged rebuttal. She wiped hastily at her cheeks, smearing tears across the flushed skin.

“This isn't a degree of what I could do.” He said, softly, “Because I know you, because I used to love you … because I know you're a good person.”

She blinked rapidly. Her boots shuffled back a step, and he could see that she was now truly scared of him, not just a masked intruder.

“Don't make me ignore those boundaries.” He added, gripping the knife tighter.

Her eyes darted, never touching his. He could see the thoughts and rationalizations spinning through her head. A silent war between her heart and mind.

At last, she cleared her throat and said, “I have to go inside and find the papers.”

“No need. I brought another copy.” He said. He unzipped his jacket and pulled the folded stack of papers and a pen from the inside pocket.

She gazed at them in quiet defeat as he held them out to her.
“Please do this for me.” He whispered, “For both of us. For Walter. So you two can move on and forget I ever interrupted your lives.”

“You were never an interruption.” She said, “You were the love of my life.”

“So were you.”

“Then why are we standing here?”

“Because, I can't say no to fate and my destiny.”

“That's a lot of bullshit.”

“I can't explain it any other way.”

He sighed and shook the papers in front of her face. She snatched them from her hand and leafed through them to the final page.

She motioned for him to turn around so that she could use his back as a surface to write on. He closed his eyes as he felt the pressure of the pen scrawling out her signature.

“He doesn't love you.” She said, her voice a bitter whisper, “He's a psychopath and killer. When he's bored with you, he'll chop you up and serve you just like everyone else – but I can't save you from that fate anymore.”

Will turned around to take the paper and pen back from her. She shoved them willingly into his hands.

“Maybe.” He said, “I'm ready to accept it if he does.”

“Why?”

“You made me happy.” Will said, “But no one has ever understood so completely and accepted me as I am the way Hannibal did. When I finally stopped fighting, I realized I had never known myself, or loved myself as much as I did when I was with him. If it's wrong, I don't want to be right.”

He turned around and walked toward the truck, feeling as if a weight had risen from his shoulders. Molly gazed after him, the tears drying in her eyes. “Have a nice life.” She muttered.

He climbed into the truck and drove away without looking back. It was the last time she would look at him as her husband, and not as the deranged intruder who had taken over Will Graham's body.
“Are you ready for this?”

Will snapped back into reality when he felt the touch of Alana's hand on his elbow. He hadn't realized he was dissociating while he waited for them to set up the camera for his formal statement.

“Um, yeah.” He muttered, scrubbing a hand over his face, “I've put it off long enough.”

“Are you okay?” She asked.

“Just tired. I slept like crap last night.”

“Maybe you should see the doctor about your sleep.” Alana suggested, “It could be a symptom of the trauma.”

“Sleep and I have never had much of a friendly relationship.” Will replied, offering her a forced smile, “I'll get through it.”

She wasn't convinced, but didn't argue as she opened the door to let him into the interrogation room.

He sat down across from Jack and Agent Morrows. The camera was pointed at his face, the tiny lens glinting like a cyclopes' eye. He rubbed his eyes. The light overhead was too bright.

“Ready?” Jack asked.

Will nodded. Despite anxiety and lack of sleep, he felt much more in control of this statement than the first attempt. He knew what he had to say. He knew it was the right thing to do.

Morrows switched the camera to record.

“Today is January 20th, 2020. The time is 10:35 a.m. I'm Jack Crawford, director of the BAU, taking Will Graham's formal statement on the events which occurred from April 26th, 2015 until present day. Will, start by telling us about the events which occurred on the night of April 26th, 2015, when Hannibal Lecter escaped police custody during a transport.”

Will drew in a deep breath. He didn't look at the camera as he plunged into the interview.

“Dolarhyde came at us sooner than expected. He attacked the transport vehicles, and the van carrying myself, Hannibal, and two other agents was driven off the road. The other agents were killed. Hannibal and I were uninjured. Hannibal made me get in the car with him, and we drove to his safe house by the sea.”

“He forced you?” Jack asked.

“Yes. I wanted to find a phone and call you, but he had gotten free of his restraints and took one of the guns from the dead police officers.”

Jack regarded him warily for a few moments before waving a hand, “Continue.”

“He took me to the safe house and we waited there until nightfall. Dolarhyde arrived. He attacked
me with a knife, and Hannibal lunged on him to stop him.”

“Hannibal Lecter killed Francis Dolarhyde?” Jack asked.

“Yes.”

“I've been over the ME report.” Jack said, “The examiner is fairly certain that there were two assailants. The depths, direction, and quantity of the wounds seem to indicate Dolarhyde was killed by more than one person.”

Will chewed at his lower lip.

Jack tilted his head, “Do you have anything to say about that?”

“It was self defense.”

“Are you sure you want to say that? It looked more like a slaughter to me.”

“You just told me the ME was certain it was two people. I was the only other person there. I'd rather claim self defense than perjure myself when all of this goes to trial.” Will said.

Jack gave a slow nod, and consulted his notes in the silence.

“What about Bedilia Du Maurier?” Jack asked, “We found your DNA at the crime scene.”

“I was present. I didn't kill her.”

“Did you eat her?”

Will kept his gaze up. Avoiding the camera or Jack would just make him look guilty.

“I knew he was going to kill her.” Will said, “But I thought I could try to stop him. I went along with the charade to buy time. I tried to persuade him not to kill her.”

Jack's eyes narrowed. Will could see that he didn't entirely believe what Will was saying, but he didn't have any proof to speculate otherwise on this recording.

“How did you leave the US?”

“By plane. He booked us under false identities.”

“International flights have layers of security since 9/11. How did he manage it in such short amount of time?”

“I don't know. I wasn't helping him.”

“Where did you go?”

“We started in Paris, but we didn't stay long. After that, we went to Gibraltar.”

“Smart. It's small, secluded.” Jack said, making a note of the location, “Did you try to escape or make a phone call at any time?”

“He never let me out of his sight. The only phone we had was a burner he used for arranging new travel plans. He had it on him at all times.”

“During this time, was he drugging you? Manipulating you in some way?”
Will scrubbed a hand over his face, and swallowed back the lump forming in his throat. There was a sick, hollow feeling expanding in his belly, and a dull ache pounding at the base of his skull.

“If I got too unmanageable, he would drug me.” He whispered, licking at his dry, anxious lips, “It taught me to stay obedient.”

“We don’t need all the specifics about your travels right now.” Jack said, “So, I just want you to tell me about his behavior. Did he leave for long periods of time?”

“No. Not at the beginning.”

“What about later?”

“After a few years, it got more relaxed. He would leave me alone at the house for a few hours at a time.”

“Did you know if he was killing people?”

“I don't know.”

Jack sighed. He pulled a piece of paper out of his folder and slid it across the table to Will. A list of a dozen names were written uniformly down one side of the paper, in handwriting Will recognized.

“Hannibal was brought in this morning so that we could obtain the information we made a deal for.” Jack said, “He gave us these thirteen names.”

Will bit his lower lip and considered how to proceed.

“A baker's dozen.” He murmured, running his finger down the list of names.

“That's what he said.”

Will looked up, sharply, “I didn't know about these people. These names mean nothing to me.”

“All right.” Jack conceded. He took the paper back and tucked it in his folder, “At this stage, we don't have any forensic evidence to prove otherwise, so I'll leave that question behind.”

Silence settled across the room. Will could feel the sweat between his shoulder blades and itching on the back of his neck. Jack was shuffling through his papers, but he seemed to avoiding the million dollar question. Will knew it was coming.

“You want to know if he raped me … don't you, Jack?”

Jack's eyes swung up to meet Will's. He took a paper from the stack and turned it to face Will. Will recognized the patch of skin over his ribs which had bruised so easily under Hannibal's knuckles. He winced as the image aroused a vivid replay of the memory through his head. He could still remember how the cords bit into his wrists and ankles, and the warm, dizzying sensation of the drug sliding through his veins, stealing his will to fight.

“I don't need to know if.” Jack said, his voice taut with thinly veiled anger, “I can look at a goddamn picture, Will. When they cut the extension cords off of you, they told me he tied them so tightly you could have lost your hands if they had been left on for an extended period of time.”

Will pushed a hand through his hair and hung on until his scalp burned. He just had to stray strong a little longer.
“I want to hear it from your mouth.” Jack said, stabbing a finger at the table, “I want to hear it from you so we can get you the help you need. You don't have to go through this alone.”

Will nodded. He closed his eyes against the moisture that suddenly swelled against his lids. Drawing in a deep breath, he whispered, “He did hurt me, Jack, but I was ... I was never afraid of him. I don't remember being in pain. I don't remember him threatening me, or making me bleed, or ...”

“It could be a symptom of the trauma.” Jack said, quietly, “The brain blocks out horrible things so that you can cope.”

Will wiped angrily at his eyes. He'd told himself walking in here that he would be strong. It didn't matter if he was throwing Hannibal's loving sacrifice and dashing it on the ground. Hannibal wanted it to be this way, and even if Will didn't, he couldn't destroy Hannibal's carefully constructed plan after Hannibal had already given so much.

“It's how Hannibal Lecter works.” Will said, thickly, “I'm just another Miriam Lass. Another plaything.”

“Miriam Lass survived.” Jack said, reaching out to touch Will's arm, “She did her time for shooting Chilton, she got out, she picked herself up, and she kept pushing forward. You're strong, Will. I know you'll do the same.”

~

The cell was just as he remembered it. The cool, metallic colors, the polished wood floor, and the dome above that looked out to the stars were all a familiar space that felt like a palace compared to the ten by ten foot room in the basement.

Jason and Elliot rolled him inside exactly a week from the day he visited Jack at Quantico. Byron placed a call that morning to assure his client's end of the bargain was being upheld. He was transferred to the phone Hannibal's new rights afforded him, and they had a short but triumphant discourse about Hannibal's new living arrangements.

When Hannibal hung up the phone, he cast Helena a smile. “Thank you.”

She took the receiver back through the opening in the glass and passed the cart carrying the telephone off to an orderly. The orderly rolled it out of the room, leaving doctor and patient alone.

“The books were a nice touch.” Hannibal said, sweeping a hand toward the stack of volumes on the desk.

“We have a friendly relationship now.” Helena said, pacing parallel to the glass, “I'm the new Alana Bloom. I give you things, you give me things ... That sort of relationship.”

He lifted his chin and followed her motion with his eyes. He detected the tiny shifts in her thoughts, like tectonic plates bumping against each other. She was trying to evolve their relationship from linear to circular, where they might run into each other.

“No agreement with the FBI was to be moved from the basement.” She added, “This room was not a specific part of that document you signed. I arranged all this, just like Alana did five years
“Alana arranged this room and my special rights because if she hadn't, I might have told everyone she and her wife were responsible for Mason Verger's death.”

Helena's eyes widened a bit, but she did not care about Alana's supposed crimes.

“I'm doing it because we have a mutual benefit to be gleaned from this type of relationship.”

“What would you like in return?” He asked with a chuckle, “Shall I kiss your toes?”

She came to a stop in front of him, barely a foot of space and a sheet of glass between them. “That would be enjoyable, but no.”

He waited. She wanted him to ask what she wanted. She wanted to see that she had gotten under his skin. She hadn't.

“I started digging after our last conversation.” She said, at length, “Lithuania is a small country. Not many Hannibal Lecters. Not many Count Hannibal Lecters.”

“Did you find me?” He asked.

She smiled, tautly, “Not many Mischa Lecters either.”

“You're right. I had a sister. I don't make it a habit of lying about it.”

“All I could find was a birth certificate. But there's no trace of her. She's dead, isn't she?”

“Yes.”

“Just like your parents?”

“Not quite like them.”

Helena crossed her arms. Waiting. There was a small tick beneath her left eye.

“After my parents were killed in the conflict, I was sent to an orphanage far from home.” Hannibal said, “I didn't speak for some time. It wasn't difficult for me to accomplish since the people there wanted so badly for me to speak.”

Helena shook her head, “Son of a bitch.”

“You won't ply from me something I don't want to give.” Hannibal said, “You, however, will give me every last thing I want. Not because you want to, but because you are compelled to. Because you are driven by curiosity and lust you can't control. It's like an itch in the middle of your back, a craving you can't quite place or satisfy. It will drive you mad until you can't stand it any longer. Then it will drive you to death.”

Helena's draw grew taut. A flicker of fear glinted in her pale blue eyes, and a hint of anger she didn't dare express.

“I'm the director of this hospital.” She said, “Don't forget where you are, Hannibal. Don't forget you'll spend the rest of your lift rotting behind this glass. You have nothing.”

She turned on her heel and departed swiftly, letting the doors slam shut behind her.
Hannibal laid down on his cot and laced his fingers behind his head. He gazed up at the skylight, where the crisp, blue winter sky blazed overhead. The stars and the universe spun just out of his reach, and should he stretch his fingers, he might find his way to God.

~

Will filled a satchel with the scarce things he could find in the house that might remind Hannibal of him. He and Hannibal didn't agree entirely on reading material, but he added a few books he thought Hannibal might enjoy.

His hands held a tremor as he prepared to make the trip to the BSHCI. With the passage of another week after their capture, he despaired, but today was a reason to celebrate. With Hannibal's new privileges accorded to him by the deal with the FBI, Will could visit daily if he wished. He had access to Hannibal's room. Even when they had used the privacy room, they were watched by guards outside, but Hannibal's cell gave them complete privacy. No more prying eyes.

Will threw on his coat and hoisted the satchel on his shoulder. His motions came to sudden halt when he paused by the door to put his shoes on. He heard a car pulling into the driveway outside, and when he looked out, he didn't recognize the vehicle.

Will slowly opened the door and peered outside. The car engine died, and a red-haired women stepped out of the vehicle. She paused, scanning the property and the house with a look of serene satisfaction on her face. Will stomach clenched with seething distaste. He would recognize Freddie Lounds anywhere.

Freddie pulled her bag out of the car and marched up the front porch steps. She slowed when she saw Will's face peeking through the partially opened door.

"Hello, Will." She said.

Will sighed. He thought through the situation for a moment before deciding to face her head on. She would pick him apart if he tried to avoid her. Even worse, she might make up her next article if she failed to get an arousing quote out of him.

He opened the door and stepped out onto the porch. "Hello, Freddie. I was just leaving."

"Do you have a minute?" She asked.

"Not really."

She tilted her head, "Come on, Will. I know you're not that busy. What do you have to do all day? You've been back all of three weeks. Don't tell me you already have a new job and social life arranged."

"No, I don't. But I do have an appointment at the Baltimore State Hospital."

"You're going to see him."

"Don't play dumb." Will said, casting her a withering glare, "I know you've been following me and taking pictures."
“True. I have photographic proof you’ve visited Hannibal almost every day since I started following you.”

“Good for you. Are you going to publish them?”

“What's the use in taking them if I'm not going to publish them?”

“Fine. Just don't pick an unflattering one.” He flashed a fake smile dripping with sarcasm, and started down the front steps, “Like I said, I have an appointment.”

She followed him, stepping quickly but carefully to avoid slipping on the snow in her high-heeled boots, “Will, I'm going to interview you for my next article. Whether you want to have a say in what I write or not is up to you.”

“Back to your same old tricks.” Will said, over his shoulder, “Turns out the high-life of writing true crime hasn't really changed you after all.”

“No, it hasn't. I'm still willing to do whatever it takes to get the story.”

Will paused by the truck, his breaths creating fog in the air above him. He could feel the snow absorbing through his boots and freezing his feet.

“You can ask me one question.” He said, “One. Then I'm going.”

Freddie thought for a moment before she pulled out her notepad and paper, “One burning question .... Everyone wants to know, Will – is Hannibal Lecter in love with you?”

Will smiled, “That's not a question.”

Freddie narrowed her eyes, but she scribbled the answer on her notepad. “If that's not a question, can I ask another?”

“Quickly.”

“Now that Hannibal is in custody and you've been released, what do you intend to do with the rest of your life?” Freddie asked, “You left the FBI years ago, but from an unbiased standpoint, it seems like profiling is what you're good at. Will you return to that life, or has Hannibal Lecter spoiled it for good?”

“I intend to spend the rest of my life on my terms.” Will said, “Whether that involves the FBI or profiling, I don't know. I haven't thought that far out.”

He yanked the door of the truck open, narrowly missing Freddie, and climbed inside. She took a quick step back as he started the engine and pulled away. He left her in a spray of snow and mud.

~

Will endured a long process of security checks before he was allowed past the doors of Hannibal's room. Since they were now allowed total privacy, the hospital was concerned that Will might pass weapons to Hannibal. He agonized over security's rough handling of the gifts he'd brought, but didn't protest. It was the price of having their privacy.
When Will finally walked through the doors, Hannibal was standing at the glass. Will bit back a smile as he rushed to the glass. He put the satchel on the ground and put both hands to the glass. Hannibal's palms came up to greet his, separated by an inch of glass.

“You look happy.” Will said.

“You're here.” Hannibal said, softly, “How could I not be?”

“I brought you some things.” Will nodded toward the bag, “Some books and stuff.”

“You can put it through the box over there.” Hannibal said.

Will picked up the satchel and walked to the end of the glass. He emptied the contents of the satchel and pushed them through to the other side. Hannibal looked over the items, a tiny smile gracing his lips.

“Why are you giving me this?” He asked, lifting a piece of jewelry from the pile. It was a slim, gold necklace with a round pendant, sparkling gem laid onto a gold back.

“Remember when you gave that to me?” Will asked, “I remember that night vividly.”

“As do I. It was a gift. You should keep it.”

“You can give it back to me when we're out of here.”

“How are you certain we will be out of here one day?”

“I trust you.” Will said, “Besides, I know you couldn't possibly be content living in a cage for the rest of your life. You're Hannibal the Cannibal.”

“And I can snap my fingers and wish myself out of here?”

“No. But you'll find a way.”

“Yes.” Hannibal said, a sly smile touching his lips, “As I told you, I am working on something.”

“The doctor?”

“Dr. Helena Mortise.” Hannibal said, his eyes sparkling, “She's malleable.”

“Like I was?” Will asked, tilting his head.

“Not exactly. She has something you didn't.”

“Which is?”

“Pride. She can't see past her own inflated ego. She's going to trip on it in her hurry to dissect my brain.”

Will chuckled, “You're one to talk.”

“I keep my pride out of he way of my feet, to avoid such blunders.” Hannibal said.

He turned back to the items Will had brought him. He pulled a sheaf of papers stapled together from the binding of one of the books. It took him mere seconds to understand what the document was.
“You took my advice?” He said, looking up at Will's pleased expression.

“I crafted what could probably be considered the riskiest, most foolish plan ever, but somehow, it succeeded. She signed.”

“You must be careful.” Hannibal chided, despite the smile tugging at his mouth, “I would be severely displeased with you if you were to undo all my work by causing Molly to file charges against you.”

“But I didn’t.” Will murmured, “So you can go easy on me.”

Hannibal regarded the soft, daring blue eyes blinking at him, and pursed his lips over a quiet moan. Had the glass not been between them, he would have Will pinned to the floor already. Taking silly risks, even if it were for their future, earned some form of punishment …

“Did you come here to torment me?” Hannibal asked, his voice a husky whisper.

Will looked away, flushing pink, “No, I'm sorry.”

“You know what you do to me.”

“I should be more aware.” Will said, daring a glance up at Hannibal, his lower lip trapped between his teeth.

“We're going to be married.” Hannibal said, as if he were just realizing it, “It's a true shame I can't consummate it on the day of our vows.”

“We'll make up for it eventually.”

“Not soon enough.”

“No.” Will sighed. He motioned to the necklace looped around Hannibal's fingers, “It can be our talisman. A reminder that they can't keep us apart. Wear it for me?”

Hannibal opened the clasp and put it around his throat. It came to rest just below his collarbones, beautiful and out of place next to prison attire.

Will smiled, his eyes moist. “We'll have more nights like that one. If I think otherwise, I won't make it through this.”

~

**Four years ago**

The staccato rhythm of rain on the roof had all but lulled Will asleep until the sound of the front door opening forced his head up from the pillow. The TV was still on, but the the movie he had begun watching was over. A talk show, featuring three fashionable women speaking rapid-fire French played to an uninterested audience.

Will sat up on the couch and scrubbed a hand over his face. Hannibal stepped into the room,
shaking rain from his umbrella. His coat was drenched despite the umbrella.

Will stifled a yawn. “What kept you? It's almost ten.”

Hannibal shrugged out of his coat, revealing that he held rectangular black box against his side. He devilish smile played on his lips, “I had to make one last stop before coming home.”

Will regarded him with suspicious eyes, suddenly fully alert.

Hannibal took off his shoes and crossed the room to join Will on the couch. He set the box on Will's lap and slid his arm around Will's back to touch his hair and then his cheek. He pressed his nose gently against Will's neck, ignoring Will's protest that his skin was cold from the rain.

“It's been a year today.” He murmured, “Did you know that?”

“Oh.” Will said, “No, I didn't … I didn't realize.”

“Open the box.”

Will drew in a deep breath, and glanced at Hannibal cautiously, “Should I have remembered? Should I have gotten you something or-”

“No, I didn't remind you purposefully.” Hannibal said, “Open it.”

Will pursed his lips, his heart suddenly fluttering like a hummingbird. He took the lid of the box. It held another box, but one with a velvet cover that immediately informed Will that it must be holding some type of jewelry.

“Hannibal-”

“Whatever you are going to say, don't say it.” Hannibal said, kissing Will's cheek, “Open the box.”

Will pursed his lips over another protest. He took the jewelry case out of the box and lifted the lid. His breath caught as his eyes came to rest on the delicate, gold chain and the pendant resting in the middle. The body of the jewel was a deep blue, but it was the colors that reflected within that made Will's breath stop in awe. It was like fire frozen in time and infused in the stone, a brilliant display of gold, orange, and red that glinted against cobalt like a midnight sky under the influence of aurora borealis.

“What is it?” He whispered.

“Black opal.” Hannibal said, “The most precious and rare of opals. Only a handful are mined each year.”

“It's beautiful.” Will whispered. He touched the jewel softly, anxious it would break or disappear under his fingertips.

“I was aware that this gem existed, but I did not become enchanted by it until I began to search for the perfect gift for you.” Hannibal said. He reached out and took the necklace gently from it's case. He held it up to Will's throat, “May I?”

Will turned and let Hannibal put the necklace on him. He drew in a shuddering breath as it came to rest against his chest, just below his collarbones. He gazed down at it glinting against his skin, thinking something so beautiful didn't belong on him.

“I chose the black opal not only because of it's rarity and beauty, but because of it's appearance.”
Hannibal said. He took Will by the shoulders and turned him around to look into his eyes, “It looks quite a bit like fire, don't you think?”

Will nodded.

Hannibal's hand cupped his cheek, thumb dragging softly over the cheekbone. His eyes gleamed in the dim lighting of the room, reflecting something Will had only found glimpses of in the past. His lungs constricted, and his heartbeat roared through his ears.

“For so long when we first met, I saw the fire inside you.” Hannibal said, “First, the fever, and then when the sickness was gone, a new kind of fire that burned away the shades of you that no longer showed your true nature. They say fire is cleansing, that it has the power to mold and purify. I see that fire in you, Will. You've touched me with it, and without my permission or realization, burned away my own shadows. I am … raw and open with you. I am reborn in the flames.”

Will swallowed against the lump swelling in his throat, struggling to speak, to respond to words he could hardly believe he was hearing. The sound of the rain pounding on the roof faded away as his senses came fully to bear on Hannibal’s face and the sound of his shallow breaths.

Time slowed, every sensation expanding and swallowing him as Hannibal bent forward to join their lips. His fingers moved through Will's hair, finding the nape and curling into fists that pulled Will down against the couch cushions. The weight and warmth of his body settled between Will's thighs, and his shoulders blocked out the light from the window as he bent down to ravish his mouth down Will's throat and across his mouth. His hands moved quick and subtle, finding the openings of Will's clothes and pulling them away. His fingers crawled hungry and insatiable over exposed flesh, drawing the need from Will's body and molding him to his will. Will's every motion followed Hannibal's command, his body thrumming with the need to please, and the hunger to be satisfied.

But it wasn't the pleasure that made him moan into Hannibal neck as Hannibal finally thrust into him. It was the thoughts that bloomed inside his skull from the nurtured seeds deep down in his chest. The stems had burst up through his heart and the passages of his aortas, tearing through flesh and barriers he'd tried so hard to keep up. The walls broke down, and the secrets he'd held behind his lips came rushing forth in an unstoppable stream of moans and broken strings of adoration. Between friction and the shadow of pleasure, he heard, as if from beyond his body, his lips speak the words he'd thought he would never say.

“I love you.”

~

Present Day

Helena Mortise marched solemnly down the solitary halls of the hospital, frustration churning in her gut like the flu. Her hands shook despite her curled up fists, and the thoughts knocking around in her head made her want to scream.

She'd jumped headlong into the ring with Hannibal Lecter knowing full well he had never let any psychiatrist test or analyze him. He was an enigma – no, he was not as elegant and high-class as he
assumed. He was garden variety, grade A bastard. He was just playing with her, and having a
damn good time.

Most people would say it was time to call it quits. She had put in a good effort, but she had failed.
Just let it go. But, no. Helena Mortise did not let things go. Least of all the most prized psycho in
all of America. She was going to crack his code, and when she did, she was going to watch his
smug satisfaction turn into disbelief and horror.

Helena's confident stride slowed as she reached the hallway housing the staff offices. Down the
hall, in a room which hadn't been occupied in years, the light was on and people were conversing.
A frown touched her brow as she drew closer. Her gaze broke the edge of the doorway just as a
short, slender man dressed in an impeccable, navy suit swept around the desk to sit down.

Helena's mouth slipped open. The face was unrecognizable, or rather, the scars were. Despite years
of therapy and surgeries, Frederick Chilton's body was still a mass of burn scars and ruined tissue.

Two men exited the office, but didn't seem to notice her as they strode down the hall. She picked
up just a few bits of conversation as they passed her.

"We can't persuade him otherwise."

"I give up. When he collapses on the job, that's when I'll jump in and tell him to retire ..."

Helena froze in the hallway for a few seconds, her mind processing the situation and the
consequences that were sure to follow. Then, she broke out of her trance and rushed down the
hallway to the open door.

Chilton looked up from surveying his desk. His smug smile was made even more grotesque by his
mangled face, “Ah, Dr. Mortise. Come in, if you like.”

“You're back?” She asked, hovering in the doorway.

“Yes. I've decided it's time to return to the profession I love.”

“What about your doctors? Your health problems? Don't you-”

He waved his hand, “No, no, no. Not you too.”

“I think we all have a right to be worried.”

“I'm perfectly fine. It's been five years. That's long enough for a sabbatical, I think. I have a
routine. I take my medicine, I keep a strict diet. The doctor's say I'll probably live just as long as
anyone else.”

Helena pursed her lips. Her chest was pumping hot with anger, but if she disrespected Chilton, she
might never see the BSHCI or Hannibal Lecter ever again.

“May I ask if you intend to resume your full duties?” She asked.

“I can agree with my doctor that I can't do as much as I used to.” Chilton said, “I've agreed to keep
you on as my assistant director.”

Helena's teeth clenched. Assistant director – what a shitty title.

“I appreciate that.” She said, “You're starting today?”
“Yes, jumping right in.” He said. He rose from his desk, letting his finger run along the smooth, wooden edge, “Now, tell me, Dr. Mortise, how is our prize patient? I want to see Hannibal Lecter.”
1 month later

Will watched the transformation of the snow melting into early spring from the window of his house, content to sequester himself from the world with Winston as his only friend in between visits to the mental hospital.

Alana came by to visit once a week, sometimes twice. She was worried about him, but Will didn't let her see the extent of his depression. Only the unwashed dishes, and the clothes and pizza boxes piling up on the floor betrayed his state of mind. If she noticed, she didn't demand answers about his mental health. She came, brought meals to him, talked, reminded him she was there, and left him in peace.

When she was gone, he sat on the couch and felt the walls close in around him.

There had been a time when all the company he needed was his dogs. He'd wanted nothing more than to be left alone, to find a quiet place away from the chatter and pain of the world. Now, the house seemed empty without Hannibal at his side. He missed sitting in perfect silence, their hands laced together, their thoughts swimming and touching in the space between their heads. The harmony was gone with Hannibal, and so was his happiness.

The only thing that drew him from the house was the process of the divorce. He and Molly had to attend only a few court sessions to process the divorce since neither of them were contesting the separation. They hadn't owned much of anything jointly, and if they had, Will would have given it all to her without argument. She deserved it, after what he had put her through.

It was the final day of the court sessions, and the March wind had the taste of spring as he and Molly walked into the courthouse. They were quiet, solemn, like a funeral march.

“This is it.” She said, stopping before the closed door of the courtroom.

“Yeah.”

“I don't suppose we'll be seeing each other after today.” She said.

“It's probably best.” He agreed.

She reached for the door, but he grabbed her hand. Their fingers touched for several moments before he withdrew his hand.

“Sorry, I just … I've been meaning to ask you …”

“Yes?”

“How's Walter taking all of this?”

Molly drew in a deep breath. “He's, um … It's hard for him, Will. I have to be honest. He's not taking it well.”
“I’m sorry. Maybe I should see him and-”

“No. That would be the worst thing you could do for him right now.”

Will ducked his head. He could feel her gaze drilling into his skull, and the hidden force of her anger.

“This must be hell for both of you. I’m sorry.” He said, hazarding a look into her eyes.

“You’ve said sorry a hundred times.” She said, crossing her arms, “But you’re not sorry. You’re selfish, Will. After today, you don’t care what happens to me or Walter because you’re going to go off and live your twisted little fairy tale. But it’s fine – I hope you enjoy this Bonnie and Clyde romance while it lasts.”

“That’s not true.” He whispered.

“Which part? That you don’t care, or that you’re selfish? Or that it’s not going to last?”

“That I don’t care.” He said, firmly, “Maybe I am selfish, but I do care about you, Molly. I loved you, but … I can’t anymore.”

“Do you know how shallow that sounds?”

“I don’t know what I can say to make you believe me, but I am truly sorry for everything I’ve put you through.”

He pulled the door of the courtroom open and strode down toward the tables at the front. His stomach pulled into a knot of dread as he considered her words and his own excitement at the prospect of the divorce being finalized. He was selfish, selfish as hell. He’d barely thought about Molly while he and Hannibal were on the road in Europe. He hadn’t thought about her when he had proposed to Hannibal. Despite his raging conscience, he wouldn’t think about her when he and Hannibal were once more gone from Baltimore.

~

A floor above the courtroom where Will and Molly’s divorce proceedings occurred, Hannibal Lecter and a prosecutor from the district attorney's office sat across from each other before Judge Murray. It would be the first and last hearing of this new case.

Judge Murray called the courtroom to order, “Case number 28757, the State of Maryland vs. Hannibal Lecter. The charges are as follows: kidnapping, false imprisonment, criminal harassment, assault and battery, and thirteen counts of murder in the first degree. Prosecutor, you may begin with your statements.”

The representative from the DA was one Prosecutor Alan McDaniels. McDaniels had served as prosecutor at Hannibal’s original trial, and thus, had detailed knowledge of the case. He’d been appointed to oversee the new case with consent from anyone involved.

“Thank you, Judge Murray.” McDaniels said, rising from his chair, “Judge, the reason for this hearing is determine whether there is enough evidence to conclude whether Hannibal Lecter should go to trial for these charges. Already, it is unnecessary as there is a multitude of evidence against
the accused. We all know who Hannibal Lecter is. He's already serving a life sentence at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane under the auspices of a declaration of insanity. There's no question whether or not he's guilty. We have collected forensic evidence from the house he was seized at in Madrid, Spain, included but not limited to, human remains in his freezer. He gave the FBI a list of names of the thirteen men and women he killed while abroad. He's admitted it himself. As for the charges of kidnapping, assault, and false imprisonment, we have photographic and forensic evidence, and a statement from the victim's mouth, affirming that Hannibal Lecter imprisoned, abused, and raped him over a five year period. Your Honor, this is extreme. Hannibal Lecter has done just about everything he can to his victim, Will Graham, without killing and eating him like all his other victims. It deserves worse than a jail sentence.”

“Thank you, Mr. McDaniels.” Judge Murray said. He turned to Byron, “Mr. Metcalf, how does your client intend to plead?”

Byron rose from his chair. As he moved around the table to face the judge, he smoothed down his tie and buttoned his suit jacket, “Your Honor, we intend to plead guilty on all charges. I think we can all agree with Prosecutor McDaniels – a trial is unnecessary. The forensic and physical evidence is overwhelming, and overshadowed by my client's former crimes and reputation. However, my client has already been proven insane, therefore, I make the motion that he remain at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally insane for the remainder of his sentence, or rather, the remainder of his life. Due to his insanity, my client requires the care of medical professionals and the special treatment his mental state requires. That's all I have.”

“Thank you, Mr. Metcalf.” Judge Murray said.

Byron returned to the table and sat down next to Hannibal. He flashed his client a smile.

“Taking both sides into consideration, I am going to approve Mr. Metcalf's request that his client remain detained at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane and that these crimes for which he stands accused be added to his list of proven offenses. This court is adjourned.”

Judge Murray banged his gavel, and disappeared into his office.

McDaniels began to load his briefcase. He glanced over at Byron, “Not much has changed in five years, I see.”

“Nothing ever does.” Byron said, spinning his chair to face the prosecutor, “Disappointed you can't have another pissing contest with me in court?”

“Not in the least.” McDaniels said, shaking his head, “This time, Hannibal Lecter stays behind bars. I'm satisfied with that.”

“Well, good for you.” Byron said.

McDaniels hauled his briefcase from the desk and turned to leave. He paused in the aisle to glare at Hannibal. “I know you aren't crazy.” He said, “But we've got you now, and at least I can rest easy knowing that you won't be hurting anyone else.”

As he walked away, Hannibal raised his eyebrows and chuckled.

“He's full of hot air, that guy.” Byron said, “Well, are you satisfied with the hearing?”

“Yes.” Hannibal said, “Exactly as I expected and wanted.”

“Good. I hope you can still pay for all the hours of hard work I did this time around.” Byron said,
“Of course.”

“I don't want to ask where the money is coming from.” Byron said, rising from his chair. He began to stack his files and notebooks back into his briefcase, “They froze all your accounts Stateside.”

“Then don't ask.”

Byron glanced over his shoulder when he heard the courtroom door slam shut. “Well, there's your boyfriend now.” He said.

Hannibal turned around in his chair to see Will striding down the aisle. He smiled at the expression of joy and freedom on Will's face.

“I just got out of court with Molly.” Will said as he reached the table, “It's all finalized.”

“I'll get out of your way.” Byron said. He turned to Hannibal, “Hannibal, it's always a pleasure working for you. I'll see you again soon, I'm sure.”

“Please do, Byron. I couldn't ask for a better representative.”

Byron left the courtroom, and Will took the chair next to Hannibal. He ignored the orderlies from the hospital hovering behind them, and leaned in to kiss Hannibal. Their lips joined for brief seconds before Jason interrupted.

“We have to get back to hospital. Let's go, Lecter.”

Elliot and Jason urged Hannibal to his feet and began to truss him up in the straight-jacket and mask.

“Shall you come back with us, and we'll discuss it?” Hannibal asked Will.

“Yes. I'm free the rest of the day.” Will said.

“Perfect.” Hannibal said, as they lowered the mask over his face.

~

Will was forced to wait for Hannibal to be put back into his cell, and to go through security before he could enter the Hannibal's room. It had been an hour since they'd left the courthouse by the time he stepped inside the room.

“It takes too long to get in here.” Will complained as he met Hannibal at the glass.

“The price of privacy.”

“Back when I came to ask you to help with the Red Dragon, all I had to do was flash my FBI ID.”

“Back then you despised me.”

Will suppressed a coy smile, “I suppose it's a fair trade, then.”
“So, tell me about divorce court.” Hannibal said, “How did it go?”

“Smoothly enough for divorce court. Molly's pissed as all hell, of course. There's not much I can do about it.”

“Mmm.” Hannibal murmured, disinterested about Molly.

“It makes me realize ...” Will said.

“What?”

“You finally succeeded.”

“In what?”

“In taking everything out of my life that isn't you.”

“Are you bitter about that?”

Will shrugged, genuinely considering the question. It wasn't something he'd given much thought; it had just … happened.

“No.” He said, at last, “I'm happy … or I was happy with my life.”

“You will be again. I promise.”

“You shouldn't make promises you're not sure you can keep.” Will said, casting Hannibal dubious gaze.

“You told me you believe I will find away. Your faith in me gives me confidence I will.” Hannibal said, smiling briefly.

“I was standing outside when your hearing was in session.” Will remarked.

“Yes?”

“I heard you plead guilty to hurting me.”

“It was what I had to do to avoid trial. A trial would have been utterly pointless, Will. It would only take much longer to prove my guilt and to remand me once again to this institution.”

“I told Jack and everyone at the FBI it was true.”

“Good. Then you've done what I asked.”

“For the rest my life, the world is going to see me as a victim.”

“Is that what really bothers you?”

Will sighed and scraped a hand through his hair, “No. It's the fact that it's not true.”

“I have repeated the rationale many times.” Hannibal said, gently, “I am unwilling, immutably so, to see you behind the bars of this institution.”

“I know what the rationale is.” Will snapped.

They were quiet for several moments. Will wondered if Hannibal could even understand his
frustration. To a mind like Hannibal's, the plan made logical sense. The best solution for a bad hand of cards. The only emotion that played a role was Hannibal's endless love for him.

“I'm sorry.” Will said, lifting an apologetic gaze to Hannibal, “I'm just … frustrated. I spend every day sitting at home by myself thinking about how things used to be, and wondering when – and if – they'll be that way again. Wondering if I can keep doing it.”

“Surrender is the end of this, Will.” Hannibal said, his voice quiet but firm, “The moment you decide that it's over, it is, and I can no longer help you.”

“It's not over.” Will said, “I know it's not. I'm too invested to let it be over.”

“As am I.”

“You sat in here for three years.” Will said, waving a hand to the cell, “Waiting, wondering. Didn't you ever start thinking you would never see me again?”

“Of course.” Hannibal said, “Three years is incremental in the scope of the universe, but behind this glass, it has the quality of a lifetime. However, I realized that allowing doubt to control my actions would only lead to a life of despair and longing. I fixed my eyes on a goal. I waited, and in my waiting, I was rewarded. We all must have faith in something, even if it is just the abstract idea of freedom and satisfaction. If there were not a light at the end of the tunnel, we would all be stumbling about in the darkness.”

“It's only been two months, and it already feels like an eternity.”

“Yes, but we cannot focus on our present suffering. Life is out there, Will, not in here. And I intend to live every last second of it out in that vast wild. Will you help me do that?”

Will lifted his chin. “Yes. I think I can.”

~

Alana parked just behind Will's truck. When she climbed out of the car, she was greeted by a jumping, yipping Winston. The driveway was a muddy mess since the warmth of spring had melted all the snow, and she had to back up to avoid getting his dirty paws on the front of her Versace coat.

The screen door swung open and Will stepped out onto the porch to call Winston back. He held the dog at bay as she joined him on the porch.

“Sorry about that.” He said, rubbing Winston's shoulder, “I think the fresh spring air is turning him into a puppy again.”

“That's quite all right.” She said, bending to pet Winston's head, “I'm glad to see him happy.”

“Did you want to come in?” He asked.

“Yes. I brought these.” She said, holding up a Tupperware container of muffins.

“They look good. Homemade?” He asked, as he led her inside.
"Yes. Margot and I took some baking classes together. Neither of us are very good cooks, but we are expanding our horizons. You'll have to let me know if we did good or not."

"I'm sure they're delicious.” He said.

He put the container in the fridge and poured them both glasses of cider.

"You look good.” Alana observed as she took off her coat by the door.

"Thanks.” He said, “I feel good.”

"Anything in particular putting you in good spirits?” She asked.

"The divorce went through today.”

She joined him at the table, and took a sip of her cider to hide any personal opinions that might have come to the surface. She'd never known Molly Foster well, but she could tell Molly was a good, strong woman. She had been able to put a ring on Will's finger, after all. That alone was worth some respect.

"So did Hannibal's guilty verdict.” She pointed out.

"He plead out.” Will said, raising a finger.

"No use in wasting tax payer money and time on a trial I suppose.” Alana said.

"That's what he said.”

"You're still going to see him.”

"Yes.”

Will met her gaze over the rim of his glass, unperturbed by the note of distaste in her voice.

"Will, I don't understand.” She admitted, “You said in your statement that he did all the things we accused him of, then you continue to visit him almost every day. Can I ask why?”

"You don't understand our relationship.” Will said, “You never did.”

"It's toxic.” Alana said, “He's abusive and manipulative and-”

“I really enjoy these visits, Alana. But I can't enjoy them if you're just here to harp on me about Hannibal.” Will said, getting up from his chair and leaving his cider to grow warm.

"I'm not harping on you.” Alana said, turning in her chair to watch him pace, “I'm worried about you because you're my friend.”

"Why don't you just put it under the list of reasons why you think I'm unstable, and not dating material?” He said.

His back was turned to her as he toyed with the fishing lure half finished on the desk.

"Please don't tell me you're still holding onto that.” She said.

He sighed, “I'm not. Sorry.”

She rose from her chair and crossed the room to join him by the table. The fishing lure he was
tying was orange and black feathers. The hook glinted sharp and silver in the sunlight.

“Are you going to take it up again?” She asked.

“Yeah, I think I will.” He said, casting her a smile, “I haven't been out of the house much the past two months, only to go to court and to see Hannibal.”

“Good, you need something to take your mind off of things. Help you heal.”

“Hannibal reminded me of it today.” Will said, lifting his gaze to the vast yard in front of the house, “I can't sit around here anymore, worrying about the future. I'm going to live my life out there, in the vast wild.”

“That's what Hannibal said?” Alana asked. A shadow of dread crossed her mind as she imagined those words coming from Hannibal's mouth. In that voice, they sounded much more like a threat.

“Mm.” Will grunted.

“Was he saying that about you, or him?” She pressed.

Will didn't seem to have heard her. His eyes were distant as he smiled, “I've got plenty of lures and the river not far from here. I'll spend my days out there, until this is all over.”

“What, in your opinion, is the point when this is all over?”

Will looked up suddenly, as if waking from a daydream. He left the lure unfinished and walked back to the kitchen.

“Let's have one of those muffins.” He suggested, cheerfully, “I'm hungry.”

~

Over the course of the previous month, Helena had created a consistent schedule for her sessions with Hannibal. The time of their conversations occurred while her schedule for the rest of the hospital was open, and they used an observation room away from the rest. The need for secrecy had increased since Chilton's return. Helena knew he had his greedy eyes set on Hannibal. If he found out about the *quid pro quo* status of their meetings, he would try to quash them immediately.

Helena washed down Advil as Elliot and Jason rolled Hannibal into the room. They strapped him into the chair, but Elliot's gaze lingered as they left. She flicked an annoyed gaze at his back. It was almost time to cut him loose.

“Something wrong, Doctor?” Hannibal asked, turning his gaze to the Advil bottle in her hand.

“Headache. Nothing I can't handle.” She said, opening her folder and note she was compiling from their sessions.

“It could be stress.”

“It probably is.” Helena said, “Chilton is always breathing down my neck like a goddamn dragon.”

“He made his attempt to analyze me years ago.” Hannibal said, smirking, “I remain unimpressed –
as did most of the readers. Have you read his book on me? It's mostly lies.”

“I have.” Helena said, “Some if it a bit fantastical.”

“They say truth is stranger than fiction, but that is not the case with Chilton's book. He wanted to seize the opportunity to launch his career into fame, but since he had only bare knowledge of my mind and how I operate, he was forced to embellish the details.”

“You seem pleased.”

“Let's say Dr. Chilton and I have never seen eye-to-eye.”

“Why not?”

“Do you need to ask that question? He's clumsy, blunt. It was almost too easy to trap him.”

“You think he's below you.” Helena said, “What does one have to do, may I ask, to get to your level?”

“It's not so much a matter of doing as it is understanding.”

“You want everyone to see the world the way you do.”

“But they cannot, and therein, lies the problem.”

“No one could ever achieve it, then.” Helena said, “We all have our own viewpoints, our own belief system. I've been a psychologist long enough to know that everyone tells the same story a different way.”

“You are right.”

“Then, it's impossible.”

Hannibal smiled at her. He liked it that way, she thought, scribbling out new notes. He fancied himself some kind of god.

“Forget Chilton.” Hannibal said, “He's of no consequence. Tell me about yourself.”

“What's the question?”

“I want you to tell me about a painful moment. The moment you felt most helpless and vulnerable.”

Helena back stiffened. The memory he was searching for came to front of her mind immediately, sending a wash of pain and shame through her. She'd spent the last month talking about her childhood and parts of college, but none of it had been as painful as what she now braced herself for. In retelling the painful moments of childhood, she realized she'd made peace with those demons long ago. But some things, some wounds, would never fully heal.

“I can see you've thought of something.”

“It's not something I could ever forget. You're asking a lot.”

Hannibal considered it for a moment before he said, “If you tell me this, I will tell you about my sister.”
“Sure you wanna play that card?” She asked, despite the flutter of excitement in her chest, “I haven’t gotten one word about her out of you in a whole month.”

“I will tell you.”

She pursed her lips. The silence lengthened for several moments as she gathered her courage. At last, she cleared her throat and began, “I had just finished my undergraduate degree, and was living with a room mate in Baltimore. I was twenty-three, and at the time I thought that was very grown up. I had the summer to relax before I started on my Masters degree. Me and my friends were out partying almost every weekend, trying out different clubs and having fun. One night, we were dancing and a guy came up to me. He was very handsome, and it looked like he had money. He told me I was pretty, and asked for a dance. You've probably never been clubbing, but let me tell you, you get approached by a lot of guys who tell you you're pretty and ask for a dance. I danced with a lot of hot guys, and that was the end of it. But this guy, this rich fucking prick in designer clothes and a watch worth more than my apartment on his wrist, was really, really into me.”

“Let me guess.” Hannibal interjected, “You danced the night away, and when the evening was over, he wanted to take you home.”

“Something like that. Up until then, he'd acted nice and respectful – for being in a club, that is.”

“He took you home?”

“Yes. By this time, I was a little tipsy and my adrenaline was racing. I wasn't thinking straight. I asked if he wanted to come in. He did, so we went up and had another drink. We started talking, and somehow I told him that I was interested in some kinky stuff. We started making out, not doing much because I was half-drunk. But then, he kept pushing me to do more, and finally we went to the bedroom. I had a weird feeling, but I thought it was just the alcohol. Then he pinned me down and started choking me, saying he was going to do all of those things we had just been talking about.”

“Did he?”

Helena opened her eyes. Her cheeks were hot with shame, and Hannibal was gazing directly at her.

“Yes.”

“He raped you.”

She swallowed hard, “It took me years to figure out that it was rape. I thought because I danced with him and asked him to come home with me that I'd … somehow asked for it.”

“Did you tell him you did not want to do these things with him?”

“Yes.”

“Then, in quantifiable terms, it was rape.”

She narrowed her eyes at him, “What do you know about respecting someone's consent? You plead guilty to abusing Will Graham.”

“I was not interested in going through another trial. The end result would have been the same – the jury would find me guilty and I would remain here for the rest of my life just as I am to do now that I have plead guilty.”
“Are you telling me you didn't rape him?”

Hannibal turned his gaze back to the wall, his profile like flint.

“You're a cold-blooded killer. You're a cannibal, for Christ's sake.” Helena said, “How can you consider yourself better than a rapist?”

“Rapists are the kind of people of I eat for dinner, Helena. Haven't you learned anything from these sessions?”

Helena picked up her pen again. “Right.” She murmured.

“That kind of life-altering event can cause extensive damage.” Hannibal said, “Were you depressed? Angry?”

“I despised myself. Like I said, I thought I let it happen. My mother is a strong, loving woman, but she taught me to keep my chin up and forge on, no matter the circumstances. Weakness wasn't tolerated because there was no room for it in our lives. All I ever heard was 'no use crying over spilled milk', ‘the show must go on’, and so on. I did my best to bury what happened and moved on. I never told anyone about it.”

“Never?”

“No, not until now.”

He was quiet for several moments, and she wondered if that honesty had shocked him.

“I've heard many things from my patients.” He said, “Stories like this one. The most important thing, is to find the way to take your power back. How did you take your power back, Helena?”

“I was unhappy with myself for a long time, but I threw myself into my studies for my Master's degree. While I was studying psychology, the topic of therapy tactics for a victim of abuse inevitably came around. I was in clinical psychology, but a lot of the people I deal with have abuse in their childhoods. While reading the material and learning how to understand these people, I had a breakthrough. I realized what had happened wasn't my fault, and over time, the wounds began to heal. Of course, I'm still very careful about who I let near me, but I don't hate myself anymore.”

“You have never seen a therapist.” Hannibal said, “You could have found peace much sooner.”

“You're thinking about what you would have advised me to do if you had been my therapist?” She asked, curiously.

“Of course. I often think of the many patients I've had over the years and the treatment I prescribed – which ones were a success, and which ones weren't.”

“Some people classify you as a sadist.” Helena pointed out, “People with the mental defects that you have can't feel emotion or empathy.”

“I have never been diagnosed or labeled, not officially. What defects I do or do not have are a matter of pure speculation.”

“Here's the question, then – what did you really want for your patients? You love to toy with people, Hannibal. Don't tell me you didn't see a whole plethora of possibilities for mind games.”

“I wanted what every therapist wants – an effective, lasting treatment for my patients. Whether that
treatment was unorthodox or not doesn't negate my motivations.”

“I know you treated Mason Verger, who is also a maniac. What kind of treatment could you possibly want for him?”

“Mason walked into that treatment, all on his own.” Hannibal said, flashing her a smug smile.

“Apparently so did Alana and Margot Verger.”

“I won't remark any further on the Vergers as Alana has always held up her end of our bargain.”

Helena considered the reply. His thought process about therapy surprised her. She wanted to ask a dozen more questions, but she had to choose her words carefully. The moment she began overflowing with questions, he would cut her off and demand she uphold her side of the agreement.

She steered the conversation back to herself. “If you had been treating me, what would you have advised me to do?”

“The obvious, of course.” He said, “Take your power back.”

“You mean kill him.”

“Bitterness is toxic. You spent years berating yourself for the rape. Had you flushed it from your system sooner, you may not be so scarred today.”

“You think revenge is a good form of therapy?”

“I think we must all face our demons, and to face them literally is a chance not all of us are afforded – and so we should take advantage of the chance should it arise.”

“I've never seen him again.” Helena said, “It's been so long, I can hardly remember his face. But I do remember his voice – sometimes I still wake up in a cold sweat after hearing it in a dream.”

“So you haven't taken your power back.”

Helena blew out a sigh. Rising from her chair, she paced in front of him to pin him with a cool gaze. “Enough about me. You said you would tell me about your sister.”

Hannibal gazed at her, expressionless. Immediately anger rose in her chest as she began to wonder if he would refuse again.

Suddenly, he sat forward as far as the restraints would allow him, “I did not kill her.” He whispered, “But I did eat her.”

Helena blinked in shock at his unexpected honesty. She rushed back to her notepad and scribbled down his exact words.

“How did that happen?” She asked, her voice trembling.

He fell back against the chair and blew out a sigh. “Perhaps that is a conversation for another day.”

“You said you would tell me about her.” She snapped, her cheeks instantly hot with anger.

“And I did. I'd like to go back to my cell now.”

“You fucking bastard.” She ground out, “You got the entire story about the asshole who raped me,
“You didn't have to tell me the whole story. You could have condensed it to two sentences if you had been so inclined.”

“This isn't going to work if you can't follow the rules.” She said.

“Considering that these conversations have never officially happened, there are no rules written in stone. I have answered every question you asked me. In fact, I have given you more than a psychiatrist of your caliber deserves.”

“Of my caliber?”

“You're dull, Dr. Mortise. You couldn't understand what motivates me if you studied me for ten years. It's no fault of yours, it's simply the way you are.”

She broke away from the desk and marched to the door. Flinging it open, she shouted for Elliot and Jason to come take Hannibal back to his cell. The orderlies rushed into the room, wide-eyed.

They unstrapped Hannibal and moved him to the cart with swift efficiency as Helena stewed in the corner. Hannibal smirked at her as they strapped him down. He didn't stop smiling all the way back to his cell. He had maneuvered Helena into the position he wanted her; she just needed another few nudges to send her toppling over the edge.

Chapter End Notes

Hey, everyone, I just wanted to write a little note here at the end because of the content of this chapter, regarding Helena. I was very uncertain about writing this part about Helena being raped because I know it is a very sensitive subject, and some people may be adversely affected by reading stuff like this. I also was a bit worried because I didn't want to make it seem like Helena is a person who enjoyed bdsm because she was abused or something like that. That's not my standpoint on abuse, or bdsm. The angle with Helena is how the experience changed her, and how it splits her motivations when it comes to psychiatry and Hannibal. I don't want to ramble on about how I created the character, just wanted to make sure everyone was clear on my intentions with her. Thank you :)}
The overhead lights in the lab reflected off the white and metal surfaces, exacerbating Jack's headache. He'd drunk a bit too much whiskey last night before nodding off, but these days, alcohol was better company than the case files sitting on his desk.

He'd established the habit of taking work home with him after Bella passed, first as a way to distract himself, and later, to fill the emptiness. The house wasn't the same without her; it never would be. But this was the first time he'd regretted taking a copy of the case files home.

“You want to see all of it?” Jimmy asked.

“Yes.” Jack said, “I know Hannibal has been convicted, but this still doesn't smell right to me. I need to see everything for my own peace of mind.”

Jimmy and Brian pulled the lid off a dozen cardboard evidence boxes, and an assistant rolled in two clothing racks.

“This is everything?”

“There's a lot of expensive shit in these boxes.” Brian said. He pulled a small, white marble statue from one of the boxes, “This is an original sculpture.”

“Just because Hannibal wasn't living large didn't mean he wasn't living expensively.” Jimmy added, “What the furnishings lacked in multitude, they made up for in class. You should have seen some of the wine bottles in the fridge. It's a crying shame they're going to go to waste in evidence boxes.”

“Anything personal in those boxes?” Jack asked, “Photos, journals, that sort of thing?”

“No, nothing like that.” Brian said, “According to the guys in Madrid, the house looked like it just stepped out of an interior design magazine. All the flourish, no personal touches.”

“My guess is, they hadn't been there long.” Jimmy said, “If the information Hannibal gave you is correct, they'd moved almost fifteen times in the past five years.”

Jack scrubbed a hand over his jaw, “It doesn't smell right.”

“Something weird.” Brian said. He went to one of the boxes and pulled out a small scrap of fabric, “We did find this.”

He tossed it to Jack, who caught it mid-air. The material was silk and fringed with lace, all of it white except for a few pink details. When he unfolded it, he quickly realized he was holding a pair of sexy underwear. He gaped at it for a few moments before he throwing it back to Brian.

“I already know what Hannibal was doing … to Will.” He said, in a low voice, “I don't need visual aids.”

“It's just weird, isn't it?” Brian asked, “Sexy lingerie is the kind of thing you do when you're trying to treat your partner. Rape doesn't usually come with frills.”

“Maybe Hannibal wanted to put frills on the fantasy.” Jack said, “Anything else like that?”

Brian tilted the box so that Jack cold see over the edge, “There's a whole box of it.”
“Shit.” Jack muttered.

He paced to the clothing racks and looked through some of the fabrics. All of the tags boasted expensive name brands. He recognized Hannibal's affinity for bright colors and patterns on the first rack, but the second rack was full of darker, earth colors. He checked the tag. Size small.

“What is it?” Jimmy asked.

“Does this look like something Hannibal would wear?” Jack asked, yanking a pair of dark wash jeans paired with a gray cardigan from the rack.

“I'm not fashion expert,” Jimmy said, “But Hannibal is, and someone with his tastes would probably throw up if they wore that.”

“So,” Jack said, shoving the hanger back on the rack, “Hannibal says he's keeping Will tied up as his personal plaything for five years. He's also putting him in fancy clothes and racy underwear.”

Jimmy motioned to a box filled with jewelry, watches, and other accessories, “We've got a lot of really expensive jewelry here too.” He plucked a bracelet inlaid with diamonds and gold piping from the pile. “This doesn't exactly fit Hannibal's style, either.”

“Stalkers are known for buying the object of their fantasies nice things.” Brian said.

“Hannibal isn't a stalker. He's a psychopath, and psychopaths don't do nice things for other people. They can't fake the emotion. They can't pretend to care.”

“Jack, what are you trying to say?” Brian asked, “We've already been through this whole is he guilty, is he not guilty routine with Will. Do you really wanted to jump the gun like that again?”

“I'm not jumping the gun. I'm interpreting the evidence.” Jack said, “I want to look through every single one of these boxes. I have to make a phone call.”

He marched out of the lab before either Jimmy nor Brian could protest. He pulled his phone out of his pocket and began to dial as he walked. He didn't see Freddie until they collided coming around the corner toward each other.

“Freddie, how did you get down here?”

She rubbed her shoulder, and gave him a smug smile, “You did give me this visitors pass.” She tugged on the badge pinned to her collar.

“That doesn't mean you can come into the lab.” He said, waving her back the way she came, “It's authorized personnel only.”

She huffed as he led her out into the hallway, “Jack, I can't get the full story like you promised me if I can't get everything I need for the article.”

“You can ask me questions if you want to know.”

“You're not guaranteed to tell me everything.”

“Some things I do not want leaked to the press.”

“Like what?” She challenged, poising her hands on her hips, “Anything that you just saw in there?”

“Look, I appreciate that you've steered your articles away from the misconduct bullshit, but that
doesn't mean I'll tell you every detail of the investigation.” Jack said, “Ask me what you want to know, and I may or may not answer it. Then you can leave.”

“Did you see my last article?” She asked.

“I've been a little busy.”
“Will Graham gave me a quote.”

“Did he?”

“Yes. Do you want to know what it is?”

Jack sighed, and crossed his arms, “Get to the point, Lounds. I have real police business to attend to.”

“I asked him if Hannibal was in love with him. He said, that's not a question.”

“Hannibal did hold him captive for five years.” Jack said, “Sexual abuse isn't about love, it's about power; but a lot of people don't see it that way. Will probably just doesn't want to talk about the trauma.”

“Well, here's another thing I thought you might find interesting – he's been visiting Hannibal for the past two months. Ever since he was released from police custody, here's been there almost every day.”

“What?”

“Maybe Will doesn't want to talk to me, but he sure as hell isn't traumatized.” Freddie said, “While you've been off conducted “real police business,” you've left the biggest question mark in your investigation unattended. My suggestion – go check up on what's happening at the Baltimore State Hospital. It might surprise you.”

Jack processed the information slowly, and then all at once. He began to shove past Freddie, his fingers trembling as he searched his contacts for Helena Mortise's number.

“Looks like I've been doing more useful investigation than you.” Freddie called after him, “Why don't you give me a quote about the investigation since I just tipped you off about Will?”

Jack spun around, pointing a finger in her face, “Here's my quote, Freddie. Will Graham is a victim. A victim of terrible abuse, and his mind has been so manipulated and warped, he probably doesn't know friend from foe. I want you to stay away from him. No more pictures, no more interviews until I know what's going on his head. Got it?”

Freddie reached into her pocket and clicked off the tape recorder. “Got it.”

~

Helena was intrigued when Jack called her. They hadn't spoken since she had offered her perspective on Will Graham. Jack hadn't been entirely pleased with her point of view. She could tell he was wrestling with the urge to believe Will was a complicit part of Hannibal's crimes. It was always hard to watch a friend walk down a dark path, harder still to wield some kind of authority
but no power to use it.

She agreed to have a sit-down with him to discuss Will and Hannibal.

He arrived an hour later. His expression was concerned as he sat down across from her, and accepted her offer of coffee.

“What can I do for you?” She asked as she poured two cups of coffee, “You said on the phone it was about Will Graham.”

“All of our investigative power had been focused on Hannibal and Madrid.” Jack said. He accepted the cup of coffee with a nod, “Now that Hannibal has been sentenced, we're left with the peripheral parts of the investigation, and I've realized we may have neglected the ongoing situation.”

“You didn't know he was visiting here, did you?”

Jack sighed, “No.”

“He's been here almost every day for the past month.” Helena said, “Now that Hannibal's rights to privacy as been restored – thanks to you – I can't keep tabs on their conversations anymore. I don't know what they've been saying, if that's what you're hear to ask.”

“What's your observations of him?” Jack asked.

“He seems content to come visit every day.” Helena said, “Sometimes he's frustrated by all the security he has to go through, but other than that, he seems stable and happy.”

Jack rubbed his fingertips over his forehead and uttered another low sigh.

“Can I ask … Has something happened?” Helena asked.

“The more I look at the situation, the more it casts a bad light on Will.” Jack said, “I'm trying to be objective, but every angle I come at it from makes me think Will is hiding something.”

“Like what?”

“His behavior is all wrong for a victim.” Jack said, “He's coming here of his own volition, he isn't seeking professional help or victim's counseling. He's divorced his wife, and now we've gotten the evidence from the house shipped here from Madrid, and none of it looks good.”

“Why is that?”

“It looks like two men living together as a goddamn couple.” Jack said, rising from the chair. He paced to the window and gazed out at the yard shining with afternoon warmth, “We've got nice clothes and books, some jewelry … even some racy undergarments.”

“Lingerie?” Helena asked, “Really?”

“Unfortunately, yes.”

“Hannibal is a creature of comfort.” Helena said, spreading her hands, “He probably loves that sort of thing.”

“They're not his.”

“Oh, I know.” Helena said, “I'm talking about his sex life, his fantasies. If someone is going to get
him in the sack, they damn well better thrill him. The moment you become boring, he's disinterested.”

Jack froze. A thought occurred to him, a thought which had never entered his brain.

“Dr. Mortise …”

“Yes?”

“What you're saying is … for someone to interest Hannibal, they have to remain exciting, appealing.”

“Yes. He's as curious as a child, going from one toy to the next. It actually surprises me that he's willing to settle on one person.”

“You can only rape someone so many ways.” Jack whispered.

“What?”

“I said,” Jack said, turning slowly to face her, “you can only rape someone so many ways.”

“You're right.” Helena said, “That's why I've never bought the story that he was raping Will for five years. If Will wasn't cooperating to continue making sex interesting and different and thrilling, Hannibal would have gotten bored and killed him long ago.”

“Shit.” Jack whispered.

“Another reason why I can't understand his relationship to Will.” Helena added, “He has to know that at some point, someone is going to realize that he's lying about raping Will. But why lie? He's grandiose, he's elaborate. He would love it if the whole world bought Freddie Lounds's tale of 'murder husbands'.”

“But not if they were caught.”

“The only reason to lie, though, is to avoid Will's going to prison.” Helena said, “I think all of the doctors who have tried to diagnose him as a psychopath and a sadist are completely wrong. They have to be. Hannibal has sacrificed himself for Will, Jack, and to be willing to sacrifice yourself, you have to have emotion and the ability to love. There's no question about it. He would rather tell the whole world that he's a sadistic rapist than put Will behind bars with him.”

“Goddamnit.” Jack whispered. His mind raced as Helena's theorizing rapidly filled the gaping holes in the entire investigation. It was the only version that made sense. “I have to talk to Will.”

He rushed toward the door, but Helena jumped up from the desk, “Jack, wait.”

“What?”

“It's useless.” She said, “You can't persuade Will.”

“Why not?”

“Because …” She gazed down at the papers on her desk for several moments before meeting his expectant expression, “Will is too far gone. He proposed, Jack. He's going to marry Hannibal, and the ceremony is happening in three days.”
Hannibal was immersed in one of the books Will had brought on his last visit when the door to his room opened to admit Chilton. Hannibal smiled and set his book aside. He'd already had one visit with the mangled doctor, which had gone extremely well in his opinion – probably not in Chilton's.

“Hello, Frederick.” He said, rising from his bed, “How are the kidneys today? … Or are those some of the organs you are missing?”

“You're very funny, Hannibal.” Chilton said, “How's the junk? Blue, I'll bet. I'm sure it's hard, getting to see Will, but not getting to fuck him anymore.”

“We could trade insults all day, but as much as I'd enjoy that, I'd rather read my book.” Hannibal said, “What do you want?”

Chilton pulled a piece of paper out from behind his back and pressed it flat against the glass. Hannibal rose from his bed and crossed the room to peer at the paper. It was a print-out of the latest tattlecrime article by Freddie Lounds. The headline purported conflict in the investigation.

“You don't have to read the whole thing.” Chilton said, snatching the paper from the glass, “Freddie Lounds is straddling the fence with her alliance with the police. She theorizes the police have reason to believe Will might be guilty, but they are not following the lead. According to this article, the furnishing from your Spanish home look … questionable.”

“What point are you attempting to make, Frederick. You're boring me.”

“Freddie is building the case for her notorious 'murder husbands'.“

“Good for Freddie. I know how the public loves to indulge in a bit of homoerotic horror. She may publish another book yet.”

“Are you feeding her these stories?” Chilton asked.

“Freddie has become much smarter in five years time. It seems, she has managed to figure things out all on her own this time.”

“Lips are flapping somewhere.” Chilton said, tilting his head.

“They never do cease. Did you come here to flap your lips about my relationship to Will, or did you have something intelligent to say?”

“Ah, yes. It's Dr. Mortise. I've decided to keep her on as my assistant at my doctor's request, but I'm beginning to wonder if I've made a mistake.”

“She's an intelligent, beautiful woman. I thought you would enjoy objectifying her to your heart's content, Frederick.”

“I know about your little meetings.” Chilton hissed.

“She's my doctor. She's providing me with the therapy my … condition needs.”

Hannibal chuckled. Doctors like Chilton loved the word “condition.” It was a catch-all phrase for “you're sick and you need help.”
“Therapy my ass.” Chilton sneered, “I know how you operate. When you were committed eight years ago, you didn't let one single doctor analyze you. Why would you allow it now? Especially from that airhead?”

“It upsets you that she got to me first.” Hannibal said, joining Chilton at the glass. He clicked his tongue softly, “It's a shame nearly dying didn't shrink your ego a bit, Frederick.”

“The reason I'm not dead is because I haven't changed my aggressive tactics.” Chilton said, drawing himself up to full height, “I'm reassigning you as my patient, starting now.”

“I believe I still have some rights, and I'd like to exercise those rights. It would be a conflict of interest for you to treat me, considering I framed you for my crimes. Objectively, you couldn't treat me without someone whispering revenge.”

“I am the director of this hospital and-”

The door swung open again, and Jack Crawford's shoulders filled the frame. His face was cast in shadow, but his eyes burned through the darkness, “Hannibal, we need to talk.”

“Agent Crawford, what has happened?” Chilton asked.

“I need to speak to Hannibal.” Jack said, striding across the room, “Alone.”

“Perhaps a third party witness would be a good idea.”

Jack's gaze cut to Chilton with simmering anger and a withering threat, “I said alone.”

Chilton lifted his chin, “As you wish.”

As soon as the door shut on Frederick's heels, Jack stepped up to the glass. His voice was a harsh whisper, “What have you done to him?”

“To whom?”

“Don't act stupid. You know I'm talking about Will.”

“Ah.” Hannibal said. He lifted his left hand to reveal the gold band around his fourth finger, “You must be talking about this.”

“I want to know what you did to make Will think he wants to marry you.”

“I did nothing to him.” Hannibal said, “Except guide him to his true self and free him from perishing, earthly restraints.”

“Done nothing to him?” Jack scoffed, “From the day you met him you have done your best to break him, starting with your unethical therapy, up until the day you sent Francis Dolarhyde to kill his family. You've been gone for five years; I don't believe for one second that your habit of manipulating and hurting him has changed.”

“I only want what's best for Will. I do care for him, you see.”

“If you cared for him, you would have let him go a long time ago.”

“On the contrary, Will needed my help to see beyond this life and it's moral obligations. He's much happier now, I can assure you.”
“I'll decide that for myself.”

“Don't waste your breath, Jack. If you intend to go see Will in some valiant – but truly vain – effort to change his mind, don't. He won't be dissuaded.”

“Maybe you're just trying to discourage me because you're worried he'll break free of your hold on him, and break off the engagement.”

“No, I don't think so.”

“Then what is it that you want? I already made one deal with you, Hannibal. I'm sure I can make another. Is it the walk outside that you want?”

Hannibal cocked his head, as if considering the proposition. Jack waited with bated breath until, at last, Hannibal shook his head, “No. I'm perfectly content with my books, my drawings, and my visits with Will.”

Jack cursed under his breath. He paced the length of the glass, rubbing an anxious hand over the back of his head and neck. Hannibal watched him with a cool gaze, his hands clasped loosely behind his back.

“We all want so many things in life. It's a shame you'll never get all of them, and that after everything you've done to stop me, I'll still emerge with all the things I've wanted.” Hannibal said, a smile touching his lips, “Oh the irony. You have to appreciate it, Jack. I'm in here, free as a bird, and you're out there, trapped by morality and the righteous behavior your job requires from you. You'd much rather beat me to death than cooperate with the laws of your government, wouldn't you?”

“After everything you've done, yes, yes I would.” Jack said, turning a coal black glare on Hannibal.

“You did it once.” Hannibal whispered, “Wouldn't you love to do it again?”

“Yes, but I'm also interested in results.” Jack said, “At this point, I'd get only temporary satisfaction out of breaking every bone in your face. I want a lasting resolution – Will's freedom from you, and to break your hold on him forever. There must be something I can give you that you want.”

Hannibal sighed and tilted his head back, “Jack, why did you marry Bella?”

“What?”

“Your wife. Bella. Why did you marry her?”

“Because I loved her. She was everything I'd ever wanted and ....”

“Yes.” Hannibal said, turning his gaze back to Jack, “Everything you'd ever wanted in one beautiful, intoxicating woman. That's right.”

Jack's eyes narrowed.

“We've both known Will a long time, so you know what I mean when I say he can understand anyone and anything, no matter how dark it is. No matter how much it upsets him, he looks, he understands, he absorbs. When I met him, it was the first time I'd met someone who could understand me. It was as maddening as it was wonderful. My first reaction was to destroy it. Then I was curious, and finally, I let it go. I saw us as equals, and in freeing him, I freed myself to love him.”
“You're comparing my relationship with my wife to your relationship with Will?” Jack asked, his face twisting in disgust.

“I'm simply giving you a frame of reference. In all the years Bella was alive, you wouldn't have forsaken her for anything, no matter how much you wanted it.”

“You're devoted to seeing this thing to bitter end.”

“I am. I opened his eyes, Jack. I opened doors in his mind that he couldn't bring himself to touch. I led him to the light. In turn, he invaded me, parts of my soul that hadn't been touched in-”

“You don't have a soul.” Jack interrupted, “Will doesn't love you, but you've convinced yourself that he does. And maybe you've convinced him, too – but I am going to find a way to wake him up. I know Will, and this isn't him. The Will I know is a good person. He wouldn't let the things he sees and understands poison him.”

Jack turned his back to the glass and marched to the doors. He yanked the door open to leave, but Hannibal's voice made him pause.

“Jack?”

Jack turned a simmering gaze over his shoulder.

Hannibal stood at the glass, a smirk settled on the curve of his lips. “Do your worst.” He whispered.

~

The formal wear boutique in downtown Baltimore specialized in custom tailored suits and gowns that could put high fashion designers to shame. Two weeks before the scheduled wedding date, Will entered the boutique with the purpose of finding the perfect suit for the wedding.

Will chose tuxedo style shirt and bow tie, and a sapphire blue velvet fabric for the suit jacket. The designer made a quick sketch of what the finished product would look like before leading Will to the back room to take his measurements.

The designer was a dashing young man with a French accent and impeccable sense of fashion. Will smiled as he stood on the stool, listening to the man hum while he took Will's measurements.

The cozy boutique reminded him of their stay in France – their second stay, which had occurred a year after the original two week stay in Paris after fleeing Baltimore. Looking back, Will realized Hannibal had moved them back to France as a kind of anniversary. Now he wondered how long Hannibal had bought the black opal necklace before giving it to him that memorable night.

Three days before the wedding, the boutique called to say that the suit was finished. Will left home as soon as he put the phone down, eager to see the finished result.

When the designer revealed the brilliant blue fabric, cut to order, Will felt a smile and clench of emotion in his throat.

“It's perfect.” He whispered, much to the designer's delight.
Will paid in cash and left the boutique with an ethereal sense of joy expanding like a bubble in his chest. He put the suit in its plastic protective cover in the back seat with ceremonious care, and drove home.

Due to the hospital's restrictions, Hannibal would have to wear his standard uniform jumpsuit to the ceremony, but Will could dress up as much as he liked. He wanted to wear something that Hannibal would remember. It was their wedding after all, and despite the location being a prison instead of a church, it was going to be a moment they would look back on for years to come.

Will hummed with the radio as he drove home, but his joy came to an abrupt halt when he pulled into the driveway to see Jack's truck, and the man himself waiting on the porch.

Will drew in a deep breath before climbing out of his truck. He'd been waiting for this moment, this argument, though Jack had been so wrapped up in the rest of the investigation, Will had begun to wonder if he could get to the ceremony without going through Jack first.

Will walked up to the porch with the garment bag draped over his arm, and paused at the bottom step. “Hello, Jack.”

“Will.” Jack dipped his head, “Mind if I come in?”

“Sure.”

Will unlocked the door and let them inside. Winston rushed to greet them, licking eagerly at Will's hands and nudging at his leg for attention.

“What can I do for you, Jack?” Will asked, bending down to stroke Winston's head.

“I just had a conversation with Dr. Mortise.” Jack said, “She let me in on the secret.”

“What secret?”

“It seems a wedding is happening soon at the hospital.” Jack said, “On the drive over here, I pinched myself to make sure this isn't a dream, but it seems like I'm awake. Wide awake.”

“Jack-” Will began.

“What the hell is wrong with you?” Jack said, his calm tone suddenly betraying a tremor, “I thought I knew you, Will. I told Hannibal that I knew you, that the Will Graham I knew wouldn't do something like that. But maybe that was just me grandstanding.”

“If you've come here to convince me otherwise, you're wasting your time and energy.” Will said. He lifted the garment bag, and unzipped it enough to reveal the lapel of the suit jacket. “I just got back from the city. I had this custom made for the special day. I'd hate to have to try to get my money back.”

He turned and walked into the house, hoping Jack would leave of his own volition.

“That's what Hannibal said, but I'm not ready to give up that easily.” Jack said, following Will into the living room, “I can't let you go through with this.”

“What are you going to do to stop me?” Will asked, “The paperwork is already done. Dr. Mortise approved the request, and the officiant has been paid.”

“Dr. Mortise approved it?”
“Yes. Weeks ago.”

“She didn't tell me.”

“Why would she? The investigation is over, Jack. What I do with my life isn't any of your business anymore.”

“It's not over.” Jack said, quietly, “You're still caught up in his web. It won't be over until you're free.”

“Don't act like you know what I want, what I need.” Will snapped, jabbing a finger at Jack's chest, “You never did anything for me. You dragged me back into the FBI, you put me in Hannibal's hands. You've said yourself you almost pushed me over the edge. What the hell do you know about my freedom?”

Jack's eyes softened. He drew in a slow breath and nodded, “You're right. You're right, Will. I wasn't seeing clearly before …. But I am now.”

“What are you seeing? A victim? A survivor?”

“I see someone who has been hurt, and used, and manipulated.” Jack whispered, “Will, can't you see that he's still manipulating you?”

“Hannibal isn't forcing me to do anything, Jack.” Will said, “Not anymore. I'm making my own choices, and if you don't agree with them, fine. But don't come to my house telling me I'm crazy. I'm not crazy, I never was.”

“No, you had an illness which Hannibal took advantage of.” Jack said, “You didn't even realize what he was doing until it was too late. How do you know he's not doing it again?”

“My encephalitis was treated. I'm not sick anymore.”

“Maybe not with encephalitis. Will, why don't you see a therapist? You need to tell someone about what's happened to you. If you keep it inside, it will continue to poison you.”

“I don't need a therapist, Jack.” Will sighed, and rubbed a hand over his face. When his gaze met Jack's, his eyes were icy blue, “I need you to leave.”

Jack's dark eyes were pained, but he held up his hands, “Fine. I'll leave. But I want you to know that I will always be here for you. Even if you go through with this, and you regret it later on, I'll still be willing to help you. I wouldn't blame you for this.”

“I appreciate it, Jack. I really do.” Will said, “I've always valued your friendship and your advice, but this time you're wrong.”

Jack sighed. He opened his mouth, as if to make one last attempt, but Will's eyes were like stone – cold and unmoving. He turned and left the house with the weight of the world on his shoulders.
Chapter 15

The tumbler of scotch was half empty when Jack poured out another three fingers. The only light on in his study was the small lamp on the edge of the desk that cast a yellow haze across the scattered files and photographs he’d been pouring over for the last three hours. Bella would have lectured him that reading in poor lighting could damage his vision; but the sun had gone down while he read, and he didn’t have the urge to get up from the desk and turn the overhead light on.

He pulled the stack of photos Hannibal had mailed him to the middle of the desk and flipped through them for the tenth time that night. One of these photos had given away their location. He was half-convinced there was something else in the snapshots that would tell him conclusively whether or not Will was a complicit part of the whole twisted affair.

Looking through the pictures, however, just made him more confused than ever. The more he scrutinized Will’s expression and posture in the pictures, the louder the voice in the back of his mind saying that Will was guilty became. Will wasn’t tied down in any of the pictures. There were no bruises or ligature marks. He appeared nourished and healthy. He even appeared to have been out in the sun in a few of them.

Jack paused on a picture of Will lying on a black, leather couch. The picture was slightly blurry, as if he had moved just as the shutter clicked, but his expression was coy, skin flushed. His bare stomach was dappled with semen. Jack had shuddered at this image a dozen times, but this time, it wasn’t the debauchery of the photo that made him squint at the details.

Around Will’s neck was gold necklace, and between his shoulder blades rested a glittering pendant that Jack had seen before. It took him several breathless moments to realize he had seen it just the other day – around Hannibal’s neck.

Jack lowered his head into his hands and blew out a sigh. He had been pouring over the case files for the past two days, making a last ditch effort to convince himself of Will’s innocence. He hadn’t made one move to stop the wedding, or to inform anyone else that it would occur because he thought he might be able to save Will. It appeared he had placed his faith in the wrong belief.

He reached over and picked up his cell phone. He weighed it in his hand for several moments before clicking through his contacts to find Alana’s number.

~

3 years ago

Tourists were few that day as Hannibal led Will through the halls of the Lobcowicz Palace in Prague. The ornate décor and the Renaissance paintings on the domed ceilings were the surface attractions of the palace. The true gems lay in the galleries beyond, where rare collections of paintings told the history of Europe through the eyes of various artists.

“This is incredible.” Will whispered, clutching his hand, “This place must be worth millions.”
“A historical gallery like this one is worth more for the stories it tells.” Hannibal replied with a smile, “The paintings are just this way.”

He led Will into down the next corridor, which opened into the next gallery of paintings.

Will made a sound of awe as his eyes ran over the incredibly realistic paintings of cities and landscapes.

“The work of Canaletto.” Hannibal said, “He was one of the greatest Venetian painters of his day.”

“I can see why.” Will said, pausing before *The Grand Canal and The Church of the Salute*. “Look at the detail.”

“I've always considered myself an artist, but these paintings put my work to shame.” Hannibal murmured, sliding up behind Will and slid his arms around Will's waist, “It's truly sad few artists today are able to put their entire life's work into art such as this. There's no appreciation for it anymore.”

“It's like a time portal.” Will whispered, “Like looking back in time and seeing the world how it used to be.”

“This is why I've tried to capture every place I've visited on paper.” Hannibal said, “Our memories are fluid, and subjected to the wear of time. Seeing a place as it is, and remembering it as it was are never truly congruent. Taking a picture captures a single moment, but painting or drawing it as we remember it, as we are touched by it, captures the soul of that place.”

Will turned in Hannibal's arms and let his arms fall limply over Hannibal's shoulders. His eyes pressed against Hannibal's, shimmering blue and green like ocean reefs.

“I'm going to remember this moment forever.” He murmured.

“Is that so?”

“Yes.” Will eased closer, his lips brushing across Hannibal's, “I'm going to remember how sappy you sound when you talk about art.”

They both chuckled, their laughter echoing quietly like the tinkles of wind chimes off the stone walls.

“I'm going to remember that dazed look you get in your eyes when I lean in to kiss you.” Will added. He touched Hannibal's cheek with his fingertips, and Hannibal turned his chin to catch them between his lips. Will bit his lower lip coyly, “I'll remember feeling like screaming and crying and laughing all at once because I've never felt so happy.”

“And just a moment ago, you were calling me a sap.” Hannibal murmured. He cupped Will's cheeks gently and pulled him in for a kiss. Their lips met briefly, just enough for Hannibal to savor the taste of his lips before Will pulled back.

“Let's get married.” He whispered.

“What?” Hannibal asked, the smile dropping from his face in shock.

“Let's get married. Today.”

“Today?”
“Yes. Let's find a courthouse and do it. You keep telling me our identities are air tight. We're both citizens, and—”

“Will, slow down.” Hannibal said, taking a step back.

“What do you mean slow down? Isn't this what you want?” Will asked, the excitement faded from his eyes.

“This is a huge decision.” Hannibal said, taking Will’s hands in his, “Life altering. Even if it would be our fake identities being married, it is a commitment.”

“Are you saying you're not ready for a commitment?” Will asked.

“No, not at all. I would love to marry you.” Hannibal said, smiling gently, “But we must look at the consequences.”

“What consequences? We've ignored all the rules, we're on the lam, and it's been two years since we left Baltimore. Are they even looking for us anymore?”

“Will, they are never going to stop looking. This is what I am afraid of.” Hannibal said, “One day, they may find us. In the course of one day, all that we have built for ourselves in this new life could be destroyed. We would be taken back to Baltimore, I would be confined to the mental hospital and you … You would be left with nothing.”

“That's the worst case scenario.” Will said.

“It is. But it is a possibility that we must be prepared to accept.”

“You don't want me to commit to you because you're afraid that one day we're going to be separated?”

“Yes.”

Will sighed and pulled his hands out of Hannibal's grasp. He paced away, scraping his hands through his hair. It was a depressing thought, and yet, he knew it was a far more real possibility than the fantasy that they could live the rest of their life on the run, undetected by the authorities.

“I do not want you to be trapped.” Hannibal said, “Even if it is by me. There was a time when I would have done all I could to keep you with me at any cost. Now, I realize you are much too precious and free, like a bird, to keep you locked in a cage. I am more satisfied that you stay because you want to.”

“I stay because I love you.” Will said, spinning around to face him, “Because I've been in love with you for years and I …”

Hannibal rushed to gather Will in his arms as Will lowered his head to his hands.

“There now.” He soothed, stroking Will's hair, “I love you more than anything – that is not what is in question.”

“I know.” Will murmured. He sniffed and lifted his head, “I understand your argument, but I still want to do it.”

“I can't accept.”

“I don't care if I'm trapped with you.” Will snapped, slapping Hannibal's arms away from him, “I'd
rather be your caged bird than flying free and alone.”

“Will,” Hannibal said firmly. He reached out and touched Will's chin, forcing him to meet his gaze, “When I marry you, I want it to be on our terms. I want it to be official, and I want the entire world to know.”

“That's awfully narcissistic of you.” Will griped.

“Perhaps it is. But I don't take a commitment of this grandeur lightly. When we are married, I want it to be our names, our real names on the license so that no one can ever separate us again.”

“That might never happen. If we were to file for a marriage license with our real names, it would go into a database, and we would be caught instantly.” Will argued.

“We'll find a way.”

Will didn't respond as Hannibal put his arms around him again and peppered a row of soft kisses down his cheek and neck.

“Darling, I would kill the entire world for you.” Hannibal whispered.

“You'd kill the entire world for yourself, you selfish bastard.”

“What would you like me to say, then, to convince you?”

“I do.” Will said, tartly.

Hannibal sighed, “You stubborn, maddening boy.”

Will lifted his chin a notch. His eyes were simmering with anger, but Hannibal knew it would pass. As soon as they got home and Will was arched over the arm of the couch, taking Hannibal's cock, he would forget all about his ill-fated proposal.

“I'm going to remember this day forever.” Hannibal said, casting his gaze over the rows of paintings, “I'll remember your commitment, Will. It won't go to waste.”

He slid his gaze back to Will, who was still brooding. “Shall we view the rest of the gallery?”

“Fuck this art.” Will said, giving Hannibal's dark, challenging glare, “Take me home and fuck me until I'm convinced that you're committed.”

“How long might that take?” Hannibal asked.

Will grabbed his hand and dragged him from the gallery, “It could take all night.”

~

Present Day

Will scrutinized himself in the rear view mirror at the last stoplight before the BSHCI. His hair was
combed and his beard trimmed for the first time in a week. His custom tailored suit fit like a glove, and he had no doubt that Hannibal would admire how it looked on him.

He would never be more prepared. But his heart was pounding wildly, and his palms were sweaty around the steering wheel. The more he tried to breathe slowly and suppress the butterflies in his stomach, the more his stomach churned.

The day he had dreamed of for the past three years was finally here. He should be bursting with joy. Instead, he felt like a sick, anxious mess.

The nausea churning in Will's stomach rose to the next level as he pulled into the parking lot of the Baltimore State Hospital to see a crowd of people gathered on the front lawn. Even with the windows rolled up, Will could hear the din of their combined voices. Half of them were holding up signs, spray painted with angry, red words. Three news vans were parked in front of the hospital, and the crews positioned themselves in front of the mob to catch the most exciting angle.

“Shit.” Will whispered.

He lowered his head to the steering wheel and tried to breathe properly. Picketers were to be expected. Not only was the idea of gay marriage still fairly new, but the marriage of a notorious serial killer was bound to make salacious news stories.

He lifted his head and sucked in a deep breath through his nose. All he had to do was make it through the crowd and past the door. Then Hannibal would be waiting for him, and everything would be all right. It was just some people. And some cameras. And the whole world watching.

“Fuck.” He whispered, “Come on. Get it together.”

He closed his eyes, tuned out the din of the mob. He imagined the doors of the Norman Chapel opening before him, and the gentle, golden glow of a hundred candles. Hannibal stood there at the candles, lighting two and watching the flame.

“One for you. One for me.” He murmured.

“After today, it'll only be one candle.” Will replied.

Hannibal turned and smiled at him, “Yes, quite right. It's a union. After today, no matter what happens, they won't be able to separate us.”

“It's all I've ever wanted.”

“Will,” Hannibal murmured. He held out his hand.

Will joined him by the candles, wrapping his fingers tight around Hannibal's.

“Will, you can do this.”

Will's eyes jarred open to the sound of someone rapping on the window of his car. The news casters had taken note of his presence and swarmed the truck. They clamored at the window, clutching the cameras and microphones, waiting for the next hour's soundbite.

Will shoved the car door open and stepped out to face them.

“Mr. Graham, is it true that you're here today to marry Hannibal Lecter?”

“Mr. Graham, is he forcing you to marry him?”
“How did you fall for a murderer?”

“What are your plans for the future since Lecter will be locked up for the rest of his life? Are you going to remain faithful to him?”

“It's true.” Will said, raising his voice over the demanding questions.

They all fell quiet, shoving their microphones in his face and holding their pens poised over notebooks.

“It's true. I am marrying Hannibal Lecter.” He said, “No one is forcing me to do this. In fact, there's a lot of people telling me I'm wrong to do this. However, I am content with my decision, and I am determined to go through with the marriage.”

“Will, can you answer my previous question?” Asked one of the female news anchors, “How could you fall for a cold-blooded killer, a cannibal?”

“Simple. You don't know the Hannibal Lecter that I do.”

“So you're willing to ignore the fact that he's killed dozens of people?”

“We've all done terrible things.” Will said, “In fact, we've all thought about killing a person, one way or another. Hannibal is just one of the few that's actually gone through with it.”

The questions started again in earnest, but Will pushed past the crowd, holding up his hand to deter any further filming. He jogged up the front steps of the hospital and was immediately assailed by the civilian crowd.

On one side of the front door, the religious crowd had gathered with their signs claiming “You're going to hell,” “Lecter deserves the death sentence,” and “God hates gays.” Their faces were red and sneering, full of righteous indignation as he passed. He was shocked but no less disturbed by the crowd on the other side, most of which would young women in low-cut shirts and too much make-up. Their signs read “Lecter's ladies,” “We support gay marriage,” “Cannibals are people too,” and even one with Will and Hannibal's names together in a heart.

Will yanked the door of the hospital open and pushed it shut behind him. His head spun. He had worked for the FBI for years and had seen some of the most evil, twisted things. Somehow, it had never occurred to him that he and Hannibal might have fans just like Charles Manson and other famous killers.

“Shit.” Will muttered.

He looked up to see Helena approaching at a brisk walk.

“Mr. Graham, you look pale.” She observed.

“I had fight my way in here.” He said. He straightened, and smoothed the front of his jacket, “It's a circus out there.”

“They've been camped out since this morning.” Helena said, “One of them almost broke down the front door earlier, and told me she wanted to know if you and Hannibal would get a conjugal visit after the ceremony.”

“Will we?”

She scoffed, “No. Conjugal visits are only afforded in a few states, and only in minimum security
prisons. The purpose is to preserve relationships while a prisoner is behind bars so that he will rehabilitate more quickly on the outside. I don't have to tell you that Hannibal is never getting out of here.”

“We are getting married.” Will pointed out.

“Marriage doesn't mean shit.” She said, “You've been sexually active for years, am I right?”

“Well, yes, but-”

“I can pull some strings, Will, but that one is a little out of my reach.”

She led him down the hallway until they reached a small chapel. There were no decorations. The pews were faded and scratched with use, and the drab, white paint peeled from the walls.

“They'll bring Hannibal in shortly.” Helena said.

A short man with gray hair was seated in front row. As Will approached, he saw that the man wore a suit and tie, and held a Bible on his lap. His eyes were closed, his lips moving slightly in quiet prayer.

Will sat down across the aisle from the reverend, and looked up at the crucifix mounted on the wall. He couldn't remember the last time he'd prayed. His father wasn't religious, but several of the towns they had lived in had practiced the faith devotedly. He had picked up his share of religion, though it had never rung true for him. The idea that some omniscient being was up in the sky directing all of human existence wasn't comforting to him.

“You are one of the grooms?” The reverend asked.

“Yes.”

“I'm Reverend Michael Woodrow.” He extended his hand across the aisle.

Will accepted the handshake, “Nice to meet you.”

“Likewise. How are you feeling?”

“Nervous as hell.”

“That's to be expected. I don't meet many people who are calm and collected on their wedding day.”

“Good to know I'm not the only one.” Will smiled weakly.

“It is one of the biggest decisions in your life.” Woodrow said, “Are you religious?”

“No.”

“Do you have any belief in a higher power?”

“Not really. I'd like to think the world is more three-dimensional than that.”

“I won't lecture you.” Woodrow said, waving his hand, “All I can do is pray for you.”

“Don't tell me you're not biased.” Will said, “You're officiating a wedding between two men, one of whom is a killer. People like you don't like people like us.”
“I look out for all of God's children.” Woodrow said, “That being said, I cannot fully support your marriage. However, it is not my place to support or not support it. It is your choice. All I can say is that this day will impact the rest of your life for good. You can't go back from it.”

Will turned around at the sound of the doors at the back of the chapel opening. A smile touched his lips as he saw the two orderlies wheel Hannibal down the aisle.

“I don't want to go back from it.” He whispered.

The orderlies pushed Hannibal to the front of the chapel and locked the dolly into place.

“Dr. Mortise has instructed us to take off your mask and straight-jacket,” One of the orderlies said to Hannibal, “You'll still be in handcuffs. We'll be standing right here during the ceremony, so don't get any ideas.”

“Why ever would I want to disrupt my own wedding?” Hannibal asked.

The orderly rolled his eyes, and motioned for the other man to help him. It took them a whole minute to unstrap all of the restraints, remove the straight-jacket and mask, and put Hannibal in the handcuffs and leg irons.

Will hovered behind them, his gaze fixed on Hannibal's. Hannibal smiled at him despite the rough manner in which the orderlies applied the restraints. When they were finished, Will turned to Reverend Woodrow, “Can we have a moment, please?”

“Of course.”

The reverend joined Helena at the back of the chapel as Will embraced Hannibal.

“My God, you should see the crowd outside.” He whispered.

“Religious picketers?” Hannibal asked.

“And fans. And the news.” Will said, shaking his head, “This isn't how I imagined today being.”

“Will, do you remember our day in the Lobcowicz Palace in Prague when I told you that when I married you, it would be on our terms, with our names?”

“Of course, how could I forget. I was so mad at you.” Will said, giving a brief laugh.

“I knew we could never wed while we were on the run.” Hannibal admitted, “I knew if it ever happened, it would be like this. But, I knew it would be worth it to marry you as you – as Will Graham, the man I fell in love with. The man who changed my life.”

Will ducked his head, his eyes pulsing and swimming with emotion.

Hannibal's hands strained against the cuffs to take grab Will's waist and pull him closer. “Look at me.” He whispered.

Will slowly lifted his chin. He wiped at the tear escaping down his cheek, suddenly aware of all the eyes watching their intimate exchange.

“You are the light.” Hannibal whispered, “My constant, guiding star. I don't mind these shackles, or this prison because I have you. Don't forget, between the roar of the crowd and the opinions of people who don't understand, that I love you. That I will always love you until death finds a way to part us.”
“How could I forget?” Will whispered, fresh tears gushing to his eyelids, “How could I forget now that we've gone through life and death together?”

Hannibal's hands grasped his hips tighter, and Will knew the only thing holding back an embrace was the handcuffs. Hannibal shifted closer and inclined his forehead against Will's. He blew out a long, quiet breath that soothed the heat and moisture on Will's cheeks.

“What are you crying, darling? Don’t cry.” He murmured.

Will closed his eyes and let out a steadying breath, “I'm crying because I'm happy. Because for the first time in my life, I'm with someone who understands me completely, who loves me for all my flaws, and who is willing to sacrifice everything for me. And …” His voice cracked, and he pressed a hand over his mouth to swallow back a sob. He sniffed back the tears, and looked his wet eyes to meet Hannibal's, “And I don't think I deserve it.”

The moisture rested thick against Hannibal's eyelids, waiting to fall. He pressed his mouth against Will's cheek, tasting his tears. He whispered, “You do deserve it, Will. You deserve everything I could possibly give you.”

The sound of Reverend Woodrow clearing his throat brought Will back to reality. He looked up to see the reverend approaching them.

“Well, I think that serves perfectly for vows.” He said with a smile.

Will laughed and wiped the tears from his face, “We didn't plan it that way.”

“That's why it's perfect.” Woodrow said. He opened his Bible and motioned to them, “Join hands.”

Will drew in a deep breath and wrapped his fingers around Hannibal's. Hannibal gave him an encouraging nod and squeezed his hands.

Woodrow went through the vows for each of them, and Will repeated the well-known words about sickness and health, poverty and wealth, till death do us part, but as the ceremony drew to a close, the moment that he would remember for the rest of his life, that he etched in his brain, was when Hannibal said the words he had been yearning to hear for so long. “I do.”

~

Hannibal all but tuned out the reverend as he droned on about the sanctity of marriage and recited the traditional vows. His gaze was focused on Will, and the pure, trusting love in his wide, blue eyes.

It was a mystery how he had come to love Will so deeply. What had begun as a fascination had evolved into friendship, then obsession, and finally love. The final stage had hurt the most because he had spent his entire life shoring up the walls around his heart. For years, he'd felt nothing when he looked across his office at another person. One day, without warning, he'd looked up to see his other half.

Marriage had never been an appealing concept to him. Simply put, it was the proverbial ball and chain. A trap. A prison. His killing, his cooking, and his art were all things a normal human being could never understand. They didn't deserve his love, they couldn't even understand it. Until Will.
It had taken him this long to understand that he loved Will and that it would never change; but most of all, that it didn't make him weak or change how he lived. Will accepted every part of him, that much was finally clear. Now, he wished he had allowed the process to happen faster, far less painfully, much less bloody.

Will's smile broadened as Hannibal repeated after the reverend, and said his “I do.”

He recalled standing in the gallery in Prague, amused at Will's frustration and petty anger. In that moment, he hadn't thought he could love Will more. Three years later, he knew he had been wrong. “If there's nothing more you would like to say, you may kiss.” The reverend said.

Hannibal gazed at Will, suddenly overwhelmed that they were finally here, after all they had said and done to each other.

“I have nothing else to say.” He choked out.

Will threw his arms around Hannibal's neck and crushed his mouth against Hannibal's. Hannibal's hands curled around Will's jacket, pulling him as close as the handcuffs would allow. They kissed for several long moments while the world faded away to meaningless chatter. Will's lips tasted sweet like berries, and the chafe of his beard was a tender burn against Hannibal's skin. He savored the kiss, burning the moment into his memory. Another piece of history stored within the sacred walls of his memory palace, another place he would often visit when he was missing Will.

When they parted, Will let out a soft laugh and touched his cheek, “I'm all yours. You finally got me, you son of a bitch.”

“And now I won't let you go.” Hannibal murmured. He pressed another kiss to Will's cheek, and smoothed his hand down the front Will's shirt, “You look absolutely ravishing, darling.”

“I'm glad you like it. It's custom.” Will said, nibbling his teeth over a grin.

“I wish I could have dressed appropriately for the occasion.” Hannibal sighed, “Hospital rules.”

“IT must be killing you.” Will smirked.

“All right.” Reverend Woodrow said, “All I need is your signatures on the license, the signatures of the witnesses, and it will be official.”

“Where's the pen?” Will asked.

Woodrow pulled a pen out of his jacket pocket and motioned to the license sitting on the communion table.

Will bent over the table and gazed at the license. “This is it.” He whispered.

Hannibal put a hand on his elbow. “Are you ready to take this plunge with me?”

“More than ready.”

Will pressed the pen down.

“Wait!”

Will and Hannibal spun around as the doors of the chapel swung open with a thud. Alana marched down the center aisle, her hands in fists at her sides, her eyes cold with the determination.
“Will, I need to talk to you.”

“About what?”

“About this.” She said, stabbing a finger at the ground, “About you making a big mistake.”

“This isn't a mistake. I know what I'm doing … Did Jack call you?”

“Yes he did.”

“Hello, Alana.” Hannibal said, his mouth curving in amused smile as he watched her expression ripple with anger.

“Hannibal.” She said, her eyes darkening.

“Excuse me, who are you?” Reverend Woodrow interjected.

“I'm Alana Bloom, a friend of Will's.” She said, giving the reverend a stiff smile, “And I need to speak to him about this decision.”

“We've already done the ceremony.” Woodrow said, “All that's left is signing-”

“Well, that's the important part, so it's not too late.” Alana said. “Will, can we talk?”

“In a minute.” He said, turning back to the certificate.

“Will, please-”

He scrawled his name at the bottom of the document and handed the pen to Hannibal. Hannibal smirked as Alana's face flushed red with anger. It had been quite awhile since he'd seen her, much less thought of her, but he did remember how naïve she could be. She thought she could stop this ceremony with a few pathetic pleas to the Will she used to know. She didn't know they were the perfect storm, an act of God that couldn't be stopped by mere mortals.

~

Alana paced the lobby of the BSHCI, her mind racing with a dozen thoughts of conflicting emotions. Will leaned against the wall, unperturbed by her frazzled state.

“Jack called me last night.” She said, “I tried to call you at least a dozen times.”

“I know.”

“Why didn't you pick up?”

“Because, I knew it would be about the wedding.” He said, tilting his head back against the wall, “You can't stop it, Alana. It's already done.”

“Right. Only you can stop it now.”

“But I don't want to.”

“Are you mad?” She demanded, coming to a halt to face him, “Hannibal is a demented killer. He
has no emotions. He doesn't love you!"

“Just stop right there.” Will said, holding up a hand. “You can say whatever you want about me, but don't talk about him like that.”

“Why? It's true.” She hissed.

“We're all afraid of things we don't understand.” Will said, “Whenever the world encounters someone or something that's different, it's immediately rejected and feared. It's not until you get to understand that thing that you realize it has a reason, a heart-”

“He's a killer, Will. He framed you, and you tried to kill him. Or don't you remember that?”

“I remember.”

“He left you – he left us – to bleed out on his kitchen floor. He almost killed you. He doesn't have a heart, Will.”

“I know why those things happened.” Will said, shaking his head, “It wasn't because he was trying to kill me. It was because I betrayed him. He was hurt, he was-”

“Oh, so now you're going to justify killing and bloodshed? You're going to justify Abigail's death?”

Will shoved his hands into his pockets and let his gaze fall to the floor. “I'll always miss Abigail.” He whispered, “But I've forgiven him. He's forgiven me. It's in the past.”

“What if he kills you one day?” Alana said, her voice growing thin and hoarse, “I'm so afraid I'm going to wake up to a call one day, and that I'll be looking down at your dead body in the morgue.”

“He's not going to kill me.” Will said, lifting his head to look at her, “You can believe me when I say that. He likes the world better with me in it.”

She crossed her arms and bit back a wave of emotion. “So … I can't persuade you?”

He shook his head. “No.”

“Then I've lost you.” She said, her voice breaking as the tears rushed to her eyes, “I've finally completely lost you. I don't even know who are you anymore.”

“You're right.” He murmured, “I'm not the same person I used to be. I remember that version of me like something out of a movie, or something that happened to another person. But you know what I remember about that version? … I wasn't happy, Alana. I was sad, and empty, and consumed by the death I had to look at every day. Finding the person responsible didn't make it any easier. It was killing me.”

“Hannibal wasn't helping you get any better, if I recall.”

“Like I said, it's in the past. It's all forgiven.” Will said. He pushed off the wall and crossed the room to where she stood, “I hope you can forgive me now.”

“I'm sorry, Will.” She whispered, “I don't think I can.”
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

It was brought to my attention that some of the dialogue in the beginning of this chapter may be seen as blasphemous, or be uncomfortable for someone who is religious to read. Please proceed with caution, and thank you for reading ;)

“I never pegged you for the marrying type.” Helena's voice broke the silence in the observation room. She crossed her arms as she stepped in front of the chair Hannibal was strapped to. He glanced up at her with scintillating eyes and upturned lips.

“Marriage is a societal construct that serves antiquated ideals of gender roles and oppressive inequality.” Hannibal said, “Loyalty and commitment is a much more elusive concept in today's world. I'd like to think I've laid hold of a partnership that will outlast a short ceremony and a notarized document with our names side by side.”

“Ah, I should have known you wouldn't lower yourself down to the level of us mere mortals.” Helena remarked with a chuckle, “Still, you went through it.”

“It's important to Will.”

She gave a slow nod, “I never pegged you for the caring type, either.”

“The truth, Dr. Mortise, is that we all care. Deeply. It's a facet of human existence that precludes even morality and self-appreciation.”

“We all want desperately to be important to someone. To anyone.”

“Yes. To some poor, delicate souls, being important to someone is their entire life. I've done my best to avoid this type of unattainable thinking.”

“You succeeded pretty well. Marriage at fifty years old.” She said, raising her eyebrows, “Not much excitement and fire left to be had, though.”

He smirked. “You might be surprised … Wouldn't you love to know?”

She nibbled thoughtfully at her lower lip before formulating her reply. “I'm curious. In a thoroughly professional manner, of course. Sexuality isn't a highly discussed topic when it comes to serial killers because most of them are psychopaths who are incapable of forming lasting relationships and connections. They lead solitary lives, and so did you – until now.”

“As we've already confirmed, I am not a psychopath.” He said. Tilting his head back against the head rest, he let out a low sigh, “Last we spoke, it was my sister you wanted to know about. Would you truly like to spend this evening's session discussing the nature and existence of my sex life?”

“Childhood is easy psychiatry.” Helena said, “The human sex drive is far more intricate and curious. The things that excite us and fascinate us are often dark and confusing.”

“It's your choice, of course. You are the one asking the questions. You simply have to answer mine
when the time comes.”

“I've answered all of your questions so far. You don't have to worry about our deal.”

He dipped his head, “Very well.”

“The marriage is done.” She said, spreading her hands, “We can conclusively say that you're attracted to men. It's also a well-known fact that you romanced Dr. Bloom back in the day. So, how do you label yourself?”

“I prefer to avoid labels.”

“Be honest. You know exactly what you do and do not like.”

“As with marriage, sexual identity is a societal construct. We're taught since childhood that men and women are meant to be together. We're taught that certain hobbies, jobs, clothing, and so forth are exclusively for males or females. Should a person deviate from these assigned constructs, the world looks down on him with disdain. Why? Because society has formed ideas of acceptable behavior over thousand of years of evolution and elitism.”

“You're saying you don't accept those constructs?”

“I don't accept anything that attempts to tell me how I should live, what I should enjoy, or whom I should choose to be attracted to. The world is a much more free, beautiful space than society would have us believe.”

“That's a nice viewpoint.” Helena said, “Very libertarian.”

“You might say I am quite the libertarian.” He agreed. “However, some might disagree with you and I since the libertarian viewpoint is supported by the idea that we can do whatever we like as long as no one is hurt.”

“You've hurt a lot of people.” She said.

“I would disagree with that sentiment, but my crimes are not the matter of discussion.”

“So, back to societal constructs. What exactly was it that made you begin to form these ideas? Since we are all oppressed by society's rules since birth, how were you able to break free of the mold and create your own ideas?”

“I largely raised myself.” Hannibal said, “My parents were killed when I was young, and I spent many years on my own. The orphanage I mentioned in a previous session was not exactly observant of it's charges. By the time my aunt and uncle took me in, I considered myself an adult, fully capable of making my own decisions and protecting myself. During my time on my own, I began to realize that the world was not as black and white as my parents had led me to believe. I spent many nights bemoaning the unfairness of my situation until I realized crying over what had already been done was of no use. I stood, brushed myself off, and began creating my own world, my own rules, my own belief system. It was quite freeing, especially when I would go into a city and watch the world bustle past me, so consumed by the petty nuisances of their daily lives, and the monotonous routines they clung to because it's the only familiarity that makes them feel safe and appreciated. The world is crawling with ants, Dr. Mortise. Ants going to and fro from their jobs, their spouses, their children, their inane, little hobbies. It's all those boring and pointless, I realized. In a world of ants, I wanted to be a giant; so, that's what I became.”

Helena tilted her head as the considered his perspective. “That's very … pessimistic.”
“On the contrary, I see the world as I believe it was always intended to be. Full of beauty and opportunity that is being wasted by the mindless plodding of the bleary-eyed slaves of society. The advantage of ignoring faith and morality, Dr. Mortise, is that I am freed to do and enjoy and consume as I please without the fear of repercussions from an all-knowing god.”

“You don't believe in God?”

“I do believe in God. However, when I ask myself, ‘will he punish me for what I’ve done?’, I do not tremble. I feel very close to God. He's like a puppet master, standing above the sky with his strings, pulling chaos to and fro. He loves to watch us crash and burn.”

“You mean, you don't believe in the loving, self-sacrificial god of the Bible, of the Christians?”

“Christians are wonderfully naïve people. They serve a God who collapses their churches on top of them, who commits mass murder and calls it divine punishment, who lays down laws and then sends a savior to contradict them, and they follow like sheep to the slaughter because faith makes them feel important, loved, and righteous. It gives them meaning, but God couldn't care less about their devotion. He would kill them in an instant, and feel powerful and satisfied.”

Helena was quiet as she wrote down notes. She had filled an entire page already during this session, and her heart was racing. In questioning Hannibal's sexuality, she had found her way into his moral compass, or rather, his immoral compass. She had never heard such a backwards way of thinking, but it didn't confuse or scare her – it excited her.

“Well,” She said, laying down her pen, “I suppose if you don't believe in God having a moral compass, then there's no such thing as the sin of homosexuality.”

“If God did create us, he created us with differences. I believe they should be celebrated and loved. The sin would be in wasting those experiences.”

“You should talk to your doctors more often.” She said, “This is fascinating stuff. The world could probably benefit from your point of view, as twisted as that sounds.”

“Do you plan on publishing my point of view, Doctor Mortise?” He asked, turning his head to gaze at her with his dark, penetrating eyes.

“It would be a shame to waste it.” She said.

“Then you have no respect for your oath of doctor-patient confidentiality.”

“Who needs morality … or social constructs for that matter?”

He dipped his head, “Fair enough.”

“Wouldn't you love to indoctrinate your followers with these ideas?” She asked, motioning to her notes, “Because, you do have followers, you know.”

“I have no interest in pandering to any followers.” He said, his lips curling back, “If they are so dull as to follow me, a man whom they have never met, never will, and have no understanding of, they are no better than the people I have prepared for my dinner parties.”

“You're not flattered?”

“By blind faith? By people following like sheep to the slaughter? Doctor, you offend me.”
“You're one of the most narcissistic patients I've ever spoken to.” Helena said with a disbelieving laugh, “How can you not be flattered by people taking your point of view as a new religion?”

“You're one of the most narcissistic patients I've ever spoken to.” Helena said with a disbelieving laugh, “How can you not be flattered by people taking your point of view as a new religion?”

“Your question brings us back to the original topic of caring deeply.” Hannibal said, “I do care about a great number of things – the simple pleasures, food, wine, music, art … sex, when it comes from the right person. These are all things that exist in glory despite the general public's opinion of them. I exist despite their opinion. Whether they glorify or vilify me, I am satisfied. That they talk about me in the tabloids and on TV is fantastic. Would I greet them with the same excitement as they greet me? No. Does it please me that they are in awe of me? Of course, who would not flattered? Will I lead them like a cult facilitator? No, such an idea has never pleased me. They may watch me from behind these bars, but they will never reach beyond the veil.”

Helena turned her page over and started scrawling notes across the back. When she finished writing, she exchanged the notepad for her iPad.

“I have Freddie Lounds's newest article in front of me.” She said, “She said some interesting things about you and Will after the ceremony yesterday. Would you like to hear?”

“Do I have a choice?”

She smiled, coolly, “No.” Clearing her throat, she read, “It's titled Folie A Deux: Hannibal the Cannibal Says 'I Do'.”

“Miss Lounds does have a knack for exciting headlines, doesn't she?”

Helena glanced up to see him smiling. She rose from her chair with the iPad and paced in front of him as she read.

“It starts out describing the scene of picketers and news anchors outside of the hospital yesterday.”

She said, “The next paragraph is where it gets good: Here in the small, cozy chapel of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, a man, a monster, who the world has watched defy nature and authorities over and over again, will humble himself to the level of a normal human being by entering into marriage with a man who is just as controversial as he is. When asked if the FBI would be making an attempt to stop the marriage, Jack Crawford, head of the Behavioral Analysis Unit, could give no comment. It appears even the FBI cannot forestall true love. And that is the question that all of us are asking: is it true love? According to the FBI and police in Madrid, Spain, where the pair were apprehended, Will Graham was more Hannibal Lecter's victim than partner. The ceremony today proves he was neither; Graham was, in fact, Lecter's gay lover, and now his husband. A gay marriage between criminals is fantastic fodder for journalists, fanatics, and righteous protesters alike. No doubt, the world will still be talking about this marriage even when both Graham and Lecter are gone from this world. Will it stand the test of time? Can a psychopath learn to love? Can a victim forgive his abuser? Is true love more than kindness, loyalty, and sex? These two men just may smash the boundaries to bits and leave the world quaking in the wake of their devotion.

Hannibal cocked his head, “It seems that Miss Lounds is rather supportive of our union.”

“So it would seem. I wonder why that is.” Helena said.

“Miss Lounds and I have never been friends, but we've been friendly, one might say. Her own moral compass wanes from true north like mine.”

“This is the part that gets me.” Helena said, lifting a finger, “It says: Lecter, surrounded by hospital rules and armed orderlies, couldn't be reached for a comment on the marriage. However,
a conversation with Will Graham revealed only vague conclusions on his true feelings towards Lecter. The question posed to him was this: Is Hannibal Lecter in love with you? His answer – “That's not a question. Ask something else.” Apparently, Lecter's love for Graham is not in question, but Graham himself, a former FBI agent and professor at the university, has become more of a cipher than his cannibalistic counterpart. Somewhere between hunting Lecter across Europe and disappearing across the sea with him, Graham fell for his tormentor. A psychologist might call this condition Stockholm Syndrome. The world, as morbid and enthralled onlookers, would rather call it a dark, twisted love story not too distant from a blood-soaked, Shakespearean tragedy.” Helena paused to gauge Hannibal's reaction. He faced forward, his expression smooth and cold as a marble statue, “He loves you, he loves you not ...” She murmured, “Which is it?”

Hannibal smiled, “He loves me, I would think.”

“I guess this answers the question about whether or not you love him.”

“It would.” He said. He turned an unreadable expression on her and said the words that never failed to infuriate her, “I believe it's your turn to share.”

~

Helena stepped out of the observation room half an hour after the orderlies took Hannibal back to his cell. It took her that long just to gather her thoughts and her wits about her. He never failed to strip away her armor and leave her shivering and exposed.

She gasped when a voice from the shadows down the hall spoke her name. She spun around to see Dr. Chilton emerge from the shadows, his hands clasped behind his back.

“How was your session with Hannibal?” He asked.

She frowned as she detected a condemning tone in his voice.

“Personal, I'll bet.” He added.

“What I discuss with my patients in therapy is confidential.” She said, “You know that.”

“Therapy.” He sneered, “You're not using therapy on Hannibal Lecter. You're rooting around in his brain for something that will make you famous.”

“What are you talking about?” She demanded, forcing indignation into her voice.

“Quid pro quo, isn't it, Dr. Mortise? You scratch his back, he'll scratch yours? How else would you get anything useful out of him?”

“That type of relationship between doctor and patient is unethical.” She said, lifting her chin and throwing back her shoulders, “How dare you accuse me?”

“How dare I.” He laughed, swaggering closer to her, “I, of all people, understand how unethical situations work between doctor and patient.”

“Ah, yes. Abel Gideon.” She said, tracking his steps with narrowed eyes, “You nearly convinced him he was the Chesapeake Ripper.”
“Yes. And I know how to spot someone looking for glory.” He said, pausing just two feet in front of her, “I know an unethical situation when I see it, and let me tell you, right now, it's glaring me in the face.”

She swallowed as a pit of dread opened in her stomach. She glared at Chilton's challenging expression for a few moments before she asked, “What are you going to do about it?”

“I don't care if you're fucking him in there.” Chilton said, stabbing a finger toward the door, “Quid pro quo is the best way to get information out of him – the only way, I might say. He just can't help himself. I'm no hypocrite; I would be doing the same thing if I were you. What I'm concerned about is who gets the byline when Hannibal Lecter's psyche finally comes to light.”

“You want to steal this from me?” She hissed, her face growing hot with anger.

“Steal? No. Commandeer, yes. And I have the authority to do it.”

“I still have a position of power here.” She said, “You can't do this.”

“You have a position of power below me. Hand over all of your material, or you're gone, right now.”

“What?” She whispered.

“Give me your notes on Lecter, or you're fired.” Chilton said, enunciating each word as if condescending to a child.

“You-you can't fire me.” She sputtered.

“I can, and I will. Do you really want to put my authority to the test?”

She gaped at him, her mind racing with a dozen retorts, but her mouth mute of any of them. Anger throbbed up her chest and through her temples in short, painful bursts. Her control over the situation slipped like butter from her grasp.

“Even if I can't fire you, I can certainly defame you.” Chilton said, smiling sardonically, “I know what you're doing, and if the board finds out about it, you'll be gone so fast it'll make your head spin.”

She swallowed hard against the tide of hot, angry tears that pulsed to her lids. She clutched her hands into fists, only to forego the urge to strike out at him. She unzipped her briefcase and pulled her notebook out with stiff fingers. Her jaw clenched as he took it, a cold smile set on his lips.

“And the tape recorder.” He said, holding out his hand.

“Tape recorder?”

“Don't play dumb. I know you're recording your conversations. It's proof, in case Lecter should try to go back on you once you publish.”

The anger swimming through her head was dizzying, her vision edging with red. She pulled the tape recorder from her bag with numb fingers and dropped it into Chilton's hand. He swiped it the moment it dropped from her fingers, and weighed it in his palm.

“Thank you.” He said with enraging politeness.

He stepped past her in a cloud of smug satisfaction and strong cologne.
She growled, spinning around to watch him go, “I won’t let you take this from me.”

He paused, tossing an unperturbed glance over his shoulder, “Oh, but you will. Or else all your hard work will have been for nothing. Good night, Dr. Mortise.”

She watched him go, her hands forming shaking fists at her sides. When he turned the corner and disappeared, she spun around, slamming her fist into the wall so hard that the white-hot pain scorched down her arm and into her shoulder. She cried out in pain and then in anger as she sank to her knees on the cold, linoleum floor.

~

Hannibal didn't appreciate being dragged from his room again only two hours after returning from his session with Helena. When Elliot and Jason rolled him into the visitation area, and he saw Matthew Brown already seated in one of the cages, however, he began to smile.

Elliot and Jason put him in the cage next to Matthew and stood guard by the door while the two men spoke.

“Matthew, it's been some time.” Hannibal said, “How are you?”

“I'm out of the basement.” Matthew said, “What's going to happen to our plan of getting out of here, huh?”

Hannibal glanced over his shoulder at Elliot and Jason. The two were engaged in their own conversation.

“This is not a smart move by you, Matthew.” Hannibal said, “These meetings are recorded and monitored.”

“How else am I supposed to get in contact with you?” Matthew asked, “And, for the record, I know how these meetings go. I used to work here, remember? Nobody pays attention to these visits because it's usually a pissing contest between the inmates, trying to settle some imaginary beef from behind bars. Harmless.”

“We are not ordinary inmates.” Hannibal said, “Dr. Mortise is very interested in me.”

“Loosen up, will you.” Matthew said, “Tell me what's going on.”

“Nothing is going on.”

“What do you mean? What about our prison break?”

“I was behind these bars for three years.” Hannibal said, “I escaped successfully because I waited for the right moment. You must be patient.”

“Do I need to remind you that I've been in here for nine years, no thanks to you?” Matthew hissed, “I've waited long enough.”

“The angle at which I'm approaching the situation is precarious.” Hannibal said, “I risk showing my hand should I attempt to expedite the process.”
“What do you want me to do in the meantime?”

“There's nothing you can do except wait for my signal.”

“Which will be?”

“You'll know it when you see it.”

Hannibal rang his handcuffs against the bars to get Elliot and Jason's attention, “This visit is over. I would like to return to my cell.”

“Hey, asshole,” Matthew snapped, pressing his face to the bars, “what about Will?”

“What about him?”

“How is he? What's going on with him in relation to our plan?”

“Didn't you know?” Hannibal chuckled, “I married him yesterday.”

Matthew scowled as Elliot and Jason took Hannibal from the cage and strapped him to the cart once more.

“What did you do to make him go through with it?” Matthew asked.

“Like I told you, Will makes his own choices.” Hannibal said, “If you want to change his mind, you'll have to do it on your own.”

As Elliot and Jason rolled Hannibal from the room, Matthew sank to his stool with a murderous glint in his eyes.

~

The only light on in the office was the lamp on her desk. The clock read 8:15. She should be home already, but yet, she remained at the hospital, pouring out shots from the bottle of vodka she kept in the bottom drawer of her desk.

A quiet knock on the door interrupted her solemn drinking.

“Who is it?”

“Elliot.”

Helena sighed and tilted her head back against the chair. The last thing she wanted to do was fuck, but he wouldn't leave until she gave him something.

“Come in.”

Elliot slipped inside and eased the door shut behind him. The dim light reflected concern in his eyes when he noticed the bottle and shot glass.

“What's going on?” He asked.

“Bad day, that's all.” She said, lifting the glass. She winced as she threw back the shot and felt the
alcohol burn down her throat.

“Shouldn't you be mixing that with something?” Elliot asked, taking a seat across from her.

“This is fine.” She waved a hand. “Did you need something?”

“I just … wanted to see you.”

“You want sex?” She asked, blandly.

“If you're not up to it, that's fine.” He said.

She sighed again. Great. Just when she started to think he was a garden variety fuckboy, he came at her with this gentlemanly, concerned boyfriend routine.

“Maybe you want a drinking partner?” He suggested, “We could go home or … go to a bar. Whatever you want.”

“No, I want to drink alone.” She said. She swiped the bottle from the desk and poured another glass, spilling a bit over the rim.

“Sorry.” He murmured, “Do you want to talk about it?”

“No.” She said, slamming the bottle down.

He ducked his head and scraped a hand through his hair. Clearing his throat, he rose from his chair. “Maybe I should just leave.”

Helena closed her eyes. Was that affection she felt in her cold, black heart? Why did she feel so pleased that he was so appeasing and submissive?

“Wait.” She said.

He paused with his hand on the doorknob.

“Can I ask you a question? It might be a little uncomfortable, but we've been doing this for weeks now and I think we can take another step.”

“Yeah, sure.” He said, walking back to the desk.

“Do you have any dark fantasies?” She asked.

His eyes narrowed, “Like … you mean about sex? Kinky stuff?”

“Sure.” She said, spreading her hands, “Whatever you think about at night that you wouldn't want anyone else to find out about.”

He pursed his lips. “Um, yeah … I guess I do.”

“Like what?”

He swallowed hard and flushed deep pink, “You're right. This is kind of uncomfortable.”

“You can leave if it's too much.”

“No, no, I …” He sat down and scrubbed a hand of his face, “Some of this stuff I think about, I've only seen in porn videos, you know.”
“Porn isn't real life.”

“I know. I just wonder if it would be as good as they make it look.”

“Like what?”

He squirmed, “You know … All that roleplay and *Fifty Shades of Gray* shit.”

“Roleplay?”

He paused at the tone in her voice, then nodded, “Yeah.”

She snatched the shot glass and threw back the alcohol hard and fast. Slamming the glass down, she screwed the cap onto the alcohol and put it back in the bottom drawer. Elliot watched her with curious eyes.

“I think you should come home with me.” She said.

He blinked in momentary shock, then nodded, stammering, “Yeah, yeah, okay.”

“Are you done with all your duties here?” She asked, as she began to shove her things into her briefcase.

“Yeah, I was just checking in with you before I went home.”

“Good.”

She turned off her computer, and rose from her chair. Snatching her coat from the hanger, she marched toward the door, “Let's go.”

He followed her like a loyal puppy.

~

Will paced the house in the dark. It was past midnight, but sleep evaded him. Even with all the curtains drawn and the silence of the house, he was restless, exhausted but wide awake.

After three hours of tossing and turning, he gave up on sleep and wandered into the kitchen. He drank a glass of milk and ate the last muffin Alana had brought over. The food rested in his belly, but didn't improve upon his drowsiness.

He flopped down on the couch and turned on the TV. There wasn't much on this time of night, but he found a movie playing that was still fairly early in the plot. He watched without paying attention, his mind consumed by other thoughts. He wished he could call Hannibal, but it was too late at night for phone calls.

He rolled around on the couch, tense with pent up frustration and need. At last, he pushed his hand underneath his boxers and began to stroke himself. His racing thoughts slowly eased as he thought about Hannibal, letting his elaborate imagination carry him away in a fantasy of stimulation and gratification. He came after ten minutes.

He didn't move. Staring at the ceiling, letting the semen dry on his hand, he suddenly battled a
wave of crippling emotion. The mood swings weren't unfamiliar to him, but it had been some time since he'd felt the grip of depression. Five years with Hannibal had caused those chains to fall away. For the first time in his life, he'd been happy. Now, he was just as alone and empty as before.

Winston rose from the floor, as if sensing Will's sorrow, and came over to nudge and lick his cheek. Will groaned, twisting away from the wet swipe of Winston's tongue. Rising from the couch, he waddled to the bathroom with his boxers around his knees. He stripped out of his clothes, stepped into the shower, and turned the water on hot.

As he soaped up and scrubbed himself clean, he fought back the black cloud of depression that hung just above his head. He'd taken Hannibal's advice as best he could – he'd gone to his stream, he'd fished, he's imagined their life together after this roadblock, he'd gone past the doors of the Norman Chapel. Hannibal's coping mechanisms just didn't work on him. They never had. He'd spent years of his life imagining the pain away, only to wake up with the same crushing emotion and tortured imagination as before.

He had to get out of here. He had to get Hannibal out of the hospital. If he didn't, he wasn't going to survive. If he didn't survive, he knew Hannibal wouldn't.

Will spent half an hour in the shower, urged out only by the water growing cold. He toweled off and walked out of the bathroom naked. As he stepped into the living room, a blast of cold air struck him.

His mouth dropped open as his gaze absorbed the shattered window and the brick laying among the shards of glass scattered across the carpet. He knelt down and plucked the brick from the glass. As he turned it over, he saw that someone had spray-painted one bold, damning word onto the brick in black spray paint: WHORE.
The first thing Alana saw when she pulled into Will's driveway was the news vans from three different stations gathered in the driveway. The crews were filming footage of the anchors in front of the house, and one woman was knocking on the front door. Alana cursed under her breath as she noted the broken front window and the piece of plastic secured over it. She sat in her car with her mouth hanging open and her mind spinning for several moments before she got out and rushed to the front door.

“Excuse me.” She said to the news woman who was knocking and calling out for Will to answer the door.

“I'm sorry, who are you?” The woman asked.

“Dr. Alana Bloom. I'm consulting on this case for the FBI.” Alana said, “I'll have to ask you to leave before I call the director of the BAU. He's personally overseeing this case and he and I are good friends. He can have a team down here to rope this place off in twenty minutes.”

“We have every right to be here.” The woman said, her hands flying to her hips in indignation.

“It's private property and Mr. Graham doesn't want you here. Scram.”

Alana turned from the woman's shocked expression and pushed open the front door. She slipped inside before the cameras could catch a glimpse of the interior of the house, and slammed the door shut behind her.

Will greeted her wearing sweatpants and a wrinkled t-shirt. His eyes were hollow and heavy, as if he hadn't slept in days.

“Will,” She breathed, “Are you okay?”

He drew in a breath and scrubbed a hand over his face. “Uh … yeah.”

“What happened to your window?” She asked, shouldering her way past him. She marched into the living room to view the broken window from inside. He had stapled the piece of plastic to the window frame, but gusts of air still managed to get past the cracks.

“ Someone threw a brick through it last night.” He said, “I was in the shower, so I didn't hear it until they were gone. What the hell is going on? Those news vultures have been knocking on my door for an hour.”

“That's why I came.” She said, turning to gaze at him anxiously, “Last night, your location was leaked to the media. I didn't find out until this morning.”

“Leaked? By whom?”

“My best guess – Freddie Lounds.” Alana said, crossing her arms, “Jack is trying to get in touch with her now.”

“That bitch.” Will muttered.

“Will,” Alana said, touching his arm, “We'd like you to come stay with one of us until we find a better place for you to stay.”
“Thanks, but I think I'll be fine.”

“Will, do you know what this means?” Alana said, “This means all of Baltimore, all of the world, knows that you are here, in Wolftrap, Virginia. Alone. Now, some people actually support you and Hannibal, but a lot of sane people think you should be thrown in the loony bin with him. You're in danger, Will. Your life could be in danger if the right person tries to get after you.”

Will frowned at the broken window, his hand working over the back of his neck.

“It could be supporters.” Alana said, “Even worse, it could be people who want to hurt you for being with Hannibal. It could be people who hate gay marriage. It could be someone jealous that you're with Hannibal. The possibilities are almost endless when it comes to a high profile case like this one. There is all kinds of crazy in the world, and right now, most of Baltimore is focused on you. It would be in your best interests if you moved out of this house right now.” She let out a sigh as the rapping on the front door started up again. “Besides, do you want to fend off the media for the next few weeks until this dies down?”

Will sighed, “You're probably right.”

“I know I'm right.”

“Where will I stay?”

“Jack is trying to procure a safe house, but right now you can stay with him, or you can stay with me.”

Will blinked as he turned to look at her, “Stay with you? You're offering?”

“Yes, I am.” She said.

“The other day you told me you couldn't forgive me for marrying him.”

She shook her head. “Will, I will always care about you. You're my friend. I couldn't live with myself if I let something happen to you.”

“Thank you.” He whispered.

“Will you come with me?” She asked, putting a hand on his arm.

He nodded, “Yes.”

~

Freddie huffed and smoothed her hair back as the two FBI agents deposited her in the chair of Interrogation Room B.

“I have a visitor's badge that you gave me. You don't have to drag me in here like this.” She said.

Jack pushed off the wall and paced across the room to stand over her. His dark, brooding gaze reminded her of her frequent visits to the principal's office in high school.

“I'm going to ask you a question.” Jack said, “And I want you to answer me truthfully right away.”
She lifted her chin and cast him a challenging glare.

“Did you leak Will's location to the press?”

“Why do you think I did that?”

“You're the only person connected intimately to both this case and the media.” Jack said, “Plus, it's just the type of unethical journalistic crap you'd pull.”

“Why don't you tell me how you really feel about it?”

He slammed a hand down on the table, jarring the smirk from her face. He leaned in so close she could feel his breath hot on her cheeks.

“Someone threw a brick through Will's window last night with the word 'whore' spray painted on it. He could be in real danger, Freddie, and I know it's all because of you. You know the kind of charges I could slap on you for this kind of stupid stunt?”

“Then why don't you?”

He drew back slowly, and paced away from the table, drawing his suit jacket closed. “Freddie, you've been a thorn in my side for years. I can handle you. What I can't handle is suspects being attacked because of a media report.”

“Suspects?” She echoed, “Will Graham is a suspect now?”

“Will Graham has always been a suspect.” Jack said, crossing his arms, “But now you've put him on trial before the public. They're not as ethical or forgiving as I am. If the right person had heard about where he was staying, he could be in the hospital or worse by now. For every psycho who loves Hannibal Lecter, there's a psycho who hates him. Or didn't you think of that when you told all of Baltimore where Will was staying?”

“All right. I can see that you're convinced I did it.” Freddie said, holding up her hands, “For sake of the discussion, let's say I did. Not that I did, but hypothetically … What does this mean for your case? Yes, whoever leaked this information put Will in danger, but they also put him on trial, like you said. Apparently, a lot of people think Will is guilty. They want to know what you're doing about it. So, after the information leak, what are you going to do about it?”

“So, you're forcing my hand, is that it?” Jack said, nodding slowly, “You want him to go to trial?”

“I want to know the truth. So does the public. They deserve it.”

“That's what you journalists always say.” Jack said, “That the public deserves to hear the truth. Well, sometimes, police business isn't any of the public's goddamn business. That's how we get shit done. We can't conduct a proper investigation when the object of our investigation is being attacked in his own home.”

“But, it could speed things up a bit, don't you think?” She asked, cocking her head.

“You're done.” Jack said, stabbing a finger at the table, “No more insider information, no more exclusive rights. I'm kicking you out of this investigation, Freddie.”

“Fine.” She said, “I've got all the information I need. I know exactly what's happening with this case, Jack. Will is your friend, and you don't want to see him go to trial, much less the funny farm. You and Alana Bloom are biased as hell, and it's showing.”
Jack glared at her in silence.

Smirking, she rose from her chair, “Can I go now?”

“Yes, I've heard all I need to hear.”

Freddie marched to the door, but paused with her fingers around the handle. She glanced over her shoulder at Jack, “You know, since you're not going to be influencing my articles anymore, you don't have any say over what I write. Maybe my next article will be about how the FBI is concealing evidence that could convict Will Graham. I wonder what the fanatics will have to say about that.”

She slipped out the door before the broiling anger in Jack's gaze could overflow.

~

Chilton was mildly curious and highly suspicious when Helena asked him to meet in her office the next afternoon. She didn't specify the topic to be discussed, but he full well knew it would be about the Hannibal situation.

He smoothed his hair back and practiced a demeaning glare in the bathroom mirror before walking down the hallway to her office.

She welcomed him inside with a wave of her hand. “Shut the door behind you, please.”

He pushed the door shut and crossed the room to stand over her desk. “Well, let's cut right to the chase. What's this about?”

“Why don't you take a seat?” She suggested with a friendly smile.

His eyes narrowed, but he took the proffered seat. He noticed the bruises on her knuckles just before she tucked her hand in her lap.

Have some anger issues to work through, eh, Dr. Mortise?

Helena pushed aside the case file she was looking through and focused her attention on him. “Well, Dr. Chilton, I'm sure you know the reason I asked you to come here today.”

“This is about Hannibal.” He said, forming a steeple with his fingers just below his chin. “Would you like to convince me to give you the information back?”

“I have all the information. In my head.” She said, sitting back in her chair, “Unfortunately, should I publish these observations, I'd have no evidence that Hannibal Lecter truly said these things to me.”

“Yes, exactly.”

“You can see, I have a conundrum.”

“I see that you are way out of your depth.” He said, “I've been in this business for years before you got here. It's a cutthroat business, just like any other fight for survival. Psychiatry isn't a fast track to fame, Dr. Mortise. You have to earn your way there, on your own merits, and illnesses of the
mind aren't easily proven.”

“Yes, which is why I need Hannibal.”

“Hannibal was my patient long before he was yours.” Chilton said, “He tried to frame me for his crimes and when I wrote my book, he attempted to refute it. We have what you might call a rivalry. I deserve this honor, Helena. I've earned it through blood, sweat, and tears. Look at me! I nearly died for the cause of psychiatry.”

“Now that's funny.” Helena said, cocking a brow, “Because I heard you nearly died in the fire because you pandered to Freddie Lounds' bad journalism techniques.”

“The FBI asked me to do it.” Chilton snapped, heat rising up his neck and cheeks, “I was aiding a police investigation.”

“You were an idiot.” Helena said, leaning forward to glare at him, “You walked into a fucking trap because Will Graham is a manipulative little bastard.”

Chilton rose from his chair and seethed out a calming sigh, “I don't have to listen to this. As it stands, I am your superior and-”

“Please, sit back down.” Helena said, motioning to the chair, “I didn't ask you here to argue.”

Chilton glared at her for a moment before deciding he really was curious to hear what she had to say. “All right. What do you want?”

“You can't deny that I've earned my way here, too. Just not for as many years, and through fewer hardships than you.”

“Well … yes, I suppose so.”

“I've done all the legwork on Lecter, and from what I understand, he won't talk to you.”

Chilton shifted uncomfortably. “Well …”

“You can't finish this case.” Helena said, “I can. I have a rapport with Lecter that can open doors in his mind, in his psyche. I feel like I'm just beginning to gain ground with him. You have to let me finish.”

“You want to work together?” Chilton chuckled. “Is that what you're asking?”

“Yes.”

Chilton tilted his head back and let out a laugh. When he gathered himself, Helena was glaring at him, her hands folded tightly on the desk before her.

“No.” Chilton said.

“What?”

“I said 'no'.” He rose from the chair, shaking his head, “Helena, if you want to get ahead in this world, you don't 'work together'. The moment you have your hands on gold, someone will want to take it from you. You shouldn't trust anyone, most of all a partner. So, no, I cannot accept your offer. I'll find a way to crack Lecter, and when I do, I'm going to write a book that will put Freddie Lounds's volume of lies down the shitter.”
“I got the info out of Lecter.” Helena objected, jumping up from her chair, “You can't do this. I could report you.”

“You're forgetting.” Chilton said, holding up a finger, “If you report me, you're reporting yourself for using unethical tactics with Lecter. We'll go down together. Is that what you want?”

Helena swayed momentarily before sinking to her chair. She stared with empty eyes at the surface of the desk, offering no further argument.

“I think this meeting is over.” Chilton smirked.

He turned on his heel and marched out of the office. He whistled as he strode down the hallway toward his office. He had to shake his head. Helena was much too young for this business. She didn't understand how it worked. She didn't understand that what he had done was the only way to get ahead in this life. She was going to be crushed.

Chilton stepped into his office and sank down his chair. He rolled around offers he could make Hannibal in his head, rejecting each one as it came. Helena was half-right about her rapport with Hannibal, but if she could manage a quid pro quo situation, so could he. He had no qualms about sharing personal information with Hannibal, as the man was never going to see the light of day as a free man again.

Chilton pulled open the bottom desk drawer and pulled back the files he had placed on top of Helena's notebook. His whistling came to an abrupt halt when his rifling revealed nothing but the bottom of the drawer. No notebook. No tape recorder.

Panic rose up to choke him as he pawed through the files again, searching desperately in between folders and papers. When he had gone through it three times, he ripped open the other drawers to search them, thinking perhaps he had put the notebook and tape recorder in the wrong place.

By the time he finished searching his desk, papers and folders were strewn across the floor and desk, and he was breathing heavily in abject panic.

No notebook. No recorder. Not a shred of evidence on Hannibal.

He sat back in his chair, mind spinning with possibilities. He knew he had not misplaced the research material, and so there was only one possible explanation. Helena had found a way to take it. She had staged the meeting to keep him out of his office long enough to allow a thief to take it. All he had to do was find the person she had paid or manipulated to break into his office, and she would be done at the BSHCI forever.

~

Elliot met Helena in a hallway of the Schizophrenia ward of the hospital later that day. He pulled her notebook and tape recorder out from underneath his shirt, a grin spreading across his face.

“Did I give you plenty of time?” She asked.

“Oh yeah, I was in and out.”

She shoved the notebook and tape recorder in her briefcase and glanced over her shoulder. The
hallway was empty, only the distant sound of inmates groaning and muttering to themselves for company.

“I can't thank you enough.” She said, gazing down at the tape recorder, “There's some sensitive topics on this recorder that I wouldn't want Chilton to hear.”

“But you don't mind Lecter hearing them?”

“Hannibal uses other people's personal information to sate his own curiosity and for his own twisted satisfaction. He's psychotic, but at least I know he won't stab me in the back with it.” She cleared her throat, and plastered a smile on her face, “He didn't lock it up?”

Elliot's confused squint fell away to a bright smile. “He did. Didn't I ever tell you about my past as a juvenile delinquent? I know how to pick a lock or two.”

She smiled and grabbed him by the collar. “That's so sexy.”

They shared a deep kiss before Helena pulled back.

“We shouldn't be seen together like this.”

“Nobody is gonna tell.” Elliot said, “I've worked here for seven years. I knew Chilton before you started working here, and everyone hates him.”

“Good.” She said, “Still, I want to be careful.”

“Okay.”

“Well, I guess I'll see you later.”

He caught her arm as she turned to leave. “Hey.”

“What?” She asked.

He gazed down at her with expectant blue eyes, “Last night was … it blew my mind.”

She bit her lower lip. “Mine too.”

“We should definitely do it again, right?”

She nodded, “Right.”

“I mean, I didn't think I'd ever enjoy pretending to be a psycho.” Elliot said, “But roleplaying with you has given me a whole new perspective on life.”

“Don't get lost in the game.” She said, pulling her hand free of his wrist, “That's all it was. A game. We're not going to start having a serious relationship just because things got a little kinky between us.”

“A little?” He raised his eyebrows.

“Roleplaying is fine.” She said, “We're not dating.”

“I know.” He said, holding his hands up.

“Good. I have to go.”
“I’ll see you later?”

She hesitated, and quietly cursed herself. “Yes. At my house.”

“Okay.” He grinned.

Helena took off down the hallway, her teeth gritted. Last night had been an indulgence in a moment of weakness. She knew she should end it right here. What would she do when roleplaying couldn't compare to the real thing?

~

Will packed a light bag for his stay at Alana's place. He didn't expect to being staying long, nor did he want to to say long. Alana's weekly visits to his home in Wolftrap to fret over him were bad enough. Staying with her meant she could fret twenty-four seven and he would be bound by gratitude for her taking him in, unable to protest.

Not only that, but he would also have to interact with Margot. Margot, a lesbian whom he had slept with once many years ago. Margot who had almost been the mother of his child. Margot who had ended up marrying his best friend. The situation had all the makings of an awkward living arrangement, made worse by the threat hanging over his head.

Yet, it couldn't be any worse than staying Jack. Jack was considering whether he was innocent or not. Alana was convinced of his innocence, even if his marriage to Hannibal shook her moorings. He was happy to see her gentility and goodness had survived despite all she had been through. His seemed to have vanished, washed away in the cold Atlantic.

When Alana pulled her car into the driveway in front of Muskrat Farm, she parked and turned to him. “Are you going to be okay with this? It might be strange with Margot-”

“No, I'll be fine.” Will waved her off, “I'm grateful that you're offering me a place to stay.” “Okay. One more thing – I told Morgan that you're an FBI friend who needs a place to stay because a bad guy is threatening you. He's at that age where when he asks questions, he understands and absorbs the answers. Please, don't elaborate too much. I've tried to keep my work separate from family. I want him to have a normal childhood in spite of the Verger family history.”

“I understand. An FBI friend …?”

“The truth is a bit too much for an eight year old.”

“I don't work for the FBI anymore. Am I supposed to tell him that I do?”

“You can tell him you don't work for the FBI. Just don't go into detail about the situation.”

“Okay.”

“Okay.” She echoed. “Are you ready?”

“As ready as I'll ever be.”

They got out of the car and Will carried his bag while Alana tugged Winston along on his leash. As they stepped through the front door, a wave of memory struck Will. He'd been drugged for a large
majority of the time when Mason had kept he and Hannibal here eight years ago, but he recalled the antique décor and mystic beauty of the mansion.

“We've done some modernizing in the décor, but it's mostly the same.” Alana remarked.

Will nodded, “It looks good.”

“Come this way.”

She led them down the hallway and into the living room. A tall, slender boy slouched on the couch with an iPad cradled in his arms. One finger dashed across the screen, playing some sort of game.

“Morgan,” Alana said, sitting down next to him, “this is Will. Remember I told he was going to come stay with us?”

Morgan looked up from the game, “Hi, Will.”

“Hi, Morgan.”

Morgan turned his attention back to the game, his mouth set in a focused line.

Alana rose from the couch and touched Will's arm as she passed, “I'll show you the guest bedroom.”

“Not very talkative.” Will remarked as they climbed the stairs to the second floor.

“He gets that way around new people.” She said, “Margot insisted he have that iPad. I wasn't completely for it, but it has some great learning tools.”

“Does it make us sound old, if we say 'kids these days'?”

“Aren't we though?” Alana asked with a wane smile, “I'm a mother now. A wife. These things didn't cross my mind not that long ago.”

“Me either.”

“Marriage, you mean?”

He cast her guarded look, “Alana, I'm not going to talk about Hannibal. At least not here in your home. It's not the place.”

“You're right.” She said, holding up a hand, “And you have a right to privacy. You don't have to talk to me about it anywhere if you don't want to. I apologize, but I'm just worried about you.”

“I know. And I appreciate it.”

Alana opened the door to the guest bedroom and motioned for him to enter. Will glanced around the room and let out a sigh. It was twice the size of his bedroom in Wolftrap, and ten times nicer. The thick, overstuffed comforter and pillows billowing with downy invited him to lay his head and rest like he hadn't in weeks.

“This looks nice. Thank you, Alana.”

“Dinner will be at six. I hope you come down and join us.”

“Thank you, I will.”
“Okay. I'll let you settle in.”

She backed out of the room and shut the door behind her. Silence settled across the room, and he realized he'd left Winston downstairs. He didn't worry about the dog. Alana had taken care of him intermittently for years. This mansion was probably like a second home to Winston.

Will kicked off his shoes and flopped across the bed. The blankets and pillow top mattress swallowed him in a warm, cozy embrace. He closed his eyes and let out a long, slow breath. For the first time in weeks, he felt safe and peaceful. He drifted off into an exhausted slumber, and dreamed about a honeymoon he would never have.

~

“So, be honest.” Margot said as she bent over to check the food cooking in the oven, “What do you really think is bouncing around in his head?”

Alana leaned against the island counter and took a sip of red wine. She considered the question for a long moment before working up an honest reply, “I hate to say this, but I think he really cares about Hannibal.”

“He's a charming guy.” Margot said, tossing the oven mitts on the counter, “An unethical psychiatrist, but a charismatic one nonetheless. I can see him getting inside Will's head.”

“The crazier part .... I think Hannibal really cares about him.”

“You don't think he has a heart?”

“I've known Hannibal for a long, long time.” Alana said, “He's always been different, and that used to attract me to him. Now that I know what he is, I can't remember what it was exactly that made me fall so hard. All the things that used be sexy are just plain creepy now.”

“Will's brain doesn't work like everyone else.” Margot said, “He's seeing Hannibal through a different pair of lenses.”

“I've tried talking sense to him. He won't have it.”

Margot leaned against the other side of the counter and reached across to take Alana's hands in her own. “We don't get to choose who we fall in love with. It just happens, whether it's right or wrong.”

Alana smiled. “I know. But at some point you have to realize when it's toxic.”

“Do you think Hannibal is abusive?”

“That's what has always felt wrong to me.” Alana said, rubbing a hand over her forehead, “Hannibal isn't the type of person who gets what he wants through force. I've never heard him raise his voice, much less raise a hand to someone. He sits back and pulls the strings. He's a master manipulator, not a bulldozer.”

“Just because he didn't hit Will doesn't mean he wasn't forcing him.” Margot said.

“You're right. But why imply abuse if it wasn't being used?”
“Where did that angle come in?”

“From the beginning. They found Will tied up and beaten at the house in Spain. They did a rape kit, didn't find any signs of tearing that comes with perpetual rape, but they did find semen. He was drugged, so maybe he didn't fight back …. I don't know; none of it makes sense anymore.”

“Have you considered the alternative?”

Alana glanced up to see Margot gazing at her with somber, green eyes. It was one of the things she admired the most about her wife that Margot could see the truth in a situation, accept, and declare it without flinching. Pure steel underneath a beautiful, soft exterior.

“I don't want to think about it.” Alana murmured.

“I don't know Will as well as you do, but I've seen enough to know that he makes his own decisions. He's stronger than most people think, but that's because he doesn't let anyone in. You want to believe that he's fragile and helpless, and maybe he's letting you think that right now because he needs you on his side. But what if it's not true? You have to consider all the alternatives.”

“I have considered them.”

“I'm not saying you should forget the goodness in your friend.” Margot said, “I'm saying you have to put yourself in his shoes, the shoes of a victim.”

“I thought you were suggesting he's guilty.”

“We all do what we have to do to survive in this world.” Margot said, her voice growing quiet, “I know that better than anyone. Sometimes you have to do horrible things so you can survive, things you think you can't come back from; some things you never will come back from no matter how hard you try. I could understand it for Will walked down a dark path for his own sake, and didn't come back the same. Maybe he is guilty of doing horrible things, but we can only hope he did them for the right reasons.”

“I hope you're right. He's a good person. A good man. He kept coming back to the field because he wanted to save people. I can't accept that he fell for a man who is a compulsive killer and a cannibal.”

“One day, you might have to.”

“Might have to to what?”

Alana spun around at the sound of Will's voice. He lingered in the doorway, his hair tousled, his eyes glassy with sleep.

“We were just talking about the case.” Alana said, “Did you sleep well?”

“Like I haven't in weeks.” Will said. He shoved his hands in his pockets as he crossed the room to join them at the counter, “Is there another glass I can use?”

“Sure.”

Alana searched the cabinets for another wine glass and brought it back to Will. She perusing him as she poured him a glass. She didn't want to look too closely for fear that she might see what Margot had described.
Will murmured a thank you as brought the glass to his lips. Silence settled on the kitchen, brimming with tension. Alana cleared her throat and took a drink of her wine. It suddenly tasted sour at the back of her tongue.

“It's good to see you again, Will.” Margot said, smiling amiably at him, “It's been awhile.”

“Mm.” Will grunted.

The shrill beep of the oven timer sliced through the tension. Margot took the opportunity to escape the stilted conversation, and went about pulling the pan from the oven and making the last of the preparations for dinner.

Will set his glass of wine on the counter without taking a second sip. His eyes were distant like the blue of ocean tides stretching toward the horizon. He was a hundred miles away and floating listlessly; for all her psychiatric knowledge and experience, she was unsure how to pull him back down to earth.

“Is the wine okay?” She asked, “We have plenty of other selections.”

“No, no, this is fine.” He said. His grimaced smile faded as he observed her. “You were talking about me just then, weren't you?”

She lowered her head. “Yes.”

“I'm not trying to convince you of anything, Alana. You can believe what you want to believe about me.”

“What I want to believe isn't necessarily the truth.”

“Whatever helps you sleep at night.” He said, bringing the wine glass to his lips.

“That's not a healthy mindset. I have no interest in living in a fantasy world, especially when it comes to those I care about.”

“You're a good person, Alana.” He said, “You want to help all of your patients and your friends. You want to see the best outcome from a bad situation. Your positivity is what makes you a great psychiatrist. Don't let my choices bring you down because you think you can't fix me.”

“I'm not trying to fix-”

“Yes you are. You've always tried to fix me. But I'm not broken anymore, Alana. I'm going to be fine.”

Alana frowned, but the conversation was concluded by Margot's announcement that dinner was ready. Alana called Morgan into the dining room, and the four of them sat down to a dinner of pot roast and awkward silence.

~

Will stayed with Margot and Alana for three days. While at the mansion, he sequestered himself in his room. When he emerged, it was to make his daily visit to the BSHCI. Every day, Hannibal promised that Will would soon being wearing the black opal necklace again. Every day, Will left
the hospital with the gap of loneliness widening in his chest.

Despite his conversation with Alana, she continued to hover and worry. He knew she couldn't simply turn off her concern, and so, all he could do was avoid her. In this way, it was nearly a relief when they woke up one morning to a pounding on the front door. The media had found him again.

“I guess you'll have to go stay with Jack. I'm sure he'll have a safe house lined up soon.” Alana said.

Will agreed without argument. At least staying with Jack meant straight-forward, brutal honesty. Jack wouldn't beat around the bush when he thought Will was hiding something. Neither would he waste his energy being worried over Will's mental well-being. Will wasn't sure if he was looking forward to that living situation, or dreading it.
“You seem tense today.”

“You've had your fair share of Chilton.” Helena said from her chair in the corner of the observation room.

“Ah, the thorn in everybody's side.” Hannibal said, “It's a pity his incarceration didn't last.”

“It's a pity because you ended up being convicted for those crimes. Although, as I understand it, you gave yourself up willingly.”

“If you intend to criticize me for doing so, I'll have you know that I do not regret my decision to surrender.”

“Nobody could figure it out back then.” Helena said, “But I think it was because of Will Graham.”

“You're still intrigued by our relationship.”

“Everyone is.”

“It's actually quite simple. Would you like me to explain it to you?”

“You're offering?”

“These are give and take conversations. I'm obligated to explain if you are interested.”

“Go on.” Helena said, poising her pen over paper.

“The Chinese were wise when they introduced to the world to the concept of yin and yang, the basic idea being the balance of light and darkness. What yin and yang symbolizes is the idea that for everything in the world, there is an opposite and equal denominator. Night and day, light and dark, cold and heat, order and disorder, entropy and progress; I don't need to elaborate any further. You know what I mean.”

“Will Graham is your opposite and equal?”

“It's the most accurate concept I can attach to our relationship.”

“That's very romantic. I seem to recall something about you trying to kill each other.”

“Yes. Will is nothing like me. We don't share similar interests or hobbies. We are attracted to death for entirely different reasons. Opposites are constantly at war with each other because they do not understand one another. It's an enduring reaction of human existence to find friction with the things that are unfamiliar or alien to us. However, when two opposites harmonize, it creates the perfect balance and melody. What one lacks, the other makes up for.”

“A match made in heaven.” Helena remarked, raising an eyebrow, “Why are you telling me this, Hannibal?”

“I'm obligated to tell you.”

“No, no you're not. You can still control what you do and do not tell me. You have a lifetime of experiences and viewpoints that you could tell me instead of divulging important dynamics of your
relationship with Will. The way I'm hearing it, you're admitting that you didn't rape him or abuse him. Maybe even that he killed with you.”

“I am not admitting that. However, if I were to admit something about Will, you are bound by confidentiality laws.”

“I'm bound by confidentiality laws should you divulge information about a previous crime. If I think a living person is in danger, I am obligated to inform the authorities. For instance, if I think you are telling me Will Graham is a killer and that he is dangerous, it's my duty to tell someone.”

Hannibal smiled. “Unfortunately, Dr. Mortise, I am not saying that.”

Helena clenched her jaw. The tension bridled at the back of her neck threatened to break loose across her skull and forehead. She'd slept barely a wink last night going over her situation with Chilton in her head. Hannibal's attitude didn't put her worries to ease in the least.

She rummaged for the bottle of Aspirin in her bag and threw back two with a glass of lukewarm water. She could feel Hannibal's eyes tracking her movement about the room.

“Is there something you would like to divulge to me now?” He asked.

“Making your own conclusions, Dr. Lecter?” She said, crossing her arms and glaring at him.

“Stress is one of the easiest ills of the body to recognize.” He said, “It's a product of the mind, but it can have detrimental affect on the physical body. It's also something I have vast experience in treating as it plays a large part in the reasons most people seek out therapy.”

“I'm stressed because Chilton has threatened to fire me.”

Hannibal's eyebrows rose. “That is serious. What did you do to earn such a threat?”

“I'm studying you.”

“He knows about our conversations?”

She nodded.

Hannibal chuckled. “Ah, Frederick. Always late to the party. He's burning with jealousy, isn't he?”

“Yes. I don't find it amusing. He does have the authority to fire me, or persuade the board to fire me.”

“The thing about Frederick is that he's all hot air and good intentions with none of the confidence or brains to back up his threats. You have to grab him by the balls and put him in his place.”

“Maybe you can do that, but my career is on the line. Getting fired from an institution like this one at such a crucial point in my career could end everything for me.”

“The world is a large place, and Baltimore is quite small. I have confidence you would find your way into better circles should you leave this place. In fact, it might be the best thing that could happen to you.”

She frowned, considering his remarks. It gulled her that for all the therapy she had been through, she had never spoken to a doctor quite as reassuring as Hannibal. Murderous and endearing; a cocktail for disaster. He could have anything he wanted in the world if he spun his words in the right direction.
“The important thing about Baltimore is you.” She murmured.

“You've grown attached to me. I'm touched.” He said, turning his head to smirk at her.

“You're a prize patient. No one can diagnose you. If I did, I wouldn't have to do this type of meticulous, dismal work again. They would be begging me to do speaking engagements and analyses.”

“So, you have a professional curiosity about me. Is that all?”

She pursed her lips. His dark gaze sparked with intelligence and a dare – a dare for her to lie to him so that he could humiliate her with the truth.

“I think you know it's not.” She said, her voice thin and hoarse. She slid her hand across the table to turn off the tape recorder.

“Why are turning off the recording?” He asked, his gaze snapping to the small device. “Are you about to admit your sexual desire for me?”

Shame coursed hot up her chest and into her cheeks. Her face prickled with consuming heat that she imagined had flushed her skin bright red by now. She clenched her sweaty hands into fists as her brain searched for a response that wouldn't exacerbate her humiliation any further.

“It would be shame for you to leave here without getting what you wanted.” He said, his voice soft like honey that trickled down her ears.

She crossed her arms taut over her chest. She avoided his penetrating gaze, but felt the burn of his eyes on her all the same.

“It is what you want, isn't it?” He pressed, “All those conversations we've had about your enjoyment of BDSM and violent partners … I could smell it on you, Helena. I've smelled it since the day you first strapped me to this chair. Why don't you just take what you want? You have the power and the credibility; you could do it, and no one would ever know.”

“I don't want to hurt you.” She snapped, the words bubbling past her lips before she could halt them. “I want you to hurt me, goddamnit.”

Silence settled on the small room. The friction rushed hot between them, filling the room with tangible tension.

“At last,” Hannibal said, softly, “The truth comes out. I had wondered when you would reveal your longings to me.”

She marched away from the chair, out of his line of sight. He rested in the chair, unperturbed by her sudden admission and the anger that pulsed at her fingertips and the tip of her tongue. She could hurt him, she thought. She could hurt him quite a bit since he was strapped down and helpless. They were on the other side of the hospital. No one would hear. If they did, no one would care.

“Admitting your darkest desires to yourself is one of the best things you can do for your mental well-being.” Hannibal said, “If you fear them, they master you. If you accept them, you could master a world.”

“Is that what you told yourself the first time you killed someone?” She asked.
“No. The first time I killed someone, everything became quite clear. I have never feared my lot in life. But you do.”

“You live in your own little world. You don't understand what these … these fears mean for me.”

“Of course I do. They mean disgrace and humiliation should anyone find out. They mean your credibility is gone, irreparable.”

“I won't live a lie.”

“You live a lie now because you are not true to your desires.”

“I won't accept one moment of pleasure for a lifetime of hiding. It's short-sighted and asinine.”

“Yet you will struggle just as greatly if you do not follow through.”

Helena strode back around the chair to face him. His eyes followed her with singular fascination, as if he were just now coming to enjoy their sessions. Weeks ago, she would have done anything to get that look out of him. Now that he knew what she was thinking about when they met, she couldn't enjoy the attention.

“Are you encouraging me?” She demanded.

“I am encouraging your fantasies.”

“You just finished telling me that Will Graham is the yin to your yang. You married him, for Christ's sake. Now you're telling me to follow through with my desires?”

“I'm asking you to be comfortable with them. Whether I capitulate or not is beyond your control.”

“Would you?”

A smile tugged at his lips. “No.”

“Then why are you asking me to follow through?”

“Whether you think so or not, you have told me a great deal in the past few weeks, Dr. Mortise. You're an only child, the daughter of a single mom who tried her best but just couldn't cut it. She worked two jobs to support you, but you could never love her enough for it. Why? Because she asked too much of you. She pushed you and pushed you to succeed, but it was never enough. You went to college because you didn't want to disappoint her, and entered into a profession that forced you to see the flaws within yourself, that gave you the tools to fix yourself – and yet, you refuse to objectively treat yourself because good is never good enough. You pretend to be a confident, powerful woman, and this job offers you that facade, but you don't see yourself that way. Your self-worth has been ground down to nothing by the men you've let soil you, and the professionals around you that degrade you for your gender and upbringing. Nothing would satisfy you more than to prove them wrong. That's why you're so set on understanding me. Not because you value the discoveries you could make rooting through my brain, but because, for once in your life, you would be better than everyone else in the room. You would finally prove them wrong. But once again, you've failed yourself. Your sexual longings are in the way of your professional need for achievement. They've always spoken louder than professionalism, they've always deterred you from becoming the woman you want to be. You want to satisfy your needs but the floundering psychiatrist inside you knows that if you do this, you can never ever turn back. You can never rise above your peers knowing that you've found gratification in a man your world has termed a monster. The conflict will never end, Helena. You must choose one side or the other. If you tear
yourself between these two desires, neither one will ever be whole. Neither professionalism or sexual desire will be fulfilled, and you will be left with nothing.”

Helena blinked, her eyes burning with brimming emotion. Her chest hurt, stabbed by a mixture of humiliation and painful realization.

“Shit.” She whispered.

“You don't have to tell me I'm right.” He said, “No one has ever described your inner conflict this way before. Take a moment to process it.”

“I don't need a moment.” She growled, despite the tear darting down her cheek. She swiped a viscous hand across her cheek, smearing moisture down her jaw, “You're full of shit, Hannibal.”

His cool gaze followed her as she rushed to the door. Flinging it open, she shouted down the hall for Elliot and Jason to take Hannibal back to his cell.

“If you continue to run from this, you will only do more harm to yourself.” Hannibal said.

Helena waited by the door, tapping her foot on the linoleum. She didn't meet his gaze, afraid it would once more open the floodgates behind her eyes.

“You deserve to be happy with yourself.” Hannibal added.

“You won't tell anyone about this.” She said.

He gazed at her with a placid expression that didn't betray whether or not he would tell.

She marched over to the chair and bent over him until their eyes were inches apart. “You won't tell anyone, Hannibal. If you do, I will find a way to put you in more pain than you've ever felt in your life.”

“That's what I'm talking about.” He whispered, “Let those violent urges free.”

Propelled by rage, she slapped him hard across the mouth. Her palm stung as she drew back. She was pleased to see that she had drawn blood from the center of his lower lip. He dragged his tongue across the blood and sucked his lower lip into his mouth. His eyes watched her with steady amusement as Elliot and Jason entered with the cart.

Elliot’s gaze faltered from the task to Helena as they moved Hannibal to the cart. When they completed strapping him down, Elliot touched Jason's shoulder. “I'll be there in a minute.”

Jason rolled the cart out of the room, and Elliot eased the door shut behind him.

“What are you doing?” Helena asked, “You can't leave Jason alone with him, even if he is restrained. Hannibal requires two guards at all times to-”

“I can tell when you're not okay.” Elliot said, “Right now, you're a mess. What happened in here?”

She pursed her lips, and glanced away.

Elliot slipped his arm around her waist and turned her chin towards him. His blue eyes captured her with an intensity and warming concern that had always touched her.

“You can tell me.” He said.
Helena ducked her head. “I told him.”

Elliot blinked for a moment before responding, “God, Helena ...”

“He knows now, and he's not going to let it go.” She groaned, pulling away from him. She paced across the room, cradling her face in her hands.

“Why did you tell him?”

“Because, I just … It kind of just slipped out.”

“How does that happen? How does admitting you want to fuck a maniac just slip out?”

“Watch your tone.” She said, letting her anger pull her composure back together. “I'm still your boss.”

Elliot held up his hands. “I'm sorry.”

“Well you better be.”

“What does this mean for us?”

“Don't be so fucking selfish.” She snapped. “This could be my career on the line.”

“I care about you.” He insisted, his cheeks growing pink, “Like actually, really care about you. Maybe you haven't realized it because you're so absorbed in this fucked up fantasy about Lecter, but this is more than just a fling to me.”

She stopped cold, her heart dropping. “What?”

“You're a beautiful, strong, capable woman.” Elliot said, stepping closer to her. “We have a lot of fun in bed, but that's not why I keep coming back.”

“The other day when I told you we weren't dating, you agreed with me.” She said.

“Because that's what you wanted me to do, but it's not true.”

“Goddamnit, Elliot!”

“I can't change how I feel.” He said, spreading his hands helplessly, “I just … sort of, accidentally fell in love with you.”

“Just like I accidentally told Hannibal I want him?” She bit off.

“That's not fair.”

“I told you from the beginning it was just sex. You can't just proclaim your love to me.”

“Yes I can. And I did. It's up to you how to respond.”

“I can't … I can't respond, Elliot. I'm not ready to be in a relationship.”

“You have your hang-ups.” Elliot said. “You have your demons. Everyone does, it's normal. I can deal with it, Helena. I can help you work them out.”

She nodded, swallowing back a wave of emotion. “Right. You can help me work past the seriously fucked up shit going through my head. Don't you think I've tried to work it out? It doesn't fucking
go away, Elliot. It's my brain, my body. I can't just change what it likes.”

“I can provide you with what you like. I already know what you like in bed-”

“You're not him, you idiot!” She shouted, “Don't you fucking get it? You were nothing more than a replacement.”

Thick silence settled between them except for her shallow, panicked breaths. Her head spun, throbbing through the temples, losing control. She could see Elliot standing in front of her, wide-eyed and open-mouthed in shock and pain, but it seemed distant, as if she was viewing her own life on a TV screen.

“You never cared about me?” He whispered.

Helena swallowed back a scream of frustration, and settled for one terse word. “No.”

He clenched his jaw, and looked away. Swiping a hand over his face, he concealed the glint of tears in his eyes. For a moment, it seemed as if he would offer a second effort argument, but he turned and left the observation room without a word.

Helena sank down on her stool and covered her face with a hand. She practiced steady breaths for several moments, and rose from the stool composed. She swallowed another Aspirin and stuffed her notes and recorder into her bag.

When she stepped out of the room, she was calm, only the ruddy hue on her cheeks as evidence of the storm raging inside her. She marched down the hall, passing the various wards with their solemn moaning and maniacal laughter. For a moment, she felt like one of them, and that scared her more than anything.

*Hold it together. You are in control.*

Her footsteps slowed as she turned the corner to her office and saw the people walking in and out, carrying boxes. Her confusion turned to panic when she noticed her own possessions sitting in the cardboard boxes that lined the edge of the hallway. She rushed to the doorway, and leaned against the doorjamb for mere moments to assess the situation. Three orderlies were packing up her things, doing a swift job of clearing out the office. One of them was taking her computer tower.

“What the hell is going on?” She demanded.

The orderlies paused, all of them wide-eyed, but tight-lipped.

“Why are taking all my stuff?”

The three exchanged glances, as if passing the duty of explaining to her from one to next.

“I want an answer right now.”

“You can clear the room.”

Helena spun around to see Chilton standing behind her, a smug smile set firmly on his mangled lips.

“Dr. Chilton.” She said, forcing an amicable tone into her voice, “What's the meaning of this?”

The orderlies left the room in single file, heads down, pace swift to escape the inevitable.
“You know what surprises me every time?” Chilton asked, stepping into the office.

“What?”

“How cheap people are. How easy.” He said, dragging her fingertip across her vacated desk.

Helena trailed after him, her hands clenching into fists.

“You wouldn't believe how quickly word travels around this hospital.” Chilton said, turning to face her. “Especially when the news is scandalous.”

“Is this about Elliot?” She asked.

“Yes and no.”

“Who told you?”

“That part isn't important. What's important is that once I figured out that you were having an affair with a subordinate, I realized that Elliot was probably the one who broke into my office and stole your notebook and tape recorder back. Which then made me realize that the whole situation with Hannibal is completely unimportant now that I have proof that you are having sexual relations with one of our employees. It really simplifies everything. A case of sexual misconduct is cut and dry. I didn't have to implicate myself in the slightest when I reported the issue to the board.”

“You fucking bastard-”

“No. Stop right there.” Chilton said, holding up a hand, “You're a big girl, Helena. You made the choices that got you here. You were fucking a subordinate. I had nothing to do with that trespass.”

“Don't tell me you haven't had your fair share of indiscretions.”

“Of course I have. But I was much more diligent in concealing it. You let your affair with Elliot wave out in the open for everyone to see.”

“What's going to happen to him?”

“I'm going to be reporting the terrible news that this is his last day on the job right after I'm done with you.”

Helena turned away, dropping her face into her hands. Tears surged against her eyelids, and she fought to hold them at bay. The world was crumbling around her, all her hard-earned work turning to dust between her fingers.

“You have until the end of the day to leave.” Chilton said, “When you do, you will leave behind your notes and the recordings of your meetings with Hannibal.”

“You can't do this.” Helena hissed. “I still did all the work. I can publish independent of this hospital.”

“Darling, if only.” He said, shaking his head, “Your opinion will never be valued by the psychiatric community. Having an affair is bad enough. If everyone knew that you were using quid pro quo to get the information, you would never have a job in psychiatry again.”

“You're going to tell them that?”

“No. Not if you leave the research behind.”
Helena lifted her chin, sniffing back tears. “Fine.”

Chilton nodded. “All right then. I'll be off to see your beau then.”

He swept past her without a hint of remorse in his eyes. He let the door swing shut behind him, and only then did Helena allow herself to weep.

~

It wasn't until Jack let Will into the house and gave him a short tour that Will realized he had never been in Jack's house for social reasons rather than work-related investigation. The house was immaculate and smelled of candles. Everywhere, a trained eye could catch lingering traces of Bella.

“Thanks for letting me stay here.” Will said when they returned to the living room, “Freddie Lounds is doing her best to make me a source of media speculation.”

“You've been a source of media speculation for some time, Will.” Jack said, “In recent years, bigger speculation than Hannibal.”

“We've been in the news?”

“Every time the police got a tip-off or there was an unconfirmed sighting, the whole thing would come to life on the news again.” Jack said, “As soon as that happened, I would have a whole flock of reporters knocking on my door again.”

“Sorry you had to deal with that.”

“It's okay.”

Will glanced around the living room, the spacious furniture, and tasteful décor. The house wasn't unlike some of the places he and Hannibal had stayed in the past five years.

“You have a nice place.” He remarked.

“Thank you. Most of this décor was done before Bella died. She was insistent on being surrounded by good taste.” Jack said with a smile, “I still burn candles because she always had one burning to make the house smell good.”

“You still miss her.”

“And I'm sure I'll continue missing her for the rest of my life. The key is to remember the good times, and glean from those memories what you need to keep on going.”

“Is that how you do it?” Will murmured, more off-handed speculation than a direct question.

“How about a drink?” Jack suggested.

“Sure.”

Jack motioned for Will to follow him. They walked back down the hallway to Jack's office. Jack opened a cabinet in the left corner, revealing a cooler with one row of wine and another row of
liquor. Jack produced a bottle of scotch and held it up for Will's approval.

Will nodded. “I'm not picky.”

Jack popped the cork and poured out two glasses. He sat down behind his desk, and Will pulled up a chair from the corner.

“So, how was staying with Alana and Margot?” Jack asked.

“It was fine. I kept to myself, mostly. Don't want to intrude on their happily married life.”

“I'm sure they were happy to have you.”

“I tried to date Alana back in the day, and I had a one night stand with Margot.” Will pointed out, “It wasn't exactly chummy.”

Jack chuckled, “You're probably right. Alana still cares for you.”

“And I appreciate it, but I don't really need or deserve all the doting.”

“I won't dote then.” Jack said, taking a sip of his scotch, “This is just a friendly conversation between two men.”

“You want to ask me about Hannibal?”

“Of course. But this isn't the appropriate time or place.”

“Why not?”

“First off, this is my home. I want to be relaxed here. Second, I know you won't tell me anything I haven't already heard.”

“If this is your home, why do you bring work here?” Will asked, motioning to the stack of case files on the corner of the desk.

“You got me.” Jack held up his hands.

Will rose from his chair and opened the top file. “Are these cases recent?”

“Yes. They are the ones we're actively working on. I'm not asking you to look at them.”

Will ignored Jack's remark and set his glass aside to peruse the file more thoroughly. Jack sighed, but offered no further objection. He sat back in his chair as Will flipped through the dozens of pictures, autopsy reports, and Jack's own written observations.

“He's an abductee.” Will said, after several moments.

“What?”

“It's a common misconception by persons with recurring sleep paralysis that they have been abducted by aliens during these episodes. Thousands of people have reported the same experience, but it's never been proven, and most of the alien abduction theories have been debunked. Unfortunately, combined with other forms of psychosis or mental illness, these delusions can turn violent. He's most likely looking for someone who has insider knowledge of aliens. He's trying to prove he's not crazy.”
“We've been working on that case for three months solid.” Jack said, “How do you see that?”

Will set the file down and shrugged. “There was a time when I didn't think you would ever forget how my brain works.”

“I guess I forgot how sharp it is.” Jack said, grabbing the file and opening it again.

“You should look into people who have reported alien abductions or are a part of alien abduction support groups. He's outspoken about his experience. And apparently violent about it.”

Jack made a note. He tapped his pen against the file, then pointed it at Will. “I heard you told Freddie Lounds you're not considering coming back to the FBI.”

“No.”

“You can still do the work obviously.”

“Jack, I've been through it and through it my brain. Working for the FBI started me down the slippery slope that got me to this point. I can't put myself through it again.”

“You just half way solved a case we've been stumped on for months. It's not about you. It's about the lives you could save.”

“There was a time when I was terrified of losing the work I did for the FBI. It provided me the structure and support system I needed when I was unstable. I don't need that foundation anymore.”

“I just said it's not about you. It's about the victims.”

“But it is about me, isn't it? Nobody else can do what I do. I'm valuable to the FBI as a tool, but not much else. I'm no longer in the position to sacrifice my mental well-being for another person's sake.”

“That's pretty selfish, don't you think?”

“Sometimes you have to set aside other people's well-being for your own. It's self-preservation, and it's been a standard of human existence for thousands of years.”

“Only the strong survive? The Will Graham I used to know didn't have any use for Darwinism.”

“The Will Graham you used to know was a fractured part of a whole. He existed because he was saving lives. It was a type of co-dependence. I don't feel that way anymore, Jack. This work doesn't look the same as it used to. It never will.”

“So, I can't convince you?”

“No, you can't convince me, Jack.” Will said, “I've already found my calling.”

Jack's gaze snagged on the ring glinting around Will's fingers. “What calling is that?”

Will held up his hand. “You're looking at it.”

“I don't have to tell you how crazy that sounds.”

“It sounds just right in my head. You may not understand – Alana and Dr. Mortise, and everyone else may not understand it – but I finally understand and accept myself. I'm not being consumed by my mind and my empathy. It's quiet up here.” He said, tapping his finger against his temple.
“We're just worried about you, that's all.”

“I appreciate the concern, but it's unnecessary.”

“What about the fact that you told us Hannibal abused you? You can forgive him for that?”

“He inflamed my encephalitis, he tried to frame me for his murders, he stabbed me, he killed Abigail, and then I forgave him. I think by now I can forgive him for just about anything.”

“That sounds to me like you're nothing more than his doormat.”

Will swallowed back the last sip of his scotch. “I'm much more than that.”

“It doesn't add up.”

“What matters is the court decision and Hannibal's conviction.” Will said, “In time, that's all anyone will remember.”

“You're okay with that?”

“Yes. It's what he wants.”

“That implies that it's not the truth.”

“If you're asking me if I killed anyone while we were abroad, the answer is still no.”

“But you … you've fallen in love with him?”

Will sighed and rubbed the back of his neck. He could feel Jack's gaze burning through the top of his head. “I think I always was, I just didn't realize it.”

“And he loves you? You expect me to believe that, after all he's done to you?”

“It's unconventional, yes, but he does love me. I'm convinced of that.”

Jack poured out another glass of scotch, and threw it back hard. He set the glass down with a loud clink. “I'm not.”

“Jack, I want you to know something.”

“What's that?”

“When I'm gone, I want you to remember that moment you first walked into my classroom and asked me to assist with the Minnesota Shrike case. I want you to remember me putting my faith in you that you were going to protect me. If you're starting to doubt whether you ever knew me at all, I want you to remember that I asked for your help too – to catch Hannibal. Those sides of me were real, and even if they aren't visible anymore, they're still there. I'm still here.”

Jack frowned. “Will, what do you mean, 'when you're gone'?”

The shrill ringing of the telephone interrupted their conversation. When Jack picked up the phone and answered it, the discussion of Will's sanity fell to the back of his mind, replaced by sickening panic.
The overhead lights in Hannibal's cell had turned off ten minutes ago in preparation for night. The overnight staff would be arriving in an hour to take over for second shift. He would spend another three hours staring at the ceiling before he slept.

Laying on his bed, he folded his hands behind his head and closed his eyes. Through his mind's eye, he viewed the front facade of the Norman Chapel. He gripped the handle and pulled the doors open wide to admit himself into the sanctuary beyond. His shoes tapped softly across the smooth brick floors as he strode down the aisle to the front of the chapel. Will was there, his back turned. As soon as he heard Hannibal's footfalls, he turned around, an expression of recognition and joy on his face.

The sound of a lock turning and the tap of a heel jolted Hannibal from the glowing halls of his memory palace. He sat up and peered through the darkness. His eyes adjusted rapidly to the dark, making out a slender, blond-haired figure.

“Helena.”

She stepped up to the glass, her hands clasped behind her back. Even in the dark, he could see that her face was pale and hollow, her eyes raw from tears.

“What brings you here after lights out?” He asked.

She observed him in silence for several moments before walking to the other end of the room, to the door that led into the cell. Her keys clanged in the utter silence, and the lock scraped open with a hollow thud.

Hannibal drew in a shallow breath, his heart spiking just a bit. A smile settled across his face as she stepped into the cell and let the door fall shut behind her. Nothing stood between them – no glass, no restraints, no perceptions or vanity.

“You have the look of a woman who has lost everything.” Hannibal said, rising from the bed.

“Chilton is having me fired.” She said, her voice husky with emotion, “He found out I was having an affair with one of the orderlies.”

“Elliot, is it?”

“How did you know?” She snapped, “Were you the one that told him?”

“No, of course not. I am simply a keen observer.”

She took a quavering step forward, keeping her hand locked firmly behind her back. Her blue eyes were set like flint, determination and rage locked in the icy color.

“What are your intentions, walking into my cell unarmed in the middle of the night?” He asked, “This is breaking every rule of protocol in the book.”

“I don't work here anymore.”

“But you should observe protocol. I'm dangerous, you know.”

“I think we have an understanding.”
“Do we? What understanding is that?”

She paused just three feet away from him. Her jaw was set rigid, but Hannibal could see the shiver in her knees. She smelled saccharine with fear, terrified, as she well she should be.

“I revealed my … desires to you. You encouraged them.”

“So, you've decided to choose between your profession and your sex drive.” He said. He closed the space between them in short, soft steps that didn't scare her. “If you are being fired, this is your last chance to speak with me. You could have come in here to make a last ditch effort to understand me. Don't you want to know about my sister?”

“I thought you wanted me to embrace my urges.”

“And you have. That's why you've come here, isn't it?”

She swallowed thickly. “Yes.”

“So, you've accepted them. Now here we stand at the precipice of your inner battle, between your career and one moment of ecstasy. Make your decision wisely, Helena; there's no going back from this point.”

“Will you tell me about your sister?” She asked.

“When you tell me which side you have chosen, I will decide what to tell you.”

She gazed at him with simmering anger and placid acceptance, a strange but motivating emotion. She shook her head. “No, I don't give two fucks about your sister, Dr. Lecter.”

“No? Not even one?”

“I'm giving up psychiatry.” She said, her eyes growing misty, “It was never for me anyway.”

“No, it wasn't.”

“I've told you a lot, but not that much.”

“You've been wondering all this time, thinking back on your college years, combing through the halls of your memory for one spark of recognition. Perhaps I owe you this reward, Helena … I do remember you.”

Her eyes widened as he eased closer. She was in his thrall, immobile. He reached up to touch her chin, and felt a warm shiver of satisfaction slither down his spine when her felt her jaw warm and soft beneath his fingers.

“It's been many years, but I can recall lecturing before a class hall, and looking out to see your face. You were enthralled, and yet, I could see your lack of interest in the class. I knew it was me you were fascinated by.” He whispered, peering into her entranced eyes.

“I tried to get your attention so many times.” She whispered, “It seemed like I was invisible to you.”

“I was already having an affair.”

“You could have at least acknowledged me.”
“There's no fun in that.”

Her gaze grew steely behind the veneer of moisture. “You bastard.”

“Yes … but the fact remains, you are still enthralled.”

“Despite everything, goddamnit.”

“So, you've made up your mind. What will you do about it now?”

“You told me you wouldn't consent.” She whispered, “So, I've brought something with me to persuade you.”

She took an abrupt step back, snatching her skin from his grasp. Her arm swung out from behind her back to reveal a liquid-filled syringe in her white-knuckled fist. The needle glinted sharp in the dim light, and hissed through the air toward Hannibal's neck. As Hannibal brought his arm up, their wrists collided, straining and shaking back and forth in a short-lived battle. Hannibal's free hand arched through the hair and struck her jaw, throwing Helena backwards with enough force to drive her to the ground.

She landed on her back, momentarily disorienting her with a brief wash of pain through her body. Struggling to get her elbows underneath her, she saw, through fuzzy eyes, Hannibal approaching her. His head tilted down, hands curled into fists at his sides, nostrils flared over exhilarated breaths, he had all the appearances of a wild animal closing in for the kill.

Uttering a cry of pain and fear, she scrambled backwards across the hard wood floor of the cell. Her high heels slipped off and trailed behind her, only to be kicked out of the way by Hannibal's determined stride. As he closed in on her, she rolled onto her stomach and clambered to her hands and knees. Her knees struck the floor with every stride as she crawled away, rattling through her whole body with dull, radiating pain.

She fought to rise to her feet, but the panic shaking through her limbs impeded her from finding her footing. She struggled across the cell to the locked iron door, her hand reaching in panicked desperation for the handle she knew would not turn. The keys lay on the floor behind them, beyond her reach and useless. She grabbed onto the door handle just as Hannibal's hand closed around her ankle. She clung to the cold iron, screaming in pain and fear as he pulled her by the leg, lifting her body from the floor and stretching her mid-air between the door handle and his grasp. She clung to the iron handle with all her strength, ignoring the burning pain in her ligaments and joints as he viciously pulled her toward.

A scream of horror filled her throat as her fingers slid from the door handle, and her suspended body slammed to the floor. Her chin struck the floor, sending stars bursting before her eyes. White-hot pain filled her jaw with throbbing, disorienting pain, and the taste of copper gushed sour across her tongue. Her hands slapped for purchase across the smooth floor as Hannibal dragged her by the leg across the cell, but no amount of grabbing, screaming, or twisting broke his hold.

The cell tipped before her vision, like a boat tossed at sea, and she found herself being thrown down against the thin mattress. The world spun and swam despite her attempts to blink away the pain and dizziness. Half blind with pain, she flung out her arms to defend herself, landing a few harmless blows against his chest before he grabbed her by the wrists and pinned her to the mattress. He came into view above her, his eyes like two black, hollow holes, nothing behind them but evil and hunger.

“Relax.” He whispered, “This will hurt less if you don't struggle. The pain is unnecessary,
Helena.”

Sobs choked her as he pinned her wrists with one hand and touched her bloody lip with the other. Through swimming tears, she saw him put his thumb stained with her blood to his mouth. He sucked blood away, keeping his gaze pinned to hers. She felt a cold shiver like a demon had passed through her, and for a moment, the sheer terror paralyzed her.

In the lull of the fight, his hand closed around her throat. She gasped and then choked, her arms bucking against his hand. He bore down on her, giving her just enough air to breathe, just little enough to make her head swim close to unconsciousness. She gasped weakly at his hand as he grabbed at the hem of her skirt. The material rent under his grasp, admitting a cool rush of air across her thighs. Her hips bucked underneath him, squirming for a way out, but his hand cinched tighter around her throat.

“Is this what you wanted?” He hissed, bending closer to her face, “To feel my hands on you? Hurting you? Violating you?”

She gurgled out a indistinct reply. Black swarmed behind her eyelids; unconsciousness seemed like a not so far away escape.

“I hope you feel free, Dr. Mortise.” He whispered, his fingers curling around the front of her panties, “I hope you feel … satisfied.”

A horrendous rip filled her ears. The cold air touched her intimately, and she slammed her eyes shut, expecting him to touch her. Tears gushed down her temples and into her hair, spurred on by the horrific ideas of her death. But her sobbing ebbed when several moments passed and he had yet to lay a finger between her legs.

“Open your eyes.” He whispered.

Choking out a sob, she forced her eyelids open. His hand eased just enough to let her breathe, to calm her racing heart.

“Please ...” She implored, looking into his dark, glinting eyes.

He let go of her wrists, and she yearned for the strength to fight. Her arms flopped against the sheets, gathering the will to defend herself. He smoothed her hair back from her face with a gentle caress. As he smudged a tear from her cheek, a smile touched his lips. “I want to thank you, Dr. Mortise. I want to thank you for our time together. You don't know how the tales of your childhood sustained me during my time here.”

She threw all her remaining strength into her arms. She pawed at her chest, pressing a plea through her fingertips and against his heart.

“Shh, shh.” He soothed.

His hand lifted from her throat and moved to her forehead, a nearly gentle touch between the violence. Then, his fingers sank into her hair and pulled her head back, stretching her neck open and vulnerable.

A cry rushed to her lips as the panic rose up to swallow her again. She twisted, her hand batting at his chest and face. She knew what was coming.

“No, please!” She screamed.
He reached underneath the mattress and pulled out a slender object, the tip of which gleamed bright and malicious above her. It took her mere seconds to realize it was a pen, but she didn't have time to wonder how he got it. In those few seconds, he brought his fist down, slamming the tip of the pen into her throat, piercing the tender skin over her jugular.

White-hot pain seized her throat. The building scream stopped short when it reached her punctured throat and only wet, gurgling moans filtered past her lips. He yanked the pen free, letting the blood spurt from the hole in her throat. It splashed her face and his chest, spilling hot, red streams down the front of his gray jumpsuit. His eyes glinted maroon in the dim light, the color of bloodlust and satisfaction as he brought the pen down once more. Her cries choked off as he punctured the hollow between her collarbones, driving the pen straight through her throat and esophagus. A grotesque wheezing sound squeezed up her throat, her lungs working desperately to draw in a complete breath.

Dark shrouded her vision, and numbness took her her limbs. She couldn't feel her extremities by the time he stabbed her fourth time. A warmth seeped into her body, like a warm, ocean tide tugging her to the brink of darkness. The narrowing tunnel closed tighter and tighter, forming a black halo around Hannibal's blood-spattered face. Her hand slipped from his chest, and fell limp over the edge of the bed.

He bent closer, and she felt him press a kiss to her forehead. “Thank you, Helena.”

It was her last lucid moment – a bloody kiss, a departing gesture of tenderness now that he had killed her so brutally. She was only aware of the sticky heat gushing down her neck and the front of her blouse as her eyes slipped shut. She reached for the grounding texture of his lips against her forehead as the darkness curled around her, but the world was far away. She gave a final, shuddering breath, and felt no more pain.
Chapter 19

He could hear “Lacrimosa” playing through his head, a fitting soundtrack for the blood that stained his jumpsuit. He slipped through the hallways as an element of the shadows, only pausing against the cool, brick walls when an evening guard passed by.

Overnight at the Baltimore State Hospital was as quiet and deserted as a graveyard. The night shift operated on a skeleton crew of orderlies and security. The security swept the halls regularly while the orderlies shared an office with two cots until one of the patients required their care. Since the hospital was locked up tight, incidents requiring the security and the orderlies were rare. They weren't on guard for anything serious to happen, and as such, Hannibal slipped past them without notice.

He knew he had limited time before someone found Helena's body. Once it was discovered that he was not in his cell, the situation would escalate rapidly. Chaos would fill these halls like fire.

Hannibal made his way down to the floor below his cell. One guard operated the room in front of the iron door that led down to the row of cells beyond.

Hannibal knocked on the door, then pressed himself against the wall. Moments later, the guard eased the door open and peered out. Hannibal waited until the guard deemed the knock a product of his imagination and turned back to his post. He lunged away from the wall, pushed the door out of his way, and caught the guard by the head. With a harsh pull, he snapped the guard's neck and let his body fall to the ground with a thud. Hannibal plucked the keys from his belt. He tried each key on the ring with unfaltering patience before the right key slipped into place and granted him admittance to the cells beyond.

He marched down the hall, passing each cell with it's slumbering resident. His tread made little noise, rousing not a single patient until he reached the cell he was looking for.

“Matthew.”

The form curled up on the cot shifted.

“Matthew.”

A hand rose from the lump and yanked the blanket back from Matthew's head. He sat up, rubbing at his drowsy eyes and squinting through the darkness.

“Hannibal?”

“Get up.”

Matthew threw his blanket aside and jumped up from the cot. He rushed to the bars, his eyes wide and fully alert.

“What the hell?” He whispered, his wide eyes racing up and down the front of Hannibal's bloody jumpsuit.

Hannibal unlocked the door and pulled the bars aside. He swept a hand to freedom. “Come with me.”
“This is your plan?” Matthew hissed. “How did you get out of your cell?”

“I killed Dr. Mortise.”

Hannibal turned and marched back down the hallway. Matthew jogged after him. He caught Hannibal's arm just as they reached the guard's station. He froze when he saw the guard lying on the ground, neck twisted at a grotesque angle.

“Shit.”

“You still know this hospital.” Hannibal said.

“Yes.”

“In a few minutes, the guards will be making their rounds again.” Hannibal said. “Someone will find out that I am not in my cell. At that time, they will alert the rest of the guards and the police. We have until then to make our escape.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“I intend on slipping away without their notice.”

“How will you do that.”

Hannibal smiled. “We'll slip away in the fray. Matthew, I want you to release every patient in this hospital.”

~

Will didn't have to hear the other side of the conversation to understand the reason for the phone call to Jack. Jack said just enough for Will to know that Hannibal had made his move.

Jack stood with his back to Will, the phone pressed against his ear.

“How the hell did this happen …. Yes, yes, … I want an armed response team immediately. The hospital's security can't handle this.”

Will's body flushed with a wave of numbing shock that was quickly followed by a warm burst of joy. This was it. This was the moment the long weeks of loneliness and fear ended.

He rose from his chair, his eyes pinned to Jack's back. Consumed by the phone call, Jack didn't notice Will's movements. He slipped out of the office and out into the living room. His hands shook as he glanced around the living room, scrambling for a plan. The glint of Jack's car keys sitting on the counter made him freeze.

Without a second thought, he snatched the keys and left the house. The March evening held a chill, reminding him he had left without his jacket, but he put his head down and rushed to Jack's car without looking back.

~
Matthew hovered in the doorway, his heart hammering out of his chest, as Hannibal slaughtered both guards in the control room with the knife he had taken from the man guarding the cells in Matthew's section. In the dead of the night, they never saw their deaths coming.

Matthew had killed one person in his lifetime. He'd thought about killing a lot more than that, but it wasn't until the bailiff from Will's trial that he followed through on his fantasies. He was in awe of the cool precision with which Hannibal slit the guards' throats, as if it were as natural to him as breathing.

Hannibal motioned to the security cameras and control console.

"Is there a master control?" He asked, "Some way we can open all the doors at once?"

"No, but I can go by section. All of the wards are divided up into sections to help with distribution of medicine and the orderlies' schedules and-"

"I do not care about the process. Just do it."

"Right, right."

Matthew sat down at the console and found the row of switches that corresponded to the doors in each wing of the hospital. Hannibal hovered by the door, his hand gripped tight around the bloody knife. A pool of blood of one of the guard's slit throat crept toward his shoes.

A horn sounded every time a section of doors opened.

"That will surely alert everyone." Hannibal said, "We can't linger here."

"I'm almost done."

Matthew's hand held a tremor as he flipped the last of the switches and entered the override code. It was his luck that the codes had not changed since he worked here. They were in place to prevent this very situation from occurring, but the hospital was rather grandiose in it's perception of it's security. Such a thing had never happened at the hospital, and so, they did not imagine it ever would. They hadn't been accounting for Hannibal Lecter – or Matthew Brown, for that matter.

"All right, it's done."

"So is our time here." Hannibal said, "Let us be free of this place."

Matthew rose from the chair. "You could have gotten out of here without all this," He said, motioning to the controls and security cameras, "You could have left me behind, but you didn't."

"I keep my promises."

"It's more than that. What's the point of letting all the other patients here escape if we could have slipped out of here unnoticed?"

A smile touched Hannibal's mouth. "There is beauty in chaos, Matthew. I'm curious what will happen once all of the patients are released."

They both froze when the sound of voices shouting in the the hallway interrupted their conversation.
“Take a weapon.” Hannibal said, motioning to the guards lying on the floor.

Matthew yanked a taser and a knife from a guard's belt and sidled up behind Hannibal. “I'm ready. Let's fucking do this.”

Hannibal yanked the door open and stepped out into the hallway. The hall was dark except for the bouncing, blinding beams of flashlights, carried by three guards who charged down the hallway toward them.

Matthew stepped out of the control room and paused to watch Hannibal, silhouetted by the yellow beam of flashlights, stride with eerie calm determination toward the security guards. It was a sight to behold, an image that would be burned behind his retinas forever. He wondered if he had not underestimated Hannibal at their first meeting.

Matthew broke away from the doorway as Hannibal met with the guards. He ducked, missing the surge of taser tongs that flew over his shoulder and crackled on the floor. Driving upward, he thrust the knife into the guard's neck, and yanked the twitching, bleeding man around to use as a shield. The guard took the impact of another taser, his body jolting and spraying a gout of blood under the pressure of electricity. Hannibal tossed the man's trembling body aside and slammed the knife into the second man's stomach. The guard's choked, gurgling cry echoed down the hallway as Hannibal yanked the knife upward, eviscerating him from pelvis to breastbone. Blood and intestines spewed down the front of Hannibal's jumpsuit, staining his legs and shoes in fresh, warm rivulets of red.

The third guard froze where he was, holding the taser at his side, yet too paralyzed to make use of the weapon. As Hannibal dropped the gutted man to the floor and turned to face him, the man's face blanched white with horror. He spun around and took off down the hallway, feet pounding the linoleum flat-flooted in absolute terror. Hannibal ran after him, and they both disappeared into the darkness beyond.

Matthew darted down the hallway to where Hannibal had left to two dead guards. Their flashlights rolled across the tile, sending tilting beams of light across the hall in a jagged strobe effect. Matthew snatched one of them from the floor, and skirted the growing pools of blood to pursue Hannibal through the hospital.

He pulled to a stop when he reached the end of the hallway to find Hannibal kneeling over the third guard's body. He yanked the knife from the back of the man's neck, and rose to his feet. He breathed steadily, exhibiting barely a sign of exhaustion or even exhilaration.

“Keep up, or stay behind.” He said.

Then he opened the next door to chaos.

~

The gunmetal gray clouds split open with a boom of thunder halfway through Will's drive to the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. A torrent of rain burst from the heavens, pounding the windshield with blinding rivulets that even the windshield wipers struggled to clear.

Will leaned forward, gripping the steering wheel in white-knuckled fists, peering through the downpour that muddled his view. The tail lights of the cars ahead were smudged reds and whites
like a watercolor painting that hadn't been finished. He couldn't see the street signs, but he drove down the lanes by memory to the hospital he had visited a hundred times since their capture.

When he reached the hospital, he squealed to a stop at the front walkway, and jumped out of Jack's car into the rain. The raindrops struck his cheeks at stinging velocity, forcing him to squint hard to see through the deluge.

Most of the lights in the hospital were off, but even at this distance and through the torrent of rain, Will could hear the din of chaos. The front doors burst open to admit a stream of jumpsuit clad bodies. Will's mouth slipped open as the mob rushed him. The screaming, laughing patients streamed down the front steps, ignoring Will's presence even as shoulders as arms collided with Will's rigid stance at the base of the steps. Will broke from his shocked trance, and dashed up the front steps, fighting against the exiting tide of bodies to get inside the hospital. Dripping wet and panting, he ran across the lobby and pushed the door to the visiting area out of his way.

The room was a shouting, writhing mess of residents and guards, the security outnumbered drastically. They struggled to restrain even one resident while the residents screamed or cackled in amusement. The insanity throbbed at the edges of Will's mind, poking holes through the forts to find his empathy huddled in his the center of his brain. A tremor worked it's way through him, and he clenched his jaw against the wave of fear that suddenly gripped him. He squeezed his eyes shut and searched for strength.

When his eyes opened, it was as if God had parted the Red Sea of blood and writhing, fighting bodies. His gaze found Hannibal through the chaos, and all else faded away away to muffled noise. Hannibal crossed the room toward him, a smile touching his lips. Covered in blood and disheveled as he was, he had never looked so perfect to Will.

A figure crossed in front of Hannibal, breaking the connection their gazes had made. Will recognized Matthew, and the intensity of Matthew's gaze touched like a live wire pressed against his chest. The dark, hollow gaze grabbed at him, joy and lust and fear wrapped into one glint in a madman's eyes. His mouth forming Will's name, he started across the lobby to where Will stood, his eyes shining with excitement.

Will stood frozen at the front of the lobby, his eyes focused on Matthew's intent gaze. Matthew fought his way through the mob, shoving aside guards and residents in his haste to greet Will. Will's eyes widened as a pair of large, familiar hands surrounded Matthew's head from behind, yanking Matthew to a halt. The light in Matthew's eyes transformed into horror, instant realization striking him, but not fast enough to save him. Hannibal's bloody hands surrounded Matthew's jaw and the back of his head, and Matthew, consumed by the vision of Will as he was, had no time to react before Hannibal twisted his neck to the breaking point. The recognition and joy faded from his eyes, replaced by a cold, blank void as his body sank to a limp pile on the floor at Hannibal's feet.

Hannibal stepped over Matthew's body and rushed toward Will, his eyes wide and wet, his arms out stretched. Will gasped in an aching breaths to his lungs. For the first time in weeks, he didn't feel like he was suffocating; he was breathing deep and sweet air of freedom, breathing in the anticipation of their skin touching again. Moisture smeared his vision as he broke from his reverie.

Their eyes were joined, already one before their bodies even met. Will didn't see the impending danger of the sizzling taser tongs before they embedded themselves in Hannibal's back. The warm, loving quality in Hannibal's eyes twisted into shocked pain as his back arched against the surge of a thousand volts of electricity. His body froze for a few horrifying moments before he collapsed to the ground, revealing the man standing behind him with the taser pointed now at Will.
Will didn't recognize the young man with tousled dark hair and angry, blue eyes brimming with tears, but he recognized the steely devotion to finish a man's life for the cost of love.

~

Elliot was sitting in Helena's office when the chaos began.

It was his last day working for the hospital, and Helena's last day as his boss. When they spoke after Chilton fired them, Elliot did his best to convince Helena that this loss was for the best. The hospital was toxic for her, and her obsession with Hannibal was coming to a close at a pivotal time. She could take her life back. They could go on together.

She told him to wait here while she gave her final remarks to Lecter. The longer she was gone, the faster he paced, the more frequently he glanced at his watch. She hadn't said how long she would be gone, but seeing as it was a goodbye, he didn't expect her to be gone for more than twenty minutes.

After thirty, he was a ball of nervous energy. When the alarm bells began to ring through the hospital, he knew something had gone terribly wrong.

He stepped out of Helena's office to find the hallway dark and echoing with panicked shouts. Fear seized his chest as he took a few steps down the hallway, peering toward the corner ahead. The shouting was coming from deep within the hospital, in the patient's wards.

Elliot turned and rushed back into the office. He pulled out all the drawers with shaking hands before he paused over the taser sitting in the lower drawer of Helena's desk. He took the gun out of the drawer and held it in his hand for a few moments as he considered what he might find once he left the office. Deep down, he knew – and yet, he refused to believe it until he saw it.

Elliot marched out of the office and down the hallway. He held up the taser as he rounded the corner, his finger hovering over the trigger in preparation to shoot. The next hallway was pitch black and empty.

Now chased by fear, he ran down the hallways he knew well, finding his way to Lecter's private room in the dark. The door to the cell beyond stood open. Even in the dark, Elliot could sense that something was terribly wrong here.

He stepped up to the glass, drawing in shuddering breaths. Sweat trickled down his temple, and his fingers ached around the handle of the taser. If he squinted, he could see a figure lying on the cot. A slender figure that didn't move.

No, no, no.

Rushing to the other end of the cell, he tried the iron door that led directly into the cage. The door swung open with ease, admitting him into the living space of Hannibal Lecter. Stepping beyond that door felt like stepping into a circle of hell. He imagined a cold breath of air that sent a shiver down his spine and lifted the hairs down his neck and arms.

The coppery smell of blood penetrated his nostrils with alarming clarity. His heart seized as he looked down to see a trail of blood leading across the floor toward the darkness that shrouded the cot. He stepped around the blood, breathing in shallow bursts, and gripping the taser with both
hands. His fingers loosened under numbing shock as he reached the cot to find the figure lying there like a broken rag doll.

“Helena.” He whispered.

The taser landed on the floor with a thud. He sank to his knees, tears rushing to his eyelids. He reached out a hand to touch her cold, ivory skin, marked with drying blood. Her eyes were wide open, looking to the sky, a frozen look of regret preserved in her final moments.

“Helena, oh my god.” He sobbed, letting his head fall to her chest.

She was still warm against him, almost warm enough to be alive. He squeezed his eyes shut and pursed his lips over a cry of agony. The pain his chest felt as if his heart were being ripped out by an iron fist. He had accepted that he’d fallen for her, but it wasn't until now that he realized the full impact of his feelings for her.

Heat surged up through his chest, scorching past blood and flesh and bone to his very core. His soul was filled with murderous rage as he gazed into Helena’s blank, lifeless.

Sitting up, he sniffed back the tears, and reached out to press her eyes shut. He pulled the sheet over her, concealing her death from his eyes and the world. Pressing a hand over her covered face, he whispered a final vow before he turned and left the cell.

~

Will ran to Hannibal's fallen body. He pushed Hannibal onto his back and grabbed at Hannibal's slack face.

“Hannibal. Hannibal, come on. Wake up.”

Hannibal's eyelids fluttered and he uttered a pained groan. “Will ...”

“Get up. We have to go.”

He looked up to see the young man dressed in a white orderly's uniform advancing toward them. He had used his taser. If he reached them, it would be a bare-knuckled fight Will wasn't prepared to engage in.

“Come on!”

Will threw all his strength into getting his arm around Hannibal and hauling him from the floor. Hannibal struggled to get his feet under himself. He clung to Will's shoulder, panting in shallow, pained breaths.

Will cast a final gaze at the orderly before he turned to drag Hannibal across the room. In the chaos, a resident ran into the orderly, clawing and slapping at his shoulders as the madman recognized his uniform. The young man struggled with the patient, his eyes following Will and Hannibal's progress with enraged desperation.

Will latched both arms around Hannibal's waist and dragged Hannibal with him across the visiting area. He didn't looked back at the determined orderly as he slammed his shoulder into the door and
dragged them to the lobby beyond. As they reached the front doors, Will glimpsed the red and blue flash of police lights swarming into the parking lot.

“Shit!”

“Will,” Hannibal panted.

“What?” Will snapped.

“Will, we're going to be okay.” Hannibal whispered, his head lolling against Will's cheek, “Don't panic.”

“This was your plan?” Will growled, readjusting his grip on Hannibal's waist, “You're a real pain in my ass.”

“The taser was a minor inconvenience, Will … The plan is going perfectly well.”

“Shut up and help me.” Will growled.

He shoved the front doors open and hauled them out into the driving rain. He paused for a moment over the view of a dozen police cruisers and ambulances filling the parking lot. Jack's car was still parked directly in front of the curb.

“We have to get down these stairs.” Will said, “Ignore the fucking taser, and walk.”

Hannibal's arm tightened around his shoulder as they plunged toward the stairs. His feet worked languidly beneath him, carrying only a small part of their weight down the steps. A shout from one of the police officers below urged them to move faster.

Will pulled the passenger side door open and stuffed Hannibal into the car. He slammed the door just as Hannibal's feet were tucked inside, and ran around the hood of the car. Police officers ran toward the car, pointing their guns, and shouting at him to stop. He yanked the door open and jumped inside the car. With a hard twist of the key, the engine roared to life. Slamming the gear shift into drive, he stomped on the accelerator and thrust them from the curb just as the police officers reached the vehicle. Their hands swiped across the side of the car as Will pulled away.

Will glanced in the rear view mirror as he pulled the wheel hard over, squealing tires in a sharp turn out of the parking lot. His gaze caught on the white uniform bursting from the front doors of the hospital and racing down the front steps toward the crowd of police officers. The orderly shoved a police officer out of the way and climbed into one of the cruisers idling in front of the curb.

“Shit!” He cried.

The cruiser carrying the orderly turned onto the road behind them. Will stepped hard on the gas, carrying them at a unsafe pace down the rainy street with the police cruiser in pursuit. He turned down the nearest road he saw, and felt the car shudder as it momentarily lost traction on the rain. The back end of the car whipped around, skidding them sideways across the road for a few terrifying seconds before righting itself.

Will gripped the wheel in a crushing grasp as they sped down the road. He glanced over at Hannibal. “Are you okay?”

Hannibal pushed himself upright in the seat. “I will be okay in a moment.”

“What the hell were you thinking?” Will demanded, “Staging an escape like that?”
“I saw the opportunity and took it.”

“What if I hadn't overheard the phone call to Jack?” Will asked.

“I would have come for you.”

“The hell you would have.” Will ground out, turning his gaze back to the road.

“What does that mean?” Hannibal asked, “Of course I would come for you.”

“You wouldn't be able to get close to me with all the security Jack would have called in to protect me.” Will said, shaking his head.

“I would have found a way. But such a discussion is pointless since we are together now.”

Will glanced over at him. Hannibal was gazing at with a gentle, adoring look that made the world melt away to nothing. Will gritted his teeth. Hannibal rarely made poor decisions, and so it was in Will's nature to hold onto his anger when it happened.

“Well, this could all be pointless if we're caught.” Will said, “I don't want to know how many police cars are following us right now.”

Hannibal turned around to look through the back window. “Only one that is important.”

“Who is that guy?” Will asked, “He looked like he wanted to kill you.”

“I believe he is the man with which Dr. Mortise was having an affair.” Hannibal said, “I killed her.”

“And he wants revenge.”

“He's a stupid boy.”

Will braked for another turn, taking them around the corner without skidding this time. He accelerated down the road and squinted through the pouring rain. He had taken them away from the city and down country roads that had few street lamps and faded lines. He could hardly see the curves in the road until the pavement swerved in front of them.

“Why are you slowing?” Hannibal asked.

“I can hardly see anything with this damn rain.” Will said, motioning toward the black, wet void before them.

“He's going to catch up.”

Will glanced in the rear view mirror to see the police car closing in behind them, lights flashing.

“Shit.”

“We should accelerate.” Hannibal said, “He could be just as dangerous as a police officer.”

“This isn't a fucking movie.” Will snapped, “I can't just lose him in an elaborate car chase.”

“Then why did you come swooping in to save me?”

“Because I love you, you insufferable bastard.”
Hannibal smiled. He reached over to touch Will's hand. “I love you too.”

Will paused, letting the heat of his anger cool to a simmering burn. Hannibal's eyes held him in a warm embrace, stealing Will's breath away. He could still remember the first time Hannibal had looked at him like that, right after they exchanged those three words for the first time.

“I did save you.” He said, a smile touching his lips. “Finally, I get to save you instead of the other way around.”

He looked up, and all thought of love and safety disappeared from his mind. The road was gone.

The entire car jolted them forward as a horrendous crash from behind propelled them toward the guard rail. Will yanked the wheel, attempting in vain to turn them away from the edge of the road. It was much too late. The car nose-dived against the guard rail, hitting with driving force that upended the backside of the car. For a few breathless moments they were suspended mid-air, defying gravity. The moments seemed to last an eternity in Will's panicking mind. His life didn't flash before his eyes; only the most intimate treasured moments he'd clung to during their separation, and the fear that he might never experience them again.

The grass swooped in to greet them, and Will slammed his eyes shut as the car flipped over the guardrail and slammed down the incline in a massive crash of metal and glass. The windshield exploded before his face, throwing bits of glass and metal into his exposed skin. He felt a thousand tiny cuts bloom across his face as the car rolled into motion, spinning in a sickening backflip down the ravine on the other side of the guardrail. The car impacted again and again, jolting Will's body each time and prying his fingers loose of the steering wheel.

His eyes opened just in time to find them balancing for a millisecond on the nose of the car. The force of the crash propelled him through the windshield, transforming him into a bird in flight.

~

The hiss of a dying engine and the groan of crushed metal were the first sounds that pierced Hannibal's unconscious mind. He pried his eyelids open and drew in a shuddering breath. He felt pain all over his body, but none debilitating enough to keep him from moving. He shifted each arm and leg, testing for broken bones. He felt a pinch in his side each time he breathed. He'd fractured at least one rib, and God only knew what else. But at the moment, the only thing that fueled his brain was survival.

He took stock of his surroundings and discovered that he was still inside the car. He was lying against the hood of the car, gazing at the passengers seat above him. His foot touched grass where the windshield had blown out.

“Will ...” He rasped.

He reached over, but only felt broken glass, the fiber of the hood of the car, and grass under his fingertips. He jerked his gaze to the side and felt panic rip through his chest. The driver's side was empty; Will was gone.

Hannibal forced himself up onto his hands and knees and crawled toward the open space where the windshield had once been. The edges of the glass snagged on his jumpsuit and tore into his leg as he clambered out of the car, but he pushed the pain to the back of his mind. He fell onto the wet
grass outside of the car and scanned his surroundings for Will.

“Will?”

A quiet moan reached his ears, dragging all his focus to the other side of the car. He stumbled to his feet, ignoring the sharp pain that registered throughout his body. He leaned against car as he made his way around to the driver's side. Another moan drew his gaze to the ground.

“Will!” Hannibal cried.

Will lay on the grass next to the car. He was flat out on his back, uninjured at first glance. Hannibal rushed to his side, coming to a halt when he saw Will's arm pinned under the car and blood gushing from the edge of the wound.

“H-hannibal ...” Will choked out.

Hannibal fell to his knees next to Will, clutching Will's pale face, wet with rain and tears.

“I can't feel my arm.” Will whispered, his eyes shifting unfocused toward the sky.

“Will, look at me.” Hannibal insisted, dragging Will's face toward him, “Look at me. I'm going to get your arm free.”

“How?” Will mumbled.

Hannibal glanced over at Will's pinned arm, then at the car. “I'm going to lift it enough for you to pull your arm out.”

“You're going to lift the car?”

“Yes.”

Will began to laugh, but the amusement choked off to a groan of pain. “Sure you are.”

“I'm not leaving you here.” Hannibal said, “It will only take a bit of room to free your arm.”

The sound of a car door slamming drew his attention from Will. He rose to peek over the top of the car. A police car sat on the side of the road, next to the bent guardrail they had tumbled over. The orderly that had tased Hannibal climbed over the guard rail and slipped down the ravine. He was clutching a baton in his hand.

“I have to leave you for a moment.” Hannibal said, turning his attention back to Will.

“No!”

“Yes, for just a moment.” Hannibal said, pressing Will against the grass, “Lie still. Don't try to move.”

He crawled to the front edge of the car to see the orderly, Elliot, marching across the grass toward the wreckage.

Hannibal lunged to his feet, and came around the hood of the car at a fast clip toward the murderous orderly. Elliot saw him just as he neared the car. He let out a shout and swung the baton toward Hannibal. Hannibal ducked, and heard the baton slice through the air just above his head. He came up swinging, driving his fist into Elliot's jaw.
They both fell to the ground, Hannibal scrambling on top of Elliot to get his hands around the young man's throat. The prick of his fractured ribs impeded his speed, and Elliot managed roll out from underneath him. Hannibal's fingers slipped through the wet grass, choking nothing but dirt as Elliot rose to his feet. Pain exploded through his nose as Elliot kicked him hard. His body lurched back against the grass, blood pouring from his nose and across his lips with sharp, sweet taste mixed with rain.

Elliot charged toward him again, baton raised over his shoulder. Hannibal didn't move until the last second, letting Elliot's momentum carry him downward. He dove to the ground which Hannibal had recently vacated, landing with his face in the dirt. Hannibal rolled several feet away before getting his feet under himself. He kicked the baton out of Elliot's hand and snatched the weapon from the grass.

Disoriented, Elliot didn't see Hannibal swinging at him until it was too late. He took the baton fully across his cheek. A scream filled the air as blood spouted from his mouth, and the force of the baton threw him on his back on the wet earth. Hannibal charged toward him, swinging the baton with full force. The stick connected with Elliot's chin, snapping his head back, and throwing him, limp and moaning, across the grass.

Hannibal stepped over Elliot's prone body and dropped to his knees, straddling the young man's hips. He placed the baton over Elliot's throat, one hand on each end, and bore down with all his weight. Elliot's eyes snapped wide open and blood rushed dusky to his cheeks as the baton crushed his throat. Hannibal met his wide-eyed, terrified gaze with cold satisfaction. Elliot's wheezing breaths came in short bursts above the sound of the downpour, filling Hannibal's ears like music. His hands pawed weakly at his throat and Hannibal's hand, leaving behind tiny scratches across Hannibal's knuckles in a pathetic attempt to free himself.

Hannibal allowed Elliot to struggle, and choke, and fight for his life for several satisfied moments before growing bored with his pitiful fighting. With one final thrust, he obliterated Elliot's esophagus with the length of the baton.

Elliot's eyes fixed wide open, his hands clawing at his throat to find air. His crushed windpipe hissed and wheezed insufficient amounts of oxygen, leaving his face stretching and pale. He was still choking and suffocating as Hannibal rose from the ground. He marched around the car to where Will languished on the grass.

“Will,” Hannibal said, kneeling down next to him. He gave Will's face a gentle slap, “Will, I need your help.”

“Anything for you ...” Will mumbled, barely conscious.

“Will, as soon as I start relieving the pressure on your arm, I need you to pull yourself out from under the car. Do you understand me?”

Will nodded.

“Good.”

Hannibal smashed out the driver's side window with the baton and tossed the baton to the side. Planting his feet next to the car, he wedged his shoulder underneath the door where the window had just been, and focused all his strength into his back. The car groaned, glass settling somewhere inside the wrecked vehicle as Hannibal shifted the front half of the car upward. Excruciating pain flared white-hot through his entire body. An animal growl of pain ripped past his lips as his fractured ribs bit into his lungs. The pain snatched his breath away, but he didn't stop lifting until
he saw Will roll away from the car.

Hannibal dropped to his knees, letting the front half of the car settle back against the grass. Panting and wincing through the pain, he crawled toward Will. The pain skewed his vision, but he could see that Will's arm was a crushed, mangled mass of splintered bone and bloody, ripped flesh.

“Will.” He whispered, dragging Will's limp body across his lap. He smoothed wet hair from Will's forehead with a trembling hand, “Will, open your eyes.”

Will's eyelashes trembled against his pale cheeks. The lids cracked open just enough for Hannibal to glimpse fading blue eyes.

“I know you wanted to save me.” Hannibal murmured, bending down to press a kiss to Will's forehead, “But it appears you also can't stop sacrificing yourself for me.”

Will mumbled something indistinct, and his eyelids fell shut.

“I'm going to save you.”

He pulled Will's limp body into his arms and over his shoulder. He wavered on his knees for several moments before finding one last vestige of strength to get to his feet. He carried Will over his shoulders to the edge of the ravine where the earth tilted up sharply toward the road.

He closed his eyes and summoned the will to fight his way back up to the road. The police car Elliot had stolen would clinch their escape. They could blend into the rest of the police swarming the area and get away without notice. If they stayed in this ravine, they would die – or even worse, be separated once more.

~

“How could you let them get away?” Jack demanded.

The police officer inched a step back, but lifted his chin in defiance, “All due respect, Agent Crawford, almost all of the prisoners here at the hospital were released from their cells. The best we could do is damage control.”

“Hannibal Lecter is the most dangerous prisoner here.” Jack said, “He's the one you should have been focusing on capturing.”

“It's mass chaos. We had no way of knowing that it was Lecter who had escaped. We sent an officer after them, but they had a head start.” The officer said, “Our manpower was best spent here, containing the situation before anyone else escaped.”

Jack considered berating the officer further, but realized it was useless. With a grunt, he turned away from the officer and marched up the front steps of the asylum. Just inside, Dr. Chilton was giving his statement to an officer. He appeared shaken.

“Dr. Chilton.” Jack said, interrupting the interview, “I need to speak to you.”

“Excuse me, officer.” Chilton said.

The officer nodded, and stepped away to give them privacy.
“How did this happen?” Jack asked.

“I was not here when it happened.” Chilton said, “I was already at home, but as soon as I heard there had been an escape, I drove over to assess the situation. By the time I got here, the officers had managed to capture most of the patients.”

“So you don't know how Hannibal escaped?”

“From what I understand, he killed Dr. Mortise.” Chilton said, lowering his head, “They found her in his cell, stabbed to death.”

“Stabbed? How did he get a weapon?”

“We don't know.”

“What do you know?”

“My co-worker is dead.” Chilton snapped, “Several security guards are dead. Some of our most violent, unstable patients escaped. And Hannibal Lecter has escaped once more. The entire situation has gone to hell, Agent Crawford – that is what I know.”

“My god.” Jack murmured, scrubbing a hand over his face.

“Why don't you ask your friend Will Graham what's going on. He seems to have all the answers about Hannibal.”

“That's just the problem.” Jack said, a sickening ball of dread dropping to his stomach, “Will is gone, too.”

Chilton processed Jack's remark for a moment before he held up his hands. “Well, I guess that answers our question.”

“What question?”

“About whether or not Will Graham is innocent in all of this.” Chilton said, “Jack, if you don't believe that Will was complicit in Hannibal's crimes, or whether he really has fallen for that maniac, after this, you are very blind. I don't care what your relationship with Will was before this – he's obviously gone insane.”

“You think he helped Hannibal escape?”

“He definitely didn't stop him.”

Jack sighed. He turned to gaze through the open doors of the visitation room to the chaos beyond. For a moment, he felt like a different person, in a different time, a strange place. He couldn't reconcile a world where his friend was crazy – he never had, and he never would.
Will drifted through a hellish world of burning pain and delirium, exhausting fear and churning nausea. He was only vaguely aware of the sense of motion and the matted scratch of a faded seat cover under his cheek. From beyond the haze of suffering, Hannibal's voice touched him like a cool drop of water in the midst of hell fire. He reached for it and a comforting touch, but the pain tugged him away into swallowing darkness.

The next time he opened his eyes, he was in a cool, clean place, his back against creamy sheets. A rhythmic dripping drew his bleary gaze to the clear bag suspended over his head. He could feel the prick of a needle in his arm, but when he tried to move, a sharp pain shot through his forearm and fingertips.

“Don't try to move.”

Will gulped in a breath. His arm lay bandaged against the sheets, spots of blood seeping through the binding.

Hannibal came into his field of vision, leaning over the bed with a concerned gaze.

“Will, don't try to move.” He repeated, touching Will's forehead with a gentle palm.

“What happened?” Will asked.

He combed his memory for the reason for his being here and the terrible pain, but a black, gaping hole lay between leaving Jack's house and waking here.

“There was an accident.” Hannibal said, sitting down on the edge of the bed. He took Will's uninjured hand between his own and gave it a reassuring squeeze, “Everything is under control, but your arm is badly hurt.”

“Hurt … How?” Will asked, glancing anxiously at his arm.

“You were thrown from the car.” Hannibal said, “Your arm became pinned when the car landed.”

Will gasped in a breath as a flash of memory burned behind his eyelids. Brief seconds of shattering glass and a sensation of weightlessness preceded by white-hot pain and harrowing numbness.

“I'm trying to save the arm.” Hannibal said, lowering his gaze from Will's wide eyes, “But, at this point, I am not optimistic.”

Will swallowed hard. He blinked against the surge of panic in his chest. “You mean …”

“If I can't keep the infection out, and the limb alive …”

Will blinked once. Twice. The conclusion pressed against his brain, but he felt numb to the realization.

Hannibal's jaw clenched. “Will, you could lose the arm. I'm so sorry.”

“How long have I been laying here for?” Will asked, his voice choked with emotion.
“It's been three days since the accident.”

“I don't remember anything.”

“I've kept you sedated, mainly because the pain would be too much for you to bear.”

“Where are we?”

“South Carolina. At this point, we're laying low. We can't leave the country just yet.”

Will processed the information in silence. It felt too much like a dream, or rather, a horrible nightmare in which he might have to amputate his arm. Maybe he was dreaming. Maybe this was just his active imagination.

“Will,” Hannibal said, drawing him back to reality.

“What?”

Hannibal reached behind his neck and unclasped the black opal necklace. He gently lifted Will's head to slip the golden chain around his neck and lay the pendant against his chest.

“We're not home free yet.” Will murmured.

“This is a turning point for us, Will.” Hannibal said, pressing his mouth to Will's knuckles, “Either we survive this, or we die trying to find our wings and fly to freedom. In either case, I want you to know that I harbor no regrets about the life I've chosen with you. Whatever happens, we go together.”

“Don't.” Will whispered, “Don't act like you're saying goodbye.”

“I don't want to say goodbye, Will. But I must accept that as possible scenario. You are badly injured, and I am not entirely well myself. The authorities are searching for us with all of their manpower. They are terrified of our escaping into the world once more. It won't be as simple as last time.”

“So, what, you're giving up?”

“No, of course not.”

“Then don't act like it. You're Hannibal Lecter. The man I fell in love with wouldn't let all of the search parties in the world get him down. He'd see it as a challenge.”

Hannibal chuckled, and shook his head. “My dear Will, how you've changed me.”

“I don't want to change you. I want you to find a way for us to be together for the rest of our lives.”

Hannibal's eyes grew somber. “If that is what you want, I must explain our situation to you with brutal honesty.”

Will swallowed, but nodded, “Okay.”

“Your arm was nearly severed during the crash. Most of the bones are broken, several of them pulverized beyond repair. The best I can do at this point is try to graft the limb back to your arm. It will take a skilled surgeon and much more advanced tools than what I have at my disposal to reconstruct your natural flesh and bone. The process can take months, years even.”
“I think I know what you're going to say next.”

“The healing process would be much faster if we amputated.” Hannibal said, with a stoic nod. “The human body is much better at creating scar tissue than regenerating damaged parts. Should we amputate the arm, the stump would heal in a minimum of two months. Most amputees require a hospital stay of only two weeks before they are released. The longest part of the amputation process is relearning certain motions with a prosthesis and dealing with the loss of an integral part of the body. It's an emotional recovery that can take it's toll on a person. I must warn you of the psychological impact before you decide which path you'd like to take.”

Will let out a slow breath and turned his eyes to the ceiling. He could feel a small tear escape down his temple and into his hair; the only emotion he was willing to give to circumstances that couldn't possibly be altered.

“These are not the circumstances I had hoped to find us under once we escaped.” Hannibal said, “I feel this responsibility heavily, Will. I may have been wrong in attempting an escape at the time I did. If I had known this would be the consequences, I would not have acted-”

“I won't let you take the responsibility for this. I've made my own choices that brought me here. You didn't force me to fall in love, or run away, or say those vows. I knew the dangers, and I accepted them – and here we are.”

Hannibal sighed, and gave a resigned nod. “Yes, of course, I wouldn't presume to make your decisions for you. Yet, I've acted hastily and my yearning to be free with you again has cost you a pound of flesh I didn't want to take from you.”

Will reached up to touch his cheek. He could feel a hint of life flow back into his body as Hannibal bent into the caress. He leaned over to impart a tender kiss that Will pressed into with all his strength. After months of separation, the simplest brush of their skin was a gratification that matched his memory of lovemaking.

When their lips parted, Hannibal's eyes were misty and bursting with adoration. He caressed Will's face with yearning fingers, “I would gladly exchange our places if I could-”

Will pressed his fingers to Hannibal's lips, stemming the flow of regretful conviction.

“I can live without my arm.” He whispered, “I can't live without you.”

~

Frederick Chilton let four days pass out of contrived respect for the lives lost in the hospital before taking the master key ring down the hallway to the departed Helena Mortise's office and stepping into the room.

Police presence lingered in the scattered furnishings and open filing cabinets, papers lying in disarray across the desk. Jack Crawford had been all through the office, convinced Helena's death meant something specific to Hannibal's escape. That she had died in his cell with a needle full of barbiturate on the floor was indeed suspicious; Chilton knew the reasons, but he wasn't inclined to tell Jack.
Now as he sifted through the scattered papers and open filing cabinets, he hoped against hope that what he was looking for had not been taken into evidence.

He spent ten minutes looking through the files, finding only patient information and notes on other residents of the hospital. He paused when he saw the picture frame sitting on the edge of the desk. The photograph showed a young Helena with her arms wrapped around an older woman, her mother according to the resemblance between them. He reached out and slapped the frame on it's face, putting the smiling faces out of his view. Quieting his conscience, he continued his search.

When nothing of value presented itself, he sat back in the chair and heaved a great sigh. The little effort it took to look through files tired his body. After all he had survived, he now had to endure the frustration of a weak body, easily tired by the simplest of tasks, and a strict diet that left him craving for just one hamburger. It would give him the utmost satisfaction if he could make that effort worth it by finding Helena's notes on Dr. Lecter.

He paused when he saw Helena's briefcase sitting on a chair in the corner. Rising from the desk, he went to the briefcase with trembling hands. He licked his lips, offered a silent prayer, and opened the lid of the briefcase. A notebook and pencil sat in the bottom, and he snatched them up with fervor. He flipped through the notebook, growling in frustration when he saw that none of the notes pertained to Hannibal. He searched through all of the pockets and papers, but to no avail.

Stomping back to the desk, he dropped to the chair with a grunt.

He turned to the computer, his last place to look. When he turned on the device, however, he was greeted by a blank screen. His eyes slid over to the tower, where he finally noticed that the back had been pried open. Circling the desk, he peered into the back of the computer tower to see that there was a gaping hole where the hard drive should have been.

The computer and Helena's office had both been stripped clean, by someone. Her research was gone, and so was she. The secrets she had discovered were lost forever in the unreachable blackness of death. With seething anger, Chilton was certain he knew who had taken the research material.

~

The day they arrived at the beach house in South Carolina, Hannibal burned Helena's research in the fire pit. As he stared into the ashes, he bid adieu to his time at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane and Dr. Helena Mortise. He was turning his full attention to Will and his recovery.

With the chance of his psyche being published by a psychiatrist forever gone, Hannibal freed himself to consider their position. Regret nipped at his heels while he watched Will sleep, but once Will awoke and agreed on what must be done, Hannibal found his sense of control returning to him.

On the fourth day, he dressed in black slacks and a slate gray sweater, the most bland outfit he could find in his wardrobe.

He paused in front of the mirror as he slipped his ring onto his hand. No flashy jewels, just a simple gold band – more for Will's sake than his own. He still considered marriage a failing,
societal construct that most people took too seriously – or not seriously enough – but he'd said those vows because he felt more strongly for Will than he'd had for anything else in his lifetime. It was a fitting rebellion in the face of the FBI and the psychiatrists who thought they understood him, and it was an undertaking he would see to his last breath.

Drawing in a deep breath, he tucked a yellow envelope into the interior pocket of his jacket and set a stony expression of determination on his face.

To his last breath, or to Will's. Whichever came first.

~

Will woke to the front door slamming. He jolted upright in the bed, and sighed in relief when Hannibal came entered the room. He was carrying a leather bound case that Will had never seen before.

“What's that?” Will asked.

Hannibal set the case on table next to Will's bed and unzipped the lid. He lifted the lid to reveal an assortment of medical instruments, sterile gloves, needles, and a small cooler Will guessed contained perishable liquids.

“Oh.” Will said.

“I have purchased everything I need to do the surgery.” Hannibal said, “And for much cheaper than a medical professional would ask.”

“You were a surgeon. You know how to do it.” Will said.

“It's been some time.” Hannibal said, “Most of the amputations I've done in recent years were on people who were going to die anyway. It's been years since I operated on a patient who's meant to survive the incisions.”

“Are you trying to make me flake out of my decision?”

“No.” Hannibal said, giving Will a brief smile, “I'm warning you of the dangers.”

“You know what you're doing. I believe that. Miriam Lass survived without her arm, didn't she?”

Hannibal regarded Will with a chiding frown.

“You are much more important to me than Miriam Lass ever was. I had a wider range of tools at my disposal then. Not to mention, unforeseen complications in the medical field happen often.”

Will reached out and caught Hannibal's sleeve. He tugged Hannibal to the edge of the bed.

“Look at me.”

Hannibal obliged, his eyes defenseless and soft to Will's searching.

“I trust you.” Will said, “I've trusted you with my sanity. I've trusted you with my heart, and my body. And now I'm trusting you with my life. I know you won't fail me.”
Hannibal's lips gave a trembling smile. “Good.”

“Come down here and give me a kiss before you start cutting into me.” Will said.

Hannibal complied without protest. He bent down and cradled Will's face in his hands as he pressed a slow, warm kiss to Will's mouth. Will lifted his head from the pillow to deepen the kiss, throwing his good arm around Hannibal's neck to pull him down against him. Hannibal braced himself against the pillow as he nuzzled his forehead against Will's.

“I don't indulge often in regret.” He murmured, “Yet, I find myself searching back through the past five years to find my failures that brought us here ...”

“I told you not to make yourself responsible for this.”

“We were caught because I wanted to torture Jack Crawford.” Hannibal admitted, “I won't make that mistake again.”

“You've always been a narcissistic asshole. If that changed, you wouldn't be the man I married.” Will said with a chuckle.

“You take my shortcomings too lightly.”

“I take them as they are.”

“Even so, once we have left America this time, I won't be looking back again.”

“I'm just fine with that.” Will said. He pressed a kiss against the corner of Hannibal's mouth, “Let's get to it, Doctor. The sooner you operate, the sooner we can get to not looking back.”

Hannibal drew back with a resolute nod. “Yes.”

Will settled his head back against the pillow and practiced deep breaths as Hannibal went to the bathroom to sanitize his hands. There was the briefest shudder of doubt in the back of his mind, a quiet whisper that he might regret losing his arm for love one day. It was brief, and rapidly crushed by confidence that he was doing the right thing for the sake of their lives, for the sake of their love. They were married now, and marriage was about partnership, giving and taking, compromising and making the hard choices. He was willing to make those hard choices if it meant they could live out the rest of their lives together, undisturbed.

When Hannibal returned, he was wearing a sanitary face mask and cap, surgical gloves, and a white hospital gown over his clothes. Only his eyes were visible, and they pressed into Will with a concern and affection that made Will tremble.

Hannibal took all of the instruments from the case and laid them out in a neat row on the edge of the table, easily within his reach. Will swallowed hard at the sight of the saw and it's sharp, glinting teeth.

Hannibal's motions were practiced as he assembled the equipment. When he turned back to Will, he was holding a breathing mask.

“You look quite pale.” Hannibal said, “Are you certain you're ready to go through with this?”

Will swallowed back the fear, and nodded. “More certain than I've ever been.”

“Good. You don't have to be afraid; I'm going to take care of you when this is over.” Hannibal
said, resting a gloved hand on Will's arm, “I'll find the best prosthesis and a physical therapist to help you regenerate the mobility.”

“I know you will.”

Hannibal gave a nod, and extended the breathing mask to administer the anesthesia. He placed it gently over Will's mouth and nose, immediately stinging his nostrils with the chemical.

“Just breathe in deeply.” Hannibal said, “This will all be over before you know it.”

Will closed his eyes as the mask sealed over his mouth and nose, and anesthesia hissed up through the tube. He breathed in until his lungs ached and he felt the dizzy drowsiness take over his brain. Through the fog, he heard Hannibal murmur some distant assurance. It carried him out to the dark sea of his subconscious where he drifted into a peaceful sleep.

~

Jack didn't sleep well the week following Hannibal's escape.

Their only lead, his stolen car, had turned up in a ditch not far from the hospital hours after they sent out the APB. The crushed and shattered remains of his car didn't bother him as much as the fact that both Hannibal and Will were gone despite copious amounts of blood found at the scene. The blood, identified as Will's, couldn't confirm that it was enough blood loss to kill him, but it also couldn't confirm that he was alive. Jack hovered somewhere between hope that Will was alive, and relief that he might finally be out of Hannibal's reach, even if it were through something as horrible as death.

He was exhausted, his nerves worn thin, when he got a call from the Baltimore PD, telling him a new body had turned up in connection to the Baltimore State Hospital fiasco.

When the officer first gave Jack the address, Jack's tired mind didn't make the connection. He made it all the way out to his car and into the driver's seat before the realization hit him with the weight of a freight train. Sudden nausea roiled in his stomach as he gazed down at the address scribbled on the piece of paper in his hand.

“You bastard.” He whispered.

He sat there, frozen by disbelief and dread, for several moments before he shook himself. Starting the engine, he pulled out of the Quantico headquarters parking lot and sped down the road toward the awaiting crime scene.

It was a fifteen minute drive to the scene, a location he had looked upon with loathing and frustration more than once over the past ten years. The ground was soggy from spring rain, but the grass had begun to grow thick and verdant across the open lawn. In the center of a ring of blooming trees, the dome of the defunct observatory sat like a visual reminder of all of Jack's shortcomings as the leader of the Behavioral Analysis Unit.

Jack drew in a deep breath, and started up the front walk. The area was cordoned off by yellow tape, and half a dozen officers milled around the scene, sketching dimensions and taking notes. The half-naked body of a young man was suspended by ropes in front of the door, his stomach cut open and void of organs. The intestines had been left behind, spilling out of his open stomach onto
the front of his pants and the ground below.

Jack stopped next to the officer taking notes.

“Who is he?”

“Name's Elliot Ferguson.” The officer replied, “He was an orderly at the Baltimore hospital all the
prisoners escaped from earlier this week. Rumor has it, he was having an affair with the doctor
who died – Mortise, or something?”

Jack nodded. “I'm told he took off after Lecter during the escape.”

“Trying to take revenge for the doctor, I imagine.” The officer said.

Jack shook his head. “Poor, misguided kid. He had no idea he was no match for Hannibal.”

“Yeah, sad story.” The officer shrugged, “The main reason why we called you, Agent Crawford,
was because of what we found inside.

“What did you find?”

“I'll show you.”

The officer ducked around Elliot's suspended body and motioned for Jack to follow him into the
observatory. The officer took them up the stairs to the second level, and as they rounded the corner
into the open space beyond, Jack was struck by a debilitating sense of deja vu. He could still
remember walking through this observatory to find Miriam Lass's arm, and Beverly Katz's
sectioned body. Both his charges, both failures in his leadership.

“Right over here.” The officer said.

Jack stepped around the officer's shoulder as they neared a counter in front of the huge telescopes
that looked toward heaven. The severed arm that lay on the counter was bloodied and mangled, the
fingers smashed beyond recognition.

“Do we know who's arm it is?” He whispered, thickly.

“Not yet. We're sending in DNA testing now.”

Jack took a trembling step closer. A small piece of paper sat in front of the arm.

_Catch me if you can_, it read.

All at once, Jack was overcome by rage, sorrow, pain, and finally, complacency. He knew exactly
whose arm this was, and who had left it here for him to find. He knew what it meant. Just like
Miriam Lass, Will Graham was still alive. He knew Hannibal was still torturing him, still dangling
his failures in front of him. He knew he was never going to see Will Graham again. And in that
moment of acceptance, he knew Will wasn't innocent in all that had happened in the past five years.
He had fallen prey to Hannibal Lecter's whims, swallowed whole. Whatever hope Jack had held out
for Will's exoneration was gone. Hannibal had won.

Jack stepped out of the observatory, breathing in deep the cool, spring air and trying to soothe away
the sense of failure clinging to his back. He ducked under the yellow tape, and marched toward his
car. He came to an abrupt halt when he saw Freddie Lounds leaning against his SUV.

“Freddie.” He said.
“Hi, Jack.” Freddie said, pushing off the car and meandering toward him, “Looks like I got the tip-off too late. Can you tell me what you saw in there?”

“It's police business, Freddie. You know I can't tell you.”

“Any theories? You would be named as a protected source.”

“You've been here before.” Jack said, glaring back at the observatory, “What's your theory?”

“Obviously, Hannibal the Cannibal is alive, although, he's not himself. He didn't even take the time to package of the organs for his next dinner party.”

“If luck is on our side, he won't be having any dinner parties any time soon.”

“I saw your car. It's too bad.”

“I have good insurance.”

“Do you think Hannibal wrecked the car … or Will?”

Jack turned a scathing glare on Freddie. “What does it matter? They're gone.”

“So, they are together?”

“Now you're just twisting my words.”

“It's okay.” She shrugged, “I already know Will is still alive.”

Frustration simmered through Jack's veins, igniting the last ounce of strength he had.

“And how the fuck do you know that?” He asked, taking a threatening step towards Freddie, “You know, I'm sick and tired of these games, and I'm done giving you passes. You really don't want to piss me off right now, so it would probably be smart if you cooperated.”

“I'm not the one playing games with you.” Freddie said, giving a brief smile, “Hannibal is.” She pulled a small device out of her pocket, which Jack quickly recognized as a tape recorder, “He sent me this.”

“What is it?” Jack asked.

“It's a recording of a session with Dr. Mortise.” She said, “I have to admit, it struck me speechless.”

“Why would he send it to you?” Jack asked.

She shrugged, “I told him I wanted to write a follow-up book about him and Will Graham. He gave me the smoking gun.”

“What's on the recording, Freddie?”

“You'll find out with everyone else when my book comes out.” She said, putting the tape recorder back in her pocket. “But I can tell you, it's explosive material. The world is going to love it.”

“I see. I hope it's nothing that could help the investigation, as you would be withholding evidence.”

“Don't worry. It won't tell you where they are or where they're going.” Freddie said, “Besides, you're a profiler and you used to be Will's friend. I think you can figure out what Hannibal has to
say about him all on your own.”

Jack sighed. “I hate to say it, but you're probably right.”

“So, if you agree with me, why don't you give me a statement?” She asked, pulling out her pen and paper.

“From me, or from the FBI?”

“From you. Will's friend, Hannibal Lecter's nemesis.”

“I'm not his nemesis.” Jack said, “A nemesis gives his opponent a fair fight. I'm just sitting here taking the punches.”

Freddie scribbled down the remark.

“Don't put that in your book.”

“Sorry, too late.” She said, “You're getting a whole chapter to yourself.”

“Should I be flattered or scared?”

“Flattered, I'd think. There's nothing the world loves more than a tale of good versus evil. I think you know which side you're on.”

“I'm not so sure anymore – about anything.”

“This is the site where you discovered Miriam's arm, and Beverly's body ...” Freddie said, “What you discovered today, will it break you?”

“Break me? No … Radically change how I see the world – most likely.”

“The whole world? Or just Will Graham?”

“When I met Will, he was adamant that serial killers shouldn't be glorified in a museum, much less my Evil Minds Museum.” Jack said, shaking his head, “He was a guy who wanted to do the right thing, who wanted to save lives. Even when he was suffering through encephalitis, he was the smartest, most kind-hearted man I knew. He was a constant in my life at the BAU, like a personification of justice and mercy. I had faith that no matter what happened, no matter how shaken or hurt he was, he'd always come back to us as a good, righteous man I knew … Now, that faith is shaken and I'm starting to wonder if I ever knew him at all. I wonder, has he changed, or was he always this way? Questioning that, maybe it does mean my view of the world has changed or that maybe the scales have just fallen from my eyes to see the world for the twisted miserable place it is.”

Freddie's pen scratched across the paper for several moments before she looked up again. “So, you're admitting you think Will Graham is a killer?”

Jack drew his gaze from the observatory. “You don't have to pander to my hurt feelings, Freddie. Are you still questioning whether or not he is?”

~
6 months later

A summer breeze drifted across the patio as Alana set out tea and danishes on the table before her and Jack. Morgan practiced riding tricks on his horse out in the yard, swerving around barrels and over bars like a professional rider.

“He's very good.” Jack observed.

“Margot had him on horseback the moment he could sit up by himself.” Alana said, watching Morgan with a smile.

Jack took a sip of his tea. “Mm, that's very good.”

“It's imported.” Alana said, taking a seat across from him. She cleared her throat. “I hope you don't mind me getting straight to the point.”

“You always have.” Jack said, waving a diplomatic hand, “Go ahead.”

“I'm sure you can guess what I want to talk about.”

“Will.”

Alana nodded. “I've spent the last six months trying to put it out of my mind.”

“So have I. It's hard to escape when the investigation is still open.”

“I've decided to air my feelings.” Alana said, “You seem like the best person to air them to.”

“I've accepted my feelings about Will.” Jack said.

“I haven't. I have this mixed sense of dread, but a stinging desire to move on. I want to know for sure, and at the same time, I don't.”

“I understand what you mean.”

“You didn't almost date him.”

“No.”

“It's strange to think that the Will I used to know might be a killer. Not so much strange as discomforting.”

“Alana, I'll give it to you straight.” Jack said, “Because you're my friend, and I know you can take it. Saying Will 'might not' be a killer is denial, plain and simple. After a lot of careful soul searching and old-fashioned profiling, I know that he has given himself over to Hannibal's whims. Whether that means killing, or helping, or even just watching, I've accepted the fact that he's not innocent any longer.”

Alana toyed with the hem of her shirt, keeping her gaze fixed on the rolling hills beyond Muskrat Farm.

“The moment he married Hannibal, my lingering doubts were confirmed.”

“It could still be Stockholm-”
“Alana, I know you want to believe in the best of Will, but it's just not true. He made a conscious decision. He divorced his wife, he married Hannibal, and he helped Hannibal escape from institutionalization. These are not the acts of a man suffering from an illness. They are decisive, planned actions with consequences he fully expected and pursued before starting down this path.”

Alana pursed her lips, and nodded slowly.

“We have to let him go.” Jack whispered, “For our own sake. For our own sanity.”

“What's your theory on Will's condition when they found him in Spain?” Alana asked.

“It was an act.” Jack said, “Looking back, I can see it so clearly, the manipulation and psychology of it. We were presented with overwhelming evidence, evidence so painful and horrifying that we were thoroughly convinced that Will was an abused victim. In hindsight, the psychology was all wrong.”

“Will told me Hannibal would never get what he wanted through violence, but through manipulation.” Alana whispered, her voice growing hoarse with emotion, “He told me, and I didn't believe him.”

“You want to see the good in people. That's not a bad thing. It's being a good friend.” Jack said.

“Not when it means letting your friend jump into the deep end without at least trying to persuade him to save himself.”

“Will jumped a long time ago. It's not your fault.”

“I still care about him.” Alana said, dashing a tear from her cheek. She cast an anxious glance at Jack, “Is it a bad thing for me to want him to be happy?”

“You can't condone what he's doing, but no, I don't think it's bad.”

“I don't condone Hannibal. I don't condone killing. But I still have a distinct disconnect in my mind between Will and all the rest. I hope he's happy out there somewhere. It's all I ever wanted for him, you know – to be left alone, to be happy.”

“Maybe he is.”

“You just said you can't condone him being with Hannibal and possibly killing.”

“If it lays his demon to rest from your mind, accept that he's happy doing just that. My suggestion – put Will Graham as far from your mind as you can, Alana.” Jack said. He motioned to the house, to Morgan cantering across the field, “Look at your life here. You have a beautiful wife and son, you have a job that you love, and a bright future. Don't let the ghosts of the past hold you back.”

“You're right, I suppose.”

“I can tell you one thing for certain.” Jack added, “Will isn't thinking about you. He's not worried about you. He's looking his own future in the eye, and shaking hands with the devil.”

~

The pink glow of a sunset furled across the sky, and a warm breeze from the coast of Morocco
rustled sheer white curtains as pleasured moans eased into humming aftermath.

Will settled against Hannibal's chest, mumbling satisfaction as the warm throb of orgasm faded from his limbs. He ran his fingers through Hannibal's chest hair, and up his neck to touch his jaw. Hannibal bent down to kiss him, tasting his mouth thoroughly, before parting their lips to leave a pattern of kisses across Will's cheek and temple.

“You make me question reality.” He murmured, his voice throaty and passionate in the afterglow.

“You redefine it.” Will said, turning his neck into Hannibal's kisses, “All the way down to how many times you can make me come in two hours.”

“Keep questioning me, and I will keep raising the number.”

“Is that a threat or a promise?”

“It's challenge.” Hannibal said, leaning back to look into Will's gleaming eyes, “Will you rise to the challenge?”

Will chuckled and glanced down at his cock, “I think I already am.”

“Careful.” Hannibal murmured, touching Will's chin with his fingertip, “I may drain you once more, and then what energy will you have to sass me with?”

“I'll find it … somewhere.”

Hannibal teeth dragged across his lower lip to suppress a moan. He ducked his head against Will's neck and dragged his hand down the curve of Will's hip and buttock.

Will groaned and pushed Hannibal away from him. “In all seriousness, let me have a break. If you squeeze one more drop of come out of me, I'm going to be sore in the morning.”

Hannibal chuckled, but lapsed back against the sheets. “As you wish, darling.”

They rested against the pillows for some time before Hannibal moved, upsetting Will's comfortable position and making him groan.

“I have something to show you.” Hannibal said, swinging his legs over the edge of the bed. “I'll be right back.”

Will waited in the bed as Hannibal left the room briefly and came back carrying a hardback book. He extended it to Will.

Will frowned as he took the book, but his confusion quickly turned to a chuckle as he read the cover aloud, “Pack Hunting: A Love Story For Psychopaths” by Freddie Lounds. A sequel to the number one bestseller Dinner and A Show: The Life and Crimes of a Cannibal.” He flipped the book over to peruse the back, “This is about us?”

“Yes.” Hannibal said, sitting down next to him, “The summary is rather vague, but the book itself is cut and dry.”

Will skimmed the summary, finding Hannibal's remark to be true.

“When you say cut and dry....”

“Our story, as it's meant to be.”
“How? I mean, Freddie Lounds makes up half the stuff she writes and uses unreliable sources.”

“Not this time.”

Will paused, a frown tugging at his brow, “What do you mean?”

“I gave Freddie the material she needed to write this book.”

“You did?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“Because, I don't care whether or not what psychiatrists and journalists write about me is true. There's been enough conjecture and speculation about my psyche to fill a library, and most of it is false. They will never understand me, but there's one thing that I do not want to be speculated about or lied about. And that thing is you, Will. I want the world to know that I love you, and that my marriage to you was not one borne out of Stockholm Syndrome or coercion.”

Will stared at him, shock registering in the moisture gleaming in his blue eyes, before he tossed the book aside and threw his good arm around Hannibal's neck. Hannibal chuckled, wrapping his arms around Will's waist as Will climbed onto his lap. Will's legs locked behind Hannibal's back, and his face pressed into Hannibal's neck, suppressing a tearful laugh.

“I didn't expect you to cry.” Hannibal said, stroking his hair.

“I'm not sad.” Will said, sitting back to look into his eyes. “I just … I can't believe you did this for me.”

“I can't believe Freddie Lounds did it for me.” Hannibal said, nodding to the book, “She could have twisted my words to suit her own agenda, but what I've read from the book is accurate.”

“You've spent years baffling psychiatrists and the best profilers.” Will said, shaking his head. “I can't believe you're breaking the mystery for me.”

“I'm handing over nothing I can't live without. This book will be my legacy. I never thought I would say this, but I am thankful for Freddie Lounds's commitment to writing an elaborate story that will seize the world. No one will soon forget what was written, or who I am.”

“You're Hannibal the Cannibal.” Will smiled.

“Yes. I'm also your husband.”

Will's smile widened. “Yes.”

“Which is why I'd like to consummate it entirely now that your arm is healed.”

Will frowned as Hannibal slipped out from underneath him and walked across the room to the closet.

“We already consummated it, I think.” Will said, motioning to the bed.

“Not in the way Freddie Lounds wrote about.” Hannibal said.

He reached into the closet and pulled out two hangers. He returned to the bed and presented the
matching, plastic jumpsuits to Will. Will reached out to touch the arm of one suit, the plastic of which would never touch a real flesh hand again. A smile and a sense of nostalgia seized him.

He rose from the bed and pressed his lips hard against Hannibal mouth. When he drew back, he saw the familiar thirst and roiling, violent passion in Hannibal's eyes. He took the hanger from Hannibal and held the suit out in front of him.

“I thought you'd never ask.”

~the end~

Chapter End Notes

And that's a wrap! Thank you so much to everyone who read along, and commented! This fic was my dream for s4, and it was made even better by my chance to share it with all you wonderful people. Much love from this fannibal heart to all of yours <3

End Notes

Thank you for reading

Hit me up on Tumblr!!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!