Echoes Beneath

by itsbeautiful

Summary

(Sequel to Transcendent Suffering.)
Thumbs drifted after tears before Hannibal leaned in to kiss each quivering bead of light, maroon eyes staring at the frightened boy looking out from piercing gaze, voice a soft whisper against lips. “Tell me, Will… was all the boundless beauty of this fallen world etched in the runes of your bones and…” A quiver of pain wavered notes to low hum of quiet. “And…writ to shine through the light of your eyes from birth? Or have you merely allowed me the grace, the honor, and privilege to witness your radiance in the life we have shared? To let me love you all the same?”

They felt tremors beneath their tangled bodies rooted to the ground.

“God, please…” Will murmured, a fresh sting of tears welling eyes, lifting them upward and praying for the first time in his life to anything that would listen.

Take us. Take us both. Just don’t…please don't. Don’t take him from me.
Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

If one were to ask the religiously devote what they might see upon their death, it is a near certainty they would all give the same mundane response. (What else can be expected of chatty lambs after all?) A bright light. Or even the absurd notion of heaven epitomized by pearly gates. They may say winged beings of the angelic or hellfire of beasts. A stranger notion of morality still to hold promise or threat to coerce human beings to pretend they are not what they say. Though God must have his amusements. But you and I can agree, there are far more terrifying monsters here with us on Earth than there will ever be in fantasy.

Glazed muddy maroon stared up at a cluster of stars emerging from the dusk through welling blood and drooping lashes, body seizing to the tempo of a metal chain fence rattling.

Having died nearly twice now—(and for what I imagine is the final time, I wish the circumstances were more favorable. This was a fairly impeccable linen silk blend before it grew better acquainted with a cold dirty alley, three pairs of filthy shoes, and a growing resentment of baseball.)—I assure you there is nothing to be seen. Only heard. Echoes beneath the surface.

There is nothing distinct I’m afraid. Muddled tones of an oxygen starved brain and rushing blood of my own heart I suspect. But I hear them. And through it all, the most distinct tolling of bells…

I hear him.

*

45 minutes earlier...

Nostrils flared. Singed smoke exhaled.

“Come and get it.”

One heartbeat. Then two. Will smiled. Water flowed through him, around him, a gentle bubbling stream. Peaceful at last.

They would know what it meant to truly scream.

Sand poured from clawed fingers before flinging in to eyes. Will launched from a crouch and slammed into the woman with the shotgun as she stumbled, an arm up to shield her eyes. She was crying out in surprise even as his hands slid around her waist and they skid across the ground. He jammed his knife in the ground, slicing free strands of flowing blonde hair. Skin split open a red gash as a muzzle jerked up and into his jaw. They wrestled for the shotgun. Knees jabbed at the soft flesh on his sides. Fingers clenched around the barrel and stock. Slender biceps shook as Will pushed, snarling down at widening grey eyes. Feet began to kick more frantically as chokes gurgled free.

Gleaming black spread a thick line across a windpipe. Pink painted nails loosened, eyes rolling back. He felt her last breath warm blood dripping down his chin. She went slack. He pressed two fingers to her carotid. There was still a pulse.

I’m a survivor. Not a fucking monster. It was his last cohesive thought as the rays of light slid below
Meaty sweating palms shoved. Fingers jammed into slots between his ribs and the world tumbled out of focus. The shotgun slipped from his grasp. Will grunted as he ground face first through dirt and stone. He spit out gravel and blood from a split lip. He drove an elbow in a stomach, wrenching the upper half of his body around to face his attacker. The larger man had traded his taser for good old fashioned fists. Knuckles drove his face back to the ground. He registered the burst of pain before another replaced it.

“F-fucking Christ,” Will spit out as fingers wrapped his throat in a chokehold.

His palms beating against wide angled cheeks and thick arms were even less useful than he had hoped. Glancing blows. He wondered if it tickled, or if it was just a mere annoyance of a buzzing fly. He gasped for breath. Was it necessary for the goliath to choke him quite so hard? It wasn't like he was going anywhere.

“Give me the goddamn gun, Henry!”

He tipped his head. As much as one could with the allowances of 280 pounds of muscles and steel grip bearing down. The thin wisp of a man wavered on the horizon of strung laundry and skyline, thumbs scrubbing at eyes. The gun lay at his feet. But that could have been a hallucination. Will tongued at the loose molar seeping copper into the back of his throat to keep from thinking about how his chest was burning for air. The glint of a blade still stuck in the dirt a few feet away came to sharper focus. The younger man snorted air into his lungs and brought the blunt edge of his hand into the crook of a left elbow. The weight crushing him faltered forward. It was all he needed.

He gasped for air and rolled to the side. The other man may have outweighed him, but he was quicker. Or so he thought. No sooner had he twisted, fingers outstretched, before he was dragged across the ground by the waistband of his trousers. Stinging lit up the other side of his face. He swore through gritted teeth, dislodging the loose tooth and grimaced.

“I’ve had about enough of this shit!” Booming bounced off the buildings beyond.

Will was flipped onto his back. He spat out tooth and blood soaked spit alike into a face. The larger man rose his fist to strike. His wrist snaked free from his side, thin bead of silver palmed between scabbed fingers. Black pupils dilated. He drove the switchblade into an abdomen, both fists shaking around the handle, and yanked through fatty tissue. He saw the man’s mouth contort open, but he couldn’t hear the scream. He only heard the rush of blood spraying out, hot and thick, a silent vision of red hitting his nose then his cheeks and mouth. It drenched the front of his shirt. The intestines unraveled first. Will scrambled back, heels scuffing across the dirt, as they tangled across his ankles. Then the organs. A liver slid free. A stomach fell flat.

“Jesus…” The younger man gasped for breath, legs heavy, knees shaking as he tried to get up.

He couldn’t look away. He watched the man claw at the ground, at the blood, trying to put the organs back in.

“Oh my god,” A high pitched wail shrieked.

Rattling metal inside shaking hands steadied. Gunpowder stung his nostrils before he heard the sound. Will blinked, eyes sliding to catch a glimpse of silver light tipping.

A bullet tore through his side.
Blood spattered a phone broken to pieces against cobblestone.

“He bit me! He fucking bit me!” The man shouting gestured wildly in the direction of his attacker.

The first blow of ringed knuckles sent Hannibal reeling, teeth dripping red with hot flesh and tendons. The second was accompanied with a gloating smile. His temple cracked against a concrete wall. His ears rang over the reverberation of voices.

“Fucking cocksucker! Piece of shit!”

“He’s bleeding real bad, man! Look at that!”

Red flooded his line of vision. Two shadows were advancing. The third was clutching at flesh hanging open over glistening muscles. A pistol spun against the ground.

“Nnn…” Hannibal let his shoulders and head roll back against concrete to focus the spreading blotch of pain, letting blood filter through clenched teeth. “Only one…of those…is true, gentleman.”

Another fist pummeled his stomach. His vision tunneled dark, body flushing hot. He dropped to a single knee, stomach retching before he vomited.

“Getting too old for this shit…” The younger man’s imagined voice streamed through the black abyss of his mind as he surfaced.

Hannibal grunted a mild agreement, drawing up to a crouch. It was getting harder to control the pain. He dragged a forearm against his thigh, wiping spit and bile from his mouth. He stared down at glistening flesh beyond leather soles now covered in viscous and clicked his teeth. A perfectly good meal snatched from his jaws.

Eighteen filed claws scratched across stone. A low snarl turned to another grunting scream. His gaze snapped up.

Winston lunged, saliva spewing from open jaws, and sank teeth in a thick calf. The heavy man staggered, swearing and kicking his leg to shake the dog off. Eyes glowed eerily yellow in the dark. Teeth clamped tighter, blood pooling.

“Get this fuckin’ animal off me! Get it off me!”

A bat swung. A pitiful yelp pierced the air. Winston slid across the ground. The dog whined as he barreled into a crate, head slumping and coming to rest on his side.

The heavy man tumbled to the ground, blood gushing out. “I can’t move my leg. I can’t move it! You listening?”

The thin man stooped for the gun, struggling to grip as blood trickled from his wounded arm, and laughed. “Serves it right, stupid animal! Now, now, can I shoot the mutt?”

Crimson leather crinkled as a bat tapped resolutely, cool voice replying, “Go ahead, Marcus. Have your fun.”

A hammer drew back on a gun.
“Are you gonna let me bleed to fucking death, for Chrissake!”

“Shut up!” The bat swung in the direction of the voice. “Or you’ll be next. One little dog bite and you’re whining like a child. Take it like a man!”

Golden limbs twitched. Rib slowly rose and fell. Watering brown eyes stared helplessly across the alley.

Hannibal inhaled and felt nothing but fire burning in his lungs, through bruising ribs, and coursing through his veins. And as he rose, he felt nothing at all except frigid cold of the snow where his sister had died in his arms. Something shifted inside his bones, dark, familiar, and howling out of jagged teeth.

“Shit! Watch out!”

The pistol swung. A shot cracked off. The money clip severed tendons on a throat with a single swipe. It buried deep in a windpipe cutting off a scream. Smoke plummed with the splinter of another bullet. Hannibal felt neither. The first grazed his cheek, thin red beading in its wake. The second bloomed red below his collarbone, tearing through muscle and shattering glass somewhere beyond. He threw his weight on top of the man with the gun. It skidded out of reach as palms flailed up to protect, his sank to destroy, ramming a skull hard against stone. A wet moan bubbled through lips. His thumbs scoured up cheeks and inched towards eye sockets. They shoved in. The man became faceless. Blood spurted and pooled in the shape of a lily opening mid morning. Even with the screams, it would never be as beautiful as the tender offering wilting above his heart in a torn pocket.

Aluminum smacked across a skull. Inhuman snarls stuttered as Hannibal fell, cold ground melding with his elbow and then against bruising ribs. He grunted, breath sending dirt scattering.

“Get up.”

He pushed up on palms, dirt gritting inside nicks and cuts. The bat came down at an angle on his spine and again on the back of his neck. He hit the ground, breath rushing out, biting his own tongue upon impact.

“I…” Sweat beaded on his brow. “…am going to enjoy… tearing your lungs…from your chest.”

Another swing smashed over his head. “Get up!”

Blood trickled from the nape of his neck, over tendons straining in his neck, and down his chin. Pain splintered through his skull. He struggled to see through a white fog. He looked across the alley. Winston whined pathetically, trying to rise before collapsing.

“If you can’t get up, old man, then I suggest you stay the fuck down and come quietly.”

He dragged a torn knee forward, hair matted with red falling into his eyes, blood spraying as he snarled, “You are an ugly little thing, aren’t you?”

Ribs cracked on his left side, force of the blow sending him rolling across the ground. Hannibal groaned, beginning to feel the gaping burn below his shoulder. It felt sticky and warm and far too human. He found no comfort in the wailing sobs of the man three feet behind him. He stretched a hand above his head, fingertips tunneling through golden fur and placed a steady palm over a fluttering heart beat.

“Winston…” Hannibal touched golden ears, tracing sad wavering eyes, and lifted a drooping mouth to a half smile. “Winston, my little one. Just breathe.”
A blood soaked snout butted the side of his face, whine growing louder. Boots thudded over stone. Heavier footsteps dragged and scuffed after.

“...I want you to...” His tone gentled, palm drifted over eyes to close them. “...go to sleep now. There is no need to see this.”

A fist hauled him up. Glowing red eyes lifted. He took a bite out of a meaty face, snagging on eyelashes and exposing an eye socket.

He spat it out in the direction of a torn leather jacket. “Had...enough?”

Rings crashed against the ever present smirk on his face. His bones collided against the corner of a building before bouncing against chain link. He crumpled to the ground. He tried to rise, arms and legs shaking. Another punch flattened his body in a gush of blood. He brought forearms up as a bat battered against them to protect his head. He released only a hissing breath. His body jerked and flailed silently as a steel toed boot rammed into his stomach again and again and again. He clenched teeth as blood seeped out and stared between the fissure of his arms at the night sky.

And Hannibal thought about god. His god.

*I hear him.*

And how he loved every single wild curl on his head, the jagged lines of a crooked smile, and the echo of light shimmering in tepid pools of blue pulling him under.

*Will skid across the sand, catching himself from falling with a palm, and hurled his body straight for a bullet clicking in a chamber. If the one throbbing to life in his side wasn’t going to kill him then neither was this one. He wrapped one hand around the gun and another at a wiry throat. The gun went off pointed at the sky. His ears rang. Fleeting nausea foamed at the back of his throat. Shoes and legs scuffed against one another. The gun slipped free. The handle swiped against the side of a head. The thin man fell to the ground with a limp rustle, red spiraling out from a temple. The younger man slumped against the nearest crate, gun shaking against his thigh. Every inch of blood soaked clothing was growing cold, sticking to his skin. He felt like the wild birds he had seen on tv drowned in an oil slick. He gave a fleeting moment of silence for the tooth dislodged from his jaw and wondered if he might need it. His heart pounded. Or was it his head? Or his side? Or was every nerve ending in his body screaming? He snorted softly. Did it make any difference? He was either going to be sick or black out. Or the third option, untimely death. He weighed each, head tipping up. At this juncture in his life, it almost sounded like what the F.B.I. called ‘forced compassionate leave.’ He figured it might as well be a much needed vacation.*

“Fuck it...” He breathed, vision fading in and out. He tucked the gun in the back of his waistband. “I have too much to do.”

*Will careened gracelessly over strewn bodies, leaning heavily on anything within grasp. Crates. Clothing line cables. Any wall that was standing more vertical than he could manage would do. He clutched his side. His fucking clothes were drenched. He had no way of telling how much blood was his and how much was well, the less fortunate.*

*Should have thought of that before they provoked me... Hands behind your head. Get up. Get down*
on the ground. He rolled eyes through caked blood. Such bullshit procedure.

All he knew was he had to get to Hannibal before he lost consciousness. Before it was too late. They had to run.

He tried to amuse himself with humor to keep from thinking. From feeling the dull ache spreading and gushing through his fingers. He should have searched their bodies. But he didn’t really want to know. He knew. He just didn’t want to confirm it. Not yet. Will grimaced, huddling beneath a stoop to catch his breath. He wasn’t a gambling man. His father had been. And his father would place eighty percent stakes on the three bodies in the alley being of the government variety. Or agents of the less savory. It would have been a toss of a coin then.

Son of a bitch would have won big too like he always wanted… The younger man peeled away from the wall, bloody smear remaining. Guess our luck ran out… Christ. Agents…? Mercenaries? God, the Verger family out for blood at last?

Will froze dead his tracks. And choked. He broke into a run. He heard it. It was real this time. A dog crying out for help. It was Winston. The soles of his shoes banged across cobblestone, dodging laundry and thickening ivy. Then a scream. Human. And another. And another. He barreled blindly down an alley, squinting to make out black outlined shapes. And… Christ, it almost sounded like a monster roaring in the dark. It almost sounded like…

His final breath left his lips in a hollow whisper, “…Hannibal…”

He slowed. Time slowed with him. He drew closer, stepping over a body discarded and strewn at an unnatural angle. If it was ever human, there were only empty sockets where eyes should have been. There was blood. So much blood. It dripped over a face, pooled down a neck, and spurted from what looked like a knife protruding from a throat. He saw a body curled in a corner of an alley. It was flailing unnaturally against the ground, silent except for cracking bones and thudding boots and grating metal. Arms shielding a face shifted over black holes engulfing red stars.

“Hannibal!” A raw shout ripped from lungs as Will tore forward.

Shadows unfurled from the dead end of the alley, reemerging as two figures, one bulky and one smaller. Then he saw, truly saw, and screamed out the name again. Saw Hannibal still and unmoving as heels of shoes and tips of boots kicked him over and over and over again. He realized the blood belonged to him. To Hannibal. To his monster. And he saw nothing. He merely heard the returning echoes of a demon shrieking.

“I’ll fucking kill you!”

In the sights of a gleaming barrel, a bullet released. A meaty head splintered, brains splattering through chain link. A stony thud followed.

“Don’t touch him!”

Claws wrenched a baseball bat away and hurled it down the alley. A gaping mouth let out a paralyzed yip. Frail bones fell to the ground before they were pinned at a waist and at a throat. His knuckles collided with bone, nose breaking and spraying red. Fingers dug into the nape of a neck, wrenching through hair.

“Don’t—“ A skull hammered against the ground to the staccato of each snarl. “—you ever— fucking — touch him!”

It grew quiet. Still. Dusk fading to black. A bloodied palm slid around a stone and lifted.
Will kept counting. Even when he lost track. He felt each tick with the reverberation of stone jarring his wrists up to his shoulders and through the grinding of his teeth.

...Twenty...twenty one...

“...W-w-will...”

Lashes blinked slowly over blue eyes, shifting. Fading flames gazed back. The younger man looked down. He was crouched over a body. It was no longer moving. He wasn’t sure when it stopped. If it ever struggled at all. A blackened stone rested on the ground next to his knee. His gaze slid up to shaking hands. There was nothing. They were empty. Except for bits of broken bone clinging to a spine where a head once was.

“Oh Christ—”

Will dragged palms against his shirt, fervently at first and then more and more frantically. He fell back, bruising his hipbone. He tried to clean his hands. He tried to make them clean. He tried. He tried. He—


He went still, palm lifting to cover a weak cry, “H-h-hannibal, oh my god.”

The older man was barely recognizable except for his eyes. They were stark, piercing rubies in the night. Both rimmed in shades of hollow purple. Bruises and blood and welts covered more than half of his body. The half that could be seen beneath ripped seams and dirty cloth. He knew what lay beneath was worse. There was a red stain spreading across his chest. And the sound of breaking bones from before. That hideous, awful crack. They were his. They had to be his. He tried not to look too hard at a piece of white, stark and gleaming, from what he was sure was a broken femur.

No, no no...no...

Will swallowed down a sob as tears stung his eyes. How was he going to get them out of here if neither of them could walk? A hand reached out, fingers swollen and battered. He took it. Ebbing strength was ripped from him with a single sob, gushing out through the bullet hole in his side. He slumped against the fence. Hannibal twitched, dragging the hand to his mouth, placing a grimacing kiss against a wedding band. His mouth was warm with blood and faltering breath.

“H-hann...”

*I’m sorry.* The words lodged in his throat, ringing endlessly on a loop. *I’m sorry. Sorry. I’m sorry.*

A timid whimper reached his ears.

Will’s entire body flinched, fingers clenching immediately to fists. Hannibal let out a plaintive groan. He was hurting him. He eased his grip, casting a tongue over swollen dry lips, staring at the spot the sound had come from with bated breath. Hoping he hadn't heard it. Hoping it wasn't real.

“G-go...” The older man whispered.

He shook his head, holding tighter as the rhythm of his heart picked up. *I won’t leave you.*
“Yes-s.”

He shook his head again, teeth chattering to keep quiet.

“Go, darling.” A single, crushing squeeze of a hand gave him enough strength. “Go to him.”

On hands and knees, Will shuffled toward the pitiful noise in the dark. He felt hot tears streaming down his cheeks. His right palm tapped tentatively in front of him, over dirt and stone and blood. He touched fur. He collapsed, sobs wrenching free.

*My entire world is in this alley…*

He dragged an arm around a cool, silky frame. Winston yelped.

*…and I can’t save them.*

He jerked his arm back, bringing a fist down against the stone, screaming, “No!”

Blurred softness reached his ears. “Bring him here, Will…to be together. As a family.”

Struggling to a crouch, Will slid hands under the dog lying limp on the ground, and cradled him close. Winston felt like nothing at all except breath and a cooling body. He whimpered softly with each jostling motion. Winston lapped at the wound on his chin as if to forgive him. He didn’t want to be forgiven. He didn’t deserve it.

*They deserve better than this.*

The younger man slumped in a corner, lying the dog gently on a side next to him, head cradled in the crook of his thigh. “Tell me, he’ll be okay.”

"I..." Eyes closed over a well of tears. "I-I wasn’t quick enough...I’m sorry."

Will hissed obscenities, reaching for Hannibal and dragging him by shirt and skin between his legs and in to his arms. He began to shake, clutching on to both, staring up at a patch of stars. It was just shock of events setting in. It wasn’t the shock of his body making him cold. Shaking from loss of blood. It was just his nerves. The adrenaline petering out. What else could he tell himself? He was running out of conscious thought to form believable lies.

*We’re just resting. We’ll get up and go. We have to go. We can’t stay here. And we’ll be fine.*

A sharp nose turned against his throat. “Run, Will.”

“I…” Will took a steady breath and held it. He ran a hand up an arm. He winced as Hannibal struggled to hide his pain. He felt the flinch of a cheek against his skin. “…can’t do that.”

“Go home,” Hannibal murmured, lips drifting up to his chin.

He held tighter, running hands through fur and silver strands, stroking tenderly, voice hoarse, “I am home.”

“Go home. To our house beside the sea and grow old with our dogs. To our family…” A gentle murmur pressed to his ear, melodic and threading. “Spare me a thought in the morning when you wake and one in the evening when your head comes to rest.” Hannibal turned Will’s face to look at him, trembling palm slipping from his cheek, and kissed him softly. “Live for me. Have a good life…”
His hands snapped fiercely in strands of grey, lunging forward and kissing the older man till the split in his lip throbbed to life, growling, “You are my life.”

“Must you…” Hannibal fell against him, heavy and breathless and straining to speak. “…be so head strong?”

“Must you piss me off with this last attempt at heroics?”

There was a long pause, a tormenting stretch of silence before a barely whispered plea. “Please.”

Will sucked in a breath of salty tears and screams welling in his lungs. He nearly crushed Hannibal against him, trying to block out the tingle of his muscles numbing as he grew weaker.

We have to get up. We have to go.

“I’m where I belong. With you,” He answered finally, palm sliding to keep the older man’s head pressed to his heart. He sighed against silvery hair. “Aside from that, you don’t believe in divorce. So I don’t have much of a choice now, do I?”

A single, involuntary gruff laugh replied. “I suppose not.”

Blue eyes closed, frail smile curving lips. “…Thank you.”

“For?” He could hear confusion scrunching fine brows and wrinkling to a disapproving frown.

“Letting me pull you off a cliff.” Will tipped his face so he could gaze at Hannibal, gingerly stroking at tears leaking from unblinking eyes. “And subsequently…giving me the best years of my life.”

“I cannot…” The older man turned his face to stare at the ground, placing a larger palm over the one resting on Winston’s head. “…abide by goodbyes, William.”

The younger man stared up at the sky, choking down sob after sob, chest vibrating with mournful wails. Hannibal was struggling to sound sure, confident, calming even with both of them broken. As if at any moment their teacup would come together. He watched his wavering breath form icy trails and drift towards the heavens.

“I don’t want to lose you,” The words fell rough and bitter from his lips. “Maybe it's selfish. But death can’t have you. You’re mine.”

“Will…” Hannibal struggled to sit upright, groaning.

“No. Hann, don’t—don’t—"

Palms framed either side of his face. He stilled, voice fading as soon as skin touched his. They were steady. Cool. Constant. A wavering smile filtered through the dark as tender as any touch.

Thumbs drifted after tears before Hannibal leaned in to kiss each quivering bead of light, maroon eyes staring at the frightened boy looking out from piercing gaze, voice a soft whisper against lips. “Tell me, Will… was all the boundless beauty of this fallen world etched in the runes of your bones and…” A quiver of pain wavered notes to low hum of quiet. “And…writ to shine through the light of your eyes from birth? Or have you merely allowed me the grace, the honor, and privilege to witness your radiance in the life we have shared? To let me love you all the same?”

They felt tremors beneath their tangled bodies rooted to the ground.

“God, please…” Will murmured, a fresh sting of tears welling eyes, lifting them upward and praying
for the first time in his life to anything that would listen.

*Take us. Take us both. Just don’t…please don’t. Don’t take him from me.*

Tremors became an earthquake.

*Take my fucking heart as a sacrifice. What the hell do I need it for now anyway? It's only ever been his. Have it pecked out beating in my chest for eternity, I don’t care, I don’t care. Just for the love of Christ, please let us die together.*

“Will, look at me. Will.”

A fragile moan answered. “Not like this…”

Anything but this.

Lightning flashed in the vision of searching bright orbs sweeping the alley. An earthquake of pounding boots became deafening. Hell’s mouth gleamed in streaking beams of red sweeping towards huddled figures. Crosshairs settled over hearts.

“Will.”

Will blinked, focusing on the soothing glow of candlelight and pressure against his cheeks, holding him steady, keeping him close, keeping him in the present.

“Look at me,” Hannibal repeated softly. Palms glided up, curving around his ears, blocking the corner of his vision. “Just me. Do you see me?”

Lifting trembling hands, Will gripped the front of Hannibal’s shirt, pulling closer until their foreheads touched to see him, to feel an echo. His heartbeat.

“I see you.” A strangled voice replied, “Just you.”

**Chapter End Notes**

I wanted to say, ‘welcome back my beloved readers,’ but I mean, what the hell kind of welcome is this? Unless a formal greeting is a sucker punch to the heart? (I feel like my divine punishment should be to swap places with Prometheus here for bit. If you're not crying, well, I am. So.)

:runs away screaming: Why do I keep doing this to us? (You may now submit for your new therapy sessions at the nearest blanket fort.)

In all seriousness though, hello my faithful readers and dear friends, the lights of my life, let our journey together begin. And I look forward to sharing it and talking once more. Thank you for the boundless support. You know I couldn't do it without you!

*

Breathe x Fleurie

Before my eyes, before my wild eyes
I feel you holding me, tighter I cannot see
When will we finally
Breathe
Waning strength pulled a small smile from lips. Hannibal pinned the corner of it in place to keep from unraveling completely. To keep from being fully seen. He didn’t want Will to see the chatter of his teeth from cold seeping through. Bitter like an icy wind clinging to decaying branches. It reminded him of endless winter. Of Mischa. And he nearly doubled forward from the weight of yet another soul he could not save, could not protect, resting in the destruction of his arms. All because he simply was not enough. A feeble bodied man of flesh and pooling blood. Weak and helpless. And undeserving. He didn’t want Will to see that.

They will take you from me, my dearest one, and I will lose the only humanity I have left. I will lose you. A man cannot live without his heart.

Pulling at blood soaked clothes, Will brought him closer, reedy breaths rapid trails of white air warming his cheeks. He didn’t want him to feel the quaking of his limbs struggling to hold close as every nerve ending caught fire. Quiet rage set his teeth on edge. He didn’t want him to look down and see that the frail chest of the dog ceased to rise and fall. Will needed to see him. He didn’t want him to look away. There was no need to know the visage of death was nearly upon them. To end them. To tear them apart. And burn their lives together to the ground. There would be nothing left of them then. Except in their memories. Hannibal wondered if only torment waited for him now, after knowing and sharing what he had only hoped for, the years of his life with Will.

Hannibal lead a cursory path of fingertips over knitted brows, following faint scars then lips, each impression searing and painful. What if he never touched him in this life again? He didn’t want Will to find the glow of their dull beating hearts turning red as sniper beams appeared, one after the other. He kept his gaze steady and unwavering. He saw darkened shadows of men drawing closer, automatic rifles tipped and raised to fire. He was transported for a moment to the merciless icy ground of a forest floor with Mischa crying out to be saved. He could not save her. He could not save Will. He had yet again made promises he was incapable of keeping. Tears needled the corner of his eyes and he blinked them away. He would not let Will see the loss of him would kill far quicker and with less mercy than his physical wounds.

The older man shifted slightly, slowly, to drag his limp body protectively in front of Will. This was all he had left to give. A shield to catch a bullet before it ripped through his heart and then Will’s. He touched a thumb against a shimmering star forming in the corner of an eye. He stroked soothing circles against the rough grain of a scalp. He considered the wide, tremble of cobalt blue and bit down on the inside of his cheek. How small and vulnerable he looked without wild curls of an angel to protect his gaze. These eyes staring in his own begged too. His mask slipped completely, thrum of pain and weariness furrowing lines throughout his face. He felt infinitely tired, ancient, a worn out stony face of a statue bent at the knee to worship. He pressed the pad of a thumb to an erratic pulse. How the boy quaked in his arms, sensing a presence even before shadows cast over them. His gaze fell to a quivering bow of a mouth trying to remain pale and thin and fierce. He had no comfort to provide. Not a single word. Just a weakened hum of a blood choked melody rising from broken ribs, a lullaby his mother used to sing to soothe his nightmares.

Hannibal let lips touch feather light, closing his eyes when nails sank on his forearms to hold tight. They would pull the younger man from his arms and leave nothing but red welts for him to cling to after. Will began to silently shake, every inch of him a withering leaf clinging to the strength of a
rotting oak. He tried to heal the texture of rose petals torn apart by fists and gravel, to envelope himself in the taste of cleansing rain, and feel the impression of the effervescent, of hope given to him one final time, against his skin. He took in a single, deep breath and held frail wildflowers frozen beneath snow in his lungs.

*You have given my life back to me, Will, when I had thought it had ended years ago. Now... I have sacrificed yours.*

He held on. To each sensation. To each memory. To every single part of Will. Their lips slid apart in fevered breath of all they left unspoken. And it was torn from him.

* Will’s eyes slipped open just enough to see wide blown pupils dilate to a halo of earth red. The silence, the ever present sound of Hannibal breathing, the beating of his heart, the quiet of his touch, the peace and safety he had grown accustomed to feeling all around him and in him, splintered a second later. The world ruptured in a roar of blunt screams.

“Get down! Down on the ground! Down on the ground!”

He was still reaching for Hannibal as his head slammed against the ground.

“Hands on your head! On your fucking head!”

A shrill shriek pierced his ears. His head throbbed. Tattered leathery hands threw Hannibal against the cold ground next to him. A high cheekbone cracked against stone. Streams of blood seeped from the gash. From the corners of a mouth. It no longer offered a plaintive smile. It was slack and pale and red.

“H-hann—”

Please don’t hurt him.

Will wanted to buck and twist and bite, fight for the visage of the man broken and bloodied and bruised lying limp next to him. He was barely able to raise his head. The mere effort left him winded, dizzy. His arm shook uncontrollably as fingers outstretched to touch blood, to touch skin, to touch Hannibal. To feel him. To take away the faint sparks of blistering pain registering on his face. Hannibal remained still. He didn't reach back. Darkening glazed eyes stared out through waves of rising sand and dirt, embers of light petering out one by one. Another kind of pain replaced it, mournful and desperate longing. He knew that look. He saw it under the halo of flashing scopes and lights, softened murmur drifting to him.

I want you to know where you can always find me.

“D-don’t…” He choked out, clawing at sand and stone, to bring the older man back from retreating. “Please, don’t.”

Another blink and a vacant mask stared out at him. *Acceptance.* God, no. Will couldn’t feel him. He could always feel him. And now there was a deafening void. Nothing. Hannibal was cutting himself off, every emotion one by one, and it was like all the—

Ridges of a boot crushed his spine. His body flattened. “Stay down!”

—air was ripped from his lungs. His palm remained upturned in mere space between them, pleading,
for one more stolen second. Instead time took back its possessions without mercy. His hand was wrenched behind his back in a burst of pain. A bite of zip ties followed. Would he ever hold Hannibal again?

His soul escaped in a feeble exhalation, begging.

A flinching cheek answered. Somewhere inside rooms, Hannibal still heard the echo of him.

*

The single wail seeping out from clenched teeth reverberated in Hannibal’s ears long after it stopped. Long after the shadow of his body left him and remained a pool of muddy crimson to lie with the fallen angel trampled beneath cruel boots. To seep towards a hand seeking his and wash over him in the last warm embrace he would offer. The monster in him howled to maim, to kill, to protect. There was nothing he could do to help him now. He was no longer able to move, let alone fight. He listened to it scream failure and bitter remorse. Bile burned the pit of his stomach. He forced his eyes closed to trap a well of brutal stinging tears. His useless, decrepit bones were hauled up right, rough hands digging underneath arms. Toes of his leather shoes left scuffed lines in the dirt as he was dragged away, a pitiful spineless thing, abandoning his life to the unknown.

He couldn’t look. He couldn’t see. Not again. Not when he was being lead away from the only person in his life who had given his meaning. Who had truly understood and accepted him. Not knowing if this would be the last time. If he would take his last breath or if…

Harsh lights grew brighter as a spotlight swung a swatch of white over him. “Get a move on. We have a deadline to meet.”

…if Will might take his. If he would survive what he loved… Hannibal curled fingers to fists, flexing against metal handcuffs rubbing wrists raw. His heavy head fell forward, silver strands clinging to a quivering mouth clenched between teeth. If he survived, he would not live for much longer after. He would make sure of it. He would not live without Will again.

Three sets of hands heaved him forward. His leg banged against an aluminum wall on the inside of a black van. Fresh broken bone left a bloodied mark. Burning heat flushed his body. Everything went dark.

*

Will clenched teeth hard. His jaw clicked and shook. His temples throbbed. Tears streaked through his vision trapped against the after images of where Hannibal once was. Beneath him in a flutter of ivory sheets painted gold by dawn and unhurried with gentle murmurs. Holding him close in the alcoves of a doorway. Bleeding out in his arms. Face down on the ground. Hauled toward the protective edge of flashlights. And then where he wasn’t. A void of blank space and a blur of faulty memory. He wasn’t there. Hannibal was gone. They had taken him. And he was gone.

His gaze shifted to a blur of wheat shimmering beneath a memory of an afternoon sun. Winston lay on the ground without them. Without Will. Shivering and alone. Except he wasn’t shivering. He wasn’t moving at all.

Watering brown eyes remained motionless, glazed beneath droplets of blood clinging to fur. Not a twitch of a leg or an ear. Not a single indication the dog even heard him. His heart lurched in his throat. The skin pulled tight over his ribs. He wasn’t breathing. Will couldn’t breathe. He just couldn’t. His stomach heaved.

Rolling up on a shoulder, Will vomited, choking and coughing and gasping against the ground. His ribs shuddered violently from a billow of trapped sobs. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.”

He rolled once more, forehead dropping to the crook of his beloved dog’s collar and prayed for suffocation. Prayed and then stopped all at once. His hands twitched at the place they were bound against his back.

Fuck you— The younger man buried his nose against blood matte fur, desperately trying to kiss his family goodbye. *Fuck you, you miserable cock.*

He cursed the heartless fuck that had taken his family. The Almighty. The bludgeoned scum in the alley. The armed men surrounding him. It didn’t matter. They were all pieces of shit.

A burly man in a bulletproof vest hauled him up by the collar, hand trained on the hilt of a gun, an excuse away from putting another bullet in him. A lush stream of blood pattered against rolling ankles from the wound torn through his side. He wished he could give him the excuse and be done with it. Faint heat trickled over him in a wave of nausea. He heard the warmth of Abigail’s freckled smile all around him. Will nearly collapsed. Another hand jerked him forward. He stared at the lifeless body of his dog fading in the darkness of crates and a chained fence, twisting and fighting against a bruising grip dragging him down the alley.

“Wait, please wait! You can’t leave him like that! You can’t—you—for fuck sake, *please!*”

He was sure the screams he heard were in his head. He couldn’t speak. Not a sound. He was going to die. Alone. And Hannibal… had promised they would go together.

And now…

The cold muzzle of a gun jammed against his spinal column. Demonic snarls rose up from the depths of ash drifting free. He thought of Winston. Left to rot. Abandoned again on the side of a fucking road with no one to care for him. He tasted grisly black decay filling his mouth. He felt the crawl of maggots burrowing inside his skin.

He had nothing.

Will slumped forward, stumbling. A gloved hand caught him by the throat. Another latched in the scruff of his hair. He inhaled skin. His teeth slashed open a radial artery. A bullet thundered somewhere to his right.

Only blood and elements remained. And if time was merciful, he would become neither one. He would become nothing at all.

* * *

A thumb flicked an ashy cigarette, sending embers scattering against gleaming leather soles.

“Somebody want to tell me what the hell happened here?”

“Sir—“ Two pairs of flashlights swung up.
“What?” The cigarette flicked away, hissing out in a pool of blood. “Never seen a ghost at a crime scene before?”

“Well, see, as a man of science—ow!”

“We just weren’t expecting to see you here.” Light rimmed blue green edges of a camera lens swinging around a neck. “Caught us off guard is all.”

“Which is, for all intents and purposes, what you’re looking at.” Teeth worried a narrow bottom lip nervously. “…The, uh, the bodies. Caught off guard? Not us. I didn’t mean us. Of course you’re looking at us. And we’re looking at you and—really, sir, I’m just surprised to see you. It’s been such a long—“

“Shut up. Jesus.” A cap clicked over the camera lens. “They never saw it coming.”

“So… an ambush?”

“By the position of the bodies and blood splatter…they saw it coming. I imagine it was a surprise none the less.”

“This is just an off the cuff thought, but it almost looks like the targets were the ones doing the ambushing.”

“Them. They saw them coming.” A gruff voice corrected, supple cheek twitching as dark eyes surveyed what remained of strewn bodies lit by a rising sun. “Shit. Anybody got a light?”

“A light?”

“A lighter, not your damn judgment, for clarification.”

“I wasn’t judging…I was just…”

A metal zippo appeared between a latex covered middle and index finger. “Here.”

“Thanks.” A click set off sparks, flame glowing orange around a grimacing mouth, reply an exhale of smoke. “This his dog?”

“Yeah…” A softer voice answered before turning sharp with fury. “Looks like that piece of shit took a swing at him. Fingerprints are all over the bat. Fractured ribs. Punctured lung. Didn’t stand a chance…the poor thing.”

“What happened to…” Bits of brain matter and shards of bone glittered. “Where’s the rest of him?”

“Bludgeoned. To tiny pieces. What he deserved.” Gloved fingertips moved soothingly over a forehead, down a snout, closing brown eyes. “But you didn’t, did you? You went down with a fight, huh boy?”

“Forget the dog.”

“I’m not leaving him here.”

"God. You sound like him. A brutal crime scene full of bodies and all you can talk about is the damn dog."

"This dog is just as precious as the other lives taken! I’m…I’m taking him home. He deserves a proper burial."
“Fine. Just-”

“Fine?”

A broad shoulder rolled forward, hunching over the bodies before rising. “Yeah. It’s the right thing to do.” The line of a cigarette pinched between thick lips. “And what about the other crime scene a few streets over? What do we know about that?”

“As much of a blood bath as this one.” Latex gloves snapped off. “It…it doesn’t look good.”

“For who?”

“For either of them.”

A fair hand pushed through grey hair clipped short and neat, sighing. “The fallen crowned eagles may become extinct after all.”

“I wish you wouldn’t call them that.”

“Why?” Fingers tugged a tie loose around a checkered collar.

“Because it doesn’t make any fucking sense. And we don’t need the press running off with it.”

“I generally don’t make a habit of sleeping with the press.”

“Fuck you.”

The two men stared at each other, arms crossed.

“It makes perfect sense.” A pout formed. “Partners often perform striking visual displays when a pair comes together after an enduring absence, talons interlocking and falling through the sky. Secondly, some hunt in pairs. They passively stalk their prey from a distance before swooping in for a kill. Before crushing the bodies of their victims and then tearing them into tiny manageable pieces to carry back to their nests to consume over a longer period of time. Aside from that… you really shouldn’t question your superior.”

Fingers tapped irritation out on a navy sweater. “Prey.”

“What?”

“You said victims.”

“Well, from where I’m standing…”

Soles of shoes clicked over cobblestone. “Call me when you actually have something, would you?”

* * *

Hannibal jerked awake to the sound of Will screaming.

“Nn…Wi…Il…”

His tongue rolled heavy and thick in a dry mouth. His throat was raw. He forced eyes open. His body felt like a stone sinking to crushing depths. He couldn’t move. His gaze slid down the bridge of
his nose and squinted. Thick leather straps bound his body to a steel table. Much to his chagrin it reminded him of ones they used in the BSHCI. If he wasn't there now, he wondered if he had the imminent pleasure of returning. He heard tires crunching over gravel. They were on the move. He stared at a paneled metal ceiling. More than likely the same nondescript van he had been thrown into. It reeked of bleach and pungent sweat. Something was dripping. Ping, ping, ping. It was hideously too familiar. All it lacked was the refrigerated stench of slaughtered pigs.

Another scream. His right hand twitched against his thigh.

“Hold him still, goddammit! You wanna end up like Bennett! You saw what he did!”

“I’m trying! He’s just not—stay the fuck still!”

“He dies, we don’t get paid! Try harder!”

Stiff neck creaking, Hannibal let his head loll to the side. It felt weighted with burnt timber, mind muddled and distant inside a fog. A bandage scratched against his chest as he strained against leather to see. Two figures crouched over a table. They were backlit against a single halogen light clamped to a rail overhead. It buzzed and flickered with each bump of a winding road. Metallic supplies rattled on a rolling tray locked in place. A ghostly blue latex glove lifted in the light. Blood trickled down the handle of a gleaming pair of forceps. White gloved hands shifted from a torso stained red before jamming on struggling shoulders. Soaked sponges squelched on a moth eaten towel. A gurgling scream echoed. Something pinged before rolling across the floor. A bullet.

“You’re hurting him,” Hannibal croaked, fresh blood seeping from a forming split on his tongue.

The man on the right turned, dropping forceps to the table, green eyes flashing underneath magnified lenses. “I thought you dosed him.”

A shadow of the other turned, pupils dilating in the face of red glowing in the dark. “I-I did.”

“Not enough apparently.”

“Not enough! Christ, if I give him anymore I’ll kill him.”

“Fine by me. I’d like to leave here with all my organs and limbs. Wouldn’t you?”

“Do you even have a conscience?”

“Dead or alive, remember? They don’t pay us for that.”

Hannibal’s gaze flicked to the table beyond, shoulder jerking against restraints, cheek flinching. Will was lying on his back, legs strapped to the table, both hands grey, bloodless, and gripping the edge hard enough the length of his arms shook. Sweat beaded across a chest, sliding down to join a thickening river of red. There was blood. So much. Spilling over the table with every turn of a wheel, dripping out of sight. Why was there so much blood?

He should have clotted by now. Something is wrong.

A low growl rose from the hollows of lungs. “Why is he bleeding so profusely?”

“He was fucking shot, remember? Weren’t you a doctor?”

Once. Once. He was shot once.

There was too much blood. The older man closed his eyes and remembered the breadth and depth of
the bullet wound. Thin, narrow. A small caliber round. A .22 maybe. It had still been inside him.

*He should have stopped bleeding by now.*

Had he miscalculated?

Hannibal jerked against leather, white heat blinding his vision. “*Answer the question.* Or so help me, I will rip out your fucking heart and force feed it whole to your friend.”

He saw a mouth tremble beneath a sterile mask. “I-it nicked his liver.”

The older man choked.

“And then, for good measure, we shot him again. Capped him right above the knee.”

“S-shut up, Anthony.”

“He murdered our friend!”

“Yes, but—“

“Tore his trachea and windpipe and vocal cords from his throat! Filthy fucking animal!”

He stared beyond the figures. A slim column of the younger man’s neck formed a tense arc, chin thrust up. Wet clung to the corners of thick lashes. White teeth clamped around a belt shoved in his mouth, wrapped around a head, held in place by zip ties snagged on a thin perimeter of a rail. The corners of his pretty mouth were bloodied from chaffing and struggling, gagging on each breath. A crude muzzle unfit for a rabid beast, let alone a man. Will was his. His to bind and render helpless. His to cut open and rearrange. His. Just his and no one else's to torment.


“I don’t take orders from you!” A scalpel swung his direction. “And if you don’t shut up, I’ll take that cast off your leg and break it again.”

“Maybe we should—“

A fist crushed a forearm in mid air. “Touch it and I will have your damn license!”

“Remove it, this very moment. Or you will find it wrapped around your throat when I gut you open and hang you with it!”

A fluttering whimper of agony seeped out. Hannibal felt his lips peel away from glinting teeth, finding Will once more in the distance. Every breath exhaled flames. The younger man was shaking from head to toe, eyes squeezed shut, breath harsh and rasping against flared nostrils. He was entirely too pale. His eyes swung back to the doctor, narrowed slits of crimson. He was going to take the man apart. Inch by inch. And enjoy every fleeting second of it.

“Are you…” A thin bead of red formed on his bottom lip, savoring the pain. He hissed. “…operating on my husband *without* anesthetic?”

A sneer flashed. “Seemed fitting. To cut and bleed dry an unfeeling monster.”

“Oh not yet…” Glowing coals flickered out. “But it soon will be.”

“And how’s that?”
"I am afraid our time for pleasant conversation has come to an end."

"Is that right?"

Hannibal smiled, uncoiling talons. “You bled the wrong monster.”


It grew silent.

* 

A plaintive gasp for air filled the van. Will opened his eyes to pitch black dark. He wasn’t certain if it was day or night. He had no idea where he was. How long had he been here? In this place. He only remembered something cruel and unyielding forcing his mouth open. Not being able to breathe. He touched his lips. Whatever it was had vanished. He remembered fingers and instruments digging in his wounds. He felt sick. Worse than before. He was lying in a pool of something cooling, sticky. It stung his nostrils. Blood. A lot of blood.

Where was he? His heart began to thud deep and heavy in his chest. Then he remembered hands, different hands, smooth and cruel bruising his hips and breaking across his face. A hideous sob died in his mouth. A sickening waft of bergamot and musk cologne seared his lungs. He tried to scramble away from glittering emerald eyes nearing in the darkness. His body wouldn’t move. Will flinched against the flurry of a needle piercing his skin. Something cold flooded in. He flexed numb fingers. He rammed a blunt palm into an eye socket.

“Sūdas!” A guttural shout rose.

“N-n-no!” The younger man’s fist connected with something solid. “You’re dead! You’re fucking dead!”

“Unn…mylimasis…”

Fingernails scraped across his scalp, hauling him forward by fine tips of his hair and flesh. Will kicked, flailing helplessly, sliding through viscous towards a nightmare waiting for him in the dark. He cried out as arms pinned him against a heaving chest, too weak to break free.

Hot breath flared over his eyelids in warning. “Have I not bled enough for you for one day?”

“Oh god…” A low moan answered.

Will pressed palms forward. He felt cold metal. Sweat dampened sheets. Rough leather. His fingertips followed its edge, tapping over buckles. He trembled above the cursory heat of skin before touching. Thick bandages wrapped around a torso half broken free from restraints. A thin hiss breathed out. He dragged thumbs up a contracting throat, over faint stubble, and drew them over thick lips arced in a snarl. He pushed against them. The mouth rippled defiantly before opening. Sharp edges of teeth snagged delicate skin on the pads of his fingers.

“H-hannibal,” Will choked out, winding fists in hair before crushing his mouth blindly on the one
below. “God, Hannibal, I thought—“

He shoved his tongue inside heat and tore out a dark growl. He tasted like blood. And overwhelming heat. He tasted alive.

His eyes flew open, tearing his mouth free, eyes wide. "Christ, I hit you! Are you, are you hurt? Did I hurt you?"

"Not enough."

Twisting fingers pulled on his hair, scraping down the back of his neck. Hannibal bit at his mouth until it opened, tongue tangling with his, luring it out to suck and share the taste of his latest victims. The younger man moaned as teeth scraped over his bottom lip in a tug of skin. A rough palm planted against the center of his chest and shoved.

“Release me, Will.”

The younger man tore at leather straps and buckles furiously. How long had the older man been trapped that way? Half hanging off the side of the bed in excruciating pain? He peppered kisses across a face, murmuring one apology after another, in every language he knew. Each snap and jerk was followed by a swear. A hiss. A pained groan. Hannibal slid off the tipped table and fell on top of Will with another low groan, arm curling around ribs. He clenched teeth together to bite down a sob. The weight was unbearable. The wound in his side flared, sending sparks of pain flowing through his belly and down to the throb in his left thigh. Ragged breath panted against the curve of his ear. He knew whatever he was feeling was nothing compared to Hannibal’s wounds. He knew neither of them could move. He tried to keep still. To keep quiet. He couldn’t stop once he started to cry. Pitiful, short bursts of tears.

A palm curled around the back of his head, lips tipping to his cheek, hollow voice ringing clear. “I’m sorry, William. The pain should subside shortly. Then I will tend to your wounds. I have given you what I was able. It is…” A cheek flinched. “Will you find it within yourself to forgive me?”

“Don’t leave me, Hannibal…” He clung to wet fabric stretched over shaking shoulder blades. “Don’t leave me. I don't want you to leave.”

“I have you.” Broken bones snapped fresh and clean. “I am here with you now.”

“P-p-promise me.”

“I…” A chest shuddered against his, cast scraping against metal. “I can’t, Will. It would be a lie. I vowed never to lie to you again. I cannot offer you another promise.”

The younger man let his hands slip free, spread palm up on the floor, growing cold and weak as something rushed through his blood and glazed his vision. His voice grew small, quiet. “Don’t let them take me. I don't want to go back. I want to stay here with you.”

Biceps and thighs shook around him, struggling to rise. Warm liquid dripped down the sharp peak of a nose, a salt puddle gathering in the crook of a neck below.

“He’ll hurt me. Don’t let him hurt me, Hannibal.”

“Will…” Hannibal’s voice pitched low as if Will was choking him, body thrashing violently in an attempt to move before going deathly still. “He is dead. He will never touch you again. Do you understand?”
“Please,” Will begged, wide tear filled blue lifting to stare at the corner of darkening eyes. “I can’t go through that again. I won’t. I won’t.”

“Will.” Strength cracked on wavering notes. “You have to calm—“

He hammered a single fist against a chest, ugly sobs wrenching free, struggling to breathe. Drowning in the darkness. Of the crushing weight of the man he loved. Suffocating on the stale air of blood and bile and bleach. Slowly dying as memories buried deep returned, flash burns against his brain, scars reigniting over his body. His hits grew weaker, erratic, as something crawled through his system, body becoming numb even as his mind screamed.

“I’ll kill myself first. I promise, I promise. I won’t—“

Will gasped as a flexing forearm gouged his windpipe, shaking, shoving in. He clawed at shoulders, bucking wildly. He stared up at darkness shifting in shadows. He felt tears splash on his cheeks from above, drops of salt rolling into an open mouth, unable to utter a sound.

“Forgive me, Will—“

Cresting desolate waves roiled over him, inky black and sweeping him away.

“—I love you.”

* 

Gritting teeth, Hannibal collapsed on his side and spit out a thin aluminum penlight he had clenched between teeth. An uncapped bottle of antiseptic sloshed and tumbled to the other edge of the van. He pitched a set of gloves and sterile bandages after it. Disgust bloomed in the pit of his stomach. Given his appalling working conditions and unsteady hands, he could have either just saved Will or killed him. The dawn would come. He would know then. He shouldn’t have killed the doctor. It was reckless. Impulsive. He should have held him on the other end of a blade and forced him to save the younger man. He slammed a swollen fist against the floor, snarling in the dark. He was letting emotion cloud his judgment. His utter lack of control was going to kill them both.

Pain blotted behind his eyes. He touched his ribs. At least four were broken. The rest bruised. He watched each press flash white like lighting before fading. He had caught his reflection in the metal tray spinning on the floor as he strangled the smaller man. He had to look again. He didn’t recognize who it was at first. More beast than man. All fangs and spit and claws. He looked hideous. Covered in gashes, welts, and broken blood vessels pooling around vivid bruises. What ever made him think he would be able to protect Will?

“Pathetic,” He spit out, digging fingernails against the cast on his leg.

A tiny moan was muffled by a curl of fingers. He dragged eyes from the ceiling, casting them around the van. He had lost the syringe of morphine somewhere in the struggle. He cursed. He would have to search for it now. The penlight rattled in the well of the double doors. He closed his eyes, teeth clenched, growling. There was absolutely no excuse for his carelessness. If the needle broke Will would be in agony for the duration of their forced journey. From his physical wounds. From the nightmares coming alive in his mind once more. The younger man would be stuck with the stench of two dead bodies and a growing resentment of the man who could not care for him as he needed. And he would have to endure every torturous second of his cries and pleas.

“H..ann…”

Hannibal curled up on his side, resting all his weight on broken bones, and drew Will against his
chest. He wrapped both arms around him. He curled his good leg over a hip to mold their bodies together. He kissed soft wisps of hair clinging to the nape of a neck. His skin was cool. A fever had not yet taken hold. His fingertips tried to smooth brutality from the younger man’s throat. What else was he going to do? He couldn’t stand that sound. A feeble human noise vibrated in his chest. He could endure anything but that sound. So frail and helpless and pleading for Hannibal to do anything. To save him. To set him free. To keep his promise.

“You should have fled! Run for your life! You should have never come looking for me.” The older man growled, shaking the limp body in his arms. “Why must you never listen! Foolish, selfish boy! I nearly destroyed you once. You should have stayed away. I should have driven you far from me. What could you possibly have seen in me?”

Teeth clamped down on the tip of a tongue. It was too late. A wracked sob of guilt scraped up his throat. He crushed Will against him, face buried in the slumped seam of a shoulder, and began to weep.

“Why, Will?” His mouth trembled over the thrum of a weak heart beat. “Why did you have to choose me?”

* * *

The back doors of an unmarked van hung open on the side of an abandoned stretch of road. The driver’s side door was ajar. Keys still in the ignition. No one was inside. Yellow tape wrapped around thick evergreen trunks, criss crossing the scene enveloped in red and blue flashing lights.

“Mother in Heaven.”

Dried blood caked the inside of the windowless van. It covered a metal table and soaked through a set of sheets on a thin foam table tipped on its side. One rubber wheel creaked eerily with each gust of wind. A body of a young blonde resident was crumpled against a wheel well, paper mask askew, eyes frozen wide open with a sickly stare of horror. Grey bruises ringed his thin neck. His chest was a gaping hole of black and red.

A camera flashed. “I’m not sure whether to be disgusted or impressed.”

“Are you praising this sick fuck, right now?” A meaty fist balled up a seam of a white lab coat. “With a man’s body hanging not three feet from you with his guts spilling out and organs jammed in his mouth. The other cut open and harvested for parts. What? Do you need a closer look to regain your humanity?”

In the center of the van, a body was posed. A doctor sitting with legs bent to kneel. His neck was strung up by a belt, leather smattered in teeth marks. Scraggly brown hair hung over a forehead pushed forward in submission or prayer. Coils of intestines glittered, spilling and swaying inside an open mouth. His lab coat was buttoned precisely over a wide spread of dried blood. Chest hollowed out beneath. His hands were placed palm up in his lap, fingers curled and gently spread, cupping two bloodied hearts.

“He’s seriously injured from the looks of these drag marks. Maybe a sprained ankle? Broken leg?” Gloved hands pointed to rough uneven swaths on the floor. “Lost a lot of blood. Or someone has.”

A camera rose, button clicking, a serious of flashes going off. “Assuming this is most of their blood then they both have. He shouldn’t be alive. This takes...serious motivation.”
“I should have your ass pulled from this case ri—“

“He does have a point.”

"Thank you."

“You want to join him!” A roar fogged up dark lenses of sunglasses.

“Listen!” Latex squeaked inside shaking fists, docker boots scraping before swinging around and striding towards the yellow middle line of the road. “This is something we haven’t seen before. If he was conscious long enough to do this, then he should have escaped. He should have ran like the last time and disappeared. But he didn’t. He stayed and left us this goddamn tableau. This is fucking righteous indignation and rage. None of his crime scenes ever had emotion before. They have only ever held aesthetic commentary. This isn’t a visual dissertation. This is a hail mary. A fucking prayer. An apology if there ever was one.”

“Why!” A gold Rolex flashed, hand digging inside a breast pocket and drawing out a crumpled box of cigarettes. “Why bother after all these years?”

A thin mouth pinched, light eyes surveying the scene, scribbling notes on a chart, quietly answering. “Don’t we all build altars to the ones we love?”

“He doesn’t love Will.” Acrid smoke burned the back of a throat. “He isn’t capable of love.”

“Are you sure about that?” Dark eyes narrowed, thumb jamming on the camera. An image flickered on. A cropped shot of clean patches of white forming two crescent shapes with blood around them. “Because I look at this and see the bloodied outlines of bodies holding one another, sleeping side by side, beneath their victims to be together a few moments longer. I never fucking liked Will, but even I can see that.”

“Bullshit.”

A hand shot out, snapping the cigarette in half and crushed it against gravel with a heel. “He’s changed, Jack. Haven’t you?”

“Then tell me, Z…” The agent’s black eyes rose, sneering. “Where in the hell are they?”

Chapter End Notes

:whispers: Someone hold me. ; ;

Just rip our hearts out, why don't you? You heartless, heartless, writer. Oh wait... that's me. Dammit. Oh, jeez, uh what to say about this chapter? I mean, can you even speak or write right now? Or are you just hemorrhaging gouts of blood in a corner somewhere?

As you can see I'll be using * * * to format POVs other than Hannibal and Will's from now on. The return of Sassy Team Science and Jack. That's never a good sign. Even if they are several steps behind. Where did they even come from? Have they been tracking them this whole time?

Throw your wild speculations (and cups of scalding hot coffee) my way. Where are Hannibal and Will? Who has them? Is anyone else’s heart breaking?
I'm gonna go put a dunce cap on my head, sit in a corner, hang my head in shame, and atone for the things I've put us through. (Or try. Because I just don't think there's enough atonement in the world for this.)
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The air was stale. Windowless dark, damp and heavy. Sage moss crawled from the floor to a high arced corner, fueled by a steady drip, drip, drip of water. The only indication of life outside four grey cinder block walls. A turn of seasons. Rain. Long stretching shadows shuffled underneath the crack of a steel door at all hours, bringing muffled moans of pain and protest before ebbing away. Twice a day, a slot would creak open and an aluminum tray clattered to the cement floor. Then inconstant stretches of time with nothing.

Hannibal watched plumes of grey breath rise, shifting a threadbare wool blanket around his torso. He was beginning to have difficulty keeping track. Of time. Of sounds. Not knowing if soft whimpers drifting through a slotted grate high on the wall were real or part of his imagination. The first thing to greet him after surfacing from unconsciousness was the buzzing static of lights. The second a large needle pulling out of his arm. Antibiotics and something else. It made him feel muddled. Dull and fading. Whatever it was masked his pain. His senses. But not his mind. He wished it dulled his mind. It remained in tact, a churning tide of racing thought and unfiltered emotion. It was screaming.

He ran a thumb over blistered and scabbed fingertips. His knees were bruised and aching. He had crawled on hands and knees every lucid moment he woke to, cast dragging after him like a deadened weight. Feeling his way across dust and moss. Tearing at every crack in the floor or crumbling brick. He searched for anything, any way out. There had to be something. There never was. No matter how many times he groped and clawed and muttered a plea. His pathetic attempts ended the same. Panting in pain, curled on his side next to a metal toilet and a dripping sink, bloodied fingertips pressed to his lips to keep from crying out. The hours seemed longest then, before he blacked out in agony and woke to watering eyes of shame, grateful for the needle in his arm before it all started again.

Bile and churning guilt burned his stomach. He should have been merciful when he had the chance. And he knew. Felt the shift inside his bones shudder through each plaintive breath seeping through bricked walls. They should have bled out. They should have gone together like he promised. In the end, he was single minded, selfish, unwilling to let the man he loved die without trying to save his life. He should have let him die. He simply knew. They were both fucking alive. He had failed. And Will was beside him. Confined to a prison cell once more by his own hands. Allowing all he loved to vanish from his arms, kept against his will by yet another unknown nightmare. He bit open his bottom lip in punishment, hissing quietly at the sting. What kind of man was he?

An unworthy one. You would rather make him suffer than allow him to free himself from you.

“H…ann…ibal?”

He gripped the ratty mattress, knuckles draining from grey to white. The bed frame rattled. He was shaking. He screwed eyes shut and held his breath until his lungs burned. Not that sound. Anything but that voice. Not his voice. Not here.

“H…H-Hannibal?”

He counted each second. One. Two. Three... five... ten... fifteen. Quiet. Will wasn’t there. He wasn’t there. It was a nightmare. A hallucination. His mind conjuring up a familiar sound of comfort. It wasn’t real. It wasn’t—
“Oh god, please…” A rasping croak echoed to the scrape of a palm dragging down the adjoining wall. “Please, no. Not again.”

Hinges creaked. Growing louder and louder. A sob tore through the darkness. Hannibal covered his ears, staring blankly up at the ceiling, blood pooling in his mouth and running down his chin. If he didn’t say anything, maybe it would stop.

“Not real. Not real. Wake up.”

He couldn’t hear this sound again. The screeching wails of the dead. He saw flashes of Will bent over a body, teeth tearing out tendons and arteries of a man’s throat, feral and battered and on the verge of death.

“How could you? Why couldn’t you just kill me, Hannibal! For god sake, why!”

He worked a hand around his neck, struggling to breathe. How could he let this happen? If he had been a better man…How could he do this to Will? His Will. His beautiful blue eyed boy. He would never survive this. Neither of them would. His cries. It was too much.

“Here,” Hannibal choked out, spray of blood matting his face and hair. He rolled to his side and coughed, clutching at taped ribs. Spit and blood dripped to the floor from a quivering bottom lip. “I’m here. Can you hear me?”

He pleaded for only silence to answer.

Cries ebbed to soft whimpers, thick rasp asking, “Where are you? Are you…are you alive? Are you real? Or am I losing my mind again?”

The final question knotted his stomach. He knew what was waiting for Will. The physical confinement wouldn’t take Will. He would be caged by time, forced to dwell inside his mind. His inner demons would take him, one by one, until there was nothing left. Soul pecked away from the inside out, leaving nothing but a shell. Hannibal would bear witness, helpless to contain it, unable to spare him from a far worse fate than before. The older man fell back on to the cot, bleary eyed and faint. He scrubbed at thickening stubble on his chin. He lifted a fist and beat it once against the wall.

“You…” He could hear shoulders sagging, either in relief or disappointment, palms searching the wall in darkness. “You’re alive.”

The older man bit on his tongue, but it was too late, icy resentment spilling out. “So it would seem.”

“Did you…choke me out in the van or did I imagine it?”

“I did.”

“You did.” Will repeated the statement slowly. And then he laughed. It was tinged with hues of marbled regret and blurred by faint resentment. “Of course you did.”

His jaw tensed, cheek twitching, words hissing out between teeth. “There were no other options available to me. You were in a state of increasing agitation. The panic and loss of blood were too taxing in your weakened condition.”

“You’ve had a lot of time to justify this in your head, haven’t you?”

“I would not reverse time and act any differently,” Hannibal snapped, digging fingernails over bandages.
“That’s a first,” Will countered dryly.

“I beg your pardon?” Hannibal sat up, swinging legs over the cot and glared at a brick wall, seething.

“I’m… I’m not…” The mattress creaked wearily as a body lowered. “Hell.”

He closed his eyes and listened to measured breathing. He saw Will clearly. Perched on the edge of the cot, knees spread wide, feet firmly planted defensively against the floor. His hands would be clasped to keep them from shaking. His slender neck would be bowed, head hanging, eyes closed.

“I was at peace with you crushing out my last breath. I had hoped to finally find some solace in this life,” A soft confession drifted through the grate, knuckles grazing bricks.

Was Will imagining he was touching the side of his face, his cheek, his neck?

_Did you not once find solace in our life together?_

“Why the fuck are we still alive?”

Struggling to a sitting position, the older man pressed his spine to the wall, imagining he could feel the heat of skin. He wanted to hold his hand. Touch the frown lines of his mouth. All those years, of carefully placed touches and brushes of skin, to foster Will’s need to find comfort solely in him. How would Will survive without it now? In the beginning, he had seen agony tumbling from blue skies and everything in his entire world tilted on its axis. Then it was no longer a means of manipulation. He felt responsible for every single torment Will had experienced, even before him, drawing out a single minded desperation to take it all away. Silently offering to kiss his mouth and breathe for him. To gather the weight of wearied loneliness to his chest and carry it for him. He had never known his life was empty before the younger man. Until it was filled with endless waiting, aching, for even a glimmer of Will needing him in return. Blood and moonlight had granted him both.

“Death seems to find perverse pleasure in eluding us.”

With patient practice, he had taught Will to seek comfort in releasing control, carefully tethered to keep from recoiling from his touch. To trust in the quiet power he offered with a brush of his fingertips. Now it was gone. Neither of them in control. A free fall. His only fear the moment they slipped off the cliff was losing his grip on the shuddering bones finally, finally resting against his. Hideous jagged rocks were waiting. This would be their end. They would both reel from the loss of each other. And he had nothing to hold on to keep either of them safe. His mouth trembled, fingers curling, crushing an imagined hand in his. They had lived in separation before, with walls and doors and miles of mistrust between them. But Hannibal had always been able to break down those doors and cage Will to him, in spite of protests and pleas, because he needed to. And no matter how much Will sobbed not to be touched, he needed to know Hannibal would give his life to protect him. But he couldn’t reach Will. Not this time.

_Who will protect you now, William?_

“I…” Wavering blue flitted through the darkness, lashes fluttering. “…didn’t want to wake up.”

Hannibal hunched forward, drawing a knee to his chest, watering eyes ground against it. “I…prayed you wouldn’t.”

“No you didn’t.”

He closed eyes against a fresh sting of tears and held his swollen tongue.
No, Will, I did not pray for your death. I never have.

Silence stretched around them. The younger man let out a heavy sigh. Fingernails scraped through blunt strands of dark hair.

“Do you have any idea where we are?”

Hannibal blinked, corner of a mouth twisting down. There was a small note of hope in those words. Faith left in Hannibal. Looking to him for answers. A knife wrenching in his back to expose his sheer inadequacy to help either one of them. He dug a fingernail beneath his wedding band, scraping at its surface. He had wed Will to a death sentence.

A rabid animal broke free through his teeth. “Apart from the most obvious guess given our current surroundings…I might suggest prison.”

“I meant…” Hurt glimmered in shadows.

_Hate me, William, and find another reason to live. To leave._

Fingernails clawed at wounds, red spreading across bandages. “I know what you meant.”

“Christ, I’m sorry!”

He bit his mouth into a sharpened edge and plunged it in a heart. “I’m not.”

“I…” Mattress springs whined as the younger man turned his back to the wall, knees drawn up to a chest, arms slung around them. “Fuck it. Never mind.”

*

Three miserable fucking days of unbearable silence. Will felt like his lungs were going to catch fire from holding in all the things he wanted to say, to scream, to whisper. He had never wanted to be put in a drug induced coma more. He would pay good money for someone to knock him unconscious.

_I love you. I want to bury my hand in your chest, clamped around your heart, until you are begging for me to never let go. I need you. I hate you. I hate you for making me need you. I want to suffocate you with nothing but my mouth._

Listening to Hannibal breathing, shifting, moving, alive on the other side of a goddamn wall was torment. He hated it. Hated the chaff of his cast hobbling across the floor, grunting softly in pain. Hated his labored breathing in sleep. Hated being able to picture every single moment in vivid detail when he closed his eyes. Goddammit, aversion therapy and torture had been less painful than this. At least then he was alone. Only tormented by the creations of his imagination. Even they had the good conscious, the courtesy, to leave him in peace eventually.

Will should have been taking care of Hannibal. It was his right, as a man, as a husband. The older man was barely breathing the last time he had seen him. He should be there. Beside him, even if Hannibal didn’t want it. No longer wanted him. He shouldn’t be alone. He should never have walked away in the first place. And now this. Enduring this separation. His teeth glittered through a thickening beard, limbs jerking at the sensation of Hannibal asleep and draped over him. All the years of isolation. Pained by fleeting comfort. A bubble of bitter laughter stuck in his throat. He had spent so much time without human connection, mere touch dispelling a constant ache, trying to convince himself he didn’t need it. Didn’t want it. Didn’t deserve it. Only to be pursued by a craving
he could never satisfy. And then Hannibal had gifted him with a gnawing hunger, consuming his
insides, killing him slowly. Falling into his arms was agonizing, realizing Hannibal had been offering
comfort and affection all along. He had slowly learned to accept the hands that tore his life apart
were the same ones holding the tangled threads of him together, warm, safe, and sinking into his
wounds to caress the scars they had left.

The ache was returning. How was he going to go back to an empty existence after Hannibal had
kept his hunger at bay? Did Elias and Peter know they had gone missing? Would they learn to forget
them?

The familiar emptiness bothered him most at night. Or at least, he thought it was night, when
exhaustion pulled his eyelids closed. And his thoughts were replaced with dreams, gentle moments
of their lives inside a home they would never see again. Will lay on the floor, curled in a musty
corner. It was the closest he was physically able to be with Hannibal. The cot was bolted to the floor.
And even if it hadn’t been, he was too weak to move it. So he stayed where he was. Huddled under
the blanket, teeth chattering from cold as the drugs in his system weakened, palm pressed to stone.
He couldn’t stand it. Knowing the older man was there on the other side. Refusing to speak to him.
The only disturbance to their routine of blatantly ignoring one another was the scrape of trays
through slots littered in indecipherable food.

He grit his teeth. He knew how he would have handled it back home. How he had handled it when
Hannibal had been forced to let Will care for him, confined to bed rest in the middle of the ocean,
where he couldn’t walk away. Couldn’t ignore him. Couldn’t escape. Will nestled his forehead
against a wrist and thought of all the hours they bickered leading to this exact kind of silence that
made his body ache for a single touch. He wished they were fighting now. Screaming at the top of
their lungs. He just needed to hear his voice. God, he didn’t want to be here. He thought of the older
man’s prized possessions, the thin box of pencils he had pitched overboard out of spite and
frustration.

“Is it a wounded bird you long to crush instead of a predator to contend with, Will? Does it please
you to know I must simply accept whatever whimsy you bestow upon me without a fight? Knowing I
alone am at your mercy?”

They were probably rusted and decayed by now. He wished he and Hannibal had joined them,
odies swept away in a current, buried underneath shell and sand, rotting inside each other’s arms.
Why did they have to end up here?

Hannibal was reverting to basic survival instincts he hadn’t seen since the older man left a carnage of
bodies in his wake to bring him home. What was left of him anyway. He had wanted nothing to do
with Hannibal for months. And when he had, he realized his blatant avoidance and pushing away
was slowly killing them both.

“I ceased to exist the moment you were taken from me. I have died every day since....”

He knew how to deal with it then. Muscle him into a corner of a shower and make the older man
face him. Look at him. Fucking answer when he called out in a daze of sleep, are you still there? Say
something. Say anything. Please. Back then he would have made him listen, cornered in the kitchen,
instead of slinking away or groveling in self pity. How in the hell was he going to deal with this?
With Hannibal? Licking his wounds and trying to pretend he didn’t need help. Didn’t need Will in
the middle of the night like Will needed him.

“Why are we not allowed to speak about what has been done to you? About what I... let happen to
you?”
Hollow eyes smudged in dark flickered against his irises, weak and giving up. Will shook his head to free himself from the memory. They weren’t going to make it. This was worse. So much worse. He tugged knees tighter against his chest, chasing after thinning air. Hannibal was never going to say he needed him ever again. Not if he blamed himself. Not if it meant acknowledging the grief and loss. Will was putting him through hell all over again. Both of them were going to burn.

“Tell me, Will…” A rough ache reached ears. “How are you faring?”

Will sucked in a sharp breath and held it. He trembled with the effort not to cry as a pang of relief shook through him. It hurt.

“Been better…” Will managed a shaking reply. His throat was sore from not speaking. “I miss you.”

A spoon clattered angrily to a tray. “Please, Will.”

*Please, what! I fucking miss you. Am I not allowed to say it anymore?*

Dragging the blanket off his shoulders, Will rocked up to knees and hurled it to a corner. His flash of fury settled to the ground with it. He lay a palm over the bandages on his side and pretended it was Hannibal. Hannibal touching him. Hannibal soothing his aches. Hannibal reassuring him in his voiceless way that everything would be alright. They would be alright. Even if they weren't.

Blue eyes flicked to the wall. “Are you eating?”

A grunt of confirmation replied.

“Enough?” The younger man let his head fall against clenched fingers, touching his own protruding ribs.

“Enough for my physiological functions to maintain,” Hannibal answered. He could hear his mouth twisting, etched in pain and rage. “Though I might prefer the gnawing pain of my insides consuming themselves to whatever passes as edible here. The irony is not lost on me.”

He winced, muttering, “Sorry.”

A fist slammed against the wall. “Stop fucking apologizing, William, I am not looking for your pity!”

“I wasn’t…” Will breathed the words, afraid to be heard, staring at specks of a crumbling ceiling floating around him, eyes wide.

“Were you not!” A terse growl violently shook through him.

“I-I wasn’t. Fuck.” He let his head fall back, drawing his bottom lip between teeth, searching for anything to say, to dampen the slight warble in his tone. “I just—“

“What? Tell me. Please.”

Will opened and closed his mouth soundlessly. He looked down at his hands. They trembled. His heartbeat quickened. His stomach clenched. His palms began to sweat. He shuddered.

*Not now. Not now. Come on, come on, breathe. Just breathe.*

He was on the verge of a panic attack.

“Answer me, William!” Hannibal snarled. “Do try not to sound like a kicked puppy when you respond.”
The blow of his words connected in a sickening crunch.

"F-fuck—" The younger man doubled over, falling to his knees, one hand clenching his stomach, the other holding him up, arm shaking. He had tried so hard not to think about it. To think about anything else. "Why, Hannibal?" Tears burned down his face, teeth clenched. "Why…why would you bring that up? God, fuck you, and your goddamn instinct to hurt anyone who even tries to love you. Isn’t this enough to suffer through? Haven’t you done enough to me? Have I not lost enough to make us even, you vindictive son of a bitch!"

"Do you not think…" Raw emotion seared his skin hot and then red, controlled violence shaking free to dismantle the last pieces of him remaining, to topple Will, until he lay in ruins. "I am keenly aware of every pained sigh and breath you take! How I wake to your screams and crying in the middle of the night. Do you not think I know the fault lies with me? You are hurt because of me. You nearly died because of me. I took your family! Your friends! I murdered your child! I let them beat your dog to death. I am solely responsible for your suffering!"

Will jammed knuckles against teeth, forehead bent to cement. The shaking was uncontrollable now. He saw Winston’s dead eyes staring out at him in the dark. He saw thick fur sliding away to reveal gaping eye sockets and white of a fractured skull. He saw Abigail beyond him, sinking in an ocean of blood. The profile of his best friend stood in pieces beyond them both.

"You tell me why you would have any desire to love the threat of a nightmare! You ought to have put a bullet in my brain when you had the chance!"

"I don’t—" The younger man swallowed rising bile over and over again, shaking fingers flattening. He had to focus. To breathe. "I don’t feel well. Please. Stop yelling."

Something metal flung across the room and crashed into a wall. Will jumped, curling into a tighter ball as the older man’s voice pitched to a terrible scream.

"And now my selfish, thoughtless inability to control the very emotions I prided myself on never feeling again, to maintain discipline, has chained you to me. I put you here! I have caged you yet again. I did this to you!" Cracking knuckles rammed into an aluminum sink. "You were better off having never met me!"

Glass shattered. A mattress over turned, crumpling in a corner. Will dragged his body across the cement floor, trying to escape the raging storm crashing down around him. It was deafening. He felt every word slam in to him. He could feel Hannibal shaking. The rage. The frustration. The guilt. The razor edge of glinting teeth tearing open their old wounds. A suffocating helplessness clawed at his lungs. His. Or Hannibal's. It didn't matter.

"You are here with me in this godforsaken pit of hell, yet again, because I had to have my way! Had to have you. Convinced myself I needed you. And nothing else."

Glass shattered. A mattress over turned, crumpling in a corner. Will dragged his body across the cement floor, trying to escape the raging storm crashing down around him. It was deafening. He felt every word slam in to him. He could feel Hannibal shaking. The rage. The frustration. The guilt. The razor edge of glinting teeth tearing open their old wounds. A suffocating helplessness clawed at his lungs. His. Or Hannibal's. It didn't matter.

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Nails latching on an edge of a toilet, Will hauled himself forward. His stomach heaved. He flushed hot. He was violently ill a second later. He rested a cheek against a metal rim, after shocks wrenching through him. Tears leaked in a steady stream through closed eyes. The silence had returned. He could hear the audible broadcast of Hannibal breaking.

Will wanted to hold him. Hannibal wanted to die. Wanted Will to move on and find some fucking meaningless existence without him. To sacrifice himself and make it all go away somehow. They would die together. Slowly. Painfully. Desperate until a moment before they drew their last breaths. Hannibal just didn’t know it yet. Will brought a fist down, denting a side of the sink. Pain splintered up his arm. He had spent too long relying on the older man’s calming constancy and show of
strength. He would rather him dead than broken.


“Shut the fuck up!” Will snarled, the sentiment of each word clawed at his bleeding heart. He knew Hannibal was making some goddamn confession to him in a language he had yet to understand. He spat venom and fury. He dragged a wrist over his mouth. “Close your goddamn mouth right now. Stop. Just stop. Can you do that? Can you manage to shut your mouth for a single second!”

For me. Can you do that for me? Because I can’t take this. You giving up on me.

“You cannot be here, Will,” Hannibal choked out weakly. “You cannot be here with me.”

The younger man stared blankly at a distorted reflection. He could taste the older man’s tears. The vibration of suppressed sobs hidden in another cell gutted him open. He was trying so hard to regain control for them both, to show Will he could be strong for them both.

“I don’t want you here. I needed you to run. Why, darling, why could you have not abandoned my side and lived?”

God, you’re going to kill me. Don’t. Just...Christ, shut up. I’m begging you. I can’t have this conversation with you again.

“I don’t want you here either…” Will released a faint breath, head tipped back as he slumped against a sink. He was still shaking. He wasn’t sure it would ever stop now. Not without Hannibal to make it stop. Every single word he offered was pointless and inadequate. “At least we’re together. You know I’m right here. And I love you.”

“You love me…” There was a distant noise of distress, Hannibal choking on his own blood as if Will had wrenched his very heart from his chest and crushed it in front of him. “Dievas. Kodėl?”

"Yes, I fucking love you. I chose you! I married you. Is that alright? If you wanted to be rid of me so badly then you should have finished the job in the van!"

“Please, Will, show mercy.” It was barely a whisper. A plea. Hardly anything at all except a man’s weak, dying breath. ”I cannot bear the echo of your voice inside these walls.”

Blue eyes slipped to watering corners, watching dispassionately as limbs began to quake viciously. “…Fine.”

This killer wrote you a poem. Are you going to let his love go to waste?

Hannibal was right. He was always right. It was a fucking waste. He should have cherished it more, so much more, somehow. Will had lost Hannibal, his Hannibal, the moment he let go of his hand. He tried to find comfort in knowing he would have been nothing without the older man, less of a person for having never known him, still craving an acceptance never to touch him. They all rang hollow. Will was going to die loving Hannibal either way.

Death would have been a far less cruel mistress than Fate.

Chapter End Notes
Nooooo, I don't want to go through this again! Everyone is hurt. And I hate it when they fight. Someone wrap them both in blankets, especially Hannibal. Where is that plush toy Mae gave me? I need it.

* 
Rough Lithuanian Translations:


(I'm sorry...beloved...my light. My life. What have I done? I hurt you. I hurt you. I always hurt you. Stay away from me, Will. Please, forget I even exist.)

“You love me…” There was a distant noise of distress, Hannibal choking on his own blood as if Will had wrenched his very heart from his chest and crushed it in front of him. “Dievas. Kodėl?”

(God. Why?)

* 
Atlantis x Seafret

I can’t save us, my Atlantis, we fall
We built this town on shaky ground
I can’t save us my Atlantis, oh no
We built it up to pull it down

Now all the birds have fled, the hurt just leaves me scared
Losing everything I’ve ever known
It’s all become too much, maybe I’m not built for love
“You do realize at some point you are going to be forced to surface for air…”

Hannibal sighed, shifting slightly with a creak of leather in a wing backed chair. A fire crackled in the hearth, left unattended to hiss upon ashy wood logs. He gazed up at a water stain on the ceiling, index and forefinger tapping out a quickening rhythm on a midnight navy silk pocket square tucked in a breast pocket. His eyes strayed to rain clinging to glass French doors. Beyond them water streamed down a steel ladder balanced against a side of the house, abandoned for more earthly pursuits.

“…and when you do, I will be waiting for your answer.”

The older man’s gaze slid with the rain. His eyelids grew heavy, staring through a thicket of fair lashes. His fingers drifted the nape of slender neck, blunt nails swirling cropped waves of dark hair. A curious glimmer of blue lifted. His breath hitched quietly. Long fingers flexed on soft flesh above his hips as a flat edge of a tongue licked the length of his cock.

“While I truly appreciate…” His measured voice came out breathless and faint. A far cry from poised and stern he had intended. “…your valiant return to tried and true methods of distraction and avoidance, I am going to have to insist on finishing our discussion.”

Blue eyes rolled defiantly before returning to the space between his thighs. Hannibal nipped his bottom lip between teeth, sighing as a palm slipped into his trousers and cupped him, squeezing to the rhythm of a sucking mouth. Both had been brashly thrust upon him in a matter of seconds. The younger man had ambled down the ladder, mopping at sweat on his forehead, caught one glimpse of a will and testament lying on the desk and dropped to his knees. It wasn’t that Hannibal was complaining. He wasn’t. He was having a difficult time focusing, certainly, but—

“Dieve mano!” A guttural shout tore free from his throat, desperately trying to clutch at clipped curls.

Shaking his head, Will slipped easily through his grasp sucking him deep at the back of his throat in a foray of spit. He could feel the younger man smirk even with a slight choke. It was one of a handful of phrases Will seemed to understand in Lithuanian without the necessity of translation and he took his time exploiting it. Particularly when avoiding a conversation. One Hannibal had tried to have with him four times in the last week, at different intervals, and had been interrupted each time. The first time hauled to the edge of his desk, legs spread. Once face down in the back seat of the car on the side of a road. Another shared with a sink and mop bucket in an inconveniently narrow restroom of a café. And now, well…

At the frenzied pace the younger man was setting they would both asphyxiate in a manner of minutes. Will was breathing harshly through his nose, cheeks flushed bright pink, hollowed and bringing Hannibal to a dizzying array of white release flickering in his eyes. His toes curled inside leather shoes, soles dragging up a curved spine and tensed shoulder blades.

“Am I going to have to put you on your knees to instill you with some sort of focus?”

Slicked lips mumbled around his cock, vibration sounding remarkably like a sarcastic jab of:
“Already on my knees.”

The older man jerked involuntarily at the sensation, gripping an arm rest in one hand and a fist full of what little hair remained on the younger man’s head. He inhaled sharply, to steady his breathing and keep from coming. He hated this new style of short hair Will was trying out. There was absolutely nothing for him to hold on to. It made it nearly impossible to put the younger man where and how he wanted him, or in this case, didn’t want him. Or did want him but—Hannibal let out a low moan. He was never going to have a cohesive thought if Will was going to insist on lapping at the underside of his head and teasing its slit like that. If they never spoke again, except in groans of pleasure, he suspected it would suit Will just fine. He enjoyed having Hannibal at his mercy.

“You know exactly what I was implying,” Hannibal growled after a lapse of consciousness. His thumbs latched under a jaw, tugging. “Now, please, darling. Ground yourself and focus.”

His cock, regrettably, popped out of a mouth with a plop. It slapped his white dress shirt hanging half open in a wrinkled mess around his stomach, red and throbbing underneath a trail of spit and precome.

“I was focused…” Will growled back, dragging a wrist over swollen lips, glint in his eye. “…on sucking your cock. If you hadn’t noticed.”

“This—” The older man tapped the papers on his desk emphatically. “—is something we have to discuss.”

“No. It isn’t,” The younger man seethed, rocking back on muddied boots, muscles coiling as he rose in a fraction of ticking muscles and popping joints. “I was in the middle of something. Or near the end, if you would have let me finish.” A shadow loomed. Will gripped Hannibal’s jaw in one punishing palm, forcing him to look up, and slid the other hand around his shaft. “Now shut up.”

He stared at a glistening mouth, flushed from exertion, drawn to a thin line of almost cruel determination. “Exactly how long do you intend to prolong the inevitable?”

“Another…” Will looked down, red head sliding faster through a dry grip. “Two minutes. Five tops.”

“And then?” Hannibal asked weakly, lifting his mouth, almost able to taste Will.

“Then…”

“Then you will allow us to have an actual conversation?”

Blue eyes snapped up. “I didn’t say that.” Will gripped the base of his shaft, delaying his orgasm, out of spite. “It’s really inadvisable to piss off the guy currently in control of letting you come or not, Hannibal. Your chances are diminishing drastically every time you open your mouth.”

Hannibal mumbled a terse ‘fuck me’ as he forcibly removed Will’s hand from around his cock and pushed him to his knees, hands on either side of his shoulders. He tightened his grip to reign control back within his grasp. The younger man glowered up, half sneer, half snarl twitching at the edge of his expression.

“Your jaw…” The older man leaned forward, kissing at the wolf trying to break free. “…is going to be exceptionally sore if you are going to be this adverse to speaking to me.”

His breath rushed out.
Will yanked him forward by the knot of his tie, teeth scraping his throat, forcibly taking control back. “A risk I am willing to take.”

“Will.”

A single dangerous curl fell over a brow, eyes narrowing. “Hannibal.”

Hell. He was beautiful. Why did he bother? Hannibal gripped at a heather tan Henley shirt and pulled Will against his mouth in a clash of teeth and heat.

“Come here,” A whisper glided over a tongue.

Knees then thighs settled over a lap, teeth nipping victoriously at a jaw. “I thought you wanted to talk.”

“I do. But I believe this is going to continue to be a distraction,” Hannibal murmured against lips, breath stuttering out as Will began to roll his hips, hard ache pressing back. “And I did vow to place your happiness, your care, above my own.” He nudged a throat, kissing lightly at a sensitive spot just behind an ear, earning a soft whimper. “Won’t you let me care for you, Mister Lecter?”

Will crumbled, mouth seeking his to consume gentle affection, hands scouring through graying strands to hold it close. There was nothing he craved more than the sight and sound of the younger man shuddering a second before giving in to need and being needed. Hannibal tilted his eyes to stare in shimmering blue, palm pressed against a trembling cheek, their foreheads touching.

Nails tore at buttons, scraping a graying chest. “Ah…ah… more…”

“Not yet.” Creaks of leather slowed before picking up.

Teeth tugged at the lobe of an ear, breathless. “Baby, please. Oh god… good, you’re so good, so good to me.”

“Stay with me.” Rumbling ocean waves swept over lips.

Warm breath fluttered against arcing cheeks, warbling sparrow soaring through a blue sky. “Right here. With you. Always with you.”

Sky and ocean became one as a sun sank beneath the horizon in a flash of gold. Muddled jewel tones mingled in a pattern of quickened breaths gentling, wrapped in steady embrace and light.

“I’m making a mess of you,” Will whispered, nuzzling the arc of a neck.

“Mm…” The older man held closer to the sated body lazily draped over his chest, palms chasing after shivering skin, kissing a forehead. “I will strive to find a way to forgive you.”

Though I would let you break me into a thousand pieces if it meant you would gather me close each time. Gilded by the gold of your mouth and the cooling water of your eyes.

A little breath huffed against his pulse. “I’m going to have to take your suits to the dry cleaners in the morning, aren’t I?”

Slouching low in the chair, Hannibal tucked one arm under knees and swung Will on to his side. He unlaced boots slowly. They dropped. He peeled socks free from ankles before dragging jeans from legs. They crumpled to the floor. His fingertips circled an ankle, dragging up quivering calves and thighs, before splaying across a firm ass.
“Inevitably,” Hannibal returned absently.

“You’re going to make me have that talk now, huh?” Will grumbled, curling up in a lap and resting his cheek on a shoulder.

“Hm?”

“This bullshit.” The paper waved in front of his face.

Oh. That.

“You make it sound like I am moments away from launching into an hour long lecture on Dante and you are the first of my pupil’s to flee for the nearest exit.”

“I would have found far better uses…” A thumb circled at a slit growing cool and sticky with come. “…for your mouth as a student.”

“William.” Hannibal punctuated the name with a squeeze of a wrist, placing the hand in a safer, less distracting location before tucking himself away to avoid temptation.

“It’s morbid. And unnecessary. And I don’t want to talk about it.”

“What will you do if I no longer am with you?”

A tremble of a pout gave way to a low frustrated growl. “I don’t want to talk about you dying. I don’t even want to think about it. Can’t I just fucking lay here with you and enjoy this?”

“I do not necessarily refer to my passing, Will. What if I was captured? What if you had to live out the remainder of your days separated from mine?”

A disarray of brown hair jerked to attention. “What have you done? Is there someone in the basement? Who. Who is in our basement? Goddammit, Hannibal, if you have an F.B.I agent or Jack or—”

“Darling—“ An owl blinked slowly. “A steady inhale of breath, please. These are purely hypothetical situations.”

“So…” Narrowed blue eyes drifted to the open door of the study suspiciously. “There isn’t anyone in the basement?”

“No.”

“Well…” Agitation melted from limbs as Will settled legs over a side of the chair, feet propped on the desk, scooting down to lay his head in the dip of an elbow. He glanced up, crooked smile forming. “…now we don’t have anything to eat.”

Hannibal wanted to nibble at the smile lines creasing his cheeks, follow the stretched tendons of his neck, run an index finger through the dark trail of hair disappearing underneath a waistband of boxers. A little moan brought him to the present. He blinked. The Henley shirt lay crumpled on the desk and Will lay shirtless beneath him, biting his lip, eyes closed. His fingers were lightly stroking the younger man through boxers, fingertips rimming a head and teasing a stain of wet warm again. Thighs shifted widening invitation. He blinked again, stilling his motions. He hadn’t even remembered doing it. It would be so easy to stroke him off, lying in his arms, relaxed and giving in. He planted both hands against a stomach, clasping them together, to keep them to himself. He had even less self-control to the desires of his subconscious than Will did.
“This is exceptionally important. To me. Do you think you could give me some peace of mind?”

Defiant arms crossed, gaze slipping to stare begrudgingly at a fountain pen perched on the desk. “Fine. You first.” The younger man wriggled again, glaring at a stirring cock, then up at Hannibal before looking away. “Thanks for that. It’s not like this is helping me focus on anything you’re saying. I’m just going to stare at your mouth and picture all the ways and positions I could fuck into it.”

Maroon eyes drifted to stare. Will groaned as it twitched at the heated drag of attention. Hannibal tried not to imagine hoisting Will to his knees, head tilted back against the leather chair, and having him mercilessly rut into him in quick, jerky strokes. Hot heat and salt. His mouth watered. Will would be screaming his name in a matter of minutes.

“Jesus, don’t do that…”

“What?”

“Bit your lip like that. It’s not…”

“Like this?” Teeth indented, tongue flicking out to leave a wet sheen over red.

“Christ, Hannibal, don’t test me.”

"Should I find my glasses?" A desk drawer shuddered open. "I am having some trouble seeing in this light."

"Don't do this to me. Stop biting your lip, fucking hell! You know what that does to me."

“Be mindful of our conversation and perhaps I will be amendable to spending as much time as you would like on my knees…”

Will shrank from the low rumble of promise. He looked small, pale legs taut and arms tensed, looking anywhere but gentle maroon gazing down. He was fidgeting with a loose thread on his long sleeved shirt. Hannibal cupped his head, drawing the boy up, and pressing him carefully to his chest once more.

“If anything were to happen to me, or to us…” He murmured against a brow, breathing in damp earth of an approaching Spring. He stroked lazy circles where jersey boxers met skin. “I have filled out the necessary paperwork to entrust part of our estate and possessions to the sparrow should he wish to take on the responsibility of caring for it.”

“You mean… you’ve asked him to take care of me? I’m not one of your possessions,” The younger man snorted. “You can’t just give me away like I’m some box of broken toys at a yard sale.”

“Do I not possess you, my love, as you possess me?”

“You can’t hand me off to another man, a priest no less, in the event of your goddamn death.”

“I am entrusting him with the well being of what is most precious to me. A man of God ought to intimately understand the reverence you deserve. ” The older man’s fingers were drifting again of their own accord, thumbs scouring peaked hips and pressing in. “How to worship your body and mind to best earn your devotion.”

“No.” An elbow jabbed between ribs.
Will struggled free, knees knocking one another, storm crackling in eyes. He stooped to snatch up jeans and storm off. A forearm locked around his stomach in a swift motion. Hannibal caged him to his chest, hand snaking up a spine, fingers clenching stands of hair tight until a throat bared and teeth snapped at air.

“Let go of me!”

He peered over a shoulder. Will was panting, cock straining underneath boxers, rough heels jammed against the tips of leather shoes.

“You will stay as you are or I will put you on your knees.” A low warning breathed across the curve of a cheek. He swallowed thickly as arousal sparked in his belly, picturing his pocket square binding wrists or slipped between perfect white teeth. “It is idle assumption on your part to think I would allow you a third option. An answer.” Hannibal ground out a tense, “Please.”

“If you weren’t here?” A small voice repeated, body sinking, drained of fight.

Hannibal relinquished his grip minutely, knees widening, before he placed Will gently in the allotted space. He kept fingers rooted in hair, palm flattening over a stomach, with enough pressure to keep the younger man from drifting in a state of panic. His skin was cooling, shivering. He was scared. The older man stroked his skin in small circles. As much as Will reveled in their shared violence, it wasn't what he needed at the moment. He would have to be gentle, kiss every inch of skin in front of their fireplace, and murmur his love against Will until pleasure shook him apart safely inside arms.

“If I was ever to be taken into custody, yes.”

“...I would...Jesus Christ.” Shaking palms roughed a shadow of a beard, flattening over stinging eyes, words burning hot against wrists with a raw bark of bitter laughter. “Try to find any reason left to live.”

“William...” Fingers slipped through strands of hair, releasing, pained creases forming around a drooping mouth.

Will bent at the waist, elbows balanced on knees, head dropping forward with a strained exhale. A tremor rippled from his waist up the length of his spine and flexed white knuckled fingers.

“Fuck. Fuck. Goddammit.” The younger man's leg started bouncing, anxiety edging in his voice, eyes darting to French doors, a Persian rug, a loosed button on the floor. “I would empty the accounts. I would...I would...” A leg stilled for one second before jerking back into motion. “I would take the boat and sail to Argentina. Exchange our passports. Destroy the old ones and drive to the villa. Is that it? Are we done? Can I fucking go now, Hannibal?” Nails bore down into thighs on either side of him, piercing glint looking back. "We're done talking. I want you on your knees. Hands behind your back.” A thumb scraped open a bottom lip to reveal jagged teeth. "I'm going to fuck your throat and you can think about all the ways Elias would moan around me in your absence. Let's see if you're so goddamn eager to leave me to him then."

Seething jealousy reared its ugly head in a flash. Red eyes smoldered black. Fingernails left harsh marks down arms. The older man's mouth flinched a snarl. He forced out a long, heated breath between teeth. Will was controlling him as effectively as ever. This is what he wanted. A perfected defense mechanism to ensure they both left each other with bruises and fresh bite marks. The younger man was at his most vulnerable, fragile, and terrified when hiding behind bared teeth and blue glinting eyes. The older man struggled against the demons rising in him to answer in kind, lusting after the darkest parts of them both. He drew his hands away. He took another breath and released it. Not this time. He would not be goaded into giving up and giving in. Will needed the most
human parts of Hannibal he could offer, even as he tried to lure out the beast. They needed the knotted mess of their souls to tangle and hold close.

Leaning forward, Hannibal blanketed his chest across the younger man and drew him in. Will flinched from the tips of his fingers to toes, starting to a rigid stance. He smoothed palms over shoulders, elbows, up trembling wrists and curved palms over hands covering a face. He kept Will hidden. From him. From himself. From the images he forced him to conjure. He would hide him from terrible truth and shelter him from consequence for as long as he could control either. Will let out a weak sigh when Hannibal dragged his lips from his jaw down to soothe.

“Would you...” He kissed a small freckle on a neck tenderly, pressing his ear to a back. A clattering heartbeat stuttered. “…swim in the grotto in the morning and return to Elias in the evening for a meal on the balcony overlooking the ocean where we were reborn?”

Will went deathly still, voice tolling quietly. “Please don’t make me answer that.”

“I want to know you will be cared for. That you will be supported by family. Have someone to turn to in my absence. Is it not within reason to ensure this even if I am unable to provide for you?”

Am no longer with you in this life to do so?

Shaking, the younger man bolted, caught only by a light hand latched on his wrist. Trapped by a desert night sky abandoned to weathered elements beckoning at his back. Blue eyes strained for the open doors again in search of an escape. Will stayed where he was, toes curled, body rigid.

“And what if we were both taken? What if I was the one captured and deported to the States, Hannibal? What would you do?”

I would be consumed by a thousand agonizing deaths over the course of my remaining life without you.

He caressed a bone on a slender wrist, twitching violently at the mere mention of Will being placed back in captivity, sacrificed to endless days of suffering with only his dark imagination as companionship. He would rather die first than live through that. Be without his light. His demons had grown used to being seen, touched, caressed in the darkness and kissed in the light of day. Without Will? He shook away the thought.

“Do you...” Will placed a hand over his face again, grimacing through slotted fingers. “…have any idea how difficult it was for me to be away from you when I left the first time?”

Hannibal rose eyes a fraction to stare at the back of a head. The separation was something they never spoke about. They never had. Even when Hannibal had tried to push the subject and Will had reciprocated in kind, disappearing into rooms and resisting his touch. He didn’t dare bring it up. Didn’t dare invite nightmares back into their home, into their bed, into their lives once more. They both vehemently denied the existence of near death and violence it had brought upon them with resolute silence.

“That was only a few weeks. I started having these, these...attacks. Like someone had pulled a knotted string inside me and I started to unravel. Didn’t you ever wonder why I was drinking? I needed...”

The ground seemed to split, cavernous ravine widening in the few feet between them. Hannibal felt a well of helpless need rush to his mouth, coming out in a shaky exhale, tugging at a wrist. Will stayed where he was, on the other side, eyes closed and trembling, reliving. He didn’t need to picture the
younger man stooped over a table littered in bottles, bleary eyed and dazed, arms curled around himself to provide comfort. A habit built over an empty lifetime meant to soothe. Hannibal had come to know it with an intimacy of his own making, on the floor of their kitchen, begging for Will to kiss him one last time goodbye and let go, even as Will pushed him away, hand over his mouth to smother a confession of love.

“What did you need?” The older man asked with bated breath.

“You.”

A frail moan perched in his mouth, breaking free, heart lurching. Hannibal dropped his gaze to the floor, hand falling away with it. He stared at wood grain etched in the floor.

“I wanted to fucking come home to you. And I just...couldn’t.” Arms wrapped around a smaller torso, still within his frame of vision, hugging tighter. “It felt like my bones were breaking, being crushed by this weight of knowing… what it was like to seek comfort in your touch without asking. And you weren’t there. I just wanted to come home.”

Will didn’t possess the words to ask in the beginning. He had never learned them. Just pushed his cheek in a palm with pleading eyes to seek closeness. Hannibal felt the world dimming, to a single solitary sound of his aching heart, to picture every moment Will had walked out of his life and left him. He had wanted Hannibal to know. To know he needed him. To stay at his side or go after him. And reach out. He had wanted Hannibal to bring him home. He had left him spitefully in the cold to suffer as Will had made him suffer in a wintry night before Jack came. Why hadn’t he known? Christ, why hadn’t he tried harder?

A pad of a thumb drifted over a furrowed brow, soft and uncertain. “No one really touched me before you.”

“You were infatuated with Alana long before you met me.” Hannibal looked down to see he had torn leather on armrests, nails embedded in its supple skin, voice rough. “There must have been others.”

Why didn’t you tell me you needed me, Will?

Will laughed at that, a pained flat noise to cover barren discomfort setting his knee to a bouncing motion, wedding band glimmering. “None that stayed. Too withdrawn. Too quiet. Too unstable. One to many times of waking to my screams in the middle of night. Not exactly someone to get close to. It hurt worse to have them pull away so I… built forts.”

Red rimmed eyes lifted. Hannibal felt as if he hadn’t slept in years. As if was sitting on the other side of Will in Jack’s office, looking at desperate loneliness welling in blue beyond a barrier of glass. Had they ever left that moment?

“You denied yourself the most basic desire of connection to alienate yourself from the concept, or to blind yourself from the possibility of ever receiving it?”

“It wasn’t for me. It was something other people had. Just something else to observe, process, and identify with from a distance.” The younger man shrugged, settling against the desk, slumped, hugging himself tighter. “If I had anything it was fleeting. Empty. There and then gone without so much as a whisper of sheets.”

“You let me touch you.” Blue eyes darted anxiously to the hand reaching out, faltering, before it dropped against a plaid knee. “In time.”
Will was too raw. If he touched him now, he would run with certainty. Would he ever return? Hannibal wanted him with a pang of hunger. Beneath him. Skin to skin. Mouth to mouth. Glistening in sweat and consuming fever. Where Will felt every good intention and misplaced words of longing Hannibal was unable to show. The sacred place they shook apart together, to lie inside the others pieces.

“I never felt pitied when you did.”

“What is it you felt?”


Hannibal rose eyes slowly, mourning, to rest on a trembling mouth, a wincing cheek, blue sliding away to keep from meeting his. He gauged the distance between them. He was suffocating, arms empty, heart breaking without the pressure of a soul settling against him. He wanted. He wanted only Will. He wrapped a hand around a waist and dragged the younger man forward. He shucked jersey material up before burying his face against a scar on a stomach, eyes wet, breathing in his scent.

“This, Hannibal…” Will whispered softly, fingers sliding through a mess of scattered starlight falling at his feet, shaking from the sudden connection. “Not, what will happen to me if you’re gone. Not, what will I do. What will become of me if I lose the only person who has ever quieted my mind, stilled the madness, with a single hand on me?”

The younger man placed a chaste kiss on the top of his head, fingers curling around shoulders and delicately pushed away. Hannibal reeled from the loss, clutching at a hem of a shirt before it too was pulled away. Everything he cherished suddenly, without warning, out of his reach once more. He wrenched a tie from his neck, throat closing, cutting off oxygen.

“Will—“ Stay, stay and allow me to hold you close. Nothing else matters. “—wait.”

Head bowd, Will stopped at the sound of a voice calling out and braced in the doorway, holding up the entire foundation of their lives. He waited. Hannibal sank against the chair, fingers clenched around his knees, voice lost to the possibility of an uncertain future.

“I can’t…” The younger man’s arms shook, buckling beneath the weight. “I can’t give you what you want. I don’t know how to say that to you. To give you peace, knowing losing you would take away mine. I can only tell you I’ll exist, breathe, and try to remember how to look and sound as if my world isn’t falling apart.”

Will slipped soundlessly out of sight, leaving Hannibal to stare at after images of him, through a blur of tears.

“I’m sorry, Will...” Rain drops splashed against a wooden floor, quivering silver before sinking through slats. "...I simply need you...how else would you have me ask?”

Hannibal coiled tighter around the blanket he had formed into a lumpy and poor substitute of Will. Knees clamped where a delicate waist would have been. Hands curved at shoulders and a neck to cradle the younger man to his chest. He tucked a cold nose underneath a yarn bound edge. Mothballs and must filled his lungs. He listened to wretched, pale breathing on the other side of the wall and
held tighter.

“What is it that blackens your mind in the throes of deepest sleep, Will?”

“Moments...of separation.”

Bed springs creaked pitifully, feet shuffling across a cell, pained voice a low whisper. “Hannibal?”

His eyes lifted to stare at cement blocks. He knew Will was standing on the other side, braced on a forearm, forehead resting in its crook, and waiting. The younger man formed the question as if he spoke too loudly, he might realize Hannibal was no longer there, or hadn’t been all long, just another walking shadow to keep him company.

“Are you having another attack?” Hannibal asked quietly, inch by inch of muscles tensing to steel himself against the sounds it would bring, the horrid, helpless cries of the man he loved shattering.

Fingers curled, knuckles roughed by stone, quiet. “Not right now…”

Relief flooded in. A twinge of guilt tripped after it close on its heels.

“I should have...restrained myself for your sake,” Hannibal noted, trying to soften his clipped tone as he dragged his cast leg forward and swung it over a side of the cot. He rubbed at throbbing pain he couldn’t reach. He wanted to tear the damn thing off, a wolf content with gnawing off its own paw to escape. He knew better. He had never born weakness well. “I was once the cause of your instability and deteriorating health. It was not my intention to be the catalyst for it once again.”

“You don’t need to spare me your feelings.” Tears rose in the voice drifting in.

“Yes, well, you do not necessarily need to be privy of their existence either.” The older man shot back, clamping fingers together and squeezing until it bruised.

What was wrong with him? He had to stop.

“How many months...how many years...did it take me to break down your walls, Hannibal?” Controlled frustration hissed through gritting teeth. “I fought for the right to see you as you are. To know you. I have the scars, your scars, of finally letting me in. Are you really going to shut me out again?”

A few moments of thundering empty air and tension hung between them.

“When you’re...all I have,” Will murmured, muffled, a statement spoken out loud, meant only to comfort himself.

Hannibal gripped the steel rail of his cot, staring out at the wreckage of his cell. Shards of a mirror glistened in the corner. The metal sink bore fresh dents, askew and tilting to one side, held by a tense thread of thin piping to the floor. He catalogued the destruction he had dealt to Will, directly or indirectly, in a series of checked boxes running through his mind. He had never known how to express need without crushing the very thing he wanted to keep from leaving him.

He gnawed at his lip, drawing blood. “Are you willing to bear a thousand more by hand?”

“As many as you need,” A choked voice replied. “Just...don’t go. I stayed when you asked me not to retreat.”

“Weighing our past against one another to gain advantage is a callous means of manipulation, Will.”
“Just a choice. It’s either me, or the glint of the rail, Doctor Lecter. You can’t have both.” A palm flattened stone, voice gentling to broken glass. “And I…won’t make it this time. Not without you.”

Maroon eyes slipped through a glimmer of tears. Hannibal was drawn to his knees, pushing his palms up the other side of the wall, and rested his forehead against it. He imagined holding Will, face to face, palms against his cheeks, eyes closed. He leaned in, arms tensing. A soft moan answered. He knew Will felt him reaching out.

A shaky breath left him. “There will be times I will have to retreat…”

To spare you from the darkest parts of my true self. To keep you safe from me.

“Tell me then. Will you… tell me first? Can you, I mean? Please?”

“If…”

“I don’t know how to say that to you. To give you peace, knowing losing you would take away mine.”

“If it brings you peace.”

“…Hannibal?” The drawl of his name hung with the heaviness of black clouds rain laden moments before a storm.

Hannibal winced at the implication, knuckles flexing, pushing at dark curls and drawing them over a quivering mouth in his mind.

“An unnecessary question,” A gravelly whisper creaked out. “They would have to take my beating heart before I was capable of no longer loving you.”

Pained relief bubbled in the form of a short laugh. “I wish…”

The older man straightened, eyes narrowing fiercely, pushing away from the wall and staring as if it might break apart and deliver Will into his arms. “What is it I can give you?”

“It’s going to sound…stupid.”

“Tell me.”

He thought of blood stained palms pressed to lips as Will had consumed his flesh, bicep throbbing, begging to be of use to the younger man in any way he could. Whatever he needed. Wanted. Wished for. Anything.

“Your hand. I wish I could hold your hand,” Will mumbled, thick laughter rattling, hand pushing through hair. “Freezing my ass off.”

Hannibal watched his own grey breath in the damp dark, flexing cold fingers, trying to kindle a fire through every word he pushed across his tongue and bring warmth to all he loved. “This coming from a man who used to stand on his roof in boxers during the dead of winter?”

His knees buckled, nearly dropping to the floor at the smile he heard in reply, gentle candlelight. “You can’t hold that against me. I wasn’t well. Aside from that, I told you that in confidence. I got very used to sleeping in a pile of dogs for body warmth. You wouldn’t understand.”

“I am sure I have no idea…” The older man countered dryly, corner of his lip lifting.
He shifted, body sluggish from cold. He had been numb for the better part of a week. Even rolling over was beginning to become a challenge. He reached for the woolen blanket and threw it over a shoulder. Hannibal found a crevice in the wall and held on, climbing on top of the cot to stand. His knee popped, shaking from supporting all his weight. He hauled his cast leg after him, biting back a yelp of pain. He fought a wave of nausea as he stood on tiptoes, straining to reach the slotted bars above. Fire billowed broken ribs. He punched an edge of the blanket through, metal grinding his wrist raw.

“Are you able to reach this?” The older man asked between clenched teeth.

“What…” Will shuffled forward on the other side, pressing the length of his body against the wall and reaching up. “…is it?”

A tug on the blanket brought tears to Hannibal’s eyes, flesh torn open, his wrist hauled forward.

“A bit more.” He grimaced, trying to keep his tone soft, gentle. “It’s almost loose.”

The blanket hissed with another sharp tug, corner snagging.

“What are you—oh.”

They both froze. Neither of them breathing. Frigid fingertips brushed Hannibal’s, stretching, before curling just around the edges of his. A sob welled his lungs. The older man clawed at the wall, shoving his forearm forward, skin tearing with it. He closed eyes, crushing slender fingers inside his own.

“Hey…” A thick rasp called.

Hannibal bit at his trembling mouth to steady the cracking tenor of his reply. “Hello.”

“Your hands are like ice.” Fingertips flexed, tracing his palm, dragging until fingers slotted and slipped together. “You're going to need this.”

Lashes fell heavy over eyes, tears streaking through. “One of us spent a great deal of time in Russia, dearest, this is practically a heat wave in comparison.”

A trembling thumb grazed his index finger. “I'll give it back to you.”

He rolled his head against a stone corner, inhaling sharply as pain tore through his side. “It will carry your scent.”

“Take mine tonight?”

“Af…after you have had a proper rest.” Sweat beaded his brow, legs and arms quaking.

“Doctor’s orders?”

“Doctor’s orders.” Hannibal spoke the next words as softly, quietly, as falling snow. “I am going to let go now.”

“Right. Your leg.”

“Sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Will fingers shook as much as his voice, squeezing tight once before moving to slip free. “I…so am I. Let’s not talk about it now. I’m tired.”
As cold fingers drifted from his own, Hannibal saw glimpses of Will trapped inside a blackened ocean and treble of moonlight, limp and being dragged to a final resting place upon ocean floor in a halo of misting red. He heard the roar of the waves and siren call of the rocks. Anger simmered in his blood. He had not faced death and the slithering creatures of Poseidon to lose Will to this frigid circle of Hell. His cheek flinched against stone, lip curling, as he withdrew ragged flesh. He sagged to his knees, arm tucked against his chest, and stared at an empty palm pooling with blood. True emptiness rested in the deep grooves of skin where Will’s hand should have been. If he was lucky it would scab for him to open again and again in search of brief connection. If he was unlucky, it would bubble with infection and give him a new reason to wish to be lost to hours of fitful sleep.

A rough grunt broke the quiet. “Are you lying down?”

“Mnhm…” Blankets rustled faintly.

“Eyes closed?”

“Yeah.” A hand twitched pitifully on the cement. “God…it smells like you. I fucking miss you. I want you here. I want-”

“Shhh.”

His heart was breaking. He couldn't give what the younger man so desperately needed, a shelter from the storm within his body. Hannibal could hear the trembling return to Will’s body with every dragging minute passing. He wanted to ask him to hold himself, arms wrapped around his torso like he would hold him in their bed. He wanted him to kiss the calluses on his hands and wrists. To run his hands through his hair and feel Hannibal breathing against the curve of his neck.

“Would you…” The older man sighed, weakness creeping back in, no longer of any use to anyone, even himself. “…like me to sing a melody to help you sleep?”

“No.” There was a long pause. “You don’t know how to hum power ballads from The Ramones.”

Hannibal felt the press of fingers twining his tear stained face and curled fists, a deeper ache bleeding through his wounds. “Fair enough.”

“The stars are out,” Will whispered. “I can see them through the skylight on our boat.”

Dark eyes lifting, Hannibal stared helplessly at the wall and began to shake, pained by the feeble comfort being offered to him. He tried to move from the cot, needing to stretch for the barred gate and hold onto any bit of Will he could. If he could only hold his hand a moment longer...His knees buckled. He collapsed on the floor. His cheek and then skull banged after it. He groaned, vision dimming. A pile of old bones. He was frail and fading and unworthy of offering Will protection. Whatever called upon him when the time came, he would remain cornered, crouched and snarling with teeth, a limping wolf unable to protect its mate. He was not the man who had bludgeoned a dozen men to death on Muskrat Farm and carried Will to safety. The same question plaguing him for weeks whispered.

What kind of a man am I?

“Are you—“ The younger man sat up. “Are you alright?”

“Fine…” The older man answered through a fog. “Trying to move closer to you.”

Strained exhaustion reached his ears. “Please don’t lie on the floor. Not in your condition.”
“Why?” He hauled himself forward by palms, numb limbs dragging after, slithering beneath the cot and coming to rest on his stomach. It was far colder among the grit of the floor than he had guessed. “You seem to be content with catching a near certain case of pneumonia upon it. I am striving to be a decent husband and supporting your efforts.”

He thought of the deep bullet wound healing in Will’s side, the one above his knee, and his own throbbing ache of broken ribs. The younger man must have been miserable, shivering from cold and unfiltered pain. He wanted to lower him into a hot bath and heal his wounds with lilac salve and burning candles as he once had. When Will had relied solely on the strength of his arms and the tenderness of his hands.

“I can handle it.”

“As can I. Put your blanket underneath you.”

“Hann—“

“Now. Or you will sleep in your bed.”

“What?” A scolded nose wrinkled. “Are you going to come over here and make me?”

“Will-iam Lecter…” Hannibal growled, red eyes sparking.

Cursing muttered as blankets snapped and roughed across cement. In sync, Will and Hannibal both curled on their side. The wall touched them where their knees would have met lying in their bed. Hannibal closed his eyes and saw Will staring out through a pile of wool, head lying on his arm. Something shifted against stone. Hannibal raised his palm and pressed it to a brick. He felt Will pressing back.

“You are draped against my chest, one of your hands resting in mine above the steady beat of my heart…” Hannibal began softly, inching forward until their bodies met in a connecting palm, an elbow, a hip, and a knee. “My lips pressed to salty breeze clinging to your forehead. I’m staring at the photographs you have taken for me on the ceiling, listening to the gentle lap of the ocean waves.”

“Are you reading to me?”

“Yes…my mouth against the tip of your ear, quiet and steady.”

Imagined pages crinkled. “Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day, And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue; Then in a wailful choir, the small gnats mourn, Among the river sallows, borne aloft, Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies…”

He felt tension melting from the younger man’s form, burrowing deeper beneath blankets, eyes drifting closed. He would bring Will peace even if it killed him. The younger man was there, in his mind, lulled to sleep by Hannibal’s voice and the caress of waves. His arms and hands ached, desperate to hold on to the image they were painting.

“Your warm…” Will murmured. “Run your fingers through my hair?”

He blinked at tears. “Like this?”

“Mm…”

“May I kiss you? Crush you in my arms until we both cease to breathe? Together to become nothing but drifting dust?”
“M..mm…” A palm slid, fingers coming to rest in a corner.

The older man pressed knuckles to barren lips, chilled where Will had touched them with breath, watching shadows dispel and draw Will farther from him. “Good night, mylimasis.”

Hannibal fought cresting tears burning lungs and choking him. He had not let the years take Will. He had denied his blade a final kiss. He had bled out underneath a piano and filled stone runes to save him. He had refused the ocean its sacrifice. Cheated the beckoning of death in the cramped quarters of a ship. Will was his. And now… he had nothing. Only their memories and the sound of his voice.

Chapter End Notes

:crying quietly: Do you ever feel like we are playing a very intricate game of cats in the cradle? Where I continue to pass threads over, under, and around one another to make connections and references all throughout time and space? It's a wonder this isn't a knotted mess by now.

Are we okay, guys? Here's the thing, why I wanted to do this, write this. What happens when the only person you've ever loved is gone? Just out of reach? When you can only hold onto one another through memory? What does living with that kind of forced separation look like? Feel like? If Will and Hannibal were imprisoned, how would they survive without the other? (I also really want to draw this image of them lying on either side of the wall, reaching out for the other.)

Here's another thought. Exactly what did Hannibal do all those hours after having made his confession of needing Will with his "Do we talk about teacups and time and the rules of disorder?" and that goddamn notebook full of equations trying to reverse time, to take back all the violence he had brought against Will, to restore them as they were, a family with a daughter? After Will's scathing, gutting, refusal to have them put back together, as they were, or as they are: "I'm not going to miss you. I'm not going to find you. I'm not going to look for you. I don't want to know where you are or what you do. I don't want to think about you anymore." Did Hannibal sit out in the dead of winter, staring out at the silhouette of Will in the house, longing for a light he would never have? Denied by the only person he had ever loved? Freezing cold and imagining in agonizing detail how Will had felt beneath his hands as he dressed him in fresh clothes, and kissed his scars left by Chiyoh and Mason? (Seriously, tell me your theories, I need to write it. My heart.)

Poem: "Ode to Autumn" x John Keats

"Don't Let Me Go" x Raign

The torturous stars
Are taking every breath I wish I held
The love in my heart
Is never ending

Where do we go when we walk on light
Who do we call at the edge of night
Carry me close like the tear drops in your eyes
All I can give you is memories
Carry them with you and I'll never leave
I'll lay my head down
But when I lay my head down

Don't let me go
Heavy bolts ground free. A hinged door creaked open. Hannibal jolted awake. His head banged on metal springs above. He fell back with a groan, momentarily stunned. A newly formed welt throbbed to life. He was one hit shy of a self-inflicted concussion. He had to be more careful before he unwillingly took the easy way out. He placed an arm over the bridge of his nose to shut out blinding white light. His eyes stung. Soles scuffed cautiously, slowly, one by one into the cell. Two, no, three pairs of combat boots by the vibration of the ground. He felt like a salamander frozen by dipping temperatures, sunning on a rock, limbs yet too sluggish to move. His calves twitched. He needed to get up.

“What…what was that?” A voice slurred by fatigue and sleep pricked his ears. “Is someone there?”

Will. His Will. Was he in danger? With a grunt, Hannibal rolled out from beneath the cot and dragged himself up on his good knee. He squinted. Three looming black shadows surrounded him. He grunted a bitter laugh. At least Will was safe.

A voice thundered. “On your feet.”

Feet stumbled in the adjoining cell, fear lilting a voice. “Hannibal?”

Maroon eyes scanned murky silhouettes, shoulders hunching defensively, voice rough from exhaustion. “Uninvited guests.”

“I can’t hear you. What did you say?”

“Up.” Gloved hands pulled a pair of gleaming handcuffs from a belt. “Or we will drag you out of here.”

Hannibal snorted derisively, latching on an edge of a sink and teetered unsteadily to a standing position. He tried not to appear to be leaning all of his dead weight on it. His precarious grip was the only thing keeping him upright. It was a miracle he was standing at all. Sharp needles ran down both legs, bones stiff from cold. Muscles addled from lack of movement. Will would have been furious at him for ignoring his health in favor of remaining next to him on the floor. He sighed softly, limping unsteadily.

_And what you do not know will not hurt you, darling._

“Seeing as how I am incapable of moving much on my own, I imagine the only way I will leave this cell is with a helping hand…” The older man countered, low and dark, quiet enough to keep Will from hearing. “Friendly or otherwise.”

A fist pounded on the wall. “What’s going on?”

Three pairs of black eyes glanced at the sound before returning to train on him, cold and unfeeling. If he didn’t say something soon Will was going to have another attack. If he did say something…well, he knew the outcome would be the same. A button popped open on a leather holster, thumb trained on the edge of a gun. Exactly what would the outcome of three visitors in the a.m. hours be for him? Unsavory seemed to be a fair assumption.
“It would appear…” Hannibal called, raising his voice to a hum of pleasant notes. “I will be going out for some fresh air, my dearest.”


A glinting baton cracked open, long shadow pointing at the door. “Now.”

There was no misinterpreting the intent of the gesture. Hannibal stiffened, side eyeing shards of the mirror to his right. He tried to shift weight to his maimed leg and winced behind the safety of his teeth. It wouldn’t do. He could barely move it. Let alone put pressure. A hand slid fully around a firearm resting on a leather belt. Another baton slid free, tapping anxiously against a thigh. He grimaced, forcing shoulders back in a straight line to rise to his full height. They wanted a fight. He would have to dive for the glass to retrieve a weapon. The burning ache had turned to a dull throb, but he knew his broken ribs wouldn’t take the force of another blow. At worst, there was risk of puncturing his lungs. Calculations clattered. There was a ten percent chance he might survive another beating. He ticked a tongue across a sharp tooth. Five percent if he was being brutally honest. A ninety nine percent chance the three looming gentleman before him weren’t inviting him for a pleasant chat. He let out a breath.

And a one percent chance of being returned to Will…In a body bag.

The odds were not in his favor. When were they ever? He sure as hell wasn’t going to force Will to listen. Blackened fury winced against his cheek. He would keep him safe from the sight, from the sound, from the visions in his mind. He had control over this. His end. He was not afraid of dying. He had welcomed it with open arms and ease of a man who had chosen his life freely. Will had not chosen to welcome Death to come and take him. He would not make him choose to let him go. He would simply…go.

“Darling, I will be accompanying these gentleman for a walk.” He lowered his voice. “There’s no need for that…” Hannibal nodded towards the baton and then the door, palms lifting to show he had no weapons, struggling to speak just above a whisper. “I’ll come quietly. I would appreciate you not alarming my husband.”

Flaking paint floated from the ceiling as Will banged harder on the wall, voice nearing a panicked shout. “What the fucking Christ is going on!”

“Will…” He emphasized the name with a firm growl. The pounding slowed and then stopped. Hannibal closed his eyes for a moment, bringing the bruised fist to his mouth and kissing away the brutality. “Would you like me to fetch anything while I am out? Before I return? A cup of honeyed tea? Another blanket? Anything you might require?”

In my enduring and eternal absence.

“Where…” Will’s fragile voice cracked on a whisper. “Where are they taking you?”

This was it. The last time he would ever hear Will’s voice. He sounded so frightened. The older man’s chest rose and fell, no longer able to control labored breathing. The room started to spin. His wrists ached. He had clenched his fists at some point. His knees were locked. He forced them to loosen, to keep from passing out. In a blink, he was transported to filth of hay and a pig pen, straining against leather bonds and thinking he had heard Will screaming as his lovely, gentle face was cut and peeled from his skull inch by inch.

I was trying to save Will from you, but right now, you’re the only one who can save him. Promise me you’ll save him.
I promise.

“I take it this will be a one way ticket kind of journey? You should have given some notice. I haven’t yet packed my suitcase.” A calm measured voice rang out in hushed tones from somewhere within his soul. “May I… at least have a moment to say goodbye?”

Who would save Will now? From whatever awaited him? From himself? From his mind? Would he take his own life as he had promised? Gash open his wrists and bleed out in the frigid air, deserted and abandoned? Or tie the blanket around grated bars and then place it around his neck, feet kicking, last breath and scent of Hannibal reaching his lungs?

A leathery hand clamped down on his bicep and hauled him forward. “Not a fucking chance.”

He stumbled, another hand clamping under his arm. Hannibal stared at a blur of light meeting shadow at the tips of his feet. He saw Will where the two met. How Will smiled for the first time, blue stream of morning touching his face over breakfast then clouded by confusion at gentle praise. Heard his wispy breaths fogging the window of a car in blind loneliness, fevered and fast asleep, as Hannibal drove through a thunderstorm. He felt a blood stained cheek of compassion come to rest at the center of his chest where his heart ceased to beat and his world narrowed to only Will. He loved him. He loved him more than the transcendental beauty of a thousand glass stained churches and broken china. He had wanted to give his life. To litter his hands with a thousand hand written apologies until their was no room for either of them to breathe. To say he loved him. And he was deeply sorry. For everything he had done. Everything he would ever do. He would never say the words to Will again.

“Hey! Hannibal!” Will was yelling again, both fists pummeling the wall. “Hey! Answer me, goddammit!”

How long would his voice hold before giving out?

“Why don’t you lie down and rest, William?” Some other part of him was still talking, the beguiled tailored monster with a soothing and tender tone. He stared dimly at snowfall of the ceiling drifting free, settling against his slumped shoulders. “Close your eyes. Think of our boat. Think of the sea. Think of my arms holding you. Think of me, Will.”

Lie back and wade in to the quiet of the stream.

“The fuck—“ Ragged breath stuck in a throat, beating palms stuttering. “Are you…” He heard the knit of thick brows, the quirk of a frown, wide rain water blue lifting. “…saying goodbye to me? Hannibal, you better fucking answer me! Are you—”

Will would not have the energy to bloody his hands much longer. Hannibal held on to the small comfort, tucking it in a moth eaten corner of his chest. He would crumple, a heaving mess in a matter of minutes, at the mercy of a panic attack. Tear stained and sweat soaked. He hoped the blankets were near, to stave off chill and sickness. To serve as some ill contented comfort. He wished he could wrap the younger man inside them, carry him to his cot, and press one final kiss to his mouth.

“I’ll wake you when I return.” Handcuffs bit his wrists. The panicked pounding of his heart remained beneath a still glassy voice. “I’ll be gone only a moment.”

“What? No, hey, no!”

Glittering rubies lifted to the nearest set of eyes, jaw unhinging. “Do what you want with me, but don’t you dare lay a hand on him. So help me god, do not even think of harming what is under my
protection. Leave him in peace. Do we have an understanding?"

“A set of amber eyes flitted to meet ivy ones.

“After you, gentleman.”

Bruising hands jerked him forward without another word, pulled across the floor and out in to the sterile corridor of endless white of incandescent light and steel doors.

“Hannibal! Hannibal!”

Behind him a wolf paced, back and forth, back and forth, howling in its cage. Hannibal counted the tiles on the floor. He had never meant to cage Will. Not the first time. He had never intended to imprison him to his touch or in the darkest recesses of his heart. Never meant to love him. Except he did. Violently and without explanation. He simply locked himself away in hopes Will might find the prison of his arms a far better substitute for glass. He didn’t want to leave him here. What would happen to Will when he was gone? Truly gone…Will would wither and die without him. Of that he was sure. The sunken impression of his skull would paint the most melancholic hues of dove and stony blue. He would make a beautiful corpse. The older man's shoulder jerked.

What will they do with his body?

“Fucking Christ, someone answer me! I have a right to know!” Steel reverberated as fists pounded against it. “He’s my husband. Where are you taking him! Where are you—fuck!” A shoulder rammed against the door. “Hannibal! Hannibal! Oh Jesus fucking Christ, tell me you’re still there, baby! Please.”

A final thundering scream followed a hallway, snaked up a flight of stairs, and was trapped on the other side of finality. A door clicking closed.

“Hannibal!”

*

Will’s heart flat lined the fourth hour of screaming. His strength went with it, a dwindling whisper of smoke. His voice a screech of raw scrapes and clicks. His throat smoldered. His lungs shuddered over and over again. Electric sparks of anxiety raced beneath his skin, arms and legs jerking violently. His mind spiraled in a fierce descent of grief. Denial hit first.

*He isn’t gone. He isn’t gone. He isn’t gone. Wake up.*

He would wake up in their bed safe and loved and warm. He wasn’t gone. He was coming back. He was going to come back.

*He said so. I’m dreaming. Dreaming.*

He had to wake up. His bloodied fists tapped out an erratic rhythm of anger against his temples. Blood dripped down the back of his eyelids, filling his body, spilling out this mouth.

*I’ll kill them. Every goddamn one of them. He’s mine. You can’t just leave me here. Fuck you, Hannibal, when I get my hands on you—*

Breath burned through his nostrils. His cold sweat soaked brow ground across stone. He stared at the
thin beam of light underneath the doorway, pleading.

*Take me. Take me.*

He felt old welts splitting open across his back, blood trickling down his thighs, breath stuttering out. A low whine frothed against the back of his bruised throat, trying to shake off the sensation of his jaw being forced open, skin and salt choking him.

*Do whatever you want with me. To me. Use me. Just... leave him alone. I'll do whatever you want.*

He couldn’t speak. He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t move. He couldn’t think. The younger man coiled tighter in a ball, arms locked over his ears, blood caked hands clamped around the back of his neck. He tried to drown out the high pitched whimpers bouncing off cement walls. An animal wailing for help. He couldn’t make the sound stop. It wouldn't stop.

*Please make it stop. Hannibal, I need you. I need you. Please. Come back.*

His palms sweat. His teeth chattered from the sheer force tearing through him. Terror. Rage. And cresting panic dragging him beneath. He rocked back and forth on his side, staring blankly at the ribbon of light beneath the cell door. He would wait. The finality of Hannibal’s steady, low voice was deafening.

"Close your eyes. Think of our boat. Think of the sea. Think of my arms holding you. Think of me, Will."

"No, no, no..."

Cracking dry lips parted, wheezing acceptance. “Wait... come back... come back... I just wanted to say goodbye...”

*Wake up. Wake me up, Hannibal. Please.*

He squeezed eyes shut until green and white ink blots appeared. He opened them slowly. The edge of Hannibal's gentle smile on the horizon. He reached out. The image wavered. He was alone.

*

Maroon eyes tipped over a torn sleeve hanging loose on a left shoulder. They slid down a forearm and studied bruised, bleeding wrist cuffed to a metal chair. His current situation was inconvenient. Bordering on frustratingly intolerable. Chain looped through and around the open back of the chair. When he pulled left, the chain chimed bringing his right hand with it. When he pulled right, his right hand followed his left. It didn’t matter how many times he repeated the action. Measured distance of chain link remained.

*The very definition of insanity.*

It was physically impossible to break his thumb and slip out of the cuffs with fingertips just barely out of reach. His first instinct (after being thrown into a eight by eight foot windowless room and left to fume) was to tip the chair and break his wrist to free himself. It was as logical as the idea of chewing it off with his teeth. There posed a small problem. The chair was bolted to the floor with half inch rusted screws. If Fate was a person, he would have cracked open her ribs for a slow open fire roast, marinated the meat in a bone marrow, and smothered her in pearl onions and a dollop of
root ragout. Hannibal jerked on the chains, head tipping back and releasing a hiss of frustration. Red specks of blood joined others on the cement. She was unfortunately not a person. If she had been, he wouldn't have even deemed her worthy of eating, simply thrown her carcass for the birds to feast upon.

Fate's a bitch, Hannibal... Dancing blue eyes stirred from beneath a sail whipping in the wind. I don't know why you don't ever believe me.

The scrawny pup Hannibal was waiting for hadn't returned for hours. The older man kept looking at his wrist as if a watch was still strapped to it. If he had a pen within reach he would have simply drawn one on. (Another irony not lost upon him.) His thumb and nails drummed against aluminum. He shot a stare heated with resentment at the cast on his leg. It was appallingly ill mannered to make a man of his... A tongue slicked against the back of teeth, considering. ...caliber wait, for an undisclosed and non negotiated manner of time, to meet his ultimate and inescapable demise. His clattering nails stopped for a second before starting up again. It was just fucking rude. (Somewhere in the attic of his mind, a small voice reprimanded him on his callously unrefined speech. Noting he had clearly spent far too much time in Will's company. He had a few choice words for that voice as well.) Had he agreed to leave his cell quietly? Yes. Had he agreed to be led willingly to his death? He followed the thought with a roll of his eyes. More or less. Had he agreed to be chained to a chair in a room (somehow metaphysically smaller and colder than the one he had been in previously) and left to stare at the unsettling dirty snarl of his own reflection in an aluminum table for hours on end?

“Fuck!”

His wrist cracked, straining against chain, in an attempt to run them through his wild mane of grey. He needed to get to Will. He considered the distorted reflection, swearing softly a moment later. Who was this stranger looking out at him? His hair was matted with crumbling cement and plaster, wild and hanging like a clump of polyester batting passed his collarbone. A peppered beard was beginning to form on his jaw, a thin veil to hide ugly yellowing bruises and a newly acquired set of scars. He imagined pulling at black circles under his eyes to reveal bloodshot white. The gaunt sinew of his throat stood stark against revolting fluorescent orange of a prison uniform, covered in weeks of soot and dried blood. He looked like a goddamn nightmare. He snorted. Or a half smashed and rotting jack o’lantern. He averted his gaze to a corner of the room, shoulders shifting uncomfortably against aching arms. Will hadn't seen him like this. Old. Tired. And...hideous. Perhaps his outside visage suited him far better than clipped hair and clean shaven skin ever had. A well dressed beast. He sighed. Will would remember him how he was, slightly mussed plaid and cheeks warmed by the boy's simple smile of affection. It was a small mercy. He could grasp at some ill placed gratitude for the universe at that.

How are you, Will? He closed his eyes, wisp of a shadow shifting and sinking in the floor beneath his feet to join the one he had left behind. Are you well? Are you maintaining your strength? Or has the force of your hurricane quieted to a drizzling rain staining your skin? Are you keeping warm without phantom arms around you? He gnawed a cracked lower lip, fingers flexing. Will you love me...after all this has transpired between us? Or will you grow to resent our stolen time as the days grow long and your soul becomes weary? Will you wait for me in the next life? Or leave me as alone as I have left you?

Beeps followed a clumsy press of fingertips. A lock buzzed.

“Firstly, I must insist on educating you in the proper etiquette of keeping a man waiting. Secondly…” A scold leapt off his tongue as maroon eyes swung up before slowing. “Was it truly necessary for you to come for me when he was awake?”
The scrawny grey eyed boy edged out of the room. A thick hand landed on the door to keep it from swinging closed, bronzed by sun and heat. Rolled grey jersey shifted through the frame, muscles rippling as a broad torso eased in after a shaven head. Roping muscles of a throat flexed as a six foot seven man in camo pants and combat boots leaned against the opposite wall, arms crossed.

“There were far better options at hand…” The older man chose his words carefully, eyeing the sheer shadowy height. The reincarnation of Goliath stood before him. “Sedation among one of the top three. You have caused Will an undue amount of distress.”

A dispassionate stare of ivy glanced off him. “Shut up.”

One yellow legal pad skid across the aluminum table. A plastic blue ball point pen bounced after it. Its chewed cap remained in the guard’s mouth. The man set up a blocky plastic camera recorder, flipping open its view finder and propped it at an angle on the table. The green light blinked cheerily up at Hannibal. It was eerily familiar. He glanced down once to make sure he hadn't already been shot. He would never understand man's obsession with filming death. News anchors. Journalists. Species dysphoria serial killers.

This would be less of an honor. And more of a begrudging insult. The older man gave consideration to bludgeoning himself to death on an edge of the table to save himself the general annoyance of meeting an unworthy death. The indignity of it all. He looked at the guard, sizing him up.

I suppose if you are the best this establishment has to offer...you will have to do.

“Well…” Hannibal blinked, head tipping to the side, channeling his voice to a low hum. “…you are handing me a pen to sketch nude portraiture of my husband I fear I have no idea what you would like me to do with this.”

“Write it down.”

His chains grated back and forth mockingly against metal, lifting a fair brow. “These do pose a level of difficulty for such a task, don’t you think?”

The man peeled away from the wall. He lumbered forward, hand jammed in a pocket. The floor shook with each step he took. Hannibal watched his profile disappear behind him, knee jerking slightly. The man reminded him a bit of Cordell. All blunt edged teeth. And very little brain matter. (He had checked to see if his assumptions had been accurate.) The resemblance really stopped there. They would have been twins if Cordell had been much taller, had even the slightest will power to exercise by lifting weights, and consumed steroids on a regular basis. He filtered a wince through a glint of eyes, arm wrenched back. His right hand freed with a click.

"Write."

He twisted his wrist, laying a palm flat over an edge of the paper and glanced up. “My limerick craft is a bit rusty and altogether far too vulgar to be seen by prying eyes.”

“Start…” The man propped up his weight on a corner of the table, dark shadow falling and blocking out the wiry lamp overhead. “…writing.”

“Very well…”

A pen wobbled back and forth rhythmically between poised fingers before stopping. Hannibal nodded once. The tip scribbled across paper, pausing mid stroke. He felt breath at the top of his head. He shot an upward glance of annoyance at a block nose and covered his writing with a cupped hand.
“If you would like me to be thorough, might I suggest trying out an approach with less hovering? Or at
the very least the daily use of antiseptic mouthwash?”

The table groaned beneath shifting weight.

The older man continued writing, noting how accustomed levels of low blood sugar put a slight
jarring point on his normally perfected cursive. It would not be his best penmanship. He sighed. He
fiddled with a corner of the paper a moment, reading it over. He nodded once more approvingly and
pushed it towards a grainy rose gold watch. His watch to be exact. The one he had been wearing in
Italy. An eighteen carat gold *Armand Nicolet*. Hannibal clacked his teeth together and glowered at it.
Elias, Peter, and Will had given it to him as a birthday present. He grimaced at how the band
screeched and stretched over sinew and bone. He supposed he would have to forgo chewing off his
own wrist to escape if he ever hoped to wear it again.

The guard leaned back with a thick smirk, picking up the legal pad and began reading out loud in a
rumbling tenor. “There was once a young man from Wolf Trap, whose cock was a beauty to look
at—“ A hint of peach touched chiseled cheeks. The paper thwacked furiously back on the table. “The
confession! For fuck’s sake.”

“You…” Hannibal tongued at a rough patch in his cheek, eyes downcast in faux remorse, corner of a
mouth twitching in the table’s mirrored reflection. “…ought to have specified. The rest of that is
really quite lewd. Exactly what am I to be confessing to?”

A meaty palm clapped over his amused reflection. “The murder of Francis Dolarhyde.”

Hannibal twirled the pen through stiff fingers, gauging if the point might be small enough to pick the
lock on his left wrist. “I imagine you were at least able to recover fragments of the Dragon’s demise
on what remained of the footage…” He looked up, forming the last word slowly, to have enough
time to gauge the dilation of pupil’s in dark green eyes. “Or are you suggesting nothing remained and
all you have to go on is mildly inconclusive DNA evidence?”

Pupil’s dilated a fraction wider. A *yes then*…

“If you don’t feel like writing about Dolarhyde…” Muscles shifted away from him, dragging steadily
across the floor and towards the door. “You always have a second option.”

Paper crinkled as a page was turned over.

“Pray tell,” Hannibal muttered under his breath, pulling the pen across faint blue lines of paper to
cross hatch curls spilling over lonely blue eyes. “I can barely contain my excitement.”

He missed Will. He missed the falling stars in his whisper against skin. He missed his scent of
knotted pine covered in melting snow and longing. He missed how a single, disobedient curl used to
fall just at the center of his brow. How it would obstruct his line of vision as it grew much longer.
How he might shake his head like Winston to be free of it, before pitching glasses carelessly to the
nearest surface with a yawn, uncaring of scratches, knowing Hannibal would buy him new ones.
Lithe and stretching like the priest’s newly acquired and troublesome feline. He missed the feel of
worn leather and aged pages slipping from fingertips before they might curve against his cheeks.
How Will tasted faintly of rich cocoa in winters and mint julep in the summers. He missed everything
about him. Even how crooked lines formed on his brow and mouth when he was angry, threatening
to destroy every single cup in the house. If it was possible, he loved him more then. Hannibal stroked
the tip of the pen gently over soft lips. All of his sins, all of his ill content…and he had somehow still
been blessed with an angel.
“How about sharing the story of…”

The larger man’s voice echoed in the hall as he stepped out. The scrawny boy reappeared. Another lean red head followed. They grunted commands at one another. Each was strapped with a firearm. They bore no symbols or crests. They weren't police. Or military. At least not in any official capacity.

Who might you belong to?

A wide brimmed wooden crate scraped across the floor and in to view. As it was pushed passed him, Hannibal stared at water sloshing across the floor, running towards his denim shoes. His toes curled as it seeped through thin soles. It was ice cold. Two thick black rubber gloves plopped on the table. In quick succession, the other men slipped out of the room.

Combat boots side stepped the chair and the larger man appeared in front of him, arms swinging, and smiling. “…your attempted murder, sexual coercion, and kidnapping of former F.B.I. Agent Will Graham.”

The pen cracked. Blue ink bled out over the melancholy portrait of Will’s face in the firelight. A smudge of his right eye remained. Hannibal placed the pieces of the pen neatly in a horizontal line a quarter inch apart. He stared at blue fingertips, jaw clicking in an effort to remain quiet. To maintain a spark of wrath igniting to a single throbbing vein in his temple. Before it coursed through his hands bent on crushing a windpipe and trachea. Inside his unflinching skin, his skeleton shuddered and cracked. Men had died for far less. He kept a coppery snarl lodged in his chest. He would kill him. He didn't know when. He didn't know how. This man, his personal Goliath, would go down screaming.

Blood seeped down the back of his throat and Hannibal swallowed, marking time with a faint inhale of breath, glittering eyes lifting. “Will Lecter.” An index finger twitched on paper, leaving a violent smudge. “Or perhaps you misheard ‘my husband’ the last several times I have spoken it out loud and in your presence?”

Neither confirmation or denial answered, if he had been heard at all. Silence was his only reply. Hannibal watched blunt fingers trail across the steel table out of the corner of his vision. Boots scuffed slowly across the floor. Rubber snapped. He forced his body to melt, limbs relaxing. It would be far more difficult to remain conscious if he was tense. At some point his body would take over and he would no longer be in control of jerking limbs bent on keeping him alive. But for now he had a choice. And he chose to roll his neck against an edge of a bucket, waft of cold licking at his skin, and stare up into dark eyes with a smile.

“How about a swim?”

Rubbery fingers dragged across his scalp, wrenching hair around a fist. His head hit the water. Then engulfed his face. Hannibal stared up at liquid glow of lamplight through shards of ice. He wanted to gasp. To breathe in. To choke. The frigid shock on his chilled body from weeks of cold demanded for him to suck in a lungful of icy water. To breathe deep and surrender. His vision tunneled. He clenched teeth and forced air through them. Bulbous bubbles raced towards the surface. The cold was seeping in to the collar against his neck, dripping over his shoulders, and trickling down the front of his chest. He kept his gaze fixed on the light. He felt flesh prickle with fresh bumps, sensation of water pooling at his feet and over his body causing him to shiver. His lungs began to itch. His teeth clenched tighter. He wouldn’t breathe in. And he would never, ever…scream.

Garbled tones called. "Enough?"
His head was jerked upright by strands of hair. Hannibal let his entire head hang by the roots, cascade of water sloshing down the front of his prison uniform. His chest was soaked now. He snorted in one measured breath after the next, nostrils flaring. He teeth remained clamped. He would not give the man the satisfaction of gasping for air.

“Unn…” Hannibal scoured a palm over a dripping face, flicking water away. Droplets clung to his knees. “When I suggested…we go for a swim…this was not what I had in mind. Quite refreshing though. Thank you. Being without a means of bathing has its disadvantages.”

Fingers released his hair, knuckles wrapping the table. “Confession. Now.”

“Did your mother never teach you basic etiquette of polite conversation?” The older man asked tersely, grimacing as the final remnants of Will’s sketched face dissolved. "Or were you merely raised by a half bred of nearly distant cousins?"

“We have proof of what you did. Don’t you want to spare him any further humiliation?" The guard asked coldly. A handful of polaroids spilled out across the table, crisp and fresh. He could practically smell the drying ink and chemicals. “This is your brand of therapy, isn’t it? Humiliation? Degradation. Pretty damning evidence.”

Hannibal plucked one from the pile. He willed the fingers in his hands to remain still. To keep from crushing the image. The room was brightly lit. Sterile. And blindingly white. In the corner a pair of plain ivory flat shoes came in to view, stethoscope snaked around a hand. Will was straddling a chair, limp arms slung around its frame, cheek tipped against a high back. A red welt was forming where metal met skin. Clear zip ties held his wrists and arms in place. Vivid lighting caught fire down the valley of knotted scar tissue and fading lines on Will’s back. His lip curled slightly. The volatile markings of a cane. They were not his marks. And Will did not deserve to have his humiliation put on display while drugged and helpless. Slit red eyes lifted. He was going to kill him. No matter how long it took. His patience was infinite and endless. Hannibal would wait.

“Photographic evidence obtained without explicit consent or legal warrants is hardly going to find its way in the hands of a law abiding prosecutor.”

The photograph flipped through the air, skidding across the table, and fluttered to the floor. Hannibal wished he could have set it on fire. See the entire lot of them go up in flames. He would go up with them. If only to spare Will from being seen. From stripping him further of dignity to gaze upon unfathomable humiliation. Seething hatred gleamed behind his eyelids. They had no right.

“Let alone a judge. Is there to be a trial then?”

Pupils dilated again. Well… now, isn’t that interesting, friend.

"Or is this more of an intimate, privatized experience of judge, jury, and executioner?"

“Keep pushing and you’re going to find out…” The guard growled, rubber squeaking on a forming fist.

“Your employer ought to train you in more effective methods of torture,” Hannibal hissed as head was wrenched back, nose tipping up in the air. “This is all very… last century.”

He sucked a deep breath in and held it. Ice water took him once more.
Salt water hands glided around his torso, cold nose nuzzling the back of his neck. “How are you feeling?”

Hannibal lifted his chin from its perch on forearms, legs treading the ocean while he rested most of his weight on a thin plastic ledge attached to the anchored boat. He had promised Will to allow his care with more...ease and relinquished control. He had managed, for the most part, to allow the younger man to govern his well being. How many hours he needed to rest. Preparation of their meals with his verbal guidance. And even the kinds of physical therapy he should have to endure. He was not handling the ‘ease’ part of their bargain well. He was still short tempered and clipped of tone when in pain. The younger man took it surprisingly well in stride. He managed to keep most biting remarks to himself when a bottle of pills was pushed his direction. With Will pressed up against him like this, holding close, he knew a new day had risen and all was forgiven.

“This position seems to be improving my condition greatly...” Hannibal turned slightly, running a palm up a bent neck and burrowed fingers in wet curls until lips tipped to kiss his cheek. Will nuzzled against him. “It could be a placebo effect however. You may need to stay where you are, to ensure it’s working. For purely scientific purposes of course.”

“Oh, I see...” A smile curved against the knot of his spine. “You do know best.”

The older man hummed letting his head rest on an arm once more, going slack as fingers dug in to taut muscles. “I do, don’t I?”

He began to drift off. The sun was hot. Will was warm. His touch soothing.

“I’ve heard...” Fingers danced down ribs and slipped beneath swim trunks. “…this kind of physical therapy is really effective.”

Hannibal jolted as two fingers languidly slid up cheeks and pressed at a ring of muscle teasingly. He was definitely awake.

“What do you think?” Teeth nibbled at the lobe of his ear, Will rutting gently against his thigh, voice a throaty tease. “I’d love your professional opinion.”

He gasped, arching as slender fingers pulled up the line of his cock in time to ones pressing in. “I’m not sure what medical journals you have been reading, Will, but I would...mmm darling, your hands are divine...love a subscription.”

“Yeah? Well, I just hope they deliver in the middle of the ocean because...” The younger man pressed a husky drawl to his ear, fingers crooking and dragging a low growl from a silvery chest. “I’m fairly certain I read a peer reviewed article about the health benefits of prostrate massage to speed up healing, but I just can’t seem to remember the details.”

Hands let go and in the moment after Hannibal nearly drowned. His brain rushed with dizzying need and heat. He grappled for the ledge, glowering up at suntanned legs skipping up a ladder, pert swinging ass just above them. He wasn’t sure if he wanted to pink soft cheeks with the slap of a palm or worry it between his teeth.

“W-will...” Hannibal groaned, cock growing heavier with the thought. “Will, where are you going?”

“Up top to air dry. I don’t think I need these, do you?”

A pair of cherry red swim trunks floated down and fell over Hannibal’s face. He snatched them off and balled them up in a fist. His hips jerked slightly, reaching for the ladder, scent of salt and sex
clinging to him.

“Do you have every intention of stranding me down here?” Hannibal managed to scramble up on the platform before slumping against the boat, one hand on the ladder and the other flexing around tiny swim trunks. They would look better tied to Will’s wrists. “I took the brunt force of a vehicle collision for you.”

“You know the deal.” Bright blue eyes and a fringe of wild curls tipped over the side of the boat, bare chest gleaming in the light. “Have to re-strengthen your core.”

“William—“

“Better hurry up, angel, this lube is only going to last so long.”

*

Vision and hearing faded in and out.

“Say it. Say you forced Agent Graham into a sexual relationship and coerced him into murdering Francis Dolarhyde.”

“Mmm…” Hannibal blinked, trying to focus on the dull boom addressing him in the distance. He picked at broken nails with a thumb to keep from gripping the armrest. “L-lector. Former Agent Graham…Will…Lecter.” He struggled to form thoughts and words. Whatever he was saying was important. He felt it. “Married. Mine.”

“Ready to cooperate?” A blurred face hovered over his.

“Certainly.” The older man sneered up at the guard, raking nails down a stony cheek to leave his own mark. “As soon as you get on your knees and choke on my—“

*

Bedhead nestled deeper against a mountain of pillows, muddled rain searching through a forest of long lashes. “Were you…watching me sleep?”

“You seemed at such peace…” Hannibal murmured, stroking curls back with a palm before settling against a cheek. “I dared not wake you.”

The old timber of the cottage creaked. Gulls chattered in the distance. Morning rays of pink began to slip over the horizon.

Will scrubbed at sleep heavy eyes, yawning. “Do this often?”

The older man lifted floral covers, running a hand down a thigh to touch a bandaged ankle. The swelling had gone down dramatically since their arrival on the coast. Will giggled as fingertips swept back up, swatting at his hand and burrowing deeper. He was growing accustomed to retaking his role as caretaker. The glow showed in the younger man’s cheeks. Would his freckled stars taste dim like twilight or gentle like fading blue planets?

“With growing frequency.” He touched lumpy blankets where a head would have been fondly.
“Mmhmm…” Lips melded against the center of his chest. “You’ve thrown out your interest in hiding your obsession out the goddamn window I take it?”

“With fervor.”

Hannibal melted as Will kissed up his sternum, detouring to flick a tongue against a nipple. Was it always this hard to speak?

"Would you like me to exercise a degree of restraint?”

“Not at all, Doctor.” Will dove from beneath blankets, mouth quirked in a half smile, before slipping arms around his and lying against his chest. His breaths became shallow, murmuring, “I’m growing fond of being your sole obsession…”

The older man tipped lips to curls, eyes drifting closed, and let the gentle lap of breathing waves pull him out to sea.

*

When Hannibal surfaced he was choking. On water. On lack of oxygen. Or too much of it. Tears streamed from his eyes. His face was burning hot. The floor was covered in a stream of sloshing water. His clothes were soaked. He must have started flailing. His fingers had grown numb from gripping the chair. The first word on his lips was Will’s name. He doubled forward, arm hanging limply by restraints, and watched beads of silver fall from his nose. His eyes were bright red in the puddle beyond, rippling with each drop. He sucked in ragged breaths. He could barely see. He wished he hadn't been able to at all. He looked hideously grey and pale. There was no controlling it now. His breath fogged white. Every inch of him was shaking. He felt like an intricate ice sculpture hidden in the depths of a walk in freezer. Is this how Beverly Katz would have felt if he had kept her alive?

“You can make this all stop you know…”

Fair brows knit together. Hannibal saw Will standing over him in his kitchen in Baltimore, glinting blade in hand, a palm on his cheek. Voice shaking out and coldly telling him to let go, surrender to the quiet of the stream. Abigail was with him. Her small, ivory hand tucked in a map of calluses in Will’s. Her eyes were wide, but she wasn’t scared anymore. She was safe. Safe from him. Will didn’t look frightened either. Bittersweet resignation and love wavered in blue eyes. His face and clothes were drenched in Hannibal’s blood. He had never looked more beautiful. They were safe. Both safe. From him. He could go with ease.

Safe, my love, stay safe for me.

“Just say the words. I’ll make it easy. Say you don’t love Will Gr—Lecter and you coerced him into committing the murder of Francis Dolarhyde!”

“If it is not too much trouble…”

Hannibal released nails embedded in his thigh, pushed them up cheeks, and slung back wet hair. He placed a palm over his heart to feel its slowing melody. The burning in his chest was the only sense of warmth left to him. He leaned back and let his gaze slide to the muddied illustration of Will. He touched a frowning mouth, ink bubbling and pooling to smudge love across it.

He inhaled slowly, head tipping and let his eyes close gently, voice a clear cresting wave melding
with a stream.

“I would rather drown.”

Chapter End Notes

Hell. If I believed in it. We would be there. This is it. Welcome back, everyone, I hope you'll enjoy your stay. (For the next several chapters of our lives where we all collectively experience pain.)

You know the deal. I'm sorry. Your sorry. I love you. I leave you bleeding on the kitchen floor. You sail across seas for me. I let you go to prison. And somehow, I am still blessed enough to have you write me these amazing comments. I cherish them. I cherish you, my dear readers. I do. Seriously, do you have any idea how much I enjoy talking with each one of you? I'm pretty sure I survive on a week to week basis just to be here with you and share our thoughts.

Send me some music. Melancholy. Sad. And suiting the current mood you are in. Also...someone please finish this limerick as I am not very good at them!
Chapter 6

Dust drifted across cement. Scabbed fingers ticked involuntarily. A dried white ring of tears and saliva etched the floor. A filthy mattress was missing from the top of the cot. Rusting springs creaked in its absence. A hinged slot flicked open. A tray dropped in. A shadow scurried across the floor on all fours. With a snap of teeth, it dove back under its make shift cave. A trail of breadcrumbs disappeared beneath the cot. Deadened glow of azure flickered in shadow.

Will jammed his spine against a corner of the cell, throwing woolen blankets over his head and around his shoulders. He ducked to keep safe from poking springs above, to make himself as small as physically possible. To stave off the chill. He inhaled softly, drifting scent a fleeting comfort. He pretended Hannibal was sitting beside him. Edges of his fingers caught on teeth. Inhuman noises escaped. Crumbs scattered over his bare dirty feet. He whimpered as the last of a stale roll vanished. His stomach ached. He curled tighter, rocking, a ceaseless motion ever present with him now. His gaze flicked to a shard of broken mirror stashed underneath an edge of the mattress. Then up to faint hash marks on the wall. Eleven days. It had been eleven days since they had taken Hannibal.

*He’s dead. He’s dead. He’s dead.*

The younger man pushed palms over his ears to drown out the voice. It grew louder.

*He isn’t coming back. He left you.*

*Shut up. Shut the fuck up. Get it together.*

*If he isn’t dead. Then he’s gone. Who says you’ll see him again?*

His agitated rocking increased, arms around his knees, face buried against thighs.

*“Breathe,”* He pleaded softly as he began to shake, eyes burning.

*Why? What’s the point? What have you got to live for anyway?*

*“Shut up!”* Will shouted, thumping a hand against the mattress.

A cloud of dust plumed. Once he started to laugh he couldn’t stop. Hideous hysteria bubbled out of his mouth gleefully. He continued to rock. He was fucking losing it. It had been a little over a week and he was already talking to himself. He would rather talk to his visions than himself. Dead bodies rising up at crime scenes and walking straight toward him suddenly seemed immensely appealing. He would rather speak to them. Then he could blame sleep deprivation. Hallucinatory drugs. A mouthful of whiskey and one too many Aleve. Anything—any goddamn thing—that allowed him to pin his definitive level of crazy on someone or something else. Otherwise he was just...crazy. The silence and dark stalked after him. He couldn’t get away. No matter how tightly he wove himself into the corner. No matter how loudly he muttered in reply to his own questions. Or how tight he shut his eyes and prayed the vile scent of blood and piss was a nightmare. It was always there. Breathing. Alive. And waiting to swallow him whole.

All he wanted was to wake up.

Will let his body go limp. Allowed the attack to over take him until he seized on the little mattress in a dirty corner, alone, scared, with his own vile company. It was easier to let the panic flow over him than fight the current. Teetering gracelessly on a millisecond from unstable. He couldn’t cry anymore. But he felt the fire in his throat pricking at his eyes. This was how he fell asleep now. To
aftershocks of muscles and kicking limbs. Hoarsely wailing beneath a cloak of blankets. From the pain, the bitter cold, the thing inside of him slowly reawakening. But it was the waiting, the time, he felt tearing the most deeply. Waiting for Hannibal to come. Or for them to take him. He wished they would come. He wanted it to end. He couldn’t survive this. He constantly felt sick. Unable to stomach a reality of his own making. He had barely made it through his last endearing run in with captivity. How was he going to make it this time? How long would he last?

*Think of me, Will.*

Dimmed overhead lights hit a thin banded collar of crimson against taut tendons swallowing. Will forced himself to look away. The collar looked like blood soaked rubies. The way it adorned and glinted in the light. It somehow made the older man even more alluring. He fidgeted on an edge of the desk. He was glad Hannibal was focused on the crime scene photographs spread across its surface and not on him. He would miss the dart of his tongue against dry lips. How he involuntarily swallowed in response. He clasped hands in his lap to keep them from wandering. His roving eyes seemed to be a lost cause. Or maybe he was just a lost cause. Was there a difference?

Will sighed. He was tired, muscles tight from a two hour lecture and growing more tense at a foreseeable night of Jack rumbling at him. Being near Hannibal, seeing him, provided him a distraction. His presence was soothing. His appearance was… His gaze followed crisp, tight lines of red and grey plaid clinging to shifting muscle. Will fumbled around in his head for a word other than distracting and came up empty handed. He had hoped it would wane and smolder out. But there was something about Hannibal. And he kept coming back. His fingers flexed at the mere thought of having something, someone to feel, to touch… to hold.

“Will?” A thick voice vibrated against his palm.

The younger man jumped and nearly fell off the desk. He was running a razor edged peak lapel through forefinger and thumb, eyes half closed, and drinking in the imagined audible sensation of buffalo horn buttons popping open. He didn’t even remember reaching out. Hannibal was standing alarmingly still, chin tipped at an angle, eyes flickering coals locked on the light touch. Images from the projector flashed across the planes of an unreadable face. Not curious. Not repulsed. He just stood there. Looking at him. To see what he might do next with detached calculations.

“Uh I uh…” Shit. Will ducked his head, dragging fingers through his hair and pulled at the roots to tug an answer to the surface of his muddled brain. It wasn’t as soft as the texture of the suit. Guilt and loss welled somewhere in his lungs. “Sorry? There was something on your suit?”

Really? That was the best you could come up with? Jesus Christ. Don’t…quit your day job, Graham. Well, at least not one of them.

Will hunched forward, arms crossed, scowling at scuffed tips of suede boots. The left one was coming loose. He should fix it. He stayed where he was. If he stayed still enough, maybe Hannibal would just…leave. He couldn’t go anywhere. The lower half of him had other ideas. A vivid display of interest being one of them. He grit his teeth. He thought he was over this, whatever this, was.
If he blinked, he would have missed the flicker of a smirk in his peripheral. “Am I to ascertain whether that was a question or a statement?”

“Lint. Maybe,” Will mumbled, fiddling with rolled sleeves of his dress shirt. One of the buttons was loose. He picked at it and breathed out harshly through his nose. What else was he supposed to do? Back peddle? “Hard to tell in this light.”

“I had no idea you were as vigil about maintaining my appearance as I was,” Hannibal countered evenly, glancing down and brushing at the same speck of nothing Will had been touching a moment ago. A small pitied mercy. His voice rose a fraction, honeyed and warm. “It was very kind of you, Will. If you had let it remain the results could have been catastrophic. What kind of impression upon the world would I have made then?”

His breath stuck. The praise, false pretense or not, sent a jolt through him. Was Hannibal teasing him? The younger man wished he could clamp hands over his ears. He felt them flushing hot. A pink that would soon creep to his temples, then his cheeks, and wander beneath his button up to spread over his chest. This was far worse than pointed questions and prying insinuations. Hannibal sounded…sincere. He drew up an arm and slung it around his waist protectively.

His reply came out loud. Not in his head. And it shook with a husky timber of a man accidentally staring at a full lipped smile, lingering on the divot of a snaggle tooth. Would he taste cool and soothing like his presence?

“No one is looking at your suits, Hannibal.”

Oh for fuck sake. Why.

Red lips parted slightly. “Oh?”

“I…need to…?”

Will pursued the only avenue left to him. The one that required the least amount of effort and explanation. And would save him from the present humiliation. Or spare him from meeting a steady gaze glimmering with a hint of a question. The one that best suited his nature. Running away. He bolted.

“Ah, a moment please.”

Fingertips whisked from his forearm and caught his wrist loosely. The trace of touch burned. Will found shining false hope of a green exit sign blocked by broad shoulders. Hannibal now stood between him and the doors. Close. Too close. Rosehip and thyme clung to skin. The younger man took a step back, footing unsure, and sat heavily on the desk. He swallowed as the older man leaned over him, palms smoothing up wrinkles on his button up. He shivered. They were warm and inviting. He shoved glasses up the bridge of his nose and glowered down at his cock with a stern message to his brain. Whatever it was choked along the way as long fingers slid a hole riddled tie from his throat. It died upon his lips with a rush of breath. Two buttons slid open, fingertips brushing at his throat as the collar was turned up. He turned his head to the side, to stare at a bulb spitting overhead and tried to forget the burn moving down his skin.

“It is only courteous to return the favor…” Hannibal advised in a low murmur, eyes sweeping over the profile of his face and then down to smoothed rhythms of knots and loops.

Jesus… He stared at the hands. He knew every threaded vein and muscle in them now. They were practiced. Precise. Exacting. And they were touching him. He shuddered. Hannibal didn’t need
touch to tie him in an intricate web of knots. He had done a fine enough job of that merely staring
dispassionately at him from a leather chair and asking: how does that make you feel? If anything, he
had let Will tie his own knots and admired their perfected form.

How do I feel? Confused. Frustrated. God, how long does it take to knot a tie?

He tried not to think about the last time another man had stood this close and knotted his tie. He had
been about seven. Sent in his father’s place to attend his friend’s funeral. He had been too drunk to
teach Will how to do it himself.

“One should strive to look their best if Uncle Jack insists on you having another date with the
Ripper. At this rate, he will marry you off within the month.”

Will choked, flush barreling down his chest, and forced out a barking laugh in an attempt to cover
utter discomfort and need. To hear Hannibal say his name again.

“Not really husband material.” His brows drew together, voice softening to a disappointed whisper
of reality. “Not really…good for anyone. Not sure that I’m…good at the moment.”

He hunched further forward, corner of a mouth wincing. He wasn’t sure the last time he felt good.
Felt okay. Felt like his insides weren’t splitting open and spilling out from his well built and
practiced callous exterior. He didn’t want anyone to see the drawn lines of his face and tired eyes
from returning from nightmares drowned in the bottom of whiskey. The only one who seemed to
sense it was Hannibal. And he was never more than a phone call and a steadying palm away.
Polyester wisped together, pushing the knot to a throat. The pressure steadied his nerves. He liked it.
He let his eyes drop to the floor. He didn’t want to think about what that implied.

A fine specimen worthy of presentation.”

His mouth went dry. He flushed again, cock jerking. His ears rang. The compliment hung between
them, cloyingly sweet and suffocating. He shuffled closer a fraction, letting it wash over him. There
was no reason Hannibal needed to lean in. Not this close. Close enough he could feel breath on his
cheeks. Could practically taste him. The older man could have had the decency to let go. Instead of
leaving cigarette burns of fingertips against his collarbone and neck. What did Will feel like beneath
his touch, under his care, walking around in his mind? What would he taste like?

Taste. There it was again. A low whine stuck in the back of his throat. The idea of Hannibal
presenting him in the same way he flourished the reveal of an exquisite meal made his chest tight.
Strategically garnished in only the finest things and on display for all to see. To look upon. For the
older man to consume. To savor. He saw the image flicker in the screen of his eyelids, laid out on
the table, tracing his sternum lightly with a gold tipped knife. His body heaved to motion. He
couldn’t stay here.

“Have to—late—bye, Doctor Lecter.”

Will barreled passed the older man. He left his bag and laptop where they lay. Photographs of wide
eyed dead girls, severed bodies, and scratched notes scattered through the air. A pang of guilt
rushed to the surface. For touching them while Hannibal had been touching him. To feel a thrill of
longing with the dead pressed beneath his palms. It was wrong. He was wrong. He was what was
wrong with everything. He always had been. It had to be true. Why else would his mother have left
him? He walked faster, skidding through the hall.

Bewildered concern followed. “Will, your files?”
Did Hannibal’s voice sound rough? Thicker? Or was it just his imagination? A twinge of hope? What the fuck was he hoping for anyway? What was this? Any of this. What was he doing. He grit his teeth. Need. What if it was need in his voice? What if Hannibal needed him? He wanted to be needed. But god. What if he didn’t? His breath began to shudder. His panic started to crest, clawing free. He had to walk faster.

Ramming a shoulder against the nearest door, Will stumbled into a restroom and slammed a stall door behind him. He tipped his head back, trying to scrape air from his lungs with the hand clutching his ribs. The attempt to hide was about as non-existent as the one of him trying to pull away. Hannibal would have let go. He just sat there. Stayed. Obediently. His hands shook. He barely managed to lock it. Like a door was going to protect him. If Hannibal wanted in, he would just ask. And Will would let him. He always let him. He pulled the tie loose on his throat, gasping. He had been free of this, hadn’t he? Had stormed out of the older man’s office with in a rage of finality and thought it was over.

“I think our therapy has come to the end of its usefulness, don’t you, Doctor Lecter?”

He had made it as far as an abandoned stretch of highway. Anger hazing his vision. Radiator heat blasting. Idling engine muffling resentful moans leeching from grit teeth. He couldn’t help himself. He had come to the thought of swinging a backhand across a red lipped smirk and Hannibal’s sinewy hands wrapped around him. His vision had blurred for a second and in the mist he had seen something softer, kissing the bloodied split he had caused and asking to be forgiven. Self hatred had followed in a serious of panicked shudders. He knew how to hate Hannibal. It was solid and real and comforting. Most of all it maintained distance and kept him alone. He knew how to be alone. How to exist without being seen. He didn’t know how to do this. In spite of it all, he had somehow been lured back in. Allowed it to happen. Something was wrong with him. Why was he so drawn to Hannibal? Why couldn’t he just stay away from him? Maintain his distance. It had been so easy before. To keep them all at bay.

He braced cold aluminum, trying to catch his breath. To shake off the paralysis of memory. Of smooth, silken fingertips heating his skin through clothing. Far more forgiving than anything he had ever felt. His right hand dropped and settled over rough outlines of an erection. He hissed, eyes closing. He was over this. Had dealt with it. He had more self control than this. Didn’t he? This isn’t what he wanted. It was just a manifestation of physical loneliness. Jesus fuck. When was the last time? He closed his eyes. He thought of Hannibal touching his arm, reeling him close. He wanted to be touched. Comforted. Accepted… Who else had known him and stayed? Only Hannibal.

“What can I say? I’m unreliable like that.” Will balled fists against the door, slumping, voice


The younger man bit his tongue to keep groaning god, yes. He throbbed, released, and pressed against metal once more. He needed help. Everything about this was wrong. He shouldn’t want these things. Especially not with a suspect. And Hannibal was a suspect. Regardless of how safe and calming Will might find him. Even after what he had done to him. He somehow knew his arms would be as gentle as they were vicious… and if he ever knew them… it would be his end.

“Fine, Hannibal. Just…I need you to leave me alone,” Will ground out, dragging a wrist over tired eyes. “I have work to do. Jack is expecting me.”

“Very well.” He heard the older man’s posture straighten defensively, tugging crisp shirt cuffs. “Do you intend on keeping your appointment tomorrow? Or shall I slot another patient in your place? Since you fail to adhere to my cancellation policy, I would rather the polite courtesy of a direct answer from you now.”

“What can I say? I’m unreliable like that.” Will balled fists against the door, slumping, voice
Shoes echoed even after the door swished closed and stepped out in the middle of a lamp lined street swathed in luminous fog. He thought of going. Of dragging Hannibal back and drinking in grey light from his mouth. He stayed, smothering a need to follow and disappear.

*

Will scratched a hash line on the wall. A tray rattled to the floor. His one remaining signal of a new day. To face another stretch of hours. The tray stayed where it was. Glinting light beneath the door hit five of its companions, stale food untouched except for a buzz of flies. He stared at them a second longer before rolling away. They threw him in here. He owed them nothing. He wouldn’t eat. They couldn’t make him. His shoulder flinched. They could make him. But he wouldn’t think about that now. He curved an arm around protruding ribs. It was beginning to hurt to breathe. He wanted Hannibal. He couldn’t be dead. He couldn’t. Will refused to accept it. He was going to wait as long as it fucking took. Hannibal would come for him. He would.

A singsong sigh noted. “Fifteen days…”

“I know how to count,” The younger man hissed back automatically.

“Good to know.”

“Fuck—“ Will clamped a hand over his mouth, eyes screwing shut.

This had to stop. He snorted burning breath out his nose. His leg bounced erratically. He had to stop talking. It was one thing to do it in his head. But out loud? He had to stop. He had to stop answering. For fuck’s sake. What was wrong with him? He couldn’t do this. He hugged himself tighter. A different kind of pain had slowly replaced his physical aches. The kind that left him cold and shivering, starved for a glancing moment of touch. He had never wanted to remember rattling skeletons of loneliness embracing him. He was struggling to recall the texture of Hannibal’s hands in his, on him, around him. He didn’t want to lose that. It was all he had left. He grimaced and closed his eyes.

*

Ice clinked idly in a crystal tumbler. “What are you doing back there?”

“A child’s game of connect the dots.” A thin brush swirled a shoulder blade. “One of your favorites, was it not?”

The younger man wondered if he should correct or be perturbed his husband had described exceptional artistic talent as a whimsical game.

Will tipped his chin to a left shoulder, blue sliding to meet maroon narrowed in fierce concentration, a dry reply perched. “Some of us aren’t innately blessed with the creative, Hannibal. It was numbered dots and a few too many episodes of Bob Ross for me. Even then I never surpassed stick figures.”

Hannibal leaned away, squinting before sweeping a brush through a dab of umber and navy on wax paper, murmuring idly, “I adore your stick figures. You create them with such passion.”
They once had a scuffle once in the kitchen over Hannibal’s odd desire to display Will’s ‘art’ in frames in the office beside his own. Will had threatened to burn the house down. Hannibal had reluctantly sulked off. What Will didn’t know was there was an entire leather bound album dedicated to his ‘art’ hidden in plain sight of the library shelves.

Will snorted, curls drooping over rolling eyes. His heart felt...heavy. Weighted. Not like the one he had known before. Before Hannibal. He felt... Complete. His gaze fell down soft fuzz of grey trailing from chest to sternum, chaffed by a white sheet slung precariously around wide jutting hipbones. He considered leaning back and removing it with his teeth. If Will had to lie around naked for hours at a time it only seemed fair.

A wolfish smile answered. Hannibal kept his gaze on the painting. Will kept his eyes on him. “Is this Mister Ross an artist?”

“Sort of, yeah,” The younger man answered absently, fingers trailing a rigid thigh. “Though I can’t say his artwork would appeal to your senses.”

“I insist you stop moving.” Hannibal pushed him back on pillows arranged at the center of their bed, nearly smothering him to punctuate the command. “I am going to make a mistake.”

A grumbled paraphrase breathed out over downy feathers. “There are no mistakes. Only seagulls.”

“Are you drunk?” The older man asked inquisitively, knees shifting as he peered over, thin brow arced.

“Not entirely.” Will lifted his head, tossing a grin back. “Would you like me to be?”

“Remains to be determined.” The pointed edge of a wood paintbrush traced the inside his thigh and thwacked a swelling cheek lightly. “Now lie still.”

The younger man hummed, eyelids sinking, sting of pain turning his reply to a throaty growl, “Yes, Sir.”

Hannibal braced palms on his shoulders, leaning in cautiously, and drew soft flesh of a throat between teeth and dragged red across it. “Will.”

“Sorry, I keep forgetting what game we’re playing...” Will wriggled innocently, enveloped by increasing pressure of palms and teeth, leaking cock trapped between his body and the mattress. He rattled his glass in the air. “Maybe I am drunk. Would you get me another?”

A light smack was enunciated with a gentle squeeze of a cheek. “When I have finished the task at hand.”

"Wish you would finish me," Will grumbled, scowling at an innocent red silk pillow.

Head lolling forward, Will tried to steady harsh breathing and focus on the wisp of brush strokes forming across his back. He gripped pillows to keep still. It was more difficult than before. What was once soothing was now maddeningly tantalizing, need pooling hot between his thighs and boiling his blood. He rolled hips forward to find friction. Hannibal lowered his full weight against a lower back with a hushed tsk of feigned annoyance. The welcomed breadth of him, the wet heat, radiated through the thin barrier of sheets.

“Hmm...” Will reached and stroked a hand lazily up a bent knee, caught between lulling waves of peace and lust, the fine blur of pleasure and pain, his husband’s specialty. “What... was it like when they branded you, Hannibal?”
A paintbrush lifted. He stiffened instantly. The younger man opened his mouth and then shut it. He buried his face against forearms. He hadn’t meant to ask. They had never spoken of it. A throat clicked as the older man swallowed.

“Much like…” Hannibal began in a low thrum, resuming elongated brushstrokes. “…grazing one’s wrist on the burning coils of a stove. A blistering heat.”

Will winced, hoping his muffled voice would be too quiet to be heard. “It hurt?”

Paint slicked from his spine to a divot of his hip, pausing. “It was painful. Yes.”

“I hate that they hurt you.” The younger man burrowed deeper, brow twisting bitter resentment clenching his heart. “You wouldn’t have been there if it wasn’t for me.”

And it was my fault. I lead them straight to you.

“Sit up.”

Will stayed where he was. Pretending he hadn’t heard. He didn’t want to see him. Didn’t want to be reminded of exactly how human Hannibal was. That he could be hurt. Could bleed. Could feel pain. Pain Will had caused him.

Again. And again. And again.

A paintbrush sternly clacked a palette. It idly swirled a glass jar of lukewarm water. A rigid arm locked under a soft stomach and hauled Will o his knees, rocking him back on flexing thighs. Splayed fingers forced his spine to arch, to keep drying paint safe and a good foot of space between them.

“Stay.”

His eyes drifted closed, breath fogging hot. Will balled fists against his thighs, pushing his chest out, shoulders rolling to maintain the pose. To stay however Hannibal wanted him. Needed him.

“Good.” Hannibal's praise warmed the seam of his neck, sliding palms down hips and up his ribs in a gentle rhythm. “I had not realized it was you who set in motion my desire to consume you and then provided the follow through to act upon the impulse to do so. Putting us entirely in the precarious hands of Jack and a group of mercenaries. I always knew you were a clever boy, but all the same. Impressive. A feat for you, and only you, to have set it all in motion.”

Glinting crimson followed flickering blue sliding to escape, staring at a blinking clock on the nightstand. Will bit his lip, lower back aching to stretch and release. To push into Hannibal’s arms and let his head tip back to breathe him in. Until they were one. He didn’t deserve that. Not until he was allowed. He held his breath and the pose.

“Are you aware self blame is considered one of the most vicious forms of emotional abuse?” The older man whispered low against an ear, dragging nails lightly down a heaving chest. “It is likened to a form of paralysis amplifying the toxicity of our fears and inadequacies.” Breath whistled over flecks of wet paint, following a path of quivering muscles. “I bear the consequences of my actions alone. You are not responsible for their weight. Or the depth of scar tissue remaining.”

Will forced burning eyes closed. Every muscle in his body trembled. The older man cupped a hip and squeezed, signaling he was allowed to steady himself by reaching out. He jolted when gentle lips moved across his fingertips and down his wrist. Kindness was the least tolerable punishment Hannibal offered.
“What Cordell had planned for me was indelible honesty…” Hannibal drew Will’s head close and placed a chaste kiss on his cheek, voice lulling and dark. “I was deserving. After all the pain I had caused you. It was biblical.” A thumb traced the scar on his stomach, voice dropping to a low confession. “I only regret the mark was not made by your own hands.”

“I’ve given you enough.”

“All the same.”

The words cut ties of strength holding him upright. Will crumbled to the bed, stomach curled over his knees, whispering empty longing, for what they could not change. “I wanted you to stay…”

He had seen utter desperation writ across Hannibal in the equations lying open upon his bed and he had told him to go. To leave him alone. To live without him. To cease existing all together. Then to exist underneath reverent glass. To peer at him when the curiosity became too great. Safe and cut off from one another.

“You needed me to leave…” A sure voice wavered, thumb tentatively stroking a hip. “To sever our lifelines so yours might be returned to you.”

Pain shook his body, toes and fingers curling. Will scrambled upright and threw himself flush against Hannibal. He locked ankles round a waist as if he might be asked to let go. Lanced biting nails in broad shoulders as if they might fight to be free of each other. Coiled tight, tighter, tighter, sure neither of them could breathe. That he would never be able to be rid of Hannibal again. He wouldn’t let go. To ensure Hannibal would not leave him. Not again.

“You will ruin the painting,” The older man chided gently, twirling damp curls through fingers and kissing the crown of a head.

“Don’t care,” He mumbled against a greying chest, choking on a well of tears.

“You have had far too much to drink.” Glass clicked the safety of a solid surface, soft hands returning to his waist. Hannibal kissed the thin white scar on Will’s forehead, lingering a moment, lost in thought. “Would you like me to draw you a bath? To clean this from your skin?”

Neither voiced the questions: our scars? Or our past?

A feeble protest shook. “All your hard work.”

“I have painted this scene a hundred times, Will…” A sighing smile ruffled hair, tender lips winding down tear stained cheeks. “I will make you another, hm. For now, I wish to hold you. Is this an acceptable compromise? Or shall I discover you in the inkblots we create upon our sheets?”

Aching blue lifted. “Uh huh.”

Two figures clinging on the edge of a cliff, silhouetted by moonlight bled out in inky trails of smoke and muddied blue of tepid water. Inkwells of black palm prints and entwining skin remained on once pristine sheets to cool in the night.

* 

Hushed and frantic tones drifted underneath the cell door connecting a sterile hall.
“I’m not saying you should give up this pointless hunger strike. Just that if you’re going to kill yourself try something more effective. And less dramatic. You’re not fucking Ghandi.”

“No one asked for your opinion.”

“Technically you didn’t ask for your own opinion. Let’s be precise. And you didn’t have to. Do us a favor and put that broken mirror to good use.”

“Stop.” A desperate moan rose. “Just stop.”

“Have someone else better to talk to? Want it to stop? End it. End us. Easy.”

Two silhouettes stood close together, shuffling uneasily from foot to foot as the cell door creaked open.

The conversation halted and shadows went still.

“Is he…talking to himself?”

“Sounds like it.”

“Where the fuck is the little creep?” Flashlights swept over broken mirror. "Shit. Boss isn't gonna like this."

“Hm. There. Under the cot.”

A leather boot pushed abandoned trays covered in maggots. “He isn’t eating. She’s going to be pissed.”

“Not our problem. They said keep him alive. They never specified in what condition they wanted him breathing.”

“Hey, buddy…” Knees popped as they crouched a safe distance from the cot. Pills shook in an orange bottle. It was placed on the floor. A bottle of vanilla Ensure was placed next to it. The white straw was bent and poking through its crinkled wrapper. “Take these, would ya? Antibiotics. And for god sake, eat something.”

A gnarled hand shot out and dragged them beneath the cot with a hiss.

The guard scrambled back. A large hand lifted him to his feet and shoved him towards the cell door.

“Let’s go.”

“But shouldn’t we—“

“Go!”
Chapter 7

Will hummed softly, a shanty his father used to sing bent over a greasy engine and a lukewarm beer. It didn’t pain him as much now to hear it. The sun was high in a vivid blue sky. It was warm. He stretched against the bow and held the rail as waves rocked. The sea breeze a gentling cool of foam and soft spring time. Settling calm of water moved through him. Bright lilac eyes tipped over a shoulder with light even ringing laughter. He smiled back. He couldn’t help it. His soul was a comforting radiance. Elias had honestly never looked happier. His hair had grown. It fell in his eyes now and curled just at the tips of peaked ears. His pale skin held just a hint of candlelight freckled against cheeks. He looked like a cherub, rosy cheeked, and smiling. He also looked like a blinking beacon, indulging Will by wearing a fluorescent life vest and learning how to fish.

“Shouldn’t…” Elias tugged hopefully on the end of his line, peering over dangling feet at the empty hook beyond. “…Hannibal be sitting here?”

“Oh no.” Will shook his head hard enough to send curls scattering, eyes wide, and locked a hand around a narrow waist at the mere mention. He swore he felt the boat tip playfully in response. “We tried that. It…did not go well.”

A terse correction thundered from behind them. “It was an unmitigated disaster.”

“It wasn’t that bad.” Blue eyes rolled before looking back.

Hannibal was sitting cross legged on the deck, checkered picnic blanket spread, carving up their lunch in its center. Stacks of rolled salmon sushi and sliced cucumbers were beginning to take shape. The older man was concentrating on neatly giving each piece a feathered decorative edge. He had pulled his hair back loosely against the nape of his neck and loosed three buttons on the front of his shirt. He looked perfectly content for a man pointing a knife at Will and growling.

“It certainly was.” A knife glinted against a thumb.

Elias squirmed, eyes darting between the two gazes. It had been a year and a half since they met and he was still not entirely comfortable with their brand of teasing. Or amiable arguing. Or their real arguing. Which he seemed determined to mitigate despite the immediate threat presented when their arguments escalated from arguing to quarreling in the form of broken dishes and overturned tackle boxes. But he seemed to have the patience of a saint or a tax collector, and Will found himself in a constant state of admiration and awe for his unwavering loyalty to them both. They had come to rely on his presence. His friendship. His strangely formed sage wisdom blooming from such a young age. Elias provided a calm in their life, a steadying hand and intent desire to stay at their sides in the face of it all. It was strange to Will. But he supposed this was what it meant to have a family. They always stayed.

Will rolled eyes again and ruffled a hand through hair. “Don’t worry, sparrow, that little act of aggression was clearly directed at me.”

“You will join your ocean friends in a moment. Have no worries, Elias, Will is an avid swimmer. Aren’t you, my dearest?”

“If you’re lucky, Hannibal, I’ll take you with me just like last time. Or even the one before that if you
“want to get nostalgic.”

“What happened?” Elias swung bare feet, hiding a smile behind his wrist and returned his gaze to the sea. “Did you lose the fish? Or each other?”

“We may have…”

“Capsized,” Hannibal growled bluntly.

Elias nearly jumped out of his skin, clinging to his orange life vest as if the ocean might leap up and drag him under at any second. He stared back with wavering wide eyes and nearly dropped his fishing pole. It belonged to Will, a gift from Hannibal, and it was a beauty. All sleek black with a rolling steel plated reel. Perfect in every way. He found it charming to have someone else put it to good use.

“We didn’t capsize. Don’t scare him!” Will scolded with a stern glare. He leaned in with a mischievous grin to whisper a tiny confession. “We may have capsized a little, tiny bit.”

Lavender eyes widened with a blink of long lashes.

“Correct me if I am wrong, but is not the very definition, one of a boat belly up with a mast pointing to the ocean floor?” A fair brow rose. “Or did I misread the diagram?”

“Hey!” Will shrugged with a laugh. “We righted it, didn’t we?”

“Yes. After nearly two hours and the threat of meeting violent ends.”

“We’ve met plenty of ends far more violent than that one and made it out okay. Try to at least sound grateful.” The younger man cupped his hand over an ear, maintaining firm eye contact with Hannibal the entire time, grinning as he whispered, “He’s not a fan of sharks. And we have experienced worse.”

A thin blade jammed upright in a wooden cutting board with a twang. “William!”

“Told you.” His grin widened.

Leaning out, Elias watched glimmering ocean blue of their shadows skipping across its surface, nose wrinkling. “What exactly could be worse than sharks? They have so very many…teeth.”

“Oh, jeez. You too? Come on! They aren’t going to eat you.”

“Oh, jeez. You too? Come on! They aren’t going to eat you.”

“Nothing, our darling William, shall ever worry your pretty head about.”

Will rose an eyebrow in return. He was still not fond of anyone else’s name being followed by flourishing compliments. He begrudgingly allowed them, because he agreed with most of what could be deemed complimentary where Elias was concerned. He was just as frail and pretty as the day they had first met. He made a face at the older man and crossed his arms in semi-mock pretense. Hannibal offered whimsy with rows and rows of teeth hidden behind a congenial smile.

“Come eat your lunch.” A cork popped free from an olive green Dom Perignon bottle. “Before I allow the creatures of sea to have you. And by you, I do mean Will.”

“Well, gee, thanks, Hannibal. So generous of you.”

Elias handed his pole back to Will, sliding his feet forward to step around, and reached out for the rail to swing over the edge. “Well. I’m not a very strong swim—“
The priest lost his footing. He yelped. Will dropped the fishing pole. It hit the water with a splash. He snapped one hand on the rail and one around a thin waist, throwing them both against it. He steadied the shaking body against him, letting go very slowly. Elias dropped to his knees, head bowed to catch short breaths. He ran his fingers through wispy hair and left a soothing palm against a neck. He looked up.

Hannibal was staring at him, knife teetering in the balance. He had frozen mid crouch, preparing to sprint and dive after them. His mouth was hanging slightly open. There was a flash of something across his face. Shock. Anger perhaps. The older man set down the knife. It lay next to a set of flute glasses with a tremble. With a blink, he strode across the deck and reached over. He placed both Will’s hands firmly on the rail, mouth drawing to a tight line. Ah. The younger man grimaced. He was in trouble.

The older man lifted Elias with infinite care, cradled for a moment against his chest before setting him upright on his feet. The priest whimpered, sliding pale hands around his waist and buried a flushed face. Hannibal mouthed a gentle ‘I have you’ against his head. Will let out a breath he had been holding slowly. He was safe. They were all safe. Maroon eyes ticked to the side.

Shit. Was there still enough time to retreat to the safety of crashing waves?

Will found himself hauled over the rail by the front of his shirt and colliding with a clash of teeth. A stinging reminder of how Hannibal felt about precarious ledges and ocean landings. The younger man scoured fingers in silvering hair and loosed it from a leathery band, holding on, and let his request for mercy be devoured. It must have tasted sincere. Hannibal released him with a low growl and let Elias go with a soft push towards the picnic.

“I only see one predator here. And he is quite content to keep me...” Will let a slow fluid smile ripple on his face, adoring gaze turning up as he murmured against a frown. “Or eat me.”

Hannibal tipped his nose, striding across the deck. “Love is a regrettable affliction.” He paused a moment and placed a hand on the priest’s shoulder. “Are you hurt?”

Violet slid upward, brightening. “No. Only a bit shaken. Someone must have been watching over me.”

“Oh…” Will sauntered after them, hands in his pockets both brows wriggling up on his forehead. “I am pretty sure you mean me. You do mean me, right? And not some fictitious being?”

Elias tossed a brilliant grin and laugh over his shoulder. Christ, he was too adorable when teasing. It made it difficult for Will to be irate with the idea of his chivalrous act being credited towards someone or something else. The priest flopped on the picnic cloth crossed legged and beamed up at a brewing scowl. He was too cheery and bright to even look at.

Will narrowed eyes to peer through lashes. “The hell. Where is my ‘are you hurt, my darling husband Will’ or ‘bless you, you are an angel from above’ speech?”

“Elias.” Hannibal folded himself gracefully on the deck and presented a hand palm up, ignoring him. “Your plate, please.”

“No, no. That’s enough. Thank you, Hannibal. This looks lovely.”

Exquisite marbled grey china was handed over with a gracious ‘thank you.’ Fine, he could ignore them too. Grumbling, Will crouched down next to them. He tugged terracotta colored boots from his feet and set them aside next to a coil of rope. He had just gotten settled, brimming glass of
champagne in one hand and an empty plate in the other, when Elias scrambled up and raced across the deck. He nearly dropped both.

“Your reel!” Elias gaped over the edge of the boat and stared at a glassy ocean helplessly. He blanched to the shade of a quivering ghost. “I…I’m so sorry!”

“Come back over here…” Will snorted and pat an edge of the blanket beside him with faint hint of amusement. “…before you throw yourself over the ledge and I really do have to go after you. You know Hannibal will come too. And then he’ll bitch about how we ruined his…” He cast an eye over a pale peach dress shirt hanging loosely open and tried to detangle his words. “…this. Whatever he’s wearing.”

“Clothing?” The priest offered, shuffling sheepishly over before plopping down.

“Yu-huh. That… Now eat. The food, not—”

Hannibal shoved a plate of cucumber slices, carrot roses, and sushi into his hands. A glimmer of answering admiration rested in hooded eyes. Will tipped to his side and kissed a cheek. The older man turned his face and caught his mouth. He tasted crisp and punishing like the ocean. They slipped apart and Hannibal went back to molding a carrot into a large floral shape with perfect precision. Will lifted the champagne and paused. Elias was hunched, knees to his chest, plate balanced on them. His hand pushed it tight to his body. A bit of soy sauce dribbled down his chin. His long hair hung over his face, dull violet flashing. His cheeks were flushed. He stuffed another bit of sushi in his mouth. There had been six delicate rolls. There were only two left and one had just vanished.

“Will?”

Something ugly twisted Will’s stomach sour, brows furrowing. “I’m… not very hungry. Elias should have mine.”

A nose wrinkled, eyeing the plate as if Will had insulted more than just the food. Had personally attacked Hannibal and dismissed every hour he had toiled over a meal in preparation for their journey. Maroon gaze slid from blue eyes to Elias, understanding filling them. A roll of sushi was balanced between chopsticks and lifted to an open pink mouth on the cusp of being devoured. Dusky rose gathered in cheeks, violet eyes lowering.

Hannibal exchanged a final glance with Will before switching the empty plate with a full one, tone softening, “Very well. Will, you may share my portion. Here.”

Elias sucked in a quivering bottom lip, chin dipping, hair brushing his food. He squeezed forearms against his thighs, becoming even smaller. He locked eyes on his plate and refused to look up.

“Elias?” Will touched a right knee hesitantly.

A cheek flinched. “…S-sorry.”

Fuck. Red carnations flowered on cheeks, delicate lashes fluttering. He knew that look. He had worn that expression on his face many times.

“No…” He jammed his hand in a pocket and fumbled to find the phone, grinding his jaw until it clicked. “…want me to call Peter?”

“N-no.” Tears started to roll down cheeks.
Fucking hell. Will nearly snapped the phone in half to get it free. He glowered at his own reflection in the metallic surface. He forced his voice to filter harsh edges to petal soft breezes.

“I can call him. It’s okay, Elias.”

He wanted to put his arms around him and keep Elias in the protective circle of his embrace. The priest flinched away from his touch, fingers curling into fists. He wouldn’t look at them. Not Will. Or Hannibal. Will was reminded once again of peering in to a mirror and looked away.

“Hey…” Will knelt and put an arm around him. He was shaking. He sighed against a shoulder, murmuring, “It’s okay. Hear me?”

All he had to do was not notice. To say nothing. And they could have gone back to the sun and the breeze and their careless embracing of near deaths. He pressed the phone in a palm and helped Elias to his feet. Then he wouldn’t have to bear witness to his own weakness in another.

“At…” Hannibal studied them with slow sweeps, lifting the plate with a tender smile. “Take your meal with you below deck. You wouldn’t want it to spoil, would you? I would be most grieved.”

The priest shook his head fiercely, eyes on the deck. He took the plate, fumbled with the phone, and scampered down a ladder to retreat below with a trembling voice.

“P-p-peter… No, fine. He didn’t do anything. I…I m-miss you.”

Will rolled on to the flat of his back and stared blankly up the central mast at the sky beyond. He let his head fall against the deck. He was going to end up with a black eye. He had wanted them to have a good day. That was what Peter had told him. Threatened him was more like. And had he listened?

Make sure my dove has a good fucking day, Will, or I will be less than kind.

The vinyl picnic spread crinkled as Hannibal lay down beside him, maroon gaze sliding to the side. “That was very kind of you.”

“I made him cry.” Will scoffed. He closed eyes tight before forcing them open. “I’m an asshole.”

“He is not used to thoughtful gestures of selfless love, William. He is as sensitive at being seen as you once were,” The older man murmured, extending a hand in the space between their bodies. “One grows accustomed to being at the mercy of base need in favor of fleeting survival. Are you so estranged from the concept you no longer recall the immense struggle you faced every time you forced yourself to meet my gaze directly?”

He wriggled shoulders uncomfortably against the deck, palm dropping in a larger one. “Estranged would imply I’ve gotten past it.” He paused, mouth twitching. “Why didn’t you see it sooner?”

A dark horizon greeted him. “What was I to see?”

“He still eats like a fucking orphan,” Will snapped, trying to wrench his hand away.

Hannibal held tighter, propping up on an elbow and ran an index finger lovingly over the twist of his snarl. “You sound angry.”

“Of course I’m angry!” Will pushed back on the hand, rolling Hannibal on to his back, and lunged forward. “Winston used to do that when I first brought him home. Hunch over the food dish, snarling and snapping, if any of the other dogs got near. He ate so much he would be sick. He bit
The older man relaxed, observing his fury with a kind of fondness. “Starvation rekindles the primal compulsion to attack any who might threaten to stand over a fresh kill.”

“Shit. See, I am an asshole.” Will dropped his head to a chest and dragged his lips across exposed skin, sighing. “I’m sorry. I forget…sometimes. About your past.”

“As I had hoped you would. It is not for you to give thought to,” Hannibal murmured, drawing Will flat against him, fingers pushing up a white t-shirt to splay against a spine. “I was quick to deal with the threats to my survival, and the survival of the weakest in my orphanage, brutally and without mercy. I suspect Elias was not afforded the same comfort of a protector. Our habits borne out of terror often stay with us even as we ourselves move on and evolve into something else entirely.”

Turning his cheek, the younger man let the vibration of despair mute from the words spoken shake against him. Hannibal pushed fingers through his hair. He melted in, letting the sun blanket them.

“When I escaped and found a safe haven, my Uncle Robertus was convinced I was mad. He was not…incorrect. I was more feral than I was human. The loss of my family. My sister. The horrors I had seen and experienced were a part of me. I did not speak. A mute if you like, proverbial tongue cut out to never allow trauma to breathe against my lips. Snarled and snapped and grunted. I once attacked a servant for taking away my plate before I had finished. Nearly killed him. Hands at his throat. My aunt remained calm in the face of my violence, sipping her tea. She told me I might partake of her meal if I returned to sit beside her. Such a simple act of kindness, to a boy who did not deserve it, returned a part of me I had lost and gave me a purpose. To protect her.”

Turning his cheek, the younger man let the vibration of despair mute from the words spoken shake against him. Hannibal pushed fingers through his hair. He melted in, letting the sun blanket them.

“Christ…” Will muttered, dragging his nose against a sternum as he shook his head.

He forgot how easy it was. For Hannibal to detach when an avenue was beginning to darken and lead him to places less traveled. But also how easy it was for Will to get lost in his comfort, swept away, no longer struggling against it. He let it and listened to a heart beating. He would take care of it, of Hannibal. Neither of them would want again if they had each other.

A palm settled against his head. “What is it?”

“Peter is going to be pissed with me.”

“When is he not?” Lips curved against his temple.

“Yeah, but…”

“He still conducts himself under the notion you are coveting his songbird.”

“Covet.” Will balanced on elbows, struggling as hands drew him closer, and pieced his best ‘leave me the fuck alone’ face together. It felt strained and altogether too difficult to maintain. “Please. What am I? A verse from Exodus?”

Hannibal tipped the thought over the point of his nose and let it fall on his lips in a rippling smirk. “If you are, would you mind sharing your thoughts on ‘the sinful, earthly lurking things within?’ I am told worshiping them with ardor is considered damning to one’s soul. I cannot seem to help myself.” He rolled his head back on his neck and looked towards the ladder leading below. “Should we consult our priest on the matter?”
“You and Peter have a fucking problem,” Will replied flatly, rolling away. “I’m just as fond of Elias as you are. Admit it.”

Strong arms circled his waist and pulled the younger man into a larger crescent of warmth, cool nose pricking against his cheek, a murmur soft. “Does the sensation of loss pull at you every time you find our gilded cage abandoned for the beauty of cloudless skies of skin and rays of light?”

“I’m…having some difficulty adjusting. It’s new. He was ours first.” He sighed, settling in and wriggled back to find a perfected fit. The wording was possessive at best. They would talk about it later. “And despite his name, Peter is not a saint. So stop painting him with halos and shit in your mind, please.”

“You have such a beautiful, kind heart, William.” Hannibal moved lips up a relaxed neck, curve quirking against an ear. “I cannot say the same of your mouth. Though I am fond of it all the same.”

“Yeah. Okay.” Will huffed, fighting a smile of his own. “Let’s just keep it where it belongs, alright?”

“Where might that be?”

“In my chest. What? Do you need a diagram of that too?”

“I have several. They are called anatomical illustrations and have been around for centuries in even the most primitive medical textbooks.”

“Shut up.”

“May I at least have the privilege of holding it once in awhile?”

“Sure…if…”

“If?”

“If you promise to be gentle.”

“However could I promise to be anything else? Unless you were to ask it of me.”

*

Will woke up sobbing. Breath wrenching from his lungs. He curled in on his side, clutching his knees. His breathing was shallow and quick. He couldn’t catch it. No matter how many times he heard Hannibal telling him to calm his mind and simply inhale. He screwed eyes shut. He didn’t want to be awake. He needed to go back to sleep. He needed to see Hannibal. To be with him. He hummed loudly. Trying to recreate the last melody he had heard the older man sing, bloodied and broken against him in the alley. Pangs gnawed at his stomach. He struggled to catch his breath. He was so hungry and too weak to drag himself across the floor towards the sliver of light. Too cold to concentrate on gathering the strength to do so.

Twenty two hash marks lined the cell wall.

Go back to sleep.
Will sat in a daze on his couch, head in his hands. He should have been sleeping. More often than not he was awake. He barely slept. A few fitful hours here and there. Somehow his body continued to hurtle on and function. It was maddening. He preferred being awake now. Not that he could tell when he was awake or asleep anymore. He could be sleeping now. Hell, he could have been dead and this was his version of purgatory. It was difficult to tell. He stared at the chipped wood on his floor. Dog hair clung to his long knit navy pajamas. Nails scratched at the door. Pitiful whines grew louder. He ignored them and picked up a container of whiskey. He lifted it towards dim lantern light. It was half empty. He poured another glass and threw it back. It burned. He set both down with a thwack. Condensation left a ring around a polaroid loosed from a stack of files on the coffee table. He poured another and picked it up. A damp halo remained around deep blue eyes and brown hair.

Elise Nichols had shared his bed. He had woken to her shallow breathing beside him. He had rolled over in search of radiating warmth of skin and embrace. An experience lost to him now. He had forgotten what it was like to wake to someone else. To find you weren’t alone. Someone who cared enough to lie beside you to watch as you slept and made sure you woke. Instead he found her corpse, drained white skin and glazed eyes, drifting to a black crushing oblivion of blood. He had felt even more alone in the state of confusion that followed. It was fitting. They possessed a cleverness he admired. Even his nightmares knew enough of him to know to stay away. They saw him for what he was. Worth nothing more than the night sweats and terror they brought him. And he could offer them nothing else in return. Too broken, but not fractured enough to slip away. Will choked down another drink and hugged arms tight around his cold body. Everything was unbearable. He was drowning. In his dreams in the light of day. In his sweat choked sleep. In the moments he remained lucid and awake, drifting through the day as more horror was laid out before him and he was forced to look. Neither the living or dead found him worthy enough to keep his company. Not one of them reached out or saw he was slowly disintegrating behind his forced smile.

Blue eyes traced a path to the front door, locked and keeping the one good thing in his life on the other side. Safe from him. Filed nails scratched louder. He stared at the worn rug. Where he had collapsed. Jack had handed him a glossy stack of dead girls a week ago and sent him on his way. They stayed with him. His constant companions. He had sought the comfort of a smoky dive bar in hopes to drown out the images. Five shots in a curvy blonde had asked for him to take her home. Blue veins throbbed in her golden skin. Alive. He laid her out in the back seat of his Volvo instead. He didn’t see her face. Didn’t feel the welts on his back. Just held on and fucked to feel something, anything, except a numb pervading emptiness. The photographs had spilled across the mats. An elbow to the face and a scream left him ragged, hard, and alone. He had sped all the way back to Wolf Trap without remembering how he had done so. He couldn’t remember getting in his car. Then he was just there. His breath gasping, chest tight, he stumbled for the safety of his house. Where no one held him. No one saw him. And no one came to see if he still even existed. He was only a rusted tool to be used, to serve a purpose, and nothing more. No one needed him. He made it a foot inside the door before slumping to the floor, pitiful sobs echoing until he blacked out. He dreamt of dead girls. He woke in excruciating pain and headed immediately for self medication.

Bleary eyed, Will swayed unsteadily on the couch as he leaned forward to stare at the options laid out before him. The whiskey bottle was empty. He reached for a pocket knife and twirled it slowly. The metal was chilled. His hands shook. He turned forearms and watched spindly veins throb blue. He wished they would stop. His heart felt weaker every day. It was some cruel trick or curse that kept beating. To keep him alive long enough to remind him how much pain he was in. It was getting harder to repress, to hide from himself and those around him. He flicked the blade open. There was no guarantee it could offer solace. He set the knife down. He pushed several orange bottles of painkillers to the side. They would bring him peace. It would be easy. He would just drift off to sleep and then…nothing. He didn’t deserve such a delicate end. The bottles dropped to the floor and
rolled underneath the couch. Tears pricked up the back of his throat with a sting. His gaze fell to a right corner of the coffee table. Tarnished silver gleamed. His father’s old colt revolver. His old man was either still in a constant sloppy stupor or had drank himself to death by now. If it was the latter, Will wondered what his secret was. He was clearly doing something wrong.

He knew what was wrong. It was him. He was what was wrong.

Fingers slid around a rough grip. Initials of T.G. were worn by cruelty and time. Will lifted the revolver. It felt like nothing. There was no weight to it. He pointed it and caught the fireplace in the front sight. He had first learned how to shoot when he was eight. Tin cans lined up on a rickety fence after school. He had taught himself. A half empty carton of bullets later, his father had come home and beaten him for playing with it. When he was sixteen, Will bought his own bullets and retrieved the gun from its hiding place taped behind the refrigerator. He had managed to load the chamber before his father came at him. He had the gun pointed at the center mass of a chest before the first swing. A warning shot lodged in a black and white photograph of his mother. He left that house for the first time in his life without bruises, duffle bag on his shoulder and the weight of a revolver in his windbreaker, and never looked back. He had used it twice since then. Once on a trucker who put his hands on his dick when he was hitchhiking. And another time during a back alley mugging when walking home from the shipyard in Louisiana. He put it away after he was assigned one of his own by the police department. It had remained in various drawers forgotten until now.

Will slipped a thumb across the safety latch. It slid noiselessly to the left. The revolver was spotted from the tip of the barrel to its hilt with tarnish. It needed a good cleaning. A better owner. A more worthy person. He drew back the hammer. It shuddered with a resounding yes. He turned the gun to catch the lamplight, dark teary eyes lost to its reflection. He considered the best way to go about it. He rolled a tongue in a dry mouth. He had choked down enough shit in his life. He wasn’t inclined to add more suffering even if it was the most effective method. He pressed the muzzle to a temple and let out a rasping breath. His hands had stopped shaking. His gaze slid towards the front door where his dogs remained safe and free from his destruction. They deserved more. A loving, stable family. They would find good homes. A faint smile touched his mouth. He let his eyes close and heard the familiar shudder of a pendulum swing. He saw his lifeless body. The blood and brain splatter across the couch, splashed across a ratty lamp shade, pooling in the cushions. He felt the flash of camera bulbs across him. He was already a crime scene. This would just allow someone else to see it.

Will let his index finger slip over curved metal. He took a deep breath. And squeezed the trigger. The hammer clicked.

Nothing happened.

His eyes snapped open. He shoved the barrel against his temple. It would bruise. Will tried again. Click, click, click. The sound became more frantic. Then erratic. And finally stopped. A bubbling moan of despair fell flat across chaos of empty furniture and a dozen unseeing eyes. The younger man brought the gun away and snapped open the chamber. It was empty. His own form of safety and life insurance. A hysterical laugh screeched. His mouth began to tremble. He began to shake. A raw scream pierced the air. “Christ!”

The revolver sailed across the room and crashed against a mantle above the fireplace. It skid across the floor and landed beneath the looming shadow of a sagging grey sofa chair. Will scoured hands through sweat damp curls and hunched forward. His stomach roiled. He was going to vomit. Sobs fluttered in aching lungs and broke free.

“I can’t even kill myself without fucking it up.” Will pressed his face to knees, hands clamped on his neck and started to rock. “Fuck!”
A sharp insistent ring reached his ears. He jammed teeth against a knee to smother a pitiful cry and glanced up. His cell phone buzzed against the coffee table. The screen was face down, lighting up wood beneath. He reached for it out of habit. He flicked it open and pressed it to an ear.

Flame riddled timbers of a forest echoed. “Hello. Will?”

“…Yeah?” The younger man stared blankly at the floor, sniffling a hoarse reply. “This is.”

“It’s Hannibal Lecter.” There was brief pause of consideration, static rustling through the speaker. “Is this a bad time?”

“Depends on your point of view,” He answered bitterly.

“And what viewpoint might I assume to better understand the situation?” Fingers swept tenderly over keys, leather of a chair crinkling before fabric hissed. “Or is it more expedite to experience the situation through an immediate visual?”

Hannibal was getting up. Putting on a coat. Keys jangled.

“Would you kindly give me your address, Will?”

Will clamped his tongue between teeth to keep from bursting into tears. He threw himself to a corner of a couch and curled up to keep from trembling. He wanted someone to find him dead and mourn him. He didn’t want them to see another facet of his failure. But he wanted someone to see him. To know him.

“Mine. And no.” He tried to bit back the response, clip it in two, to continue to choke on everything unspoken warring within him. “I don’t recommend it. Not everyone befriends their monsters.”

“On the contrary…” He could hear the doctor tilting his head. “I believe becoming intimately acquainted with our nightmares allows us a path to discovery. Of who we are. And what we might become.”

“What if you aren’t interested in finding that out exactly?” Will shot back harshly.

Keys stilled on a surface, door closing softly. “Would you like to come over, Will?”

“To talk?” Thick brows scrunched derisively.

He didn’t want to talk about this. He wanted it to stop. To go away. To cease to be. He didn’t want to die necessarily. He just didn’t want to breathe anymore. It was too much. Too hard. Too painful. He didn’t want to exist. What was something like him allowed to exist for anyway? He was beginning to suspect his life was one big cosmic joke. His gaze lifted skywards. He hoped to Christ whatever was up there was having a good fucking time.

“Well, I have just finished preparing coq au vin, braised and simmered in pinot noir. Its generous portions might be more suitable for two. You may join me at my home? Or we might meet at the office. Whatever makes you more comfortable,” Hannibal drawled evenly, voice lifting to a low note of a b flat dragged across a cello. “I am only here to provide what best suits your needs. Was it you need, Will?”

Oh god. He clutched at his ribs, wincing. A threading whine lodged in Will’s throat, pain blooming fresh and hot in his chest.

“All of this makes me uncomfortable.”
A phone shifted against an ear, muffling a disappointed sigh. Will clung to it through the speaker and wrapped both hands around it. He was used to letting people down. This was different. Hannibal wanted his company.

God forbid we become friendly.

“But…” A needy gasp was swallowed whole and shook out in a weak rasp, “I could eat.”

“Then I would be pleased to have you.” A dark smile reverberated. “For whatever you might need.”

*

Thirty two marks etched the wall. Lines growing weaker and weaker.

Will scratched one elbow across cement. And then the other. His knees chaffed after in sluggish pursuit. Ragged strips of the blanket knotted together trailed after his crawling form. His left wrist was stinging and raw. He had tried to chew through it to reach the veins. He had passed out once. Thrown up twice. A feat for him given how little remained of his stomach content except churning bile. Evidently he couldn’t stand his own taste. Acid amusement lingered somewhere in the depths of his mind. Hannibal had never had that problem. He had started hallucinating. He knew in his moments of clarity what was happening. The visions were getting worse. He had seen less and less of Hannibal. Abigail and Beverly had come and gone more than he cared to count. They had become scattered. Flashes of memory blurred with horrific crime scenes. Soft moments jarred by fractures of peeling skin and dead eyes seeping through. He was scared to go to sleep. He was terrified to be awake.

If he wasn’t collecting a prism of events to create a fractured hallucination, he was experiencing something far worse. He was getting lost. He wasn’t sure where he was. There were no pens and clocks to keep him grounded here. He tried to hold on, to auditory cues of the creaking springs and the dripping water. But they were growing faint. His mind kept dragging him back. He was helpless. He would wake to the smell of his own blood and sweat. Strangle of chains and leather returned. Screaming either in the present or the past. To find himself once more at the cruelty of Nicolas Lisandru. He couldn’t. The resounding echo of dress shoes was louder than the breathing dark. Harsh scrape of nails on his thighs. The excruciating pain before it was over. Only to begin again in another passage of time.

Will choked on a strangled plea for help. His lips were split, mouth and throat too dry from dehydration to create a real sound. His cracked and broken nails searched for crevices in the cement wall. He hauled himself up to weak knees. Sweat broke out on his forehead. His biceps shook from the effort to hold on, straining to stand. This was his last chance. Hannibal was gone. There was no one to save him. He had to save himself. With a cry of pain, the younger man stood and slumped against the wall to catch his breath. He wouldn’t be able to stay this way for long. Gravity pulled at every atom in his body. The floor invited him to rest and let the madness take his mind. His physiological functions would give out. His heart would shut down. His liver and kidneys would fail. It was a matter of time. He didn’t want time. He wanted a choice. This was his choice.

He fumbled to reach slotted bars. His toes cramped as he threw the blanket up. A corner slipped through. His fingers stretched to reach an edge. They scratched over wool, pushing it through. He lost his footing, hands snapping on the strip of cloth. He pulled himself back up with chattering teeth. He gave it a firm tug. It was steady. Secure. He molded his spine against the wall and looked up. It wasn’t high enough for a fall. He knotted an edge of blanket around his throat. He balanced on tip
toes. He tested the give of his knees. He would just have to let go. Force his body to go limp. Without a drop, his neck wouldn’t break. It would be slow. Agonizing. Tears welled in his eyes. But it would be far more merciful than this.

And...he would be with Hannibal again.

Knees popped as the younger man slumped with a heavy sigh. His chin snapped upright as pressure dragged the weight of him down. His hands instinctively flew up, clawing at the pitiful noose. Fraying cloth tightened in a black gripping line against his trachea. Will clenched his jaw, snorting out breath through flaring nostrils. His clothes chaffed against cement. He tried to keep still as limp feet began to shake on dangling ankles. Red began to dot his vision. A fitting pool of blood slid through the dark screen of eyelids. A flash of numb shot through his arms. His torso began to jerk with a gurgling inhale. The last scent of Hannibal filtered tenderly inside glowing fire riddled lungs. Will smiled.

“But I love you, Will...” Lips scoured down a neck and nibbled lightly on a freckle on a shoulder. “Would you deny me?”

Will pushed at the heavy wall of Hannibal’s chest moving against him, caught in the tangle of their legs and the palms pressing him against the mattress. He was wrapped in the gauze of the older man’s words and bound to the cursory spells cast against his skin. Faint morning light washed their naked flesh silver with a light patter of rain. He arced his chest up to a mouth releasing a darting tongue, holding on to a scatter of falling hair and sighed.

“One of us has to get up...” He groaned, knee tracing ribs. “…and let out the dogs, Hannibal. They’ll piss on the rugs and you’ll be furious.”

Hannibal looked up, bent over a torso, and released a budding nipple between teeth with a light scrape, frowning. “Can we refrain from speaking of such things when my mouth and other pressing parts of my anatomy are upon you?”

The younger man shrugged lazily, biting on his lip to refocus the sting. “Just stating the facts.”

“You’re problem, William...” The older man slid up his body, pausing to trace a tongue against a suck mark on his throat. He rolled hips down, smile tilting at the gasp it elicited. “…is you have a tendency to talk too much.”

Will reached down, keeping his gaze steady with smoldering maroon, gripping both their cocks in a lazy pull, breathless. “Telling me to shut up, Doctor?”

A hot tongue swirled between his teeth. “Among other things.”

Large hands trapped his wrists against pillows as Hannibal began to drink him in with gentle reverence, bodies of ocean and tide finding one another in slow rhythm.

“Do you love me, Will?”

“You know I do. So much. So ah...much.”

“Say you belong to me.”

“I’m yours. Just yours.”
“Oh dear sweet William…” Nails scoured down a heaving slender chest, pushing breath from lungs. “Had I only known…I might not have let Cecil put a bullet in my perfectly formed brain.”

Will's eyes flew open, gasping for air. He clawed at arms holding him down. Nicolas smiled coldly down at him from above, lashes drifting over choking ivy green. He brushed a cruel mouth harshly across a forehead, jerking a face up by roots of hair.

“Did you miss me?”

* * *

Matthias loped down the corridor, hands stuffed in baggy pockets and fiddled with a flat circular pill tucked against a cotton seam. The hallway seemed endless to him. Door after door after door. It seemed to stretch forever. Another universe suspended by the static of aged steel wire lights. He glanced over his shoulder. No one had followed him from the pharmacy. He had flirted with the nurse there to get the valium. He could abide by cold blooded murder and kidnapping. But suffering was something he didn’t have the stomach for. The nurse had pretty skin. Kind blue eyes. She was younger. But not by much. Nineteen or twenty. She seemed to like him. He hated the idea of leaving again on a job without at least asking her out for dinner. Not that there was any real potential for a relationship when dating a mercenary. But he was still young in age, though maybe not in spirit. There was time to change. To be become better. He would ask her out then. Darek would have called him a whiny lovesick bitch. But what did he know anyway? The man could dismantle a sniper rifle in a flat two minutes, but that didn't help where matters of the heart were concerned. He popped a scratched key in a lock on the cell door labeled twenty three on the left and turned it. What would he call him at this very moment? The cell door swung open.

“Blessed saints...” Matthias dropped the key and screamed. “Help! I need help!”

The prisoner of cell twenty three was hanging on the interior wall by a shredded piece of blanket. His face was bright red and sickly grey with blue broken blood vessels. His body was seizing violently, feeble choking noises echoing in the empty darkness.

Matthias reached for his gun. He didn’t have it. He had left it in his locker before seeing the nurse. He hadn’t wanted to scare her. He didn’t have time. He would have to risk it. Boots slammed down the stairwell.

“Hurry up, you slow ass motherfuckers! I need help! Now!”

He barreled forward and tripped over a pile of food trays. Matthias cracked his brow on the wall, skin splitting open. With another swear, he blindly weaved towards the horrific sound of spit and gasps. He jammed arms around a torso and got a sharp kick to the stomach. His breath pushed out in a wheeze. He held tighter and lifted. Nails tore at his scalp.

He grunted, ramming his head against a sternum. “For a creep that doesn’t eat, you sure are heavy.”

Batons and boots clattered around the corner.

“Aww, fuck! I told you!”

“Shit.” Darek hulked forward, rolling sleeves up burly arms and shoved Matthias out of the way. He lifted the prisoner almost to the ceiling, snarling, “Get him down!”
A weak gasp of air resounded, noose loosening.

Matthias caught the pocket knife tossed to him and hopped on the back of a guy with black and red tattooed sleeves running up his arms. He felt the absurd need to introduce himself. He began slicing frantically. How the fuck had the prisoner even managed to reach high enough to hang himself anyway?

“Hurry up!” A boom ordered.

“I’m fucking trying!” Grey eyes slanted down.

The prisoner wasn’t moving. He wasn’t even sure if he was breathing. He hoped, just for a second, the man was dead.

“Come on! Faster!”

With a final tear, the blanket unraveled and broke free from slotted bars above. The body fell limply over a shoulder, arms dangling. Darek hefted him up, stormy scowl clouding his face before stomping out. Matthias hopped down with mumbled thanks and hurried after his superior officer. He peered at the pale face draped in long matted dark hair and thick beard. Was he breathing? Was even alive?

Don’t be alive. Find some peace.

They made a sharp right down another corridor.

Fingers quirked, wedding bands rattling on bony fingers. “N…n…no…”

A swinging door banged open. Darek heaved the body forward and let it slide across cracked beige tile. It rolled to an eerily still stop. White light stretched long across a row of showers doused in darkness. Another death rattle eased from white lips. A moss covered handle screeched. A deluge of cold water plastered the prisoner’s limp body below.

Thick arms crossed, sneering. “Pathetic bastard.”

The body jerked to life with a series of gasps. Arms rose to cover a face, tear stained blue widening. The prisoner began to shake. Matthias moved to turn the water to hot and help him beneath it. They would give him hypothermia at this rate. A meaty hand clapped over his chest as his superior turned to glower at him. He stayed where he was, sliding hands back in pockets. Maybe he needed a valium after this.

“I…want…” Broken breath rose in bloom of white. “…to see…Hannibal…”

“Oh don’t worry, pal.” Darek snickered, green eyes lighting up. “Where you’re going you can see him all the time.”

The large mercenary turned and pointed to the tattooed man lurking in the doorway. He jabbed a thumb in the direction of the shower, barking out orders.

“Get to work. Both of you. Hose him down. Find him a new uniform. And for god sake, cover up the markings on his neck before we all get fired. And make sure this one—” A meaty finger swung towards Matthias. “—doesn’t fuck it up.”

With a grit of teeth, Matthias loomed over the prisoner and commanded harshly, “On your feet, convict.”
He needed medical attention. Not...this.

“Hey pal...” The slender mercenary with the skin head sidled over and rammed a chest down with his boot. “He’s talking to you. Show some fucking respect.”

Deep throaty snarls rose with a set of steel glinting from sunken eyes.

* 

Folding hands across a steel table, Hannibal eyed steam roiling from a Styrofoam cup filled with a flimsy tea bag with disdain. The yellow stringed label read, Lipton. A fresh pad of paper and a set of pens were stacked beyond it. An hour ago he had his head held under water, happily on the verge of collapsing lungs, and now he sat here. In a new room. Still breathing. Force fed and alive. As he had been for what felt like an eternity, but was more likely only weeks. His mouth suppressed a twinge of a snarl. He had been allowed the privilege of collapsing beneath a hot spray of water and given a freshly crisp prison uniform first. It had taken three men to dress him. A low loathsome growl shook weakened lungs. They had cut his hair and carved his face with a blade to reveal protruding bone and shaven skin. They had put him here. Chained to a table. With yet more time. And a blank glow of cheery yellow and cerulean lines waiting for his confession. Steam rose sweetly against his cheeks.

With a start, the older man sent the cup flying across the room with a vicious back hand. Chains around his wrist clanked furiously. Tea bled across the paper, crinkling empty lines. It sailed after before crumpling against a wall of glass. Beyond his reflection was a mirror image of the room he was in. One steel table and stool bolted to the floor. A round black and white clock on the wall. It was evidently 7:15 pm on some god forsaken day. There was a single door leading in and out. In the upper left hand corner of the ceiling, a red light blinked inside a mounted plastic camera. He sat back down, slowly, crossing one leg elegantly over the other and released a heated breath. He had to maintain his composure. It was something he still possessed a degree of control over. A door knob rustled. He inclined his head, glancing back out of the corner of his eye. Keys scraped in a lock.

The lights surged. A glow of emergency red cast over the room with a flicker. Sirens blared from speakers in the distance. A wing tipped shoe stepped in. Hannibal let his chapped lips pull back to flash a pleased glint of teeth.

"To what do I owe the pleasure..."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for missing last week's update, everyone. It was.... a week. Let me tell you. I had one of the following happen Monday through Sunday. Came down with the stomach flu. Mini blizzard. Had no hot water. Had only cold water. Had no heat. Car got stuck in a snow drift and was late to work. Car wouldn't start after work. Had a mini breakdown on Saturday night. And am currently stuck in the purgatory that is Christmas rudeness with midnight closes and seven am opens. Ahh, I'm so tired of everything, guys. And while I was being a human popsicle I wrote about not having any heat via a prompt from slashyrogue, which was actually mildly therapeutic for a bit. (http://hallofmybeginnings.tumblr.com/post/154528747204/thank-you-to-darling-and-talented-slashyrogue-for#notes)
What I'm trying to say is.... I'm sorry. So I wrote you two chapters today. And on a completely different note, even writing that creep's name from TS makes me feel icky. I still hate him as a character. Yuck!

Also, how are you guys doing? xoxo
45 minutes earlier…

Jack stood pacing outside arched burgundy oak doors, fingers tapping on the brim of a suede hat. He stopped mid stride, listening to a voice escalating on the other side. He shuffled his weight to a left foot. Then he glanced at his silver Rolex. It was 6:43 p.m. Exactly how long was he expected to wait? He began pacing again, camel wool trench coat trailing anxiously after his form. The mashed box of cigarettes burned against his chest inside a breast pocket. His eyes flicked to sterile white and black signs reading, No Smoking. If he had to wait much longer he was going to light one up and takes his chances with setting off the smoke alarms. He had a feeling the mercenaries would give at least some thought to shooting a former F.B.I agent on sight.

Former…

He ground the word between teeth and swallowed it whole. If he played his cards right, he would never have to think or say that word ever again. He would be able to carry himself with the lumbering power he became accustomed to. Regain his status and respect. He would have his badge and gun. Instead of a filing box of affects growing mildew in the basement. No one would whisper about him as he passed through halls of his former glory. Not anymore. They would scatter to their designated corners and offices and cubicles like they used to. With a single narrowed glance. He missed making them scurry.

“I gave you strict orders!” A shrill voice shouted.

Brown eyes drifted towards the doors. An alarm began to blare. Jack swore and clamped palms over his ears, peering around him. Three mercenaries in black bullet proof vests raced passed him and down the hall. He was done waiting. He shook his head and pushed through the doors. He closed them, grateful to muffle the sound on the other side.

“You disobeyed! Their deaths are on you. Don’t argue with me! Their funeral costs will be coming out of your cut.”

A phone slammed repeatedly on the desk before being jammed into its cradle.

“You should have told me…” Jack began slowly, thick brows rising.

Slim pale fingers tensed on an oak desk, reply cold. “And what was I was supposed to say?”

“You should have told me what you were up to,” He replied, ambling cautiously in the office before perching on the edge of a cabriole legged chair. “We’re on the same side.”

“I don’t have to tell you a damn thing, Jack.” Flashing blue sliced backwards through a fringe of ebony. “I brought you in on this to help. Not to interfere. I can just as easily take away the extended courtesy.”

“You didn’t have to blind side me, Alana.”

A red mouth drained white in a thin line as Doctor Bloom turned. She looked almost exactly the same. Her hair was much longer. Swept up on her head and pulled back with a set of shell combs.
She crossed arms over a crème chiffon blouse, leaning back against the desk. A thin wax black pencil skirt hugged long pale legs. A triangular leather belt cinched her waist. Six silver and white gold bands of geometric shapes wound across her left fingers. She regarded Jack with the same level of infuriating righteous indignation he had remembered. Her eyes were bright, with a steely hint, a mere glimmer of the years in hiding, finally taking its toll.

“My wife hasn’t slept peacefully in more than three years, Agent Crawford, and I was not about to let there be a fourth or fifth,” The doctor replied curtly, gesturing to their surroundings. “I wouldn’t have needed to employ other means if you simply would have done your job as I asked. As I paid you to do.”

Jack bristled, letting his tensed jaw rest in a palm and tossed his hat to the desk, fixing her with a level stare. “You left me hunting after spectral trails of ghosts.”

“The scales have fallen from your eyes now. Isn’t that enough? That I thought enough of you to include you?” Alana watched him down the bridge of her pointed nose, frown deepening as she spoke coolly. “If the plan failed, I would have only myself to blame and you would be none the wiser.”

And I would be stuck being the disgrace of the F.B.I., the madman hunting the dead.

He thought about questioning her methods. Ask if she was indeed following in the footsteps of a disfigured psychopath to extract information. He had heard the guards talking when he passed. Had his own suspicions long before that and brushed them aside. If she was, this was the right place for it. As off the books as anything. Secluded. Private. With plenty of time to do as she pleased. He wasn’t her superior. Not even her colleague anymore. It wasn’t his place to ask questions or make insinuations. Above his pay grade once again. He let it go.

“Fine.” The camel coat crinkled as Jack fished out a pack of cigarettes. He tucked one in his mouth, mumbling around it. “What now?”

Long fingers swept forward expectantly. “Now?”

Jack regarded her curiously for a moment before handing his last smoke over. He cupped a palm and lit the end. Alana brought it to her mouth and breathed in, releasing smoke with closed eyes and a weak smile. He lit his own and did the same. They stayed in the silence of clouding grey for a few bleak moments, exchanging occasional glances. They always had been skilled in speaking only when necessary. They specialized in it. Survivors unwilling to echo the other’s sentiments. In the end, they had been partners in destruction and death. Until both their lives had inverted with a single crime scene.

“Now…” Alana shifted on the desk, exhaling grey, and motioned to a computer screen. “We put you in a room with him.”

Leaning forward on his knees, Jack flicked ash with his thumb and squinted at the screen. A fiery growl twisted his insides. Back of his eyelids gathered with heat. It tugged at his mouth. He glanced up with a toothy smile. He would know that grainy pale silver and blue outline anywhere.

They had Hannibal Lecter. Alive and well.

“And if he makes it out, well…” Alana exchanged the smile with a glimmer of her own. “That’s a discussion for another day, now isn’t it?

Their cigarettes glowed in tandem as lights flickered and doused the room in red.
“To what do I owe the pleasure, Jack?”

Hannibal swiveled on his stool as far as handcuffs would allow, eyelids sinking over a darkening gaze. The agent’s name tasted heavy like the bitter sting of marror herbs. He was not so much pleased as he was eager. To end it. He had been the man’s prey for far too long. And the older man was growing intolerant of being pursued and confined. It was no longer the amusement it once was. It was one thing to trap and strip him of freedom. Quite another to involve Will. It wouldn’t do. He wouldn’t stand for it.

Gleaming leather shoes slid through the doors and a hat tipped. He saw the hint of a gloating smirk being reeled in. He tampered low simmering rage with a command to still the muscles in his face, washing it blank. Who would they be making a sacrifice of this night? The lamb? Or the beast.

Jack pushed the door shut. It locked with a heavy bang. He loomed in a corner of the room. Smoke rolled off his presence as he peeled out of a heavy coat and folded it over a metal folding chair in the corner. Liberal notes of a rich spicy cologne wafted. Hannibal remembered the scent from his days in the BSHCI. The woman was still with him. She was more than likely his wife now. A manila folder appeared. Jack’s face was still mountainous, pocked caverns and craters, marked by the passing years with a series of grooved lines. Peppered salt was much thicker in his short cropped hair. More than anything he looked haggard, tired, body heaving sluggish motion. Hannibal took some pride in that. He and Will had caused him a metaphorical kind of death after all.

“I wish I could say the same…” The agent slung meaty fists in trousers pockets and tipped on the wall with an easy grin. “But I always knew you would end up where you belonged.”

Pushing a flat edge of a tongue along sharpened insides of teeth, Hannibal returned the amiable smile and smooth reply. “Should I be concerned?”

Dark eyes considered the sirens as red lights continued to strobe. The agent shrugged.

“Am I to owe my thanks then to you as my benefactor?”

“I’m just the messenger.”

“Alana then I presume?”

A corner of a mouth shifted slight discomfort.

Hannibal thought of Jack’s wife. Presumably a pretty young thing. He turned his attentions toward the life Alana had built with Margot. Their child. If there remained only one. Resentment charred his mouth. They had their lives. Their families. Why couldn’t they have left his and Will’s in peace? Did they deserve less simply because of who, or what, they were?

“Alana.” The older man tsked, shaking his head, hands spreading with a clatter of metal before turning the profile of his face towards the blinking camera and gazing in. “Poor, sweet Alana. She must be terribly unhappy in the life she leads now to return her wife and child to me so freely.”

His index finger twitched. He had warned her. On two separate occasions. She would not receive a third. The bruise marks on his throat throbbed. Char marks of a taser lit up from when the Goliath
had added electrocution to their daily routine. She had done this to him. Hannibal could accept his suffering without so much as a blink of the eye. But Will. His eyes sunk closed with a flash of red. No. Whatever affection he had possessed for her was gone. His leniency had run out. Alana knew the consequences. He would end her.

*Don’t be brave.*

Jack pushed free from the wall and ambled closer, pointing to layers of gauze wrapped around a wrist. “He do that to you?”

“This?” Hannibal glanced down.

He had been too busy being drowned to check for the possibility of infection. He hadn’t been taken with fever. He could safely assume the flesh torn by the prison grate had begun to heal. Though he could not say how well or if it would scar. At least the torture had passed enough time for him to be able to put weight on his leg. The cast would have to stay for another few weeks. He could move without feeling like pain was choking him. A general improvement for a man hanging on the precipice of death.

“It would stand to reason,” Jack continued evenly before sitting on an edge of the table, glancing down at the crumpled legal pad. “Seeing as how Will turned out to be a biter after all.”

Hannibal felt a jagged smirk pull his face as he looked up in a shadowed face at an angle. “This is entirely of my own accord. Though if you are asking whether Will’s proclivities are fueled by that of a sexual nature, Jack, I’m not terribly inclined to answer. We would like our private lives to remain private.”

Muscles ticked a jaw. Ah, his favorite past time returned. Prodding the man until he squirmed. Inwardly, Hannibal allowed his smile to take hold and continue to curl until it split open his jaw, maw waxing and falling open to take off the entirety of the agent’s face. He could have lived his entire life without seeing it again.

“He just killed three guards.” Thick fingers wiped a stubble beard. “Did you know that?”

With a short intake of breath, Hannibal forced fingers to remain still on the table instead of clenching. He blinked slowly, to keep the flutter in his chest and lungs steady, not allowing even a flicker of emotion on his face. Will was alive. God. He wanted to lay his head down and weep. All he had endured. It was all worth it.

“Ah, needless to worry then after all…” The older man mused, rolling fingers and studying caked blood beneath nails. He tried to keep his tone muted to contain the inflection of aching need to know more. “Have they yet contained the situation?”

“Two. With his teeth.” Jack hunched forward, eyes narrowed. “Just ripped their throats out. Another he bludgeoned to death with his own gun. Can you imagine? Well, of course you can, Doctor. Hell, I’d even go so far as to say you look proud.”

It dawned on Hannibal he let his mask slip. He felt the color in his cheeks return with a kind of feverish heat. His eyes felt bright. He was smiling.

“One cannot help but feel pride…” He rubbed a wedding band fondly, airy sigh escaping. “…for the depths of love’s creation raining fury upon those who would otherwise threaten its existence.”

If Will was killing than there was enough left of him to come back to Hannibal. He would see him again. It was enough to hold on to. Until Will was in his arms once more.
“This—“ Photographs slid across the table. “This isn’t love. This is fucking sick. You made him this way. Does he enjoy it as much as you do now? I never took Will for a sadist.”

Plucking a photograph, Hannibal studied grainy details printed on thick white copy paper. It was a still capture from a video recording. The details were difficult to make out. But Hannibal would know the blur of limbs bent over a body anywhere. Will. His breath caught. Even in black and white he could see blood spilling over and through a tiled stall of showers. The kill was fresh. Recent. His index finger ticked lightly against curls. The marrow of his bones stung. He wanted to hold Will. Kiss his mouth and whisper how very much he missed him. How sorry he was. He pushed the copies aside and lifted a set of eight by eight glossies, flicking through each with growing fondness. Their crime scene looked different in the light of day. Stark and empty. It was not filled with the same passion they had shared when slaying the Dragon.

“This, old friend…are the sonnets of old testament union penned in blood,” Hannibal answered softly, adoration filling his eyes as he set the photo aside and glanced up. The eyes looking back were black gravel ice. “To be fair, you did not know him as well as I did. And you ought to take credit where credit is due. I really ought to be thanking you. Without your brazen carelessness for Will’s well being and utter disregard for his mental health, he might have never sought comfort in my home. In my arms. In my bed.”

“You—“

Pain ruptured as knuckles met the older man’s cheek, sliding down his jaw, and over his mouth. He braced against the impact, latching on the table and let his head hang. He studied the fresh pool of blood oozing over his reflection. His tongue darted out to lap at the split stinging as he smiled. This was the kind of pain he had missed. The brute force of emotion. He was able to control Jack with just a mere suggestion of goading.

“Oh Doctor Lecter.” Joints cracked and popped in a hand. “It’s been a long time since I’ve let you get in my mind. Not about to start now.”

“If we are being honest, I would much rather be in your skull.” Dark, dry laughter rose. “Your mind leaves something to be desired.”

“Going to saw me open like you did Will?” Jack jerked up Hannibal’s face by a fistful of hair, fury flashing the wide bridge of a twitching nose.

He heard the echo of the man’s horrified screams breach the present from some closed off room of his mind. He tried not to think about that day. Not for Jack’s sake. But his own. He swallowed a rush of guilt. He had almost killed Will.

“Not at all.” His voice shook cold, sneer ticking at the edge of his cheek. “I suspect something far more intimate is suitable for our valued years of friendship.”

Sirens faded. Luminous white bleached the room.

Will… His heart clenched. Do they have you, my dear one? Have they hurt you?

The agent growled and released Hannibal with a rough shove, striding to the other side of the room. His hands were shaking. The older man kept a victorious smile behind his teeth. He had gotten a rise out of him. He swiped a knuckle over his bloodied mouth. The entire left side of his face throbbed. He savored it. All the power and strength drained in the last few weeks thundered through him now. He would channel it. He was prepared to kill again to protect what he loved.
Locks beeped and buzzed on the other side of the glass partition. The door eased open.

Hannibal felt breath torn from his lungs. He shot upright to stand, hauling on his restraints. There was nothing for him to hide behind. Not his mask or pretense. His lips parted on a weak whispering name. His walls crumbled. Emotions stormed his face. Relief. Guilt. Heart ache. And... a yawning endless rage. He watched the scene unfold on the other side of the glass.

Positioned between a column of two guards was Will. He was slumped, shuffling feet dragging with the grace of the inebriated. Hands clenched his upper arms, keeping him upright. Chains looped from his ankles to his bound wrists. Sage green of a prison uniform sagged over a chest straining to lift with an inhale of lungs. Grotesque folds of fabric draped a thin waist of an emerging skeleton. Shades of the lunar moth washed taut skin nearly translucent except for a thick black beard running down his face. Even with it, Hannibal knew every lovely inch of that face, every carved bone and stretch of muscle. It was not the same. Black circles rimmed sunken eyes and cheekbones. His eyes narrowed. Thick red lines seeped beneath a collar drawn up against his throat. Hannibal reigned in a hideous scream. Will had allowed death to hold him in the most intimate embrace.

The men pushed. Will crumpled on the stool, dazed eyes drifting near the metal table. Breath fogged the plastic mask strapped over his face. A smudge of drying blood muddied a slack frown. Distant ripples of rain drifted as wrists were secured to the table and found a glitter of obsidian on the other side of the glass. Hannibal’s breath stuck, knees threatening to give. Will looked directly at him. For a second there was a spark of recognition. It twisted to a cavern of helpless grief before going blank. Then Will saw through him, passed him, trained on some vision leading him away in the distance. No. The older man heard the crunch of cartilage and gurgling screams echoing in the halls of the Lisandru estate, where he had seen this version of the man he loved last. Will was gone.

He closed his eyes. In his mind, he snapped free of the chains. He slammed Jack to the floor. His hands at his throat, thumbs digging carotid arteries. Tearing open skin. Greeted by a rush of spurting blood. His hands shook against the table. He would gut Alana with the blunt end of the handcuffs and drink from her organs. They would suffer. He would make sure of that. And he would hold Will. They would have to put him down. Kill them both. But they would scream both agony and ecstasy first.

“Would you...” Hannibal forced measured breath through his blood, waiting for the screams to quiet. “...care to explain this?”

“No...” Jack said quietly, scratching fingers over stubble, head shaking. “No, I would not.”

The two guards turned. Bruises and cuts marred every inch of skin not covered by their uniforms. Will had put up a fight. They left the room.

“Tell me, Jack...” The older man lowered himself to the stool, unable to take his eyes off Will still looking through him as if he didn’t exist. “Did someone fail to mention to Will I was alive after I was escorted by force? Or exchange pleasantries with him long enough to inform him of where he is and why?”

“I don’t have to clarify anything with anyone. Technically no one even knows either of you are alive. Let alone here.” He felt the gleam of a smile fade to a snarl. “I work in the private sector now. Or maybe you don’t remember destroying my reputation, impugning my honor, and getting me fired?”

Private sector was a filthy euphemism of gun for hire. Hannibal’s mouth ticked. Alana had hired Jack. Had employed the men who hunted Will down in the alley. The ones who had cornered them. How would she feel if he tore Margot from her arms and held a knife at her throat? Would she know what it was like to hang in the balance and face threat of death against the one person most precious
A slender woman eased in to the room. She wore the same protective gear as the other guards. They had sent the softest version of their manipulation and violence to lure Will into a trap. Her blazing red hair was knotted at the nape of her neck. Her skin milky white and freckled. He guessed she was about twenty. She sat a Styrofoam cup beside Will and said something. The younger man didn’t move. Just fixed the room beyond with an empty stare. A fountain pen and a pad of paper slid in front of him. She leaned in and murmured something else. Hannibal snapped teeth together. They had already broken Will. Now they would twist his pieces to wring out the confession they had been unable to drown out of Hannibal.

“I am going to speak very, very slowly so as not to confuse you, Jack,” Hannibal growled, swinging a frigid stare from the glass and back towards the watchful agent. “Where have they been keeping Will?”

A snort was followed by a rumbled chuckle. “Away from you I imagine was the ultimate goal. A successful one it looks like.”

“Where precisely?”

“Solitary. Right where you left him, Doctor.”

“Solitary?” Hannibal echoed, forming the bitter words slowly before releasing them. “You know as well as I do Will should not be left to roam the landscape of his demons alone.”

“See, I gave Will a friend once to survey those landscapes, and that friend turned Will against me. He made my friend a killer.”

He flexed white knuckles and glanced up. "Will was always a killer. Every crime scene you ever brought him to made him in to one. Fostered the dependency to become what he was not, until death and destruction was all he knew. You made him a killer, Jack. I simply showed him he could be loved for all he was and was not unconditionally."

"You turned Will against himself." Jack crossed his arms. "You let him die to become what you wanted him to be. Not what he was. Then you abandoned him to a fate worse than death here. That isn't love."

They hadn’t tortured Will. They had left him alone. Let him think Hannibal was dead. And allowed him to self destruct. His ever present shadow breathed out, rustling awake within the confines of his ribs. Oh. The older man scraped nails on the inside of his palm until it stung and repeated the motion. He would skin them alive, hang their flesh, and leave them on display to rot. If they chose to be demons, he would give them gnarled wings.

"Do you not see the madness that grips him?"

“I would say it’s his own damn fault, Doctor Lecter. He’s the one that chose to embrace it.”

Hannibal choked down his snarling monster. He watched Jack from his returned perch on the table. If he killed him now, he would have no one to play with. Bargain with. As it was, the agent had to have his lungs in tact to keep breathing. A pity. His fingers itched to ram a first down his throat and rip them out through a constricting trachea. Jack would let Will burn as easily as Hannibal once had.

“He cannot be allowed to return there,” Hannibal countered coldly, steepling fingers over a mouth to keep teeth hidden. “You cannot possibly understand what he has been through. What his mind associates with differs far from reality, I assure you.”
The agent scoffed, eyes rolling. “He seemed to be just fine with you.”

“Jack...” The older man slid eyes closed and hissed out a strained breath.

“Not a fan of sharing? Right. I forgot.”

“Not particularly obliged to having Will returned to confinement after he removes your hand, or her’s, with his teeth as you said.” He motioned to the guard in the other room without looking, tension gathering in his hips to spread up his spine and blanket his shoulders in a rigid hunch. He had to keep still. To let Jack live. This time. “He is not in his right mind. Surely you must see that simply from looking at him.”

*If there is any mind left within him. Have they stripped you of that along with your dignity, Will?*

“Oh I see him alright. Clearer and clearer with every passing day. Clearer than I ever did,” Jack replied tersely, expression turning grim and bitter. “I think he knew perfectly well what he was doing when he ripped the throats out of those men before being brought down here, Doctor. He certainly knew what he was doing on that cliff. I would go so far as to say, he knew he was going to save you even as we conspired to let Dolarhyde kill you. I will admit this is one of his better performances.”

Hannibal inhaled sharply. He had thought he had the upper hand. Making himself indispensable to the F.B.I. by harping on Freddie’s philosophy of ‘it takes one to know one.’ He had nudged each player with great care to the position he wanted. He thought he had been in control. He saw the lovely 'come hither' expression of deep blue eyes and flirtatious smile reflected in the metal surface.

*I need you, Hannibal. Please.*

Will had played him. Betrayal gnawed the pit of his stomach.

Will picked up the pen. The female guard was making progress. He was staring distantly at the pad of paper. She pushed it towards him, lips moving. All she had to do was give the right push, the correct vocational cue, and the younger man would heed it. He should know. He had personally turned Will against himself. Hannibal scoured his bottom lip with a canine. The dry flesh bled.

Would they try to get Will to solely take credit for their crimes? No...they wanted Hannibal. It had always been him. They wanted Will to breathe life to their story. What had the man said?

“How about sharing the story of your attempted murder, sexual coercion, and kidnapping of former F.B.I. Agent Will Graham.”

They didn’t want Hannibal the Cannibal. Or the Chesapeake Ripper. They wanted the man. They would turn the very thing that made him human against him. His stomach turned. Would Will betray him again? Would he even know he had until it was too late?

*Will... Hannibal stared at the pen looping across paper. Please, Will. Can you not feel me? I am here. Look at me, Will, look at me.*

They wouldn’t just bury him the system. They would make sure he ended up dead. Then what would become of William? Would he believe? Would he think Hannibal... His mouth went dry, stomach roiling. ...took him against his will? Raped him? There life together another horror to slumber beside Will. He would not make it. He would end his life. Hannibal would be dead long before then to prevent it.

“He is suffering needlessly,” Hannibal unraveled and snapped, jerking chains. “If he is indeed in a fugue state, he may not know where he is, let alone who he is! He may not recognize you, or I, and lash out to protect himself.” He gathered burning breath in his mouth and held it, letting it out slowly,
lowering his voice to a gravered hiss. “Let me see him, Jack. Allow me to be of some assistance.”

“Assistance?” Jack laughed. “That’s funny. Maybe you plan on helping him over another side of a cliff?”

He didn’t bother to correct him. What was the point. Nothing he said would help. He had to get to Will.

“Jack.” A low howl breached snarling lips. “I am asking you as a former friend, a colleague, to do me this courtesy.”

“Why?” The agent folded arms over his chest, fixing him with a grave stare of consideration. “Give me one good reason why they shouldn’t throw him back in the shoe.”

If he could just appeal to the man’s humanity… Jack just didn’t switch off like Hannibal could. He still cared about Will. Will was his friend. His colleague. Protégé. The prodigal son returned to him. Alana may have been calling the shots, but Jack still remained the formidable force of good intention or reckless abandon where Will was concerned. He felt responsible for his life. His demise. His slow death and rebirth in Hannibal’s arms. He wouldn’t have struck him if he didn’t still care. It was his only hope. His and Will’s.

“He was taken for more than three months, held prisoner, and tortured in a room no larger than the one they are keeping him in now,” Hannibal returned, forming each word with a slow staccato, rearranging his face to a blank slate of detachment. “I will let you determine if returning to such a confinement is your wisest choice. What kind of a body count is it worth to you? To Alana? What is his life worth to you? Can you put a price on it, Jack?”

He couldn’t let them see how much Will meant to him. His emotional attachment only put the younger man’s life in jeopardy. They wouldn’t do it for him. They would do it to ease their own conscience.

A glint of crimson swung to stare directly in the camera. “Or is counting your stacks of gold, Doctor Bloom, simply too distracting to be bothered with his lifeless body swinging from a cell?”

“I’m aware Will was taken. By you,” Jack corrected, eyes glinting. “Unlike you not to gloat over your exploits, Doctor Lecter. I’ve seen the files. The initial photographs they took. I’ve seen your destruction and your crime scenes. I know you.”

Fingertips ran down cold chains. Would they show the polaroids to Will? The ones they took when he was too drugged and weak to fight them off. Would he remember who gave him the marks? Or had they successfully thrust a proverbial hot poker in his mind and given it a quick stir? Was any part of who he was still clear to him?

His breath shuddered. If Jack came close enough, he would make his move. Taking a hostage. It was his only other option.

“Circumstantial evidence seized without a warrant of two drugged and unconscious defendants unable to give their consent.”

“Imagine what else I’ll find once we officially process him, huh? Worked him over pretty good, right? I mean his body is practically a map of your crimes.” The agent drew him forward by a collar, snarling between clenched teeth. “Is that how you got him to stay? Violence? Abuse? Was it as simple as Stockholm’s Syndrome after all?”

“I may be many things, Jack…” Hannibal jerked away, disgust ripping free. “But I am not a heartless
“No?” Strained laughter filtered through the room. “Is there a fine line so long as they are under your influence and not your care? Control of the mind as opposed to control of the body? Or did you find a way to wield both against Will?”

He bowed his head, crushing his right fist with the left, hands shaking. He peered at the female guard leaning closer to Will, whispering in his ear. Tears were streaking cheeks. Part of him was still present enough to hear her through the fog. The pen continued to move. What the hell was he writing?

“As much as I would love to discuss the philosophies of control and its impact on the human condition and relationships… He needs medical attention. If you care for him at all, you will let me see him.”

“Aren’t you afraid he’ll make a meal of you?” Revulsion flashed down cast eyes. “Or is that some kind of sick fantasy of yours?”

Slicing a tongue across lips, Hannibal lifted glowing red eyes a fraction, peering through razor sharp lashes. He would not bear the insinuation much longer. Not without action. The intimacy of their violence was as sacred as their most tender entwining of limbs. He would not stand for its degradation. Verbal or otherwise. He was many things. A sadist. A serial killer. A psychopath by definition alone. But he had returned to the mortality of a man, frail hearted and weak kneed. And he loved Will.

“I cannot begin to express how many phrases I have to respond to that. A later time perhaps. What have you to lose if Will attacks me and one of us perishes?”

Broad shoulders tensed before releasing a lazy shrug of indifference. “Nothing I personally would be too concerned over losing.” Jack glanced at the camera inquisitively. “Hard to misplace a body you never found, isn’t it?”

“Truer words were never spoken.”

Hannibal caught the motion out of the corner of his eye. A delicate hand trailed sweat mopped curls and settled on a shoulder gently. His gaze jerked over. The woman was too close. She was touching what was only his to caress. Blue sparked beneath lowered lashes. She didn’t see the danger. A wrist snapped forward. Will wound chains around a throat, slamming a delicate cheek against the table. The guard flailed, nails scratching and clawing at a face, arms, hands.

“I tried to warn you, Jack,” Hannibal noted gravely. “This makes four or five, does it not? Or is there a greater running tally?”

Will held on, staring out at them, glassy eyed. He still didn’t see them. Hannibal wasn’t even sure he knew what he was doing. If he felt the struggle of the woman he was strangling to death. There was no pleasure or remorse in his expression. Just emptiness. If he thought Hannibal was dead, he might feel like he had nothing to lose. He had never taken a life without just cause to do so. The action was loosed by primal instinct to survive left to roam free. If Will came back to his senses, he knew the grief would over take him then.

Guards rushed in. A baton swung across the back of Will’s head. The woman’s body slumped to the floor.
Hannibal bolted up, snarling at the men then at Jack. “They’ll kill him, Jack! Do you want his blood on your conscience?”

Blinking, the agent clamped his open mouth closed and rushed over to the glass. He banged furiously on the other side of it. He whipped out a pistol, pointing it at Hannibal’s head before dragging out a ring of keys. The older man stilled. The cuffs slipped free from the table before clamping back on his wrists. A rough motion jerked him from the room and out the door. Jack dragged him through a narrow corridor. Agonized grunts and screams reached his ears. Hannibal began to shake from the effort to keep restrained. He needed to cooperate to reach Will. A shove sent him spiraling towards an open door. He caught the motion of figures beating a figure curled on the floor. Rough fingers latched on his collar as he lunged. Teeth glinting. He would tear apart every fucking one of them.

“Everybody out!” Jack roared, pointing his gun in the air and firing twice. “Now!”

The three men startled, flattening to the wall, wild eyes fixing on the gun and then at the prisoner being wielded. Will lay motionless on the floor. The woman was beside him. Hannibal flicked a disinterested gaze over her. She was still breathing.

“Out.”

Black scurried passed. Jack was sparing them the only way he knew how.

Hannibal hauled free and went immediately for the woman on the floor. She had put her hands on Will with cruelty masked as kindness. Had touched him with blatant manipulation. She deserved much worse. He gripped her vest and dragged her out in the hall. He dropped her body on the floor. He snapped the ring of keys from a hand. It took all his strength to leave the gun where it was. He wanted nothing more than to riddle their bodies with bullets. He didn’t need intimacy. Just their immediate deaths.

“I believe this belongs to you,” Hannibal snarled, stepping over the body and moving back towards the room. “If you act now, you might be able to save her.”

The door reverberated as Hannibal slammed it shut. His hands and arms were shaking. He fell to his knees and curled over the boy below, hands sliding beneath limp shoulders.

“Will?” His voice shook with a rush of panic and tears. “Can you hear me, darling?”

The older man slumped to the stool, pulling Will into his lap. He weighed nothing, a frail exoskeleton of broken wings. His eyes were closed. Unconscious. Arms splayed limp. He heard a rustle of breath escape from a widening crack on the mask. He hauled it off and pitched the vile thing away from them both. He hauled on chains and freed the younger man from them next. He left his own on. If—no, when—Will came to, he needed him to feel safe.

“Listen to the sound of my voice…” Hannibal begged quietly, running fingers through a thicket of a beard to touch white caked lips. “My love…what have they done to you?”

He scooped a palm beneath a head and leaned close. Someone had scrubbed his skin raw with acrid dial soap. Coppery scent of blood still remained. Hannibal shook him gently. Will remained still, breath threading. He blinked at stinging tears furiously and gathered closer, whispering come back, come back to me, I need you, Will over and over against a cheek. His lips lifted before sealing over a frigid mouth with a tender kiss. He tasted weak and frail. He needed him. He needed Will to see him.

Open your eyes, dearest one.
Lashes floated over icy lakes. The surface cracked. A fist knocked breath from Hannibal’s lungs. Will shoved. The older man fell to the floor. His ears rang as his head hit the cement. The lighter body lunged after, knees jamming his ribs. He threw forearms up, but it was too late.

“Will! Will, wait—”

A vice grip snaked his trachea, pressure increasing with the intent to crush. Blood pounded in his ears. For a few minutes longer Hannibal continued to flail, feet kicking and clammy fingers gripping trembling wrists.

“W-will…liam.”

He gazed at the beauty of his own destruction though patches of black tunneling in.

*Be still…*

Hannibal became liquid, melting across the floor. He choked against the grip with a weak smile. He would be rendered unconscious soon. He stroked a hand gently over dark rage, handcuffs scraping his forearm. He strained to turn his face, lifting slightly, and kissed the inside of a wrist before lying back and closing his eyes. He felt weakness return. This felt blissful. He could die by Will’s hand.

“L-love…” Lungs pushed out a last breath. “…you.”

Bruising hands fell. Will scrambled back, low terrified whine piercing the air. He hid behind the stool and then retreated beneath the table, curling round one of the legs. Hannibal tipped his chin, staring through a blur across the floor. The younger man was trembling, mouth pressed to a palm, and with the same expression he had worn bleeding out in the kitchen. A pleading terror. For it to be real. And to be a nightmare. He was shaking apart. Piece by piece.

“H-h-hannibal…?” Will shoved his face against knees, clamping hands around his neck. “I thought…I thought—“

“No.” A feeble croak replied.

Stumbling to weak knees, Hannibal crawled beneath the table. The younger man flinched, curling tighter. He slowed and rocked back on heels. He made sure to keep a good foot of distance between them. He lifted his wrists to show Will he remained chained, at his mercy should he choose.

“Never without you,” The older man whispered, placing a tentative palm on a forehead. It was hot. “Will, you are burning up with fever…”

“Don’t.” The face burrowed deeper. “I saw him. I saw—” Arms hugged a rocking body tighter. "Are you... are you still real?”

Hannibal pushed sharp fingertips over eye sockets and let out a reedy breath. Not this. He wasn’t sure he could bring him back from it a second time. The experience would be as real to Will as it was the first time. His initial reaction was to crush Will to the floor and kiss him until he blacked out. There was nothing Hannibal had to give him to ease his suffering. He started to shake. He just wanted to hold him. He wanted to make it okay. He hadn’t been there. Will had needed him. And he hadn’t been there. Again. How many times could he fail the man he loved in a single lifetime?

“Will… he is a delusion…” Winter howled through white gritting teeth. “He is no more alive than Abigail.”

He knew the moment he said it. Before a pitiful sob wretched free. Before he looked and found
depths of watery blue crushing the soul lying within them. He was a pitiful excuse for a man.

“I’m sorry,” Hannibal offered feebly, slouching and sliding a shaking hand across the floor. “I’m sorry. Come to me, William. I’m begging you.”

Will collided into him, thrown across his lap and buried his tear stained face against a broad chest. Hannibal drew him closer with a knee, slowly wrapping arms around the trembling body. He clutched at damp curls and pushed lightly. Will fell forward on his knees, spine bending, and scrambled to twist fabric and hold tight to shoulders. He cradled a head close and pressed his mouth lightly to a scalp with wordless apologies. They shivered against one another. Frigid cold of the cells nestled deep under their skin. The older man didn’t dare speak. He held his breath. He knew if he did the entire structure of his bones holding Will up would shatter and he would sob against him for forgiveness. Will needed his strength, not his pity.

What had he done to them?

* * *

Alana flung open the doors to the make shift office and shouted, “What the hell do you think you’re doing?” She pointed at the computer screen, grinding a stiletto heel on carpet. “I told you! You have no right to interfere!”

Jack was carrying the limp body of the female guard with several more shadows in tow. His grim expression etched grooves of a scowl. His gaze a cold gleam of a gun.

“Saving her life!” The agent muscled passed her and laid the girl in the chair, spitting fury. “Unless she is nothing more to you than a set of zeros on a check as well.”

Settling besides the door, Alana clenched fists and bit back a heated shout. She didn’t have to explain her actions, or anyone else’s, to Jack anymore. She had a pile of rubble and bodies at her feet, and what was left of a frail conscience whispering to her the benefit outweighed the cost. She had run for years. She was tired and too pissed to be afraid anymore. Her beautiful wife and children, their lives, were worth far more to her than a group of strangers. This was what they did for a living. They knew the risks. She wouldn’t apologize for their mistakes. Or the loss of their lives.

Her gaze flicked from the guards surrounding their colleague and over to Jack. He was intently watching the split screen. Grainy pixels shifted. Will slammed Hannibal to the ground, hands at his throat. She flinched and averted her gaze. She felt no remorse for the orders she had given to have Hannibal tortured. She had made peace with it long ago. It was the most effective method to get what they all wanted: a confession that ended up with the man behind bars or strapped to a chair of lethal injection. But Will. She had only meant to wear him down. She reserved a part of her heart where his lonely eyes and frail pleading lips lived on. She still cared for him. He had deserved better. She should have been more watchful. Should have gone down and made sure the conditions of his imprisonment had been tolerable. She couldn’t bear the thought of seeing him. She had stayed away. And now this. All she had wanted was to keep her promise. To save Will from Hannibal. What else could she do for him now?

“I can’t watch this,” Alana muttered, unable to keep her eyes from the screen.

“With any luck, they’ll tear each other apart.” Jack said, glancing back. “Problem solved.”

“My money is on the cannibal,” A brown haired guard spat, crouching next to the female guard who
was beginning to come to.

“I’ll take a piece of that action.” The agent withdrew a money clip and laid two crisp bills on the desk. “Put a hundred on Will.”

The doctor’s mouth fell open. She marched across the office and snatched up the money. She crumpled it and threw it into an aluminum wastebasket. Jack tipped slightly and retrieved the bills, smoothing them, before placing them back in his trouser pocket. She couldn’t believe him. Any of them. Was this even happening?

“How can you say that, Jack! This isn’t a game.” Hands flew to her hips, manicured red nails digging soft leather. She motioned angrily at the screen, tears rising in flashing eyes. “Can’t you see Hannibal is hurting Will? Have we not allowed him to suffer enough! We are responsible for this. For all of it!”

Jack blinked slowly, thick hands clasped between folded knees as he leaned forward, voice dipping to a low growl. “It didn’t seem to bother you much before, Alana, when the life was being choked out of Will with Hannibal in his head. Or is this some residual guilt knowing you abandoned Will for Hannibal’s bed when he needed you the most?”

She swung a rigid index finger towards the open doors, snapping at the guards. “Get out.”

They shuffled out of the office with their comrade in tow, exchanging glances and murmurs. She didn’t pay them to talk. Or to stare. She didn’t need an audience for this.

“Don’t you dare…” Alana planted both hands on either side of Jack on the desk, red mouth glinting as she towered close. “…put this on me. I am not the one with a livery full of broken ponies, Jack!”

Jack tilted his head, grimacing. “Then you won’t mind when Will finally breaks.”

“If he dies—“

“We’ll both sleep better at night.”

* * *

Will was too out of his mind with grief to realize what he was doing. He felt the numb shock of what he had just done seeping cold in his blood. He heard the gurgling pleas of the girl muffled in his mind as if listening through thick glass. He thought he had been seeing ghosts trailing on the other side. But Hannibal had been real. Evidently so had the guard he nearly killed.

He looked down. Hannibal was pinned beneath straddling legs, arms stretched above his head, held tight by chain linking cuffs. His vision blurred in and out of focus. The prison uniform was unzipped and pushed apart. Sweat glistened on a heaving chest. He bent his head and bit above a hammering heart.

“You’re not well—“ Breath rushed out.

“No… I’m not.” Will scraped teeth up a throat, growling against an ear. “So fix it.”

He wanted to punish Hannibal for leaving him. The older man felt responsible. He would let him. He
would take every bruise with stoic reserve. He scraped nails from navel to clavicle and growled as hips lifted as fingers retreated. He wanted to be held. To feel safe. He shook his head trying to clear the underbrush catching fire. He couldn’t focus. Couldn’t think. How could he be burning up and freezing cold at the same time?

Ragged lips moved across his cheek. “Let me help you.”

Will jerked Hannibal down by hair, scowling. “I’ll help myself. Thank you.”

A moan formed on swollen lips. His hand was between the older man’s legs, dragging up a hard wet spot. He licked his palm. His toes curled, eyes falling closed. He tasted sweet. Dizzy waves washed over and he teetered forward. Hannibal rolled Will beneath him, pushing up on elbows. He saw agony mirrored in his eyes, warring between giving him what he wanted and what he truly needed. He sighed. With a tug on the handcuffs, the older man blanketed him and turned a mouth to the crook of his neck.

“I wanted you to fuck me, hard and relentless,” Will mused, breathing against skin. “Not pity me. I’m not weaker than you. I don’t need to be saved. I don’t need you.”

The lie tasted foreign. Hannibal knew. He had said as much without saying anything at all. The man holding close was heavier than he remembered. Or all his weeks of forced fasting was catching up. But he was pleasantly warm against sweat soaked skin. Feeling beginning to return to his toes and legs. Will never wanted him to move. He touched his lips to a neck. Hannibal flinched. He opened his eyes, squinting. Were those bruises palm spreads? Will jostled him to the side and touched the marks, questions flashing in his eyes. Hannibal shook his head and looked away.

“May I hold you, William?” Guilt wracked the smooth tenor.

Hannibal wasn’t to blame. For any of it. Will knew how to take responsibility for his own mistakes. He just never had a good handle on coping with them.

“Yeah.”

He fished a set of keys underneath the table and tugged off handcuffs. Hannibal smoothed rough palms down his cheeks, kissing each eyelid, before drawing him to his chest. Will let his eyes close and shivered closer, covering the offensive inmate number on the uniform with a palm. He could have apologized. But he knew it was unnecessary. The older man would resent him for making excuses for following his true nature. Hannibal would more readily accept the blame than he would forgiveness. He reached for a cast leg and draped it carefully over his until every inch of them was pressed together.

“Tighter.”

Hannibal squeezed until his breathing became strained. “Better?”

Will nodded once. He flexed hips against a responsive outline. They were both hard. If he wasn’t so tired, or able to keep his own eyes open or lift the weight of his head, he would have done something about it. Or at least wanted to believe he would. He felt more skeletal than human. He figured he had better get used to it.

“If I asked…” Hannibal slid fingers hesitantly over a swallowing throat. “Would you tell me the truth?”

He mirrored the gesture where someone had made their mark on the older man. “I could say the same.”
Someone had hurt Hannibal. What had they done to him? And for how long?

“William?” There was so much pain in the breath of his name.

“Yes.” Will replied quietly. “But…I don’t want you to ask.”

“Will you try again?” Arms tightened a fraction, moving to wind in his hair.

A wince shuddered his heart. He heard it most distinctly there. The fear in Hannibal’s voice. The wilting seed of doubt. Abandonment. Hannibal still thought Will would leave him, by any means necessary, by choice.

He shook his head, eyes watering, voice soft. “I thought you were dead. It was…rational.”

A sharpened cheek flinched. Hannibal wouldn’t meet his gaze. “I…should have found a way to contact you. If I had lost you…”

Will slid their mouths together to cover the quivering sound, holding close as Hannibal began to tremble. He didn’t want to hear the need in his voice asking Will to stay, as he always had, in his own way. He choked down a yelp as hand slid underneath his uniform and smoothed bruised ribs. He pushed in to the pressure. Gold lightning cracked behind his eyes.

“Not your fault…” He breathed against a retreating tongue, following after. “Just let me have this. I’m not going anywhere.”

His mouth moved to the brutality on his throat, lapping and kissing it away with tender strokes. Hannibal shuddered, head shifting to find the younger man’s neck and run a wet tongue along stinging marks the noose had left. He didn’t want him to hurt. He wanted the version of him lying underneath the sun on their boat, eyes warm and watching Will steer them to safety. How would he take care of him here? Like this? The uniform pushed down his shoulders. Will flinched, shoving at the center of a chest, eyes wide.

“Steady, William…” Hannibal commanded softly, laying a hand on his bare shoulder. “I need to examine you.”

“No.” He shook his head fiercely, clenching fabric closed on his chest. “No, you don’t.”

A tender palm moved to cup his cheek. “Will.”

He jammed his body against the farthest leg of the table and curled in. He lowered eyes to hide smarting tears. Will didn’t want to know what he looked like now. He sure as hell didn’t want Hannibal to see it. What had become of him. What he had let happen. He felt hurt settling in to Hannibal’s eyes and it was much worse than seeing it.

“I’m sorry…” He whispered. “I don’t mean to.”

“Did they…?” A razor pressed mouth rippled.

“N-n-no. No. Too long in the dark with an overactive memory.”

A weak breath of relief was followed by one shaken, grieving. “I forced you to relive it.”

“Not all of it.” Will reached blindly for a clenched fist and pressed it fiercely to his mouth, kissing each knuckle until Hannibal released and let him kiss the center of his palm. He brought it to his throat, eyes closing as fingers flexed. “Here. Help me…you said you would. So help me.”
Blood red eyes faded to black. “Are you asking me to kill you, Will?”

Chapter End Notes

SURPRISE! (Though I think most of you clever hawks had this one figured out.)

A short one this week. (Would it be possible to gather our resources and buy me an actual immune system off the black market for the holidays?)

Miss you, guys. Your comments are better than this chicken soup. xo
Hannibal scoured fingers down blotchy red left by a noose. Hostility made his skin crawl and fell forward with the length of a suffocating shadow. His chest heaved with emotions warring within. Would Will really be so cruel as to ask him to finish what he could not? When fate and circumstance had denied them twice already?

Blue eyes widened. The question resounded between them in the mist of falling rain and glass. Brows twitched several expressions at once. Consideration. Fear. A pitiful ache. Will shook his head slowly, mouthing the word ‘no.’ Blue eyes darted away. He pulled the uniform down thinning arms as if peeling off a layer of dead skin. It clung to every protruding angle and tangled around a bony torso. The younger man lowered pitiful wavering eyes and drew in a bottom lip. His skin stretched thin on stark ivory ribs, hollowing over the pit of his stomach. He looked empty.

The older man gripped a soft spot on his cast until it burned. Will had wanted his touch. Both gentle and medical. His help. Not his accusations. Hannibal was uncertain if he would be able to touch Will without hurting him. Had he ever been able to do so? This was his doing. His responsibility. He dragged a shaking hand over his mouth to stifle another apology and reached out. A trembling palm slid against his. They ignored the way they both flinched, forced to revisit their past. His moving fingers felt sluggish as if tracing them through forceful currents. Their shadows lingered against one another on the cramped bathroom sink when Hannibal had first peeled horror free from the younger man’s dead skin. He stared at a leg of the table as he undressed him, rolling the uniform carefully against hips. After he had spent all those months not looking, not touching, he wasn’t sure he could bear to see the rest.

“You can’t examine me if you won’t look…” A tangled thread of softness spoke.

And if I do not wish to see what I have let you become?

Hannibal raised his eyes. Will stared at the floor, hands balled in the material against his waist to keep from moving. He was a wisp of translucent skin and bone. He felt a hideous hunger of his own return. He knew what starvation looked like. Felt like. Burning from the inside out as life cruelly clung to each breath. What was left of the crumpled boy was covered in bruises and chrysanthemums of split blood vessels. The icy rattling of Death had caressed every part of him with infinite care and thorough attention. A battered field of violets crushed beneath muddied boot prints twined from a sixth rib to the fleshy hollow of a swallowing throat. Angled swings of a baton left streaks of goldenrod against a hip to the beginning bend of a thigh, sliding beneath rough twill cotton. He hooked a hand around a neck, pulling until it bent to his will. He swabbed fingers against the crown of a head. He drew fingertips to the light. They were covered in molten red.

Legs drew up against a chest, arms encircling them. The older man’s shadow pitched forward, darkening wavering pools of blue below. Will shrank. Hannibal became aware the deep snarling he was hearing emanated from the back of his throat. He would never gently lay his husband to rest in the healing salts of the dead sea and soothe his body with embrace ever again. His gaze fell across the gaunt figure once more and hissed. They had almost taken Will. He would have lain him in a shallow unmarked grave. He might still do so.

He pushed away and rose, flattening aching palms to the table. His arms shook. He left the younger man where he was in hiding and let visions glaze across the glassy surface beyond. He saw his first victim clearly painted upon an Autumn afternoon, roped to a tree and pulley. Heard his shrieks and begging before a keen whistle, pressure splitting the body in two. He had been a boy then. Vengeance had not brought Mischa back. But he had learned to hunt. He scraped knuckles across
metal. He would do so again. One by one. The men who had done this to Will did not deserve the complexity of design. They just needed to die. And he had time. Plenty of time. He choked down a rush of sobs and hunched forward. He would not last long in this place without Will. And he should have been without him. He should have made him run. How many books did he need to fill, page by page of equations, to fix this? To fix him? To fix everything.

Timid fingertips touched the small of his back.

“What have I done to you to allow this?” Hannibal snarled at his own reflection.

“You didn’t…do this to me.” Broken whispers fluttered against his shoulder as a nose pressed to his spine. “I don’t want to live without you. I wasn’t asking you to…”

Whirling around, Hannibal snared a waist and trapped Will, encircling arms tightening until he cried out and tears pricked lashes sweeping up. He prayed for learned tenderness in his limbs to return and instead clutched tighter to the wounded. He kissed parched lips until they bled. He wanted to chase after the tiny pained sound and tear it out, seeding spindly wide leaves and dainty white petals of _datura_ within to return soft visions of delirium. He left a bite mark on a chest where a bit of unmarred skin remained to reclaim. He could open him up, twine reverent gold of _scotch broom_ and dried thistles to the ghastly beating heart within to bring peace. A hand wound in his hair to hold tight and he tore it free, cupping it between palms to kiss each battered knuckle, eyes closed. His lips brushed over something rough as he worked down a wrist. The tip of his tongue scratched against a loop. Then another.

“What did they do to you, Hannibal?” Whimpers burrowed against the crook of his neck, lips lifting to drag each sting of raw flesh to a kindling throb. “They took you. What did they do?”

“I cannot spare you from what afflicts you inside these walls, Will…” The older man growled against an ear, pushing his throat against teeth to bring back the electricity that had caused each mark. “…but I can keep you from seeing the horrors that come for me.”

“That’s not fa—ah!”

Hannibal’s eyelids slid open. Will’s skin was a gauzy white of starlight, hand clamped over a grimace. He eased open his mouth and turned his head to find what he had caught with a nip of teeth. A deep gash of fraying skin and muscle was drawn from a lunate bone of the wrist to the sunken radius. The older man snatched the forearm closer, seeping monster breathing out trails of smoke. He heard the scrape of teeth chewing. Black wiry retention stitches sutured flayed flesh. It was done poorly. His curling lips bent to tear them free. The arm he was holding jerked with a stifled gasp.

“Don’t!” Will tripped backwards, landing an edge of the table.

“I thought…” The older man’s voice dropped to ocean waves rushing over weathered statues, drawing Will in inch by inch by a fistful of hair until their lips nearly touched. “…you had set this foolish impulse aside? Was once not enough?” Hannibal gripped at scar tissue in Will’s arm until he winced. “Or are you intent on suffocating me with every facet of our murky past!”

He dragged a harsh thumb up the gash.. If he had been successful, he would have bled out in a matter of minutes.

Will tipped his face toward the ceiling, color draining from tip of nose to navel, letting out a shaky breath. “Evidently…so.”
“Do you no longer deem me worthy of more than a childish retort?”

“What’s the point? I can’t change it.”

Hannibal wanted to shove Will away. Send him sprawling face down and finish painting his body in bruises. He placed him delicately on the table and put it between them. The only walls he seemed capable of constructing now were physical ones. He walked towards the glass, hands jammed in pockets, and stared out at the empty room. Where he had prayed for nothing more than to be seen and bring Will rushing to open arms. Every time he had laid a hand on the younger man here it had torn his chest open and exposed the frailty Will had lovingly grown within him. Why didn’t he understand? Did he wish for them to part in matching body bags? His lips flinched. Or did he simply wish to be alone?

“Did I…” Will inhaled quietly. “…kill her?”

He could hear guilt wavering just beneath the surface. He despised the sentiment. Even more so in the baritone of a wilting voice. There was no remorse for what Will had nearly done to him. Left him. Alone to face his own mortality and suffering. But enough to resonate for an absolute stranger. Who deserved his violence. His retribution. For a moment, Hannibal wished Will had killed her.

“No.” Harsh rippling lines ceased.

“I think…I think I killed someone. He helped me. Or tried to…I think I killed him anyway…” Will said softly, wrapping arms around his waist, bowing forward to gaze at the floor. “There might have been another. I’m not…sure. What did I do, Hannibal?”

Maroon eyes followed blue green flashes of glass. He watched a rigid spine unfurl as Will folded over the top of the table to lie down. Blue glanced back. There were tears in his eyes. The younger man was looking to him for reassurance. He wanted Hannibal to guide him. To tell him it was wrong. To caress the weary soul hiding within of the man who once strove to find goodness in the world around him. He wanted to describe in vivid detail the stories Jack had spun for him and watch a vivid imagination choke the life from Will, until he gasped for Hannibal to hold him, to take it all away as he once had. The older man wanted to shout there was no good, no evil, no morality within this world to embrace him with kindness. What he had was standing with him in this room. Hannibal was not good. He had killed. He would kill again. And he would feel nothing for their lives or the lives they left behind. He watched the red line shift as a throat swallowed and clenched fists. The only good he had ever known had tried to take his own life and remained as unapologetic as Hannibal was. Will might as well have finished strangling him. Turned him in and left him to rot. The younger man would be free of him then. There was no cure, no soft words to be spoken, to heal Death.

“You survived,” The older man finally returned curtly. “Do not cloak yourself with a mourning shroud, William. They do not deserve grief. Only your fury. A man can survive upon anger far longer than he can on grief.”

“And you?” Will’s reflection watched warily as Hannibal drew free of their past etched in the glass and came towards him. “A man can catch fire. Rage can burn him up.”

“I have walked through flames before. I will survive.” Hannibal stood between knees and gazed down coldly. “If only to bring death to each and every one of them.”

“You can’t mean—“

A firm palm pinned a chest against the table, pushing out breath. “This is not an open forum for
discussion.”

“I…” Will let his voice trail off, tongue flicking out.

Hannibal’s throat tightened as he watched vivid pink dawn across cheeks then flush down a trembling chest. He pressed harder earning a quiet groan. A quickening heartbeat fluttered against his fingertips. The younger man was frail and too weak to fight back. When had he touched Will last? He deserved to lie peacefully in his arms, cradled in warmth and tender kisses. He was too light headed to hide his cravings and push away. He tiptoed farther across the fine line of bloodlust and slid a hand up a knee.

The older man leaned closer, rapid breath roaring in his ears. His gaze followed a thicket of hair against a navel adorned by a scratching zipper. He inhaled a hint of salty arousal. He could reach down. Unzip the last few inches and find a glistening pink cock to taste. Bring Will to the edge, begging, and demand an apology before finishing him. They stared at one another though half sunken gazes. A pink mouth unhinged with a low whine as fingertips gripped thighs. He longed to strip him of the uniform, peel bones from his skin, and mend the wounds beneath with trace of his tongue. Both his and the others.

Dismantled. I will carry all your bloodied parts with ease and infinite more care than I have ever offered you as a whole.

The blink of a prying red light heat the back of his neck.

“As much as I find your ardor appealing…” Hannibal noted, growl deepening as Will dragged him forward by the uniform. “I am adverse to the idea of filming a sex tape.”

A zipper whirred down, palm pushing in after. “Are you adverse to the idea as a whole?” Will murmured against an ear, nails twisting chest hair. “Or just when I’m playing the starring role?”

“When you have healed…” The older man gasped. He pushed wrists against the table and straightened. “We might discuss it then.”

The older man forcibly threw himself back over the invisible line and clung to crumbling ground beneath. He tore his gaze from sighing lips, hands sliding up to slot their fingers together. He winched as Will held tight, brushing a light kiss over a scowl. He wanted to resist. His entire body was pulled by the gravitation of a single touch. He fell forward, burrowing his face against a neck and tried to kiss away the offensive red with heated foreign murmurs. Unsteady fingers slid up his back and held on to shoulders to keep him close. Crumpled yellow caught his eye. Hannibal lifted his head slightly. He stared at the pad of paper until his vision went fuzzy.

“You want to know?” Blue followed his gaze, brow lifting. “You’re curious.”

Hannibal brushed at a matted beard and cheeks until Will thrust his chin up, eyelids fluttering shut. The sigh took away the painful sound of his sweet voice. The older man would never truly be rid of it. A tremor of uncertainty shook through him. He watched the strained rise and fall of his chest. He looked peaceful. As tranquil and shivering as when Hannibal had drawn him close, cool skinned and doe eyed, and cupped the side of his face in that fatal night in the kitchen. He could forgive him. Couldn’t he?

Can I? Am I capable of it?

“Sheer curiosity does not provide me with a right to delve into that which you would rather I not know, Will.”
Will opened concerned eyes, registering the arms shaking around him. Pupils dilated wide. He knew this part of the man holding him. The younger man lay perfectly still, gnawing at a quivering mouth. It drew to a soft line of acceptance. Hannibal wanted to bite it from his face and never see it again. He had stood by in the past and observed the flirtation with minimal interference. He had nearly offered Will’s hand in marriage to it once. They had both given it their hearts at one point, though he had not done so entirely without selfish reasons. Heated breath flared his nostrils. But now it would end. Will would end this deepening infatuation with Death. Or he would end them both.

“Not any more?” Fingers flexed against numbing circulation.

Red eyes lifted as Hannibal crushed forearms. “No...”

“So.” Will crooked his head to the side, glancing down with mild curiosity at a gnarled hand reaching for his throat. “This is your solution then?”

“It seems suitable.”

“It does.” There was a long pause. “But you aren’t interested in giving in to my request. You just don’t want anyone else to have me. I’m not theirs to punish. I’m yours.”

With a snap of teeth, Hannibal shoved away and sat heavily on the stool. He looked at his upturned palms with a glimmer of hate. They were responsible for so much destruction. What good had touched them? He felt the sensation of skin gilded in sunlight and sea. Except maybe Will.

A pad of paper thwacked against his chest. “Read it.”

When Hannibal did not reach for it, Will let it fall in his lap with a grumbled curse.

“Idiot.”

Hannibal smoothed a hand over the coarse cardboard under layer. It was covered in grooved etchings of a pen on scraps of paper. Some he could make out. Phone numbers. Dates and times. Others were just a sensation of ridges.

“Turn it over and read it. Or I’m going to beat you with it.”

Yellow splayed over his right knee and rustled as he shifted. Pages flexed backwards one by one, falling in to place. He went slowly. Listening to the crinkle and the dull aching dread of his heart. He had been in love with this feeling of melancholy once, the sentiment growing stronger with each letter he sent to Will in prison going unanswered. The last page floated from his fingertips. Jarring points and scratches filled the blue marked margins. He squinted, dipping his head to see more clearly. It took him a full three minutes to realize it was written in fluent French. His thumb skimmed the first few words, translation creaking in his mind: *Et vous aussi devez mourir…* Hannibal suddenly gripped the paper so hard it bent at an angle in the middle, agonized sigh forming.

*And you as well must die, beloved dust,*  
*And all your beauty stand you in no stead;*  
*This flawless, vital hand, this perfect head,*  
*This body of flame and steel, before the gust*  
*Of Death, or under his autumnal frost,*  
*Shall be as any leaf, be no less dead*  
*Than the first leaf that fell, this wonder fled,*  
*Altered, estranged, disintegrated, lost.*
Nor shall my love avail you in your hour.
In spite of all my love, you will arise
Upon that day and wander down the air
Obscurely as the unattended flower,
It mattering not how beautiful you were,
Or how beloved above all else that dies.

~Edna St. Vincent Millay

He had seen the poem before. On one of the pages of a leathery spine in a cozy library. One of his father’s books. He had seen it once more penned on tea dyed parchment bound by tarred black fisherman’s twine. Will had written him a hundred poems for his birthday and delivered it safely in his arms beneath the hum of starlight near the Seine. He had tasted of drowning lilies and souls swept away by the river underneath their feet.

Nor shall my love avail you in your hour.

No sooner had Hannibal finished the poem than it was ripped from his grasp and flung across the room. The older man nearly dropped to his knees and crawled after to retrieve it. To pull gently at the perforation and fold the paper to a perfect three inch square. Then tuck it in a place above his heart, fingertips caressing every crippling word. He turned on the stool and stared up at Will, mouth open without a single word able to escape.

“One of your favorites, isn’t it?” Will snapped, jamming arms into sleeves before zipping up the uniform with a harsh jerk on a zipper. “I heard the words in the timber of your voice when I was….when I thought it was the end. I knew that sound, no matter how far I drifted, would always bring me back.”

Brows wavered with contrition. Hannibal stretched out his hand, gaze falling on the crook of a thigh and a hip, to bury his face there and hide a well of tears. His hand was swatted away.

“But you…” Will shook his head slowly, pain creasing the lines of his mouth, voice bottoming out to a harsh slur. “You thought I was confessing. Setting you up to take the fall?”

Curling forward, the older man clutched at the fraying hem of the uniform’s trousers and offered a pitiful noise trilling up his spine. The abyss within shook with a stir of his darker self, howling suspicion still. He wished he could cut it out of him.

Nails dug in to his jaw and Will jerked his face up, eyes flashing azure hurricanes of the Mediterranean. “Answer me.”

“I-I…”

Hannibal’s steadied voice broke and faltered three times. His lips contorted on every syllable, mouthing them silently over and over, until they finally formed.

“…considered the possibility of influence over a broken man greater than the one you believed disintegrated to beloved dust.”

Fury shook him and snapped the older man’s head back. “I am not broken!”

“An ill man with a shattered mind and weakened body is easy to influence…” Hannibal pushed away and walked to the other side of the room, two halves of him locked in battle and mangling the
words he meant to speak. “Did I not provide you with an intimate enough experience to know its truth?”

“I would never do that,” Will whispered fiercely, standing abruptly.

“Not consciously.”

The younger man marched over, feet spread wide, chest puffed out. “Not ever!”

Hannibal touched violence ticking in a vein on his forehead and offered a weak smile. “Never say never.”

“What do you mean ‘former?’” Will demanded, twisting the hand away and wrenching it behind a back.

“We do not always choose to condemn men to death…” He considered the twinge in his arm, hobbling most of his weight to a good leg and kept a level gaze with harsh blue. “Sometimes it is purely a matter of circumstance. And a glass of whiskey between friends.”

“You know…” Will let go as if Hannibal had burned him, tears flooding his eyes, tone cracking to a breath. “But I…I chose you.”

“It is not an accusation…” The older replied softly. “It would not, does not, change the depth of all I feel for you, William. Your very name, the love I possess for you, will be carved upon my bones until the end.”

“A vicious thing to say to given the circumstances, angel.” Tears slid down pale cheeks and disappeared in a forest of black.

Lips pressed firmly to a wedding band. “I love you, Will…”

“Crueler still.” Will looked up with shattered longing.

“I am…” Hannibal bent his face, peaked nose brushing a cold one, gaze narrowing to the tremor of a mouth “…a cruel man…”

Their lips met in a clash. They both were cut open and spilled out across their feet. Legs twined around a steady one. He lost his balance. Hannibal banged in to the wall first and then spun Will against it, beneath him. Fingers twined in short hair. A beard scratched against his cheeks as the younger man kissed him fiercely, demanding to claim the oxygen heating his lungs to warm him. To hold him. To make it all disappear if only for a few minutes. The salt of their tears mingled with the shift of their mouths.

“I want you, I want you, god, please tell me I’m enough to trust in.”

“If you can say…” A sweeping tongue delved in after. “I am enough to hold on to.”

“You are…” Will whispered feverishly between breaths. “You are. I love you.”

“William.” Hannibal crushed Will in his arms, sniffing against a wild mane and scrubbed at tears on his cheeks. Deep aching need shook through him. “Tell me you will not leave me.”

Boots echoed in a hallway near by.

“They are coming for us.”
“Please don’t make me go back.” Will fell forward, clutching at his shoulders, begging against the emblazoned code on his chest. “I don’t want to go back.” A fist twisted a sleeve tighter and tighter. “I don’t want to go back. Don’t make me. Don’t make—Hannibal, I can’t—“

Hannibal kissed him once, a gentle twine of lips before murmuring, “Quiet, dearest… breathe.”

“It’s dark.” Knuckles blanched white, shaking. “You know I hate the dark. You know what waits for me there.”

“Another breath, please, slow and steady. Very good.” The older man rocked the body gently, locking an arm around a waist. He could feel Will’s strength draining, face growing pale once more. “You will not be returning to solitary.”

The door banged open. Will jumped. Hannibal coiled tighter around him, sliding a hand around the back of a head, and peered over a shoulder with a glittering gaze.

“There is no one here except you and I…” He pressed lips to the curve of an ear, tension riddling his arms as black leather moved closer. “Listen to my voice. Can you feel yourself safe inside my arms, Will?”

There were four of them. It wouldn’t be long now.

“I need you to listen. Can you listen to me, Will? Events are going to progress very quickly, darling. And I need you to be strong.”

A fierce nod rustled against his uniform.

“Good, very good…” Hannibal praised him softly, leading them further away from guards closing in. “Uncle Jack has returned.”

“W-what—how?”

“There will be a trial. Of that I am certain. They will find a way to return to justice by the book.”

“Who’s they? What do—“

Hannibal clamped a hand over a mouth and spun Will against a corner of glass and plaster, blocking the view with a hunch of broad shoulders. He stroked hair out of wavering eyes and kissed a forehead.

“We will be read our rights and questioned. They will charge us with the murder of Francis Dolarhyde.”

Feeble protest warmed his palm.

“There is a possibility we may be charged with whatever else they believe they can prove. We will be processed. Do you understand what that means? Do you remember?”

Will nodded with a pained expression.

“They cannot compel us to testify against one another, Will. Not with the union of marriage tying their hands.” Hannibal rushed through as much as he was able. “I will hire us an attorney. Entertain them with whatever web of fiction you like until they arrive if you feel the need to speak. Be patient. Compose yourself if you are able. Nod your head if you will do as I say?”

The older man pushed a hand over a clattering heart and smiled gently as Will shook his head in
agreement, nuzzling against the palm on his mouth.

“I am right here…” Hannibal murmured as a rifle jammed against his lower back. “With you.”

Bending to knees, his hands slid down trembling arms and squeezed hands. He would hold on for as long as he could. Will backed into the corner, gaze sweeping wildly over the array of firearms pointed their direction. His knees buckled from the strain.

“I need you to cooperate and go quietly…” Hannibal placed a palm against a knee, raising his voice to the melody of rainfall on roof of their home. “For my safety. For your own. For the safety of those around us.”

Will took one more breath and slumped to the floor, hands locking around his head. They bent forward until their foreheads and knees touched.

“Unless…” Hannibal tipped his face to peer up in darkening blue eyes, murmuring tenderly. “You would like me to create a fresco with their blood in your honor?”

Will glanced up and finally returned a smile. “How romantic.”

*
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Their relationship wasn’t destructive. It was an atom bomb imploding over all their lives. It left nothing in its wake. Not even each other. Just imprints of shadows where they once occupied the same space. And here they all were. Back together. Just waiting for the radiation to slowly kill them off.

The former doctor paced her office anxiously underneath the watchful gaze of Jack. She glanced occasionally at the monitor to make sure Will was still breathing. It was difficult to keep her emotions shielded behind painted red lips and kohl lined eyes. Her heart had stopped when the two men disappeared beneath the only blind spot available. She was sure Hannibal was getting his revenge, choking Will to death beneath the table. She could hear fevered cries of help. Alana snapped the ash left of Jack’s cigarette and finished it off without even a ‘thank you.’ When a shadow of the older man reappeared within view, she startled and fell back in to a leathery chair. But no Will. When the other did appear, he was shaking and bare from the waist up. A hand reached out… she held her breath. Then—

“Oh my god.” Alana clamped a hand over her mouth.

Doctor Hannibal Lecter had his mouth on Will Graham. She waited for the pull and rip of skin as lips vanished beneath teeth. Mason Verger’s hideous face illuminated grotesque angles in her mind. Her painted nails scoured white lines over leather before she reached for the phone on the desk to call in the guards. She waited for the scream or for Will to fight him off. The view changed and she dropped the phone. The dial tone hummed in the silence. Antique legs of a chair creaked uncomfortably behind her.

Will had both hands lightly wrapped around a neck as he was bent back against a table, eyes closed, and was firmly engaged against the mouth against his. She had only kissed him once. It lasted no more than a minute. She swallowed a tang of bile. But Hannibal wasn’t hurting Will. He was kissing him. And Will wasn’t pushing away. He was holding on and kissing back, just as hard and fierce. Without leaning closer (and her experience with Hannibal), she was fairly certain there was tongue.

Jack rose stiffly from the chair and clicked off the monitor. “Enough of that…”

Alana would have registered the confusion and then dip of repulsion in his voice if she wasn’t so busy staring at her own horrified expression in the black screen. She might even have asked if he felt the same way when she kissed Margot. But she doubted it. Jack wasn’t put off by two men kissing. He was more likely disgusted that a known serial killer was sucking face with his proverbial son.

“I…” A rough voice rattled. “I…can’t stay.”

“What do you mean you’re not staying?” Jack asked bemused.

She was moving. Walking out of the office and down the hall in a hurried click of heels. She stooped and tore them off. And then walked faster, nearly breaking into a run.

“Where are you going!” A bellow chased after her.

She touched her mouth. Her mind was racing. Will’s lips had been soft, thoughtful and confused and trembling. Just like he was. All nerves and quivering need to be held. He had looked down at her
with those puppy eyes and asked her softly to stay the night. It had been an unsure, fearful whisper. Romantic overtures. That’s what Will called it. He had been so in love with her in a moody silence, drifting past her for years, and only once made vague mention of it out loud. He had been this crumbling facade of beauty.

_Do you feel unstable?

Mmhm...

What she saw wasn’t that. It wasn’t quiet. It wasn’t docile and gentle. It was… The image of Hannibal leather bound and tied flashed behind her mind. She let out another _oh god_ and kept moving. It was submission and dominance all in one. It was unwavering desire and control. Did Will….?

_No. She shook her head. No. Absolutely not. Hannibal made him this way._

“It’s your hospital, Alana!” Jack caught her by the wrist and spun her around, still shouting. “They’ll be under your care. You can’t just leave!”

“That is IF they are convicted, Jack! “ Alana shouted back, jerking her hand free. “You wanted them back in the States. Well, here they are!”

“Technically, you brought them back, Alana. I came here because I thought you wanted it too!” Jack returned, lumbering after her as she took flight once more.

“I may have provided the means and funding necessary for you to gallivant throughout Europe, but don’t delude yourself. This was _your_ hunt, not mine!”

“They need to be processed by a court of law, not…” Leathery shoes banged after. “Not this!”

Icy wind hit her face. A helicopter loomed on concrete. Alana rushed forward, hands clenching then unclenching. She wanted to go home. Leave it all behind her. She didn’t want to think about Will. Or Hannibal. Either one of them ever, ever again.

“I am not willing to put my wife and children in danger because of what you want.”

“Alana—“ Jack made a frustrated growl, gesturing with curling fingers at the sky. “We need to see this through. Together! Don’t you want to be able to tell Margot she's safe?”

The doctor stopped in muddied tracks and stared down at her bare feet. Her chiffon blouse whipped in the wind created by turning blades. It was only fifty feet more. She could go. Like she had last time. She thought of Margot playing in their wild flower garden with the children, tucking pin straight hair behind her ears, and smiling brightly up with rosy lips. Her mouth pinched to a line. How many times had she kissed the cluster of freckles on her right shoulder and told her _I promise to make it all okay._

“I will see them through the trial…” Alana turned a cold stare on Jack. “And then I am gone. They are your responsibility! You hear me?”

Jack blinked, forehead creasing. “Thank you.”

* * *
“What comfort can I give to make you stop shaking?”

Will forced heavy eyes open and lifted his head from a cell floor, turning to face the voice. “A happy meal.”

“I…” Hannibal blinked from where he lay face down a foot away, brows scrunching. “…have absolutely no idea what that is.”

He laughed. “Course not.”

The younger man immediately regretted it. His entire chest still hurt from the landing when the guards had thrown them in. They hadn’t been separated. Will had only to show his teeth to get the guards to do what he wanted. It was a neat little magic trick. He should have learned it early on. Saved them some trouble.

“You aren’t going to explain, are you?” Hannibal looked pained, either from the expression on Will’s face, or his own renewed aches.

“Not a chance.” The younger man stitched on a crooked grin and scuffed a hand across the floor. “We’re passed explanations.”

“You accept me for who I am?”

“I always have.”

“What shall we do to pass the time?” The older man asked, holding his hand.

Will let his gaze fall over the bridge of a nose with a dead pan. “We could jerk each other off.”

Hannibal’s entire expression caved with a strained sigh of exasperation. Will tried hard not to laugh, but ended up doing it anyway. It hurt so much. But he couldn’t help it. His husband looked absolutely devastated by the prospect. As if his favorite set of gold tipped blades had been hung on nails within the kitchen just out of his reach. Or within reach, but caused too much agonizing pain to make it worth the effort.

Will rolled towards him, cursing the entire way under his breath. “Damn, damn, ow, damn. Fuck. Are all my ribs bruised?” He came to a halt against a stony wall of a chest. He glanced down to find baggy fabric of a uniform filled out, before returning an innocent smile as fingers tiptoed up a cast leg. “I’m far too tired anyway…and I have this doctor who would recommend rest over physical exercises for at least—”

He gasped as the older man rolled him on top and grabbed a handful of his ass. “Your blood sugar is dangerously low given your ordeal.”

Well. The younger man blinked. He hadn’t expected that. He considered asking if Hannibal scented the diagnosis or if he could feel it through kneading hands. He draped across the length of the body below and considered the width and length of what he was being forcibly ground against with interest. He sucked lightly at raised skin on a throat, hoping it soothed rather than hurt. Though he knew the older man preferred a delicate combination of the two.

He shivered. Fuck, it was fucking cold. Will had gotten used to his thawed out state. They wouldn’t even be able undress or they would end up with hypothermic shock. Or worst. Frost bite in places he had grown fond of. The room spun with a rush of light headedness. Will groaned. If he would have known they would have ended up in an interrogation room or a cell together, he might have called off his hunger strike. He could have put the energy to good use. He wanted nothing more than to ride
his old man until he limped, for reasons other than a broken leg. They would both be much warmer. He bit the inside of cheek. He could come from just this. Would have if he didn’t open his damn mouth.

“My reenactment of Ghandi you mean.”

What in the fuck is wrong with me?!

“Will, please…” A weary sigh rustled his curls as Hannibal went still, shifting to bring Will to a far less stimulating and more PG rated position. “I will see to it they provide you with proper nutrition. Though I advise an IV drip to return the vital nutrients you have lost and prevent further dehydration.”

“Thank you, Doctor Lecter…” Will ground his teeth, eyes rolling. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

He didn’t want Hannibal to blame himself anymore. He internally screamed. Then rolled off and stared at the water dripping in the ceiling. He hadn’t missed that either. What he did miss was toe curling orgasms. He would settle for one premature, semi-good one. He didn’t need candle light or precome slicked blow jobs. Or even those dexterous fingers up his—Will let out a low groan of frustration.

“Will…” A throat clicked with a hard swallow. “Are you…?”

Will looked down to find himself palming his hard cock through the uniform. He blushed bright. He both blessed and cursed the pitch dark of the cell. He knew Hannibal didn’t need to see. He would scent him. He squeezed up the length of his shaft. Wet trickled down his stomach and between shifting thighs. When the older man inhaled again, he had to stop himself from jerking off at once. He wanted to come.

Hot lips traced the curve of his ear. “Do you want…?”

A high pitched whine reached the air as a firm palm cupped his balls and lifted. His next impulse was to rut and come all over the older man's cast leg. He reached down and tightened the grip on his cock, guiding the hand in a few lazy strokes. Will arced his back and sighed. He felt good. They had been through so much. This was easy. Hannibal picked up the pace, tracing the tip of his tongue against a neck. But he wanted Hannibal inside of him, uniforms trapped around there thighs, sweaty and rough and quick. He wanted them close and—fingers twisted lightly.

“You have to stop,” Will moaned, pulling at the wrist dislodge the hand attached.

He yelped as the erratic jerk sent him over the edge. He came with a shout, gripping a flexing forearm as Hannibal worked him through it. Will collapsed spineless and somewhat humiliated back on frigid concrete. The shock of it alone sobered him up. Christ, did he just…? And here. Of all places.

A low voice swept over him as Hannibal pushed at hair clinging to a sweat soaked forehead. “How do you feel?”

“Cheap…” Will muttered. “Like I couldn’t get it up for you long enough to give you the real thing.”

“Does our change of scenery reinstate some archaic diagram outlining what constitutes as ‘real’ and ‘normal’ acts of comfort between lovers? Sexual or otherwise?” The clipped tone dug deep beneath his skin. “I thought we had discarded labels some time ago. Unless we are replacing them with some kind of psychoanalytic worth I am not aware of.”
“No, but—” The younger man gestured in the direction of an unflagging cock as if it emphasized what little Hannibal had gotten out of it.

“Was this exchange cheap?” Irritation was replaced with genuine frustration and then anger. He could feel the older man bristling, eyes narrowing. “Or are you insinuating my part in it was less than desirable?”

“I just—” Will let out a frustrated howl of his own and pounced Hannibal, sucking on his tongue until he was too distracted to start another fight. He pulled away slightly, squinting to make out dark pupils. “I just…”

He sighed. He had always had a hard time saying it. Making love. It sounded so ill witted and brash and…crude. Will sighed. Why did Hannibal want him again?


“All of our experiences are shared, William…each precious within their own right.” He felt a fierce scowl soften against his cheek with a quiet whisper. “Have you not considered I might find my own respite in providing yours? When I have so little power over how you are treated and looked after here. That I might bring you even a moment of peace at all…”

“I’m sorry…” Will turned his head and brushed the words against a mouth. “I’m sorry, baby, you know I am an idiot. I didn’t mean to say it wasn’t. I just wanted to give you more. You deserve more. Can we cuddle to make up for it? Because I’m starting to get cold again.”

Will tucked himself in a corner and widened his knees to make room. He felt sticky and the damp of the cell was making him shiver. Hannibal leaned back against him with a satisfied grunt of content and forgiveness. The younger man wrapped both arms tight and burrowed his nose at the curve of a neck. His body began to shake from malnutrition and exhaustion. He wasn’t sure if he should tell the older man he would black out soon. A rough palm smoothed up the side of his face and slid through his curls. Will lapped gently at a fading scar he knew was on a wrist. They would match now. Or again. He kept the thought firmly within his mouth. A thought dawned and spread like morning sun over his face.

“What I…” The younger man curved a palm up the arm framed against his cheek, point of a nose tracing from elbow to wrist, asking softly, “Can I have something else while we wait?”

“Anything you…”

Maroon eyes slid from sleepy corners, up cheeks, and locked on the divot of an upturned lip brushing up the throbbing blue of a basilic vein. Hannibal tensed, teeth glinting slightly as lips parted in a rush of breath.

Will kept his gaze, running an edge of his tongue from the scar down with a slow stroke. “Well?”

Hannibal let out a frail noise, pupils blowing wide. “Anything.”

“Reduced to one worded answers? I haven’t been able to do that in awhile…” Will tucked away a pleased smile and replaced it with a serious frown, voice dropping. “Is this okay? I need you to say it.”

“I made you a promise.”
“You can change your mind.”

“I want nothing more than to comfort you…” Hannibal responded fiercely, face tipping up for a kiss to fulfill softened promises. “Show me what you need, Will.”

* * *

A cacophony of murmurs and scuffing soles followed after as Jack wound further and further down a flight of stairs. They seemed to loop in an endless ring of corridors. The halogen lights gave him vertigo. Damp mold made him cough even through the crook of his arm covering his face. The farther they descended the colder it became. He had lived through more than one East Coast blizzard, but this was nothing in comparison. He could see his breath. It was frigid. A steel door was pushed open and they (he, Alana, six armed escorts, and one medical doctor) all exited in a stretch of dingy white filled with doors. They kept walking.

He shrugged out of his coat and offered it to Alana without looking. She took it wordlessly. He adjusted the hat on his head. There was a chill in the air and it had nothing to do from the temperature. He wondered if she had ever been down here at all. He looked at her profile from the corner of his vision. Her face was still red from yelling. Her mouth white and thin. What she had seen upset her. Jack wasn’t ready to commit to any kind of sensation, judgment or otherwise. He didn’t know what the hell he had seen.

The procession stopped in front of the door. A guard with short cropped blonde hair looked at him, keys out. Jack nodded and reached for the hilt of his gun. He guided Alana behind him. She scowled. He didn’t know what to expect. Corpses. Maybe a fight. An all out blood bath seemed to be their style. He wasn’t about to take any chances. Not after the Dolarhyde crime scene. The cell door clanged open.

A displeased hum of irritation wafted out from the darkness. “Excuse me, does no one knock in this establishment as common courtesy might dictate?”

Six flashlights and one syringe lifted.

Jack’s steady grip slipped on his gun. “The fuck…”

Someone behind him made a distressed choking sound and vomited. One of the beams of light wavered. It was a guard.

The presumably dead doctor was alive and well. Lounging elegantly between legs with his head tipped back against a shoulder. His features were relaxed, eyes closed, sighing softly. Jack had the absurd feeling he was visiting him the BSHCI again and was disturbing his allotted time for ‘rest and reflection’ on the cot.

“Would one of you wish to rehearse the conversation you will be having with a judge explaining why my husband nearly died without proper medical care in your custody? Or shall I?” Hannibal ambled on pleasantly before creaking a single eye open. “Alana, you are absolutely glowing. How I was hoping to see you again.”

“Step away, Doctor Lecter…” Jack drew his gun and slipped the safety off. He raised it and aimed at the center mass of a chest. He wouldn’t miss this time. “Hands on your head. Both of you. On your knees.”

“A bit difficult at the moment.” An airy smile lifted. “I can only comply with one of those requests
until Will returns the use of my hand. Surely you understand.”

Streams of glistening red coated an arm pressed to a mouth, fingers twitching slightly against an unruly mop of dark hair. A haze of blue glanced across the lot of them. Will drew a fresh trickle of blood as he chewed on skin. He heard Alana muffle a gasp and step back. He would have looked back to offer a comforting word, but didn’t. All it took was one distraction. He had this under control.

“Patched him right up, I see…” Jack noted, shuffling foot by foot in to the cell, shadowed outlines of rifles watching his back.

“What kind of husband would I be if I could not adequately provide comfort during a moment of distress?” The doctor stroked hands against flushed cheeks, murmuring against an ear, “May I have it back, darling, or shall I wait?”

Jack nearly turned around and threw up himself at the cloying endearment. It was offensive coming from Hannibal’s mouth.

“Distress? You mean *insanity.*”

The older man slumped as a flat edge of a tongue lapped up his forearm, revealing a series of shallower bite marks. Pink swirled delicately over a crescent of brighter red. Hannibal moved a hand over the wound and applied increasing pressure. He sighed as Will tugged his head to the side by short cropped hair and slid their mouths together, smearing red across their chins and down a throat.

Jack looked away, startling when a scuffle of feet had his gaze snapping back. Will crouched in front of Hannibal, shoulders drawn tight, bright blue peering out from dark falling over his face. A forearm dragged blood and teeth in to view. The agent took a step forward. The young man began to growl, an insidious thing seeping from the depths of his lung, feral and snapping.

“Say it again, Jack…” A hoarse timber of a blazing forest shook out. “Call me insane. See what happens.”

It was the first time he had heard Will's voice in years. He wasn't even sure it belonged to Will.

Jack took a quick step back and then another, shifting the barrel of his gun from the doctor to his former protégé. “Going to call off your killer?”

Jesus Christ. Was he going to have to shoot them both? Or would he end up like Chilton? Several feet of bowels short and burnt to a near crisp?

Hannibal sat a little straighter, amused and shrugged. “It is within Will’s right to govern himself how he sees fit. And generally I find I am all too happy to oblige.”

“This little display is going to get you shot, Will,” Jack warned, ushering the guards in after him. “If you don’t want to be called insane then try to act like someone who isn’t crazy for a change.”

Will lunged. A firm hand snaked around the back of his neck and held lightly to a rumpled collar. The older man came to stand directly behind him. Blue whipped up to glitter at a slant of cool desert sky.

Fingers flexed as Hannibal bent slightly at the waist, peering calmly into a storm. “Mind your Uncle Jack, dearest.”

“No…” Will growled, gaze slicing to the side to meet a flickering flame of red.
Jack stiffened, index finger slipping over the curve of a trigger. His palms began to sweat. He didn’t want it to end like this. He didn’t want to kill his friend. He didn’t want the sad eyes of the boy he had dragged kicking and screaming out of a classroom one day to haunt his every waking moment. Will had said it wasn’t good for him. How many times did he ignore it?

*Stability is good for you, Will.*

*Stability requires strong foundations, Jack. My moorings are built on sand.*

Hannibal tipped closer still and murmured something too low to hear with a trace of fingertips from cheek to lips. Will dropped to his knees with a heavy thud, locking fingers at the base of a bowed neck, corner of a lip twisting up before placing a kiss on an arcing cheek.

“I never said I wouldn’t mind you, Hannibal.”

A pleased hum answered, fingers threading through curls. “Good boy.”

His stomach twisted and lurched.

"Cuff them," Someone ordered. "Be quick about it."

"I object to the terminology used. Will isn't yours to cuff."

"They get it." A snort went mute. "You're possessive."

Jack watched blood flow from Hannibal’s open wound then pool in the palm of the hand he was holding. Then he caught the faint glimmer of wedding bands. And he realized…

Will had found his moorings, and built his own foundation, in the structure of bones and blood in another man. He hadn't died. He had been reborn.

Chapter End Notes

Our last few chapters have been bloody (good?) : > In the last one, flowers referenced were all ones of the poisonous variety. And I like to think they have made up for some of their snapping in this one. At least, long enough to poke at Jack.

Though I am feeling a bit sea sick from their emotional roller coaster. I know you have feelings, lovable idiots, but my god. So what's that sound? Are we screaming for more? Or just screaming?

Forever yours, dear friends and readers.

On next week's episode, we'll be returning to our tried and true days of (legal) interrogation and police work. (Do I want them to escape? Yes. Is it feasible without them being shot in the head currently? Eh... We all know the answer to that.)
“Are you seeing this?” A voice called from another room.

Brian watched the glass tray spin round and round in the food spattered microwave in the break room with a mournful sigh. For a group of forensic techs who knew how not to leave evidence, he was certain this particular atrocity was encrusted in the half eaten DNA of everyone that worked in their building. If it had bothered him enough, he and by association, what could be categorized as ‘everyone else,’ probably would have cleaned it by now. It didn’t. He left it as it was. A true testament to their existence. He was within sixty seconds of blissfully unhealthy pizza bagels. If he took them out now, they would be soggy and burn the entire roof of his mouth with blisters. If he waited, they would be rubbery and inedible because god only knew how long Jimmy was about to prattle on about something he was seeing. Or thinking. Or needing to share whatever flit in and out of his skull. The man had no filter. It could be minutes. Hours. Days. And then where would his beloved afternoon snack be? It would end up in a petri dish to test for contaminants and newly discovered types of mold. Right next to the microwave he imagined.

“Z! Hurry up or you’re going to miss it!”

He sighed and pushed away from the counter, casting one last longing glance at the microwave.

“Goodbye, my friends.”

Jimmy was anxiously perched forward on the edge of an aluminum stool, crowding close to a wood paneled television from some dated year in the 1960s. It was more than likely dug out of a dumpster and labeled a ‘gem of a find.’ He rolled his eyes. In another life, he was positive the man would be a hipster lurking in coffee shops and relabeling vintage as the new earth friendly chic.

“So…seeing, what…?” Brian leaned over and squinted at a flashing red ticker tape.

He swore to god if Jimmy had pulled him away to watch another cat video or a squirrel on water skies again…

SERIAL KILLERS CAPTURED: Brought to F.B.I. headquarters for questioning.

Oh. Brian blinked hard. He would have preferred the cats.

Cameras flashed over a sea of pushing bodies and thrust microphones. Dozens of uniforms emblazoned with various state and federal agencies appeared. Someone reached in to an armored van and pulled on chains. Steely blue lifted from behind a fogging mask directly into the nearest camera before being hauled forward by a straight jacket.

“Jesus…” Jimmy drew a hand over his mouth to muffle the disbelief in his voice. “It’s him.”

The forensic tech squatted next to the screen and ducked his head. He wasn’t hiding. Necessarily. He was resting his body…in a position that looked a lot like hiding. A shiver shook through him. Brian had never liked Will. Will had never liked him. But he had always known something wasn’t right about him. He was off. The shit that came out of his mouth should have been evidence enough of how ‘off’ he was. But no. No one listened. Was he really a cold blooded killer now? Or had he been one all along? A clamor of audio rose in the background, a blend of shouted questions and reporters talking over one another. But one rose louder and clearer than all the rest. He winced.

Get a close up, Marty. Ladies and gentleman, this is Freddie Lounds—
Both men simultaneously groaned. It was bad enough the world had to suffer her online articles. Someone had given her a video camera.

--reporting live. Events are unfolding quickly. We have just gotten our first glimpse of the presumed dead former F.B.I. agent, Will Graham, being led from a transportation vehicle. It is unknown where he was captured and how long he has been in custody. The local and national authorities are scrambling to contain a surging crowd. Oh wait. Wait. There’s someone else. It’s—

Jimmy gasped, hands clasped to knees, breathing out. “Doctor Lecter.”

You saw it here first. The return of the infamous and depraved Hannibal the Cannibal Lecter. Rumors have swirled since the disappearance of both Lecter and Graham after the discovery of their gruesome crime scene involving fellow serial killer, the Dragon. Francis Dolarhyde was most well known for…

Brian sat firmly on the floor and stared at the screen. He shuddered. He had seen first hand, hundreds of crime scenes, what that man was capable of. What he had done to those bodies was the stuff of nightmares. His stomach lurch. He had been lucky enough to never consume any of the murder victims. But the Dolarhyde murder…was different. He still closed his eyes at night and saw an ocean of blood. Gouts and gouts dried black to the slate patio. Pools and spatter leading away from the mutilated body and disappearing over a steep edge. Below uncertainty and fear had churned grey green against rocks.

Have our very own murder husbands been captured to face the reality of their crimes? How many did they kill to consummate their love?

Armed escorts pushed the doctor through the crowd on a gurney. He offered an easy smile in the direction of Freddie Lounds with a gleam of a mask.

“They’re…” The tech’s expression blanked with his mind. “…not dead.”

“Well obviously,” Jimmy shot back, tapping a hand against the television to calm a quiver of static. “But we never found their bodies. It was always a possibility.”

The man rocked back on his heels as bewilderment wrinkled his brow. No good could come of this. They had all moved on with their lives. Or tried to. Jimmy had married a younger horticulturist fellow in the Fall. From what he had heard, Jack was in the longest engagement known to man to a pretty girl he met in Spain. And he personally had been seeing someone for the last year or so, and seeing as how she hadn’t used him for information or set him up to take the fall in a tabloid magazine, seemed promising. But he wasn’t crossing his fingers. It never seemed to last. Maybe he ought to write in and ask how two of the most notorious killers in the country managed to stay together even after several near deaths.

“Jack finally wrangled his ghosts,” Brian replied with a begrudging breath.

He wished they had stayed ghosts. It was better for everyone that way.

“From the looks of it, a little too effectively. Do you see that skin discoloration?” Disapproving lines appeared as the frown on Jimmy’s face deepened and gradually rose to ripple across the planes of his forehead with concern. “Pretty sure that’s petechial bruising. I bet you anything there’s some nasty hematomas hidden under those uniforms.”

Where the fuck had they been all this time? The trail had gone cold in Italy. And then Jack had disappeared.
With a huff, he stood and crossed his arms. “Serves them right.”

“Do you think it’s true?” His colleague shot a stern look over his shoulder.

“What? That they deserve it? Damn right they do.”

“No, no. Not that. Lord knows you don’t have an objective opinion,” Jimmy rattled before pausing. He stared at the screen as blurring figures disappeared behind locking doors and then glanced back. “That the two of them are…? They’re…well, you know.”

Brian stared back at him with glazed eyes and considered what kind of funeral to give his pizza rolls. Jimmy pursed his lips, waiting impatiently for a reply, and then repeated what he said with a crude set of hand gestures.

“Oh Christ!” Whirling on his heel, Brian tried to scrub away the mental imagery and stormed out, shouting, “What are we in grade school, Price? This, or anything related to this, is not something I’m going to discuss with you ever!”

“But the people have a right to know!”

* * *

Frost clung to the window in a glum ghostly white. Molly plunged hands in soapy water and studied the dainty designs it created. The backyard was littered with limbs from drooping oak trees. A storm had blown through bringing with it a winter chill and freezing rain. She would have to clean them up soon. She glanced down at her slim pale fingers and touched a spot where a ring had once been. Water crept up seams of rolled sleeves, gauzy pale peach chiffon clinging to her elbows. Will had liked the winter months best. He said it quieted his mind. Sitting out on the porch till his cheeks turned rosy, staring off into the distance haunted by something she couldn’t see and he wouldn’t let her know. He had tasted of pine and hints of whiskey easing from icy lungs of despair. She shook the thought away.

“Mom!” A small voice called. “Mom, come look!”

Molly watched water drain frothy white as she pushed her feet in plush slippers before reaching for the light switch. She hesitated. Then left it on. She had been leaving them on for years. Inside and out. Inside for her own comfort. And kept the porch light burning for someone that never came home. She made her way to the shadowy den and found her son standing three inches from a television screen.

Walter whirled around and pointed at the glow of pixels. “It’s him! It’s Will.”

Molly grabbed an edge of the tattered beige couch for support and lifted her eyes. Her knees creaked. All the pieces of her heart surged and gathered whole. For one blissful moment she thought her prayers had been answered. Ocean blue looked directly into the camera and she sank to the floor, one hand on Walter’s shoulder and the other covering her mouth.

Then she saw him. Silver haired and red eyed. Disgust twitched her lips to a hateful angle. A rush of scorn had her biting her inner cheek. She let her hand fall and rake through the shag carpet on the floor. Tears in her eyes began to burn. The pieces inside her grew brittle and hardened, malformed and etched in years of brutal silence.
“No, honey…” Fringed strawberry blonde fell over a cold gaze. “It isn’t him. Our Will died a long time ago.”

* * *

Hannibal held wavering blue with a tender sweep of his eyes. It was all he was capable of giving through six inches of bulletproof glass. He and Will had been separated upon their arrival, placed in separate interrogation rooms. They could see one another. He suspected this was in hopes to rattle a confession from one of them. They would have to try harder if they expected them to turn on the other. He sincerely doubted torture would be condoned at a federal level. Especially after such a spectacle was made of their arrival. There was not a doubt in his mind a particular red head played a hand in wringing out classified information from yet another unsuspecting government official. Smoke often lead to flagrant fires. Freddie Lounds was often lurking nearby with blackened fingertips and discarded matches at her high heeled feet.

Rumpled wrappers of white stamped with golden arches waved his direction. Will chewed thoughtfully on its hideous contents. The consideration turned to desperate tearing of teeth a second later, glazed eyes darkening. Hannibal winced as the younger man hunched over the food to devour it in near whole bites.

_Slow down, darling…you will make yourself ill._

He knew starvation made it difficult to satiate the greed to replenish and strengthen. His first meal after escaping the orphanage had been snatched from a burnished orange fox. He had thrown a log in her direction and chased her off. The fawn’s flesh had still been warm. His stomach contents ended up by a stream a half hour later beside his unconscious body. Blue eyes lifted. Will froze mid bite and slowly set down the hamburger, flushing crimson with apologies.

A small, soothing smile flickered across his mouth. The older man’s jaw ached beneath the mask. He could still hear the crunch of a trachea between his teeth. He had not been fond of repeatedly drowning to be certain, but he was even less amiable to seeing Will crushed beneath boots after surrendering peacefully. He had put down the Goliath in the only means available to him. Hannibal smiled. His screams had been much more satisfying than anticipated. Surprisingly, Jack put a needle in him instead of a bullet. Perhaps the man had a sense of justice after all. The straight jacket, however, seemed redundant.

Tired retinas flashed with after images of cameras going off. Hannibal scrunched his nose, flexing aching shoulders. He was glad to be able to see Will. To know he was near in the hours they waited. Chains rattled against the table he was cuffed to, drawing fresh beads of red on his forearm. The mark would be permanent, much more beautiful than the slits the hospital orderly had left. It was Will’s mark by proxy. But he preferred the intimacy of their latest encounter. He sighed. He was beginning to get a headache. When had he slept last? He had nodded off several times in the transport van, brain buzzing with visions of Will lying peacefully asleep on a white sand beach, jolting awake to find his husband muzzled and eyes downcast in the cage across from him. Each time was more jarring than the last. In the seconds before clarity returned, Hannibal hoped to wake to find he was alone. He never was.

Dark brows furrowed against a mop of hair and leather straps of a mask returned with a cautious tug from a guard. Will tipped his head with concern. A rush of guilt hazed blue eyes. Hannibal shook his head hard enough to loosen several dizzying waves. He wanted to tell the younger man he was not
the cause of his discomfort. He had hardly lost enough blood to cause concern. Even if he had, he
would have let Will bleed him dry, burrow deep in his bones and rest in the safety of his skin. He
needed to regain his strength to keep the younger man from seeing his weakened state. He used to be
much better at hiding it all.

*I used to hide from you in plain sight, William, until you chased away the shadows and shined the
light of your eyes inside the caverns of my soul.*

“I never thought you were dead, you know.”

Forcing his gaze from mirrored glass, Hannibal turned to find Jack looming over his shoulder. A
stack of files was piled in his arms. Gold emblazoned his chest on a leathery badge. Ah. How
unfortunate. They had returned Jack to his post after all. Congratulations were likely in order. A
polite gesture. Hannibal considered the circumstances of the reinstatement, casting one glance in
Will’s direction. Social etiquette could be waved just this once.

A mousy agent scampered in, strands of comet colored hair falling over thick glasses. She teetered
this way and that to balance a cardboard file box before setting it on the table. Mossy grey eyes cast a
furtive glance the older man’s direction before the agent vanished. She was fresh. A new pony for
Jack to throw to the wolves. They were alone once more. Hannibal felt Will watching them with
narrowed eyes. He could sense tension gathering in the younger man’s shoulders, the stiffening of
his spine, cold sweat of palms. He had to concentrate. He blocked it out.

“Seeing as how you did not consider the possibility…” Hannibal countered coolly. “I was the killer
you were looking for all those years, I might suggest your judgment is not the most reliable.”

“And it’s not like you to leave forensic and DNA evidence strewn all over Europe, Doctor. I’d even
say careless,” Jack shot back with a smug grin, flipping the box over and dumping out contents.
“There’s enough here to make something stick.”

Plastic evidence bags littered the table of various shapes and sizes. He knew this was not the only
box Jack had acquired over the years. Not if he had been hunting them since their disappearance.
Jack was always contentious and thorough when it came to catching killers. Hannibal cast a
dispassionate gaze over them before tuning out the voice. Photographs landed next. He heard a
rumbling freight train beneath the turning of his conscious mind. He used to be exquisitely careful.
Each action calculated, weighed, and dispersed with effortless grace. He sensed the younger man
shuddering beyond the room and clenched his jaw until the sensation weakened. His emotional
attachment to Will made him reckless. He began to catalogue the evidence thick hands pushed in
front of him.

His breath caught. Will’s first time. His very own design. Their first mistake. It was lovingly depicted
in stark black and white. A man’s body riddled with a dozen jagged stab wounds. He saw the shine
of stormy blue in the pitch dark alley in Marseilles, rigid bass of a nightclub slamming against his
spine. The kill had been pure abandon, soaking Will red from the waist up, in a display of defiance
and power. To prove he did not need to be saved. Hannibal had told him to stay put. To wait. To
leave if he did not return. The boy had been foolish and endangered both their lives. He nearly killed
him, struck down by hot hands sliding beneath his shirt and a copper filled mouth gasping for air
against lust. He nipped at the fleshy bit of his lower lip. Will never tasted more vulnerable than when
he fought to survive only to offer himself up to be devoured. He grimaced inwardly. How Jack had
made the connection was anyone’s guess. Perhaps he had scoured international agencies for any
murder he could find and chased after each one in hope of a lead.

A newspaper unfolded. The Times New Roman headline shrieked in French: *Massacre at Lisandru
Estate.* Beneath that a gory photograph of two bodies embracing in a puddle of blood made him
smile. Nicolas and the boy he called Cecil deserved each other far more in death than they ever did breathing. An evidence bag slid his way. A suit jacket of cashmere and delicate hand stitching. He recognized it immediately. He had taken it from the tailoring shop after strangling the father’s apprentice. He had discarded it on the side of a road in a snow bank with his broken heart, head bent and hands shaking as he screamed silently. It would be covered with his blood. Will’s. And the DNA of a dozen others he had slaughtered mercilessly inside marbled walls to deliver the boy safe from harm. They could connect them to the crime scene. But they would never be able to prove the murders belonged to Hannibal. He hadn’t freed any of them of their organs or limbs to consume after all. At least not those particular men.

Several other article clippings slid in front of him. *Mysterious Disappearances: Connections to La Brise de Mer.* He forced his features to remain still. His teeth practically chattered with the need to gloat. He had enjoyed this interlude of time immensely. His need to reclaim Will’s honor had gotten the best of him. It had also allowed calm to return. Afforded a sense of control that had been taken. He felt most affectionate and at peace when able to provide Will with three course meals of delicately arranged parts of the men who had taken him. Perhaps he had not been as quiet as he should have been. How could he let them live after what they had done?

Hannibal touched the corner of a photograph lightly before looking away. It was a mug shot of shivering skin and panicked violet eyes. They should have never involved the priest. Elias had nearly been held accountable for their destruction. Another headline read: *Bloodbath in Local Church. Socialite Discovered Among Bodies: Priest Held for Questioning.* His thoughts turned to the house by the sea. If Peter and Elias had been searching after their disappearance, he hoped the public display of their arrest would reach them and bring closure. What would they think? Would they be horrified? Disgusted? For Will’s sake, he hoped Elias would forgive them and find a way to live with the knowledge the closest thing he had to family were two killers. He frowned. Elias was also the only witness they ever had to their crimes. He longed for them to remain friends, not one of their victims, by their hands or association.

Photographs followed. Some were of the property Hannibal had purchased for them. Afterglows painted the walls where men had died after taking Will hostage. Others displayed domesticity, closets of suits hanging next to ragged jeans and flannel. He wondered if the police had filed ones of body fluid and sex toys elsewhere to keep from seeing the light of day. Others were shots of the cabin they had spent quieter evenings in. Photographs of the inside of their boat appeared. It had been docked in the marina. They had sailed it to Italy. Hannibal let his eyes close. He wished they were still there, safe beneath the sheets and pressed skin to skin underneath starlight.

*You deserve sweet and easy peace, dearest one. You deserve a life apart from my own.*

“The Chesapeake Ripper eluded an entire department of the FBI for years.” Booming interrupted his thoughts. “You got sloppy.”

“My attentions were elsewhere at the time,” Hannibal answered automatically, leaning back before looking up. “If we are to state things for accuracy’s sake, then I might amend your statement to say I eluded you for years, Jack.”

“And exactly what was more important? The Chesapeake Ripper never left a trace. Not a single shred of evidence. No fingerprints. No DNA. Nothing.”

"Not until your agent in training." Red lips tilted with a smirk. “Primarily I was preoccupied with where my mouth and hands might be on or in Will, for example.”
A sweating palm slammed against a bouncing knee. Thin breaths fogged against a mask. Will tried to steady breathing and quell the anxiety stinging through his veins. He watched Hannibal’s mouth forming words with smooth glides, desperate to channel the careless shift of his body. He knew the older man wasn’t calm. Not really. The slight crease against his brow had appeared and then vanished. Whatever he was looking at was unsettling. His knee picked up an erratic rhythm again. Deep circles swathed red eyes in black as they swept over photographs. He knew Hannibal was weary. They had offered Will a meal after the first two hours, but left the older man in entire isolation. His heart ached. How long would they try to wear them down? Neither of them were well enough physically to keep up an endless interrogation. If he asked, promised to behave himself, would they let him sit in a room with Hannibal? He sensed a presence and turned his head.


The agent set an unmarked filing box down quietly. Jack looked at him with a vacant expression. Will felt a tingling of atoms dispersing in his skin and knew the other man was looking right through him, as if this version was less real than the one Jack had once known. To be fair, Will was never sure that man had existed when he was around. Had not known him well or for very long. Just limbs and organs held together by mossy denim and flannel. A culmination of breath and matter and nothing more. Hannibal had made him feel real. Awake. Present.

Jack was dressed down. Sleeves rolled up on a navy shirt. No tie or cuff links in sight. His thin silver glasses hung in a breast pocket. His relaxed appearance was meant to be disarming. As if to suggest he and Will were merely having a friendly conversation side by side while they shivered on the ice and shared whiskey. They had talked of trapping Hannibal then. Now Jack had them both. And he was still holding open the cage and ushering Will in.

A throat cleared after a moment. “What?”

“Winston! My dog.” The younger man grit his teeth, knuckles draining bone white. “Where the fuck are my dogs, Jack, and what the fuck have you done with them!”

“The…?” The agent shook his head before sitting heavily across from Will, rubbing wide fingers against a creased brow. “Of course.”

Will leaned forward and Jack leaned back, studying the motion with a calculated glint. “Where.”


“He’s mine.”

“He’s not yours anymore, Will. He’s gone.”

Inhaling sharply, Will felt his entire mouth flinch with anger simmering beneath his eyelids. He could handle the loss of his life. The repossession of his freedom. Even giving up his dignity. But they had taken Hannibal. Then they had killed one of his pack, his family, and let him say goodbye to neither. Not a single apology. Not an ounce of remorse.
“He doesn’t belong to you. Or Jimmy!” Will shouted, banging a fist on the table. “I want his body in the care of the priest. Buried at our home, not some goddamn plot of petunias. Where he’ll be cherished and looked after.”

The priest. Will curled toes inside of soft cloth shoes. He shouldn’t have said that.

Jack crooked an index finger over the thin press of his mouth and stared at Will, rolling words like marbles inside his cheeks. “Forgive me if I’m intruding but…” Elbows came to rest on the table. “Did you find God while in the drug induced haze of Hannibal Lecter’s company?”

It figured. It really did. Will hadn’t seen Jack in years. Had been in his company for the collective time of less than an hour. And he already wanted to walk out the fucking door and never come back. The man didn’t care about him. Didn’t care then or now. He would never be accused of not being objective. Jack had a one track mind. The return of his badge and gun were testament of that. Will was just part of the job again, to be dealt with and handled. Jack was doing what he did best. Fishing. Will was no longer the bait. He was the hook.

“Why do I bother opening my mouth, Jack?” Will sat back as far as the restraints allowed, voice dipping bitter and half turned in the chair. “You never listened to a damn word I said before. If you just would have listened—”

Palms spread to offer peace. “Now…now look, Will, I don’t want to see you here.”

Jack wasn’t offering peace. He was offering up Will and Hannibal. And he was praying he could use Will again to catch him.

“Again.” Chains snapped and rattled. “You don’t want to see me here again. Where you put me. The first fucking time!”

“Why don’t you just tell me what really happened? Is it like the first time? Look at me, Will, I’m listening. So talk to me. I’m on your side. Your friend. Remember?”

A heavy palm settled over his clenched hands. Will closed his eyes and took a breath. The touch felt razor sharp and intimate. He never liked it when the man touched him. His body always jerked as if pulled by invisible strings. This was a manipulation, an act to rekindle a friendship they once had. Jack wanted to peer beneath the surface and he had no problem skinning Will to get a good look.

“You are only on my side when it is convenient for you to be…” Will replied with a grating growl. “Or do you not recollect being on the other end of the pole as you dangled me as bait for Hannibal?”

“Talk to me then.” Jack watched Will reel his hands back to safety before looking up, eyes shining like coals in a fireplace. “We can make this all go away, cut a deal, send you back home to Walter and Molly. Don’t you want that? To go home?”

Will followed the tip of his tongue with a scrape of teeth over lips to restrain a distasteful sneer. Jack was trying to appeal to his humanity. To the things he perceived as being a loss. Will hadn’t lost them. Loss implied he had misplaced them like a set of car keys. Or even guilt or longing. He had always known where they were. He merely shed the life he had known and left his nuclear family holding his papery skin. He would let that man die again and again. Not to bring suffering to the people he loved, but for once in his life, end his own. And allow himself some peace.

“You…” The younger man shook his head, laughing lightly. “…are making it very difficult for me not to vividly imagine your death.”

“Who is this version of you talking, Will? Or is it Hannibal? It sounds a lot like him. I hear your
“Don’t let this son of a bitch drag you down with him!” Jack growled, eyes narrowing before placing fists against a mouth and forcing his voice to quiet. He sounded hurt. “I know he’s your friend. Hell, he was my friend. I would even say my closest friend. My confidant. Or I thought he was. Until he tried to kill me.”

“He is not my friend, Jack.”

“See, you’re making more sense already. Why don’t—"

“Give me his fucking phone.”

“What?”

“The phone. Hannibal’s phone. I know it’s bagged as evidence. Give me the goddamn thing.”

A spark of curiosity rippled in dark eyes. Will nearly snorted out loud. The agent thought he was getting somewhere. Getting through to his better nature, what was left of sensibility. Clinging to the idea Will was the same man Jack had taken under his care. Only to let the nightmares tear him apart. He let Hannibal put him back together. What did he expect? He would never fit together the same way ever again. He was changed.

And he loved me for having done so.

After rummaging through the box, Jack pulled out a cell phone wrapped in plastic. It was the same one Hannibal had on him the day they had been taken outside of the market in Italy. He ripped open the official seal and pulled it out.

“Why do you—hey! You aren’t allowed to—"

Will looked down at the hands clamped on his wrist then dragged darkening eyes up to meet Jack’s gaze, voice growing cold. “My fingerprints are already all over it, Jack, it’s not contaminated. I suggest you let go. Unless you want to see what these can do.”

Teeth appeared. The hand retreated. For a fraction of a second Jack looked afraid.

Good. Let him be afraid for once.

An icon bounced as he tapped on it. A gallery of photos appeared on the screen. He began to scroll through them. He tried not to look at any too closely. It hurt too much to see either he or Hannibal smiling in the bright saturated frames. It seemed so long ago. Another life time. Will thumbed over a photo and brought it up to fill the entire screen.

He took a deep breath and steadied the strain in his voice. “Now. Let’s try this again. 'Hannibal Lecter is not my friend.' Let’s hear you say it.”

“Will, you’re not—"

Will slammed the phone on table, cracking a rose gold edge, yelling, “I do not fuck my friends! And I sure as hell don’t marry them.”

The photograph was grainy. The lighting was worse. Back lit with sepia dawn framed by gauzy curtains tied against a hotel window. Two silhouettes filled the rectangular frame. One was standing,
hands on hips, head thrown back and sharp mouth open to moan. The other was kneeling on a hideous paisley down comforter on all fours, hands knotting fabric beneath curls, small of a back dipped low. Will had woken to a tongue inside him, throaty whisper pressed to his ear asking if Hannibal could have him. The older man had savored fucking him slow and sweet for an hour and a half, before they both collapsed in a quiver of thighs and seeking hands. They had slept curled around one another until night fall.

Jack tore his gaze from the photograph and put a palm over the surface, raw voice shaking free. He wouldn’t look at Will. He just stared at the table.

“Did he… hurt you? Force you to…to?”

Will bared his teeth without meaning to, stomach twisting bile. Jack moved his hand and must have swiped to another file. The younger man choked as it began to play. A shaky video recording showed the lazy whir of a fan overhead in the heat of summer to cool ocean soaked skin, voices drifting in and out.

“Oh open your mouth for me. Are you able to take more?”

“Mmm.”

“William…” A gasp and then laughter. “So eager. Not so rough, darling. Ah, ah—“

A deep groan was followed by a wet pop.

“God, Hannibal. Please. Please.”

“Please, Will? Won’t you say what you want?”

“In me. I need you in me, Hannibal.”

“Do you need me?”

“More. More. Yes, just like that. Baby, baby, fuck I’m going—”

Blunt edges fell over the screen and the recording stopped. At least Hannibal had the good sense to keep the phone within reach. Thank Christ. Otherwise Jack would have just heard exactly what they both sounded like upon orgasm. Will wired shut his unhinged jaw and tried to block out the heat of his face. He could have picked up the sound of a straight pin dropping in that room it was so quiet. Photographs were one thing, but—

Sharp commands rose to shake silence from the room. “We can have a lawyer in here in an hour. Get divorce proceedings in or—“


“Look, Will, if he hurt you—“

“I love him.”

“—we could submit that in to evidence. We have the photographs. We just need it written out, see?”

“He is the light of my fucking life and, once again, I love him.”

“You were under the influence of a psychopath, Will. He got under your skin. In your head. So deep you didn’t know what you were doing.”
Will bent at the neck and raked shaking hands through matted curls, biting the inside of his cheek hard. It wasn’t difficult to figure out. His stomach sank slowly. He knew where this was going. One pornographic photo and a near sex tape later wouldn’t end this. He ground his teeth. Whatever they had, whatever ‘new’ evidence they had spread out in front of Hannibal, was all circumstantial. It would never hold up in court. Nothing they could prove with indisputable facts. What they could prove was sitting in an interrogation room with Jack.

“I knew exactly what I was doing…” The younger man answered coldly, raising his voice to ensure the audio recording picked up every single word he said. “And the only thing he got deep in was me spread out on a dining room table with a three course meal. Unless you’re referring to the times he skull fucked me until I couldn’t see straight. Either is a good example.”

“No, no. Not just influence,” Jack blustered, barreling head long down a narrow corridor of his own self righteousness and unwillingness to accept. “Duress. He threatened your life. The lives of your family. Your wife. Your kid. What else were you supposed to do?”

“Oh, I don’t know.” Rigid shoulders shrugged. “I could have let him tear off my clothes and suck me while kneeling in a pool of Dolarhyde’s blood. I imagine he would have liked it. I imagine I would have too. But there was an issue of time, and well, imminent death or capture.”

“You could testify in court—“

“Jack, you’re not listening.”

“—that Hannibal coerced and forced you in to a sexual relationship. That he—”

There it was. Hideous, vulgar, and disgusting. They would crucify Hannibal for what only one man, less than a man, a monster, had done to him.

Will slammed both fists on the table, screaming, “Jack!”

The agent jumped, hand immediately going for the firearm strapped at his waist. Will’s chest heaved, lungs ravaged by flame. The quiet violence between them returned.

“…Thank you.”

His fingers curled one by one and then flexed open to release a trembling rage. He let the table blur and fade. He could feel Hannibal’s stare boring a hole against his cheek. He bit down on his tongue. He knew if he opened his mouth he would start screaming. And screaming. And screaming. It would never stop.

“Let me try this again in words you’re more likely to understand. Are you listening?” Will’s voice clawed free in a dark whisper, chains dragging across the table as he bent forward on elbows, fingers pressed tightly together against his mouth. “The only thing forced about my relationship with Hannibal Lecter is having to explain it to you.”

“I get it, Will. It happens all the time in kidnapping cases. A captive bonds with—“

Forcing hot breath out of nose, Will answered tersely, “Jack, there are few things I enjoy more than being tied up. But one of those includes bending Hannibal over the nearest surface with a knife at his throat and fucking him in the ass until he is screaming my name. Got it?”

“So he…” A rigid mouth opened and then shut. “He tied you up and forced himself on you?”

“Oh for the love of—“
“Jesus Christ, Graham!”

Hannibal lifted his head in time to see chained hands swiping out at Jack. The man’s startled shout was loud enough to reverberate the glass. Will had his teeth bared, shouting something back with enough force to turn his entire face red, then produced a rigid middle finger. A cellphone splintered above a ducking head. A set of bagged objects sailed through the air. The entire filing box followed shortly after.

The door swung open as Jack retreated, releasing a terse scream echoing through a hall. “I forgot what an goddamn cock you are! You piece of shit!”

When Jack circled back to Hannibal’s interrogation room his hands were shaking. He could tell by the way the fabric that formed trouser pockets rustled. Will was still standing, fists clenched, head thrown back in search of air towards the ceiling. Hannibal wanted to pull him against his mouth, drain the fight from his crimson skin, and tell him he was magnificent in fury. There were only one of two things that could get such an expressive reaction from Will.

“Did you ask him about his dogs?” Hannibal asked casually, crossing one leg over another. “Or about me?”

Jack nailed himself to the corner of a room and cracked bones in his thick neck with a twist, replying, “I don’t know what the hell kind of mind games you played on him, Doctor, but you sure have got him twisted.”

“He is lovely in a rage, isn’t he?” Hannibal sighed pensively, resting his chin in a palm, gaze flicking to the glass and smiling at Will. "Truly beautiful."

Blue eyes narrowed slightly and he knew the younger man’s gaze was fixed on his mouth, reading each word.

“If twisted is used to describe nearly aerobatic sexual positions then I must agree with you. He is exceptionally flexible. And thorough. Have I ever told you he has this amazing capability with his tongue that—"

Will began to shake with laughter, flopping back against a chair, shielding his eyes with a palm.

“For god—“

The interrogation room door creaked before it was slammed shut.

It was another half hour before Hannibal was allowed to make a phone call. Then the guards brought Will to Hannibal. He had threatened at least two of their lives and three of the lives of their family. He suspected Will probably had done the same. Jack wouldn’t let bodies pile up, at least not so soon after his reinstatement.

The older man brushed a kiss against the blank plastic of a mask, murmuring, “Our lawyer ought to be here within the hour.”

“That’s…good.” Blue slipped down and to the side, brow arching curiously. “Gonna give Jack a
massive coronary? Or were you going for more of a cardiac arrest?”

“It seems to be what we are best at...” A soft reply echoed, hooking a thumb through the face mask and sliding it free. Hannibal let it dangle, pause dragging out. “Did he—“

The mask clattered to the floor. Will slid both hands around cheeks, chains snapping taut, and kissed Hannibal until he couldn’t breath. A tongue sliced open his lips. He chased after it, gripping bony wrists and pulling closer. They would end up in a tangle of chains. If they twisted much tighter, they would be able to lie against one another and rid themselves of oxygen.

“I…” A feverish mouth slipped free, brushing gently against swollen lips. “…don’t want to talk about it. Okay?”

Hannibal felt Will shaking beneath layers of the uniform and nodded once. They leaned forward on their chairs, cuffed hands clasped between the box formed by legs and knees.

“Is it wrong of me to express how much you own me, Will?” The older man spoke softly, stroking knuckles with a soothing whirl of fingerprints. “And I, you?”

Will closed his eyes, chest rising and freezing, finally releasing lungs with a shaky breath. “Not if it’s true.”

“Would you like to hear another truth?”

The younger man nodded, wide blue drifting from his mouth to brightening maroon eyes.

“I would like to hoist you on this table as I am, bound and at your mercy, with my mouth on your cock.”

“Oh baby, take me now,” Will answered with punctuated lust, grin rippling across his face, brows quivering as his voice dropped to a throaty whisper. “You think Jack is still listening, don’t you?”

A playful wink caused another series of ripples. “One can only hope.”

They sat together for a while longer in silence. They slid fingers beneath palms and through slots of fingers, searching bruised bones and following imprints of textured skin. What fortune rested in their curving paths now? Hannibal pressed wedding bands between forefinger and thumb to watch flesh blanch white and then return to a dusky rose. He wished he could return Will's freedom the same way he might release his blood.

“Are we…” Will’s voice cracked on a low pitiful note. “Hannibal, are we going to be okay?”

“We are together now, Will…” Hannibal kissed him softly, then brought hands to lips, pushing hand cuffs down to kiss the bruises they left. “It is all I can promise to give you in this moment.”

Their gazes locked. All the unspoken fears passed between them in a shimmer of water and a flicker of fire. Will was on the verge of tears, cheeks stained, lips trembling. He sighed and forced his gaze to the floor. Hannibal loathed the bite of his chains as he reached out, dragging a thumb through a beard and held a trembling chin steady.

“You are exhausted, mylimasis…”

“What gave it away? The circles under my eyes. The blinking vacant sign strapped around my neck?” Knuckles ground against eye sockets to battle against tears, voice growing weaker and weaker. “I haven’t slept in days. Weeks. Months? What does it matter anymore? I don’t see it
changing anytime soon. Might as well get used to it.”

Hannibal slid his thumb between fingers, brows drooping low on his forehead. He could break it, slip free of the cuffs. The pain would be far less than the agony etching tired creases in Will’s face and returning to gather shadows to eyes. The ones growing bright without hope and washing out under grey skies of crime scenes. Hannibal could hold him. Fight off the inevitable return of a haunting filling the home of his bones.

*I drowned that man in the sea. He is not the one I saved.*

“Please, don’t…” Palms slid over his hands and squeezed. "I don't want you to."

Crimson wavered in a well of tears prepared to plea. Will shook his head again and pressed a kiss to a temple with another silent denial.

“Here…” The older man’s voice was jagged and fading as he hooked an ankle around the leg of a chair and pulled. “Rest with me.”

Hannibal heaved the weight of his body to the edge of the chair, balanced precariously and shifted his cast leg after. His arms began to tingle as the handcuffs began to cut off circulation, arms stretched long and rigid. He pulled Will against his shoulder until he fell against chest. He wouldn’t be able to feel the pain for much longer. Even if he did, he could block it out. He would do anything for Will.

“This—“ Will shook his head hard, mouth drawing to a thin line. “–can’t possibly be comfortable. It’s hurting you. I’m not going to hurt you.”

A commanding growl hissed between teeth. “My comfort is not your concern.”

“Oh, really?” A single eye creaked open before snapping shut. “If I don’t, you’ll just keep talking, won’t you?”

“It is entirely probable.”

The threat of conversation, of strained muscles and aching arms, was evidently more agreeable than the one of broken bones. Will slumped closer, nuzzling against a soft spot where his shoulder sloped into a broad chest. Bound hands twitched where their left and right knees pressed together. They needed to rest. There was no telling how long they might be kept for questioning. Hannibal wanted to sleep. His heavy eyes drooped further and further, brain humming for quiet. He had an entire sentencing to sleep. An endless eternity after. He might only have a few moments longer to be with Will.

*I would ask you to sleep, my love, to wake you with a chaste kiss when this nightmare has reached its conclusion.*

“I wish I could hold you…” The younger man murmured, hiding his face against folds of rough fabric.

“Shh…” Hannibal squeezed eyes shut and pushed with the sharp angle of his chin to dislodge Will from clinging too tightly to his heart.

Will slipped further, head resting in the bend of a thigh and waist, twisting to look up. “Need anything while I’m down here?”

“A great many things. But I will settle with letting Jack or any other audience member use his or her
imagination.” The older man felt a pained smile gather and wished he could run hands through curls below, to soothe Will to sleep. “For now, rest.”

“Wake me up if your limbs start turning blue from lack of circulation.” A wide toothed yawn stretched. “Or any other part of you for that matter.”

He closed his eyes, focusing on the sensation of light breath and the stony weight of Will’s safety pressing down on him. “Yes, dearest one…”

“Hannibal?”

“Mm.”


Hannibal felt the scouring of gentle teeth, the pressure, then a flashing jolt. An exquisite bite of pleasure and pain. Will had devoured him with soft pleas and whines, mouth dripping red. He had brought the older man to release within a few minutes, without a single hand on him.

“Divine…” Rough notes breathed out. “Though I suspect you have more of an obsession with coordination than I do. Are you intent on our wounds matching like the mirror images of our minds?”

“Some people buy matching sweaters and a bicycle built for two.”

“These were neither of those things.”

“What can I say? I’m old fashioned. Hard wired for primal urges to mark my territory.”

“Go to sleep before I suffocate you.”

“Hmm…” He felt the curve of a smile fade. “Angel?”

“Yes, Will?”

“Why exactly was there a rather vocal recording of us having sex on your phone?”

“You…must be in dire need of rest if auditory hallucinations have returned.”

“Mm. Yeah, must be it.” There was an inevitable pause. “You should tell Jack to get that checked out some time at a hospital.”

Red bleary eyes flew open. "Pardon?"

Chapter End Notes

Oh Hannibal, at least you have managed to interject some ridiculously awkward situations for Will to live through during these last two chapters. But Jack. Jaaaack. Come on, man. Seriously?

I apologize for losing track of time and the delay this week! Missed you guys! I’ll catch up on answering your brilliant comments shortly.
Seafret x Explosion

Love is more like a loaded gun than a safety net
To fall back on
Like walking around with a ticking bomb and just counting down
To the explosion
Jordan Silas was a nervous man, slender fingers drumming against the crook of an arm. He had been for as long as he could remember. Perhaps since youth filled with schoolyard bullies and taunts from girls he thought had been pretty. His fingers often ticked against a thumb on his right hand when faced with social interaction, tapping out rhythmic anxiety. He had buried himself in a pile of books in a dusty corner of the library. Fending off loneliness with interplanetary deep space adventures and astronomy books thicker than the plastic lenses taped to his face. While other children passed triangle shaped love notes, he poured over texts on astrophysics and scribbled lengthy equations. It was the only time he had felt calm.

Space was his passion. It was not his father’s. The law was their holy scripture. A true man’s work. In the seventh grade, his father sat him down and told him he would become a lawyer like his two older brothers, Gerald and Benjamin. It was a family owned company after all. And didn’t he want to be a part of the family? Not some outsider obsessed with stars?

One evening, his father stood a dark cast shadow on the Persian rug as Silas pitched all his precious books into a fireplace, biting a quivering bottom lip. He had held on to his third edition textbook by Stephen Hawking for last, clutched to his chest as if it might impart some final knowledge. His father took it and he watched its pages catch fire. It was the first and last book he would ever burn. It was the same day he developed a stutter and was rushed to the hospital with third degree burns on his right hand.

Tell me, little one, what is your name?

S-s-silas.

Would you mind if I inspected your hand, Silas? I would like to help you. If you see it fit for me to do so.

Silas tugged nimbly at sandstone lambskin gloves. Hand stitched fingertips were always a half an inch too long on the right. Not that he could feel them even if they were snug. Nerves had never healed the same. The skin had grown back unevenly like melted candle wax, reddened and ugly, to others, not to Silas. He had grown to appreciate its uneven caverns and tunnels in time.

It’s ugly. I’ll b-be ugly forever.

You are not ugly, Silas, merely changed. Fire is transformative as often portrayed in mythology by such key figures as Prometheus, the god of fire, or Loki, the cunning trickster capable of endlessly changing his form. Do you think they would consider your markings ugly? Or would they consider you distinguished by the seal of greatness only fire could offer mortal man?

His family had plenty of money for plastic surgery of course, but he liked the slow guilt ridden return of his books more. He chose to wear gloves instead. They were either a comfort or a weapon of his choosing. Coordinated by color and texture of animal. Only when he was alone did he take them off. One other person had seen them after the accident and a dozen times more during the recovery.

Hazel eyes darted towards the top of a silvery head, peak of a sharp chin resting on top of wild black curls fast asleep. The man sitting in the interrogation room had been a doctor in the ER then. His skin
had been smoother, eyes brighter, with the hint of light in his crooked smile. He had been impeccably dressed, white lab coat stark against a snug silk tie, five button waistcoat, and slim trousers. The doctor never chided him when he cried. Simply bent on one knee to be at eye level and spoke in the timber of leaves crunching underneath light hooves. If he was particularly good, the man would often present him with a new book. There was a small caveat. He was required to share all he learned on his next visit to the hospital either for treatment or a light lunch.

*It hurts. It hurts! I want it to s-s-stop.*

*It will only hurt for a while longer, Silas. I am quite impressed the bravery you have shown during your therapy.*

*I’m not brave. Father says I’m a fool.*

*And do you think you are a fool? No? I did not think so. There is strength in your bones and fire in your heart. Let them see how brilliantly you burn against the night sky. I know I will find you there.*

When he was older, Silas had gone to thank the doctor who had channeled his nervous energy and tragic experience into an insurmountable force to be reckoned with. He had left the hospital. No forwarding address. He simply was gone. He carried that voice with him as he plundered through his studies, gaining a degree in astrophysics from Princeton and a year later a law degree from Yale. What his wit could not afford, his family’s charitable donations saw to. He had both by his twenty second birthday. A practice of his own by twenty four. Semi-retired fourteen months later to return to his love of books and quiet, generously giving his two brother’s oversight of its business practices and finances.

Here he was. A boy no longer. What seemed like a lifetime later with a man twenty years his senior in an interrogation room after a call from his proverbial conscience and sense of guidance. He had stared at the rotary phone’s receiver as if hearing a ghost through the crackling. Silas pushed a wiry pair of silver glasses up his nose, adjusting his posture against a corner of a room between the door and mirrored glass. He had been here for four and a quarter hours and still didn’t dare breathe. His brain had spent a good thirty seconds trying to catch up with his mouth immediately barking out orders upon his arrival.

*Get those handcuffs off them! Serve them a meal of substance! Sans Souci. Give them my name. They will deliver. It was not a request, gentleman. I will take a coffee. Black. And not that swill you have in the break room. Now!*

It seemed like the most natural thing in the world to take charge with that devilish sliver of a smile washing over him. He remained unfazed by the criminal charges. He had read the paper, seen the news, with his dear doctor’s face splashed upon print and television screens years earlier. It mattered very little to him. The man had brought him hope, showed him strength, when he had none. There was no wrong he could do in his eyes.

They had spoken softly over their meal, wavering from the years past to the situation before them. The young man draped in the doctor’s arms had not stirred once except to ask for a glass of water and fallen asleep again. By the way Doctor Lecter held him, one palm cupped under the back of his head, the other under limp knees, Silas knew his hands were as kind and gentle as he remembered them to be.

The older man had closed his eyes—*‘a moment, just a moment then we will continue our discussion.’* He had not woken since, tucked around the slumbering form, at peace under Silas’ watchful eye and vigilant determination to keep disturbances at bay. He noted visible markings on their bodies. Bruised fists. Swollen eyes. Sunken skin and bone. It set his teeth on edge to see his
false idol battered and wounded by mortals. He would take his own photos. It would not stand. They
would not chain his god to a rock and watch on as crows pecked the strength from his bones. His
gaze moved across the doctor and his husband once more. They seemed to fit effortlessly in and
against one another. Fluidly draped like water. Fused together by flame.

Do you hold your transformation with as much tenderness as we once held mine?

A rap of knuckles on the door. Silas freed himself from the wall and lay a single hand against a
slumped shoulder. Doctor Lecter stirred with a husky sound, heavy eyes easing open and sliding up.
He held his breath. Had they always been filled with mythic flame?

“It’s time,” The lawyer intoned quietly, motioning.

“Of course…” Hannibal replied, blinking sleep away as he jostled the body he was holding between
his knees. A peaked nose drifted against a seam of a shoulder before lips pressed to an ear. “Will?”

“Nnn…go…a…way.”

“Will, darling, I must disturb your slumber.”

Balled hands pawed weakly at a chest. “Tired.”

“Shall I have Silas fetch you a coffee?”

Silas straightened, tugging curtly on a jacquard waistcoat, lifting his chin and squared his shoulders
in preparation to be of assistance. He glared across the bridge of a nose as another knock sounded.
They may have worked here, but there was no need to be impolite.

“What…” Watery blue creaked open. “…fairy tales have you been reading?”

The doctor lit up with a soft smile and Silas felt his chest tighten with admiration.

“The ones penned by the Grimm brothers mostly.”

Will snorted. “It all makes sense now.”

“Would you prefer a kiss?”

Rough hands scrubbing against brows slowed to a stop, eye peering between fingers, voice rough.
“…Yes.”

Hannibal tipped a chin up with a crook of fingers and brushed his mouth against Will’s. The other
man sighed when they parted before moving his own chair, mournful gaze stuck to their reflections
in the table. A hand slid around his waist.

“I…” The doctor let his chin hook over a shoulder, breathing against curls. “It would please me if
you stayed.”

Will turned his face, light rose on cheeks. “I don’t think…” His gaze flicked up and away from Silas.
“I don’t think that would be appropriate.”

“Given the physical state of yourself and Doctor Lecter…” Silas edged in a suggestion, tugging
coppery strands from his eyes. “I might suggest you have more authority on your choices and
circumstances now that I am with you.”

Will melted in arms after that, allowing the embrace to tighten and Hannibal to press a kiss to a
cheek. He jumped a moment later as a broad shouldered black man stomped into the room with eyes of coal, mouth snapping open to make demands of his own. Fingers rolled against his thigh, but Silas surprisingly remained stationary and nonplussed by the intrusion.

“My clients have nothing further to say,” Silas cut him off, pulling a black on black business card from a breast pocket and thrust it the man’s direction between two poised fingers.

Confusion crossed a face before looking back up. “I would advise your client...”

“Sorry, for clarification, which one of us, Jack?” Will piped up, nestled even deeper in arms, eyes once again closed. "You are representing us both, are you not?"

"Quite."

The lawyer found himself smiling. They would both be asleep in a matter of seconds. How charming.

“I advise your client, Will, to reconsider my offer,” A booming voice tried again, flashing credentials of his own their direction.

Silas looked them over with vague disinterest and resisted the urge to roll his eyes and instead pulled out a Blackberry, flicking through some obscure emails. They were mostly advertisements, spam, or the occasional client trying to pry him out of solitude with stacks of money. Nothing of interest. The agent would have to find a different octave if he was trying to either impress or intimidate. Or a different strategy to maintain his attention. The doctor seemed to be in firm control of the situation. He would interject when necessary.

Hannibal nosed against a collar, pushing fingers through dark hair. “Did he make you an offer, darling?”

“Don’t worry, Hannibal…” The other man was a quivering puddle, purring. “It wasn’t sexual in nature.”

“A pity,” The doctor answered slowly, before looking directly up at the FBI agent. “Jack, would you ever consider bottoming? As an empath William has a remarkable skill set in the verse of another’s pleasure.”

Jack’s mouth fell open with a noise intended to be a reply, eyes wide, aghast. The lawyer tipped his own behind a glove pretending to stifle a yawn, lips twitching a suppressed chuckle. If Hannibal found the man of interest enough to rattle his cage then Silas took no issue letting him have his fun. He always had appreciated a good verbal sparring.

“I’d like to pleasure you for a couple of hours.” A hand pushed up a knee, resting just on the inside of a thigh.

Breath caught slightly. “Would you?”

“Mm. Well, the tense on that matter is undecided.” Will drawled quietly, face turned slightly to sweep a gaze from mouth to darkening eyes. “You did just offer my sexual services to my old boss after all. I’m not sure how I feel about that. Offended I think.”

“It was intended to be complimentary. Though we could talk about your feelings on the matter.” The doctor arched a fine brow curiously, glancing at a phantom wristwatch. “My schedule seems to be quite open at the moment. How would this afternoon suit you? Two o’clock, let’s say.”
“Just fine…” An adam’s apple bobbed on a long swallow as fingertips pressed against it. “Might want to call off your next appointment. Ours could get pretty lengthy. Deep even. I’ll need our session to be thorough.”

Silas openly smirked behind the curve on his hand now, gaze flicking from the two prisoners to the agent who was sputtering for some rehearsed script of procedure balled up inside fists.

“Requirements I believe I could fulfill to your satisfaction.” A tongue slicked the corner of ruddy lips. “What shall we discuss?”

“You won’t be doing much talking.”

“Are you intent on finding other uses for my mouth then?”

“Oh…” Pink tulips curved a fraction above a glisten of crimson lifting, breathless. “Very intent, Doctor.”

A near shout ripped from a throat. “Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham, you are being char—“

Delicate lambskin raised two fingers for silence. “I beg your pardon, sir.” Silas glided forward and rested a hand on the back of the metal chair, nodding towards the men below. “Perhaps this was overlooked in the official files or you misspoke. Will Lecter. Hannibal Lecter. Shall I have my secretary deliver the file to you, Mister Crawford?”

Eyes narrowed. “Agent Crawford.”

“Ah. My mistake.”

Will wriggled a set of nesting rings his direction. “Married, remember? Pesky little legally binding agreement?”

“The only favor God has ever shown upon me.” Hannibal pressed a throaty murmur to a neck. “I hope to become worthy of the honor in time.”

The two wound against one another again, cheek to cheek, hands clasping between their chests. Will whispered something gentle against an ear, drawing out a pensive sigh. Silas nearly sighed with them. They looked desperately in love. Jack was less than star struck. A vein was ticking furiously away on his temple. His skull might actually explode if this continued. The lawyer cast a considering gaze across his rust colored suit. He supposed brain matter wouldn’t be terribly difficult to dry clean.

“As I am sure you are well aware, sir…” The lawyer informed with a sweep of his hand. “… Miranda Rights are not valid unless using a suspect’s given name.”

“That is not his name!” Jack bellowed, throwing both hands in the air. “His name is Will Grah—“

“Now I’m sorry we didn’t invite you to the wedding, Jack, but that’s no reason to overlook official procedure,” Will interjected with frown.

“Did I not tell you we ought to have sent him an invitation? Did I not say so?” Hannibal scolded with a gentle tap on a curved nose. “We do apologize if we slighted your feelings, Jack.”

The agent took a deep breath and held it. Strong fingers pinched the bridge of a nose. Others flattened against the table to steady a tilt of sheer muscle.

“I think he might make good on shooting one of us in the face, Will.”
“I’d probably be first.”

“Do you imagine so?”

“Proximity alone makes me the best target. Don’t you think?”

“No, my love. I would never allow it. I have far too much admiration for your face to have it marked by another wound.”

“Unless yours.”

Longing dropped a few rough notes. “Unless their mine. Yes.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Silas watched fingers slide up the curve of pale cheeks and slip through dark curls before Hannibal lured a tongue into his mouth and kissed Will until he moaned softly.

“Christ Almighty, I preferred it when the two of you were friends on the verge of slitting the others throat!” Jack shouted, before motioning in two armed agents. “Cuff them! This the F B fucking I, not some damn hotel suite.”

“Just one sec—“ A rigid forearm banged Silas against the wall, pushing him out of the way.

Growls turned to snarls accompanied by swearing growing louder as chains clamored and snapped into place.

“For the last time, Jack—“ Flashing blue eyes swung up, yanking furiously on the returned restraints. “—marry, fuck, kill is a parlor game. And I only play with Hannibal.”

From the opposite side of the table where he was cuffed, the doctor pressed firm fingertips against white blanched knuckles and leveled the tone of his voice. “Didn’t you used to fantasize about slitting my throat?”

Will held Hannibal’s gaze for a full two minutes before his heaving chest began to slow, breath evening out, fists slowly uncurling. Silas was reminded of stretching out his hand to a quivering fawn in the forest as a child and touching silky wheat colored fur. Her eyes filled with as much fear as he. They regarded each other from their own worlds for a moment. Then she bounded off to a stream.

“Who…” A mouth flinched, attempting desperately to maintain an air of defiance. “…says I stopped?”

Crimson swept a loving caress over a stony face, voice soft. “Food for thought.”

“We’ll see about the legitimacy of this alleged marriage in court.”

Silas shot the agent a scornful glance for the interruption. “Will we?”

If there was one thing he learned from his year with the doctor it was to mind his manners.

A bored voice replied. “So he says.”

“Interesting.”

_The best of luck trying to prove it in court._

“Futile at best.” The doctor chimed in, leaning forward and lowering his voice with the glimmer of a smile. “Could you elaborate on this fantasy for me?”
Stormy blue lifted from the table and Will offered a dark grin.

“This can’t be happening.” Jack scoured a blunt heel of his palm across his forehead to ease an intensifying migraine, gesturing emphatically at the two prisoners. “You tried to kill each other! Repeatedly.”

“And we tried several more times over the years since.” A labored sigh echoed. “What precisely is the point you are so inadequately trying to make, Jack?”

“Christ! I’ve had about enough out of you!”

Branches of a gnarled forest fell across the agent’s face, snarl pummeling craters against deep cheeks.

“Hannibal Lecter and Will goddamn Lecter, you are being charged with the premeditated murder of Francis Dolarhyde.” Jack’s voice began to shake apart with anger, falling deeper and deeper. “And you, Hannibal Lecter…”

Consciousness returned to a stream of cerulean, lifting inch by inch.

“… are being charged with kidnapping, criminal coercion, attempted murder, and the vicious and repeated sexual assault of former F.B.I. agent, Will Graham.”

Silas heard the snap of bone before he saw the flurry of movement. He gracefully side stepped with the faint sense of air rushing against his neck.

“I will fucking kill you, Jack!” Someone screamed. “So help me god! I will—"

Falling against the wall, hazel eyes hurtled back towards the sound, widening to find Jack pinned to the interrogation and a fist a second away from pummeling an eye socket. An unhinged jaw followed suit.

*

“They could have killed you…” Uttered a horrified gasp. "You should have been more careful."

Jack tried to form a teeth baring scowl to something more pleasant when he looked up at Alana. He couldn’t. He jammed a pack of ice deeper against the left side of his face. The two agents he had brought with him had been useless. Will had gotten in more than a few hideous bare knuckled punches. His eye was almost entirely swollen shut. Cheeks bloodied and bruised. He had popped two vicodin and was waiting for a trainee (one who was already fifteen minutes and eight seconds too goddamn late for his liking) to drive him home. The other side of his face looked like a Siberian tiger had taken a swipe across it. Jagged marks stretched from below his eye socket to the right angle of his jaw. Now he and Chilton could swap stories about Hannibal the fucking Cannibal Lecter over tea. Just fantastic. His fiancée, Esmie, was going to be absolutely thrilled. He had spent years keeping her safe from this and now he was bringing it home. Again. His teeth ached from clenching. It was either that or scream.

They had moved as one. Side by side. Exquisitely in sync. As Jack fought them off, he had seen in crystal clear detail his own death, overshadowed by their faces on either side of him at a dinner table. Had Will chosen him all those years ago? Or had it been a goddamn twist of Fate? Or lack of resolve? They would have killed him. Jack was certain of that. If Will had left with Hannibal, he would have already been someone’s feast.
A timid hand touched his. “Jack?”

He wished to God he had left the two of them with Alana. Let them starve. Let them suffer. He didn’t know who the fuck Will Graham was anymore. It wasn’t him. Maybe it never was. Maybe he only saw what he wanted to see. Yeah, he had used him. For the good of the many. He just tried to kill him. No pretense. No suggestion. Now it was personal.

“Alana…” Hardened stones rose to meet a wide eyed gaze. “I want them gone. You hear me? We make this stick or we find a way to watch them burn.”

Doctor Bloom nodded once, thin lipped and grim.

Chapter End Notes

"Did he have it coming?"

"What do you think?"

:cackling for a good five minutes and then frowning: Goddammit, now we have to deal with them separated again. What do the two of you have to say for yourselves?! Apologize to our readers at once! (But don't be too sorry. Jack had it coming to a certain extent.)

Also, if you don't hear from me for a little bit, don't worry. I'll be joining the protests this weekend. If any of you are, stay safe and remember if things go to shit, it is okay to run.
**Chapter 14**

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Premeditated, my ass.*

Fists shook against rigid thighs as Will stood, hands cuffed against his belly, in a cordoned off room in the lowest levels. The head quarter laboratories were located here. Several rooms down the morgue waited with its pristine frigid steel for a body they never delivered. A shame really.

*If at first you don’t succeed…*

The man would be part of their dinner plans yet. He swallowed a hoarse growl. He hadn’t meant to attack Jack Crawford. It just fucking happened. By the time he realized he was punching the shit out of him (with a broken thumb no less) it was too late. Something inside him simply wound and snapped. What choice did he have but to commit? Especially when he looked up to find Hannibal lunging forward to join in. He had seen his eyes. Ravaging red wild fire vowing to protect him, to slay their enemies, for what they shared, and it was too much. It was as enthralling as the throes of passion. Will let go and let himself fall. They hadn’t planned it. It just was. Beautiful for the time it lasted.

That’s not what they would claim of course. For Jack. Or for Dolarhyde. Harm with the intent to kill a federal agent. Some other ridiculous charge just for a sense of finesse he was sure.

*Bull shit. This whole goddamn situation is bullshit.*

He had enough. Will wanted to go home. Return to their assumed watery graves. Where they were safe. Together. Where they had been happy. Not causing anyone any harm. At least not anyone that didn’t deserve it. But goddamn Uncle Jack just couldn’t let them die.

*Should have left us alone, Jack. Now it’s your life for the one you’ve taken from me. The first time was a consolation prize. Not this time.*

A camera went off. This was humiliating. More so than the first time he had been processed under false claims. He found a smudged palm print on glass and focused on it instead. His chest stung from charred marks of a taser. He could still smell burning flesh. His and Hannibal’s. What had he just done? All he had seen was blood and Hannibal looking at him beyond the silken red.

The younger man shuddered. Not his first mistake. Where Hannibal was concerned he had no off switch. No way of predicting himself. No gauge or compass to direct which self within would tear free. How many times had he nearly died protecting the man when the furious, rational part of him told him to let go? Let Mason and the pigs have him. Let him bleed out on the streets of Italy before the gunshot. Allow him be pinned beneath glass on display as curiosity and inmate. Give him to the Dragon. Push him off that cliff. Drown alongside him in the frigid depths of the Atlantic.

It was no use. To fight it was madness. He was living proof of that. Hannibal was his. His to shelter from the ugliness of others perception. His to threaten with the visions of clarity and truth. His to hold underneath the waves or release with lips upon his mouth. His. His. His. Fuck anyone that tried to take that from him. Especially Jack.

He was turned to the side then another flash. He sighed. And so he had attacked Uncle Jack for threatening what was only his to threaten. They could prove this. If there wasn’t a video recording
(there was, there always was. They taped everything…) then they needed only reference Jack’s face as exhibit five hundred and forty six alongside whatever other shit they planned on feeding a jury in this sideshow of their new lives.

*Why couldn’t you have just sat there and fled the room in your mind like before?* Something torn and battered hissed at him from the depths.

*Because I didn’t have him.*

Flash. Turn. Flash.

*Easy to sit still when I had nothing to fight for. Nothing to lose. Now I have both.*

He swallowed a low growl. But Jack just couldn’t help himself. Had to go and open his mouth. Make his accusations known. Stamp them with an official seal as a matter of record. Jesus fucking Christ, why couldn’t Jack just have retired to some tropical island like every other man his age and left them the hell alone!

That word. He couldn’t even think the word, let alone say it.

*Piece of shit.* Will forced fingernails free from palms. Red marks revealed. I am not anyone’s goddamn victim. I refuse to be.

Sexual assault sounded much more docile when ringing in the ears of a jury. He had left the state during the trial, but he remembered glimpses of labels. *Serial killer. Cannibal. Murderer. Insane. Inhuman.* This made Hannibal something of a curiosity to be studied and written about. The thing of urban legends. Not this time. His stomach churned. Headlines filtered with each flash of a camera. *Depraved. Abusive. Violent. And…* Will squeezed his eyes shut and tried to block it out. He would never say it. Christ help anyone that dared to.

They spent all those months fighting their way back from it. From what happened. Will swallowed a lump of sorrow. If he had been a better person, had known they would be here, maybe…maybe he would have let Hannibal touch him sooner. Held his hand. Kissed him on the mouth. Without bursting in to tears because it hurt too much to even be in the same room. Unwillingly broken. If he had just been stronger…

Now the time was gone. He could never get it back. For either of them.

The prosecution and jury would think and say what they wanted. Ignorant assumptions and statements based on something they couldn’t ever possibly understand.

*What the hell is it going to take? Ask Silas if Hannibal can fuck me in the middle of the courtroom. Is that even a plausible defense strategy?*

It wasn’t. And if anyone was going to object it was Hannibal Lecter. He didn’t even like Elias seeing him shirtless.

Someone forcefully peeled Will out of the prison uniform. He was too goddamn angry to pay whoever it was any mind. Not like he could take a bite out of them now. Given the chance he would take their entire face off to recreate a tribute of Mason’s self inflicted carving of poetic justice. Unfortunately, they had strapped the mask so tight to his face it was cutting off circulation at the base of his neck. His right hand was wrapped in an extensive amount of gauze and a splint. It should have been resting in a sling on his chest to keep it elevated. The fingers were beginning to swell. Just a new ache to add to his grocery list of injuries. Another thing to piss off his darling husband. What he wouldn’t give for a fifth of a bottle of aspirin chased by whiskey. For some odd reason, the guards
seemed less than amendable helping inmates after they tried to murder their superior.

He had it coming.

Through blurred vision he watched two agents divest Hannibal of his uniform in a windowed lab on the opposite side of the hall. They both stood in plain white t-shirts and pale grey boxers. Their bare feet cold on cement struck him as entirely too frail. Too human. With layers and layers of glass and walls and doors. He felt the weight of it all crushing him. A faint tremor of nausea fluttered in his stomach. His mouth pressed firmly together, brows scrunching, locking the older man’s gaze and hoping it conveyed all he felt.

Is this our life now? Where I can see you? And nothing more.

Will jerked as the camera flashed again. The words turned to ash in his mouth. He had heard them before. They had already mourned the loss of one another from a distance. Without touch, returned to quiet breathing of the walls they shared.

We barely survived. Hannibal… His eyes started to burn. I can’t. I don’t want to lose you again.

His hand tightened over the concealed scar on his stomach. He would haunt the disintegrating part of their past, wade through the torment of their pain all over again, if it meant they were together. When he had known, felt, Hannibal on the other side of a closed door fading like morning beams of dust across pages. It was never locked to him. He could go in. Follow. Look from the safety of the other side of room and simultaneously plead for space and security of the older man’s ever watchful presence. He wanted to beg Hannibal not to care for him again.

How fucked up is it that I would rather go through it all again? The months of torture. The degradation. And abuse. Just to be anywhere but here. I just want to be with you. Fighting you every step of the way as you try and care for me.

The older man sensed his thoughts and emotions spiraling out of control, catching hopeless mist of tears in his eyes.

Fair lashes swept slowly down and then up once as a bright flash of a camera went off. Breathe.

He let his eyes fall closed. Felt the churning ocean tides pull until he was standing in the gurgling water of a stream. Will saw Hannibal beside him and reached for his hand, the smooth glide of fingertips tracing up his palm and—

The butt of a gun jammed against his spine. “Inmate!”

Will hissed frustration between teeth then looked to his left. “I almost killed your boss with my bare hands ten minutes ago. Do you really want to push me?”

“Operative word is ‘almost.’ And I’m not afraid of you.”

Fuck. He howled a string of expletives. Did it have to be him? Really? Him. Of all the people the FBI had to choose from and it had to be—

“Zeller…” Will flicked disdain to the right and peered beyond a bulky digital camera perched on a tripod. “Haven’t you retired or been fired yet? Or buried beneath b-rated tabloid journalism you happen to be fucking by now?”

The shadow shifted in front of a bright light. “You would be so lucky. Oh wait. You’re back here being processed as an inmate for a second time. Hear there’s an electric chair with your name on it. Is
that luck? Or Fate? Or just the world righting a wrong?”

Will reigned in a jerking sensation of muscle bent on wrapping around a throat with a tense smile as a grip tightened on his shoulder. God, he hated that smug bastard. He would be more than happy to give Zeller a half day. By ensuring he ended up alongside Jack in either the sick bay or the morgue.

Blue latex gloves pulled roughly on his left hand. “Open your fist.”

He looked down. His bracelet with the equations was missing. No, no, no. He was wearing it when they brought him down. A frantic uptick of his heart made his breath quicken. He searched the room and spotted it laid out on a sterile white stretch of paper beneath a set of cameras. When had they taken it? Two hands pried at his fingers. Then a third. His mouth went dry. They wanted the wedding rings.

“No!” The younger man tried to jerk away and heaved against the wall of a bulletproof vest. “Go fuck yourself if you think for a—“

“You can cooperate, or I can ask him to make you cooperate!” Zeller took a menacing step forward and gestured to the agents on either side of him. “Got it, Graham? You wanna get tazed again? Because I’m happy to pull the trigger.”

Will looked up to find Hannibal watching closely, replying to something Price had said in the other room. He searched a gloomy face, eyes darting frantically, pleading. He didn’t know what he was asking for. Or what he expected Hannibal to do. What could he do? He was being selfish. They were both at the mercy of trigger fingers and the system. The younger man didn’t want them to take his rings. They were his. Hannibal had given them to him. It was all he had left.

The older man seemed to pick up the vibration of his thoughts and winced. Then slid his own wedding band free before placing it in a gloved palm. Hannibal looked away, absently touching the empty patch of skin.

“Hey! Graham! Did you hear me?”

“It’s…” The younger man slumped, anger fleeing him in a few weak breaths. “…Lecter.”

“I don’t care who the fuck your delusions say you are. You are a killer. Give me the evidence. Now.”

Hannibal was trying to show him how to let go. But he didn’t want to let go. He wanted to fight them. Make them saw off his entire hand and put it in evidence, chilled in a morgue drawer to join Miriam Lass with a handwritten tag reading: Here lies the final resting place of the only good Will Graham had in his entire life.

It was all detached and devoid of emotion. He hated this place and everything it stood for. Humans reduced to base components and elements, dissected in fibers and personal affects of not who they were, but what they belonged to. It was an endless catalogue of stripped identity. Winston. Hannibal. His clothes. His bracelet. Their rings. Their lives.

Maroon eyes softened, sweeping over his face, mouthing the words, “Just look at me.”

Christ, don’t make me do this…

Will felt Zeller twisting the rings from his finger. He barely registered the sting of pain when skin over his knuckles tore open, metal bands slipping free. He felt the loss instantly. A knife jammed between his ribs, puncturing his heart. If this was what it felt like to let go of Hannibal, of their life
they had built together, he would rather have died in the Atlantic.

Blood bubbled and then oozed over the tan lines left to haunt him. He never wanted it to heal. Tarnished silver fell to the ground, bounced, and then began to roll beneath a set of tables stacked in forensic equipment. He almost started to scream and bit down with a harsh exhale.

“Lose it and I’ll cut your fucking throat, Z,” The younger man snapped. “It was his mother’s.”

Zeller stared at him open mouthed for a full thirty seconds. Then he and an agent scrambled after the ring. A sole of a boot crushed it to a stop. Both rings were placed underneath a light and logged verbally as evidence.

“One antique ring. One onyx wedding band…” The forensic tech squinted curiously at the date carved in the metal.

“How could I forget the day we met?”

Will hated every second Zeller looked at it. Touched either of the rings. They were just scraps of metal to him. He grimaced and looked away, finding an unlit corner of the room and stared until his eyes ached. He was trying hard not to tear up. He knew if he looked at Hannibal he would. He heard and felt the blinding light of the camera as they photographed marks on his exposed skin. He felt like a lead weight puppet turned and angled to the appropriate degree of humiliation, by four pairs of hands.

“You killed Beverly.” A bitter voice said. “How did it feel slicing her up and putting her on display?”

“No… I didn’t…” The younger man felt blood drain from his face, wide eyes staring directly into a swirling green blue lens and shook his head, quiet. “I didn’t do that.”

I cared for her. She was my friend.

“You let him do it. Isn’t that the same thing?” Four more terse flashes went off. “Isn’t that how your mind works?”

He saw Beverly flicker to life. Moving throughout the laboratory, squinting in microscopes and smiling through thick plastic glasses as she scraped at evidence. Then she dissected, piece by piece, in a perfect straight line still smiling at Will.

“It’s…” Nausea washed over Will and he began to shake again. “It’s not the same.”

“Were you banging Doctor Lecter at the time?” A sneer flashed. "Or were your sessions more focused on literal skull fucking?”

Chapter End Notes

Love you, guys. xoxo
Hannibal stood with shoulders straight back and chin tipped proudly in front of a pristine white backdrop. Two men had taken leave of his uniform and been shooed to the other side of a closing door despite protest. Jimmy Price had never been afraid of him, just intrigued. He watched the forensic technician bustle about the lab. Not much had changed. He still squinted at all of his work even with glasses. Chewed the caps of pens when he wanted to smoke. Furrowed his brow when frustrated or exasperated by lengthy and unnecessary explanations. Sometimes pinched his lips when dealing with someone or something he disliked.

Light hit a gold band as Price leaned in with a q-tip swab and said, “You know the drill, Doctor Lecter, open wide…” Fair brows rippled, scrunched, then lifted high on a forehead. “That’s not something I thought I would be saying twice.”

That makes two of us.

The older man opened obediently. Cotton tickled the inside of his cheek before it was capped. The thin bottle was labeled and placed on a tray. Price held out the mask and waited. Hannibal blinked at it distastefully before bowing his head and allowed it to be strapped on. It was the least he could do. The man had always been cordial with him. Even after his sentencing and imprisonment.

“Is it necessary to have us secluded during this process?” Hannibal asked, vaguely aware of the scrape beneath his fingernails.

Even in a different room, he could tell Will was shaking beneath bright lights. It may have started as fury coming off the adrenaline they had shared in the interrogation room. A glorious turn of events to alleviate both their frustrations. Clinically, he knew it would soon turn to shock. And he was several hundred feet, two doors, and several guards from being of any help to Will when it happened. He was unsure if he would be of any comfort if the younger man stood next to him. Discontent and the inkling of inadequacy gnawed at his insides.

Will shouldn’t be here. Neither of us should.

“Whimsy, Hannibal, is how you will be caught.”

The older man wanted to snap the imagined neck belonging to the patronizing voice. Will was his weakness. His only weakness. He was human enough to be allotted at least one. Even if the argument would be made his psychological make up did not allow for such sentiment. It could not change the fact his love for Will made him vulnerable and powerless.

“The orders were very clear.” A thin metal hook tapped against a sheet of paper before Price glanced up, frowning. “And you did try to skin Jack. I’m lenient. Not stupid.”

“He is on the verge of an anxiety attack…” Breath fogged against the plastic with a weary sigh. “I am only thinking of his well being.”

“Is that a means of manipulation?” Price pushed glasses up his nose, head tilting. “Or do you really care what happens to Will? Or just think you do?”

Well. That didn’t take long.
Clamping back teeth, Hannibal offered the most friendly smile he was able to conjure. “I would keep
your observations to yourself, Mister Price, if you wish this interaction to remain cordial.”

The other man shrugged. “Just curious. Textbook pathology might suggest your kind can only emote
on an intellectual level.”

My kind? Eyes closed, teeth carving over a bottom lip. Oh Mister Price.

He wasn’t wrong. Given the opportunity, Hannibal would pick Jimmy’s bones from his teeth. And
he liked him. Or had for the most part up until that exact moment. If it meant helping Will then he
would accept the loss of a few friends. Jack included. His former colleague had upset Will.
Slandered the sanctimony of their marriage. Then made his intentions of painting Hannibal a
soulless, immoral creature known with much bravado and theatrics. He flexed stiff fingers. He hoped
Jack was as fastidious about having his affairs in order as he was ensuring their imprisonment. The
new markings to his face would be the least of his concerns. He couldn’t be allowed to live now.
Even if Will asked it of him.

I’m sorry, darling, but he belongs to me now.

"This procedure is upsetting him," The older man reiterated distastefully. "Regardless of how you
might see me, surely you are not so callous as to ignore a former friend's suffering."

“Well, I imagine so,” Price murmured, fiddling with the focus on a camera. “He is going to jail for
premeditated murder. They’re going to throw the book at him. Not likely to escape the electric chair
this time.”

Hannibal was a patient man. But if Jimmy Price did not shut his goddamn mouth, he was going to
gut him open and string him up by his entrails.

Maroon eyes slipped to the side, tone clipped to correct. “Allegedly.”

“…Allegedly. Yes.” The camera clicked a few times. A nervous throat cleared. “My apologies.” The
shorter man hovered behind the camera, shifting weight from foot to foot. “Doctor Lecter?”

“Yes?”

What? What other ignorant, offensive remark have you to say to me now?

“I…” Price fiddled with his gloves, staring at the floor. “I have to catalogue your ring as evidence.
Standard procedure.”

He could hear the click of his eyes hoping he stayed off of the Lecter menu.

Hannibal looked at the curve of metal then over at the one on Price’s finger. He tried not to stare at
the wedding band veiled by latex, flare of jealousy then resentment burning the pit of his stomach. It
was a ghost of a thing, pale and protected. All his promises. All his vows of shelter and protection.
Worn by someone else. By others. But denied to them both. Bitterness tasted of decayed moss on a
forest floor.

“What is it the correctional institution finds threatening about a marital band?” Hannibal asked darkly
before lighting his words with soft concern. “At least…let Will keep his.”

“Sorry, Doctor.” Price shook his head and held out a palm. “It’s for your own safety. And his.”

He turned the band on his finger once. The first time he had seen it the ring had been covered in
blood. His and Will’s intermingling on a stretch of road where they had almost lost one another. A quivering, fragile thing slipping over bruised knuckles. How exquisitely it had hurt. Far more than the extensive physical blows of a hurtling vehicle. Tearful blue eyes gazing up. Will’s voice soft with trepidation, trying to maintain his gaze, as if Hannibal might deny him. As if they had ever been able to truly escape one another. Nearly drowned out by the murmur of the crowd and approaching sirens. If objects were imbued with the passage of time, he knew this ring held frail tears and fierce love pressed against it with lips.

When he looked up, Will was struggling against Zeller, wild eyed and fighting to hold on to the last part of Hannibal that clung to his skin. He lowered his eyes and pulled his own ring free, setting it carefully in a palm. Will would have to learn what it was like to live without him. Even if it meant slowly suffocating. The thought filled him with a sense of dread. Fear and desperate loneliness embraced every part of the younger man before coming under his care. Wounded dog skirting the surroundings of his office warily, unsure whether to lunge for a kill or reach for the caress of comfort. How many evenings had he spent drawing Will out of isolated darkness, careful to maintain his distance, offering role as confidant in one hand and a syringe of burning flame in the other?

_I have returned you to the Fate I once dragged you free of._

Fingers closed around it. “Thank you.”

“I hope you will not be offended if I do not welcome you for taking my life from me,” Hannibal returned coldly, voice shuddering against choked tears.

Jimmy was just about to catalogue the evidence on paper when something crashed. A soft box bulb sputtered against a tangle of cables on the floor.

“Price! Price! Get in here!” Someone shouted frantically.

Zeller set the ring against a tray and sighed dramatically. “Pardon me.”

Hannibal bent to retrieve it and stopped. It was as much a part of him now as Will was. It was his. He was not prepared to let go of either. His gaze strayed to the men standing just outside. They were paying rapt attention to the shrieks in the other room. He plucked up the ring, bent his head forward, and slid the band against grain of teeth until it was situated between molars and cheek. The taste of metal filled his mouth. They had searched him already. He had to be careful to speak quietly, to avoid it been seen or slipping free. He would rather not swallow or choke on it unless absolutely necessary. Now if he could keep Price’s hawk like eyes occupied from noticing it was gone.

Jimmy crossed the hall and poked his head in the next room. “You rang?”

Another light fell and cracked against a table.

“Jesus!”

“I swear, Zeller, you are more of a queen than I am some days. Stop overreacting.”

“I am not overreacting!” Brian Zeller appeared, pressing fingers to a fresh split on his lip and gestured wildly towards two guards struggling to keep Will restrained with a pair of surgical shears. “He won’t fucking cooperate!”

The glass panes rattled. Will was thrown up against it, tattered t-shirt hanging open on his chest. Hannibal took a step forward, jaw clenching. He caught the movement of guards outside his room and stilled. They kept alert eyes on him and one hand on their automatic rifles. It would only escalate the situation if he took action. A gash was bleeding from the younger man’s right brow, dripping in
his eye. Zeller had spoken out of turn. Will had defended himself. His husband was hurt. Yet again. Hannibal’s expression blackened. He was too exhausted to kill every single one of them. They were making it quite difficult not to.

“I want to take these photos and get black out drunk. I can’t do that if he won’t let me.”

“Did you try asking nicely?” A patronizing tone inquired.

“Jimmy—“

The forensic tech tripped out the door, passed the guards, and leaned in.

Jimmy gestured at the situation behind him with a frown, tone stern. “Your husband is…causing some issues. Any suggestions?”

*Have your men take their hands off him before I plunge sharp objects through their bodies to leave Jack a welcome home present from the Ripper. Yours and your colleague included.*

The thought floated away from him, ringing turning into the sound of ‘your husband.’ Mister Price had not said ‘Will Graham’ or ‘Will.’ He had said husband. The older man pursed lips warily, brows drawing low. It was the first time he had heard someone from the Bureau, from their former lives, say it. Without malice. Without derision or disbelief. There was no bite to the words, no question mark at the end of it. Just a statement. A fact.

"Did you misspeak just now?"

A brow wrinkled.

"You called him my husband."

"According to the initial findings, it states the two of you are married. You were both wearing rings when they brought you in. You are married, are you not?" The man looked back at Hannibal patiently, light eyes open and honest, waiting for his response. "Whether or not the marriage is ‘official’ is irrelevant. It is real to the both of you."

Closing his eyes, Hannibal reformed the words he had initially thought to something much more civil before replying, “My husband is sensitive about his physical appearance. He is adverse to being touched.”

’My husband’ bloomed a deep ache in his chest, lingering on his tongue with a shaky exhale.

“Shy?” Faint silver brows lifted. “Or just skittish?”

“Traumatized. Ashamed and predisposed to acts of violence when presented with the threat of abuse would be more accurate.” Hannibal rolled his thumb into a palm and tested the give of the bone once more. He wanted to keep Will safe. “Less eyes and hands upon him might make it easier. It might diffuse the situation. And I would be personally grateful. The day has been…arduous and long.”

*And the longer you test my patience, the less likely you or your colleague will make it of this alive. My current survival rate and William’s will go down drastically given Jack’s orders to ‘shoot on sight’ should we defend ourselves.*

“Tell Will to close his eyes and rest upon the banks of the stream.”

Jimmy stared at him with a perplexed expression before returning to the other room. The older
The technician said something to his assistance and then to the guards holding Will firmly. They let go, the taller of the two shouting something back. Price said something else with a shrug. Both stormed off a second later. The glass door swung open.

“Hey! Hey! Where are you going? Get back here!” Zeller stood in the hall, fists shaking at his side before whirling around, brown eyes following as the other man breezed passed him. “Look, Jimmy, I know you hate me, but do you want me dead! Are you even listening? Jim—Fuck this.” A firearm yanked from a holster. He stalked back to the room and slammed the gun against a stainless steel table. “Move. Go ahead, Graham, just try it.”

A hateful snarl twitched against Hannibal’s nose.

The younger man returned quietly to the plain backdrop, elbows locked against his waist to hold what remained of the knit fabric together. Zeller lifted surgical scissors. Will shied away and then closed his eyes. His cheek began flinching as the rest of the shirt was cut away. He was still holding on to shreds of fabric and thread by the time it was stripped from him. Narrow shoulders slumped, neck folding weakly, giving in.

Hannibal thought of Will cowering against their bathroom sink, desperately trying to hold soaking fabric and brutality tightly to his frame as it was peeled away. The older man tore off his t-shirt, balling it up against cuffed wrists, and tried to find wavering blue eyes with a steadying gaze. They refused to look at him. He grit teeth and tried to keep quiet. He wanted to go to him. Hannibal tried not to stare at the bruises and gashes on his torso or notice the way he began to tremble as the camera began flashing. He didn’t notice his own. All he could see was Will curled forward, the tremble of vulnerability rushing over him, on the verge of tears.


"I swear…” Muttering drifted from the room. “I have the most incompetent colleague on the planet.”

Will stood facing away, back to the camera revealing a map of violent markings from fine white scars running from shoulder blades to raised lanced flesh dragging across hips. They faded beneath smudges of yellow and grey violet. Shoulders shook. He was crying.

“I was always told scars add character. Do you think they say that to negate the fact it also manifests visceral ugliness of the actions causing them?”

The older man’s throat tightened and took two steps forward, pressing fingertips against the glass. He didn’t deserve this. To be put on display. Exposed. Not after Hannibal had kissed every mark until they healed, until he convinced Will day after day he was no less beautiful for having them.

"I hate that he is always a part of me. With me.”

“*I am always with you, William. He is a fleeting nightmare. And he is dead.*”

“*I hate seeing them. How can you stand to look?”*

“*My hatred for what was done to you is a separate entity from what I see when I look at you.*”

“*His marks?*”

“*No. Your strength. Your beauty. And a fatal reminder of my mortality and yours. I would die to protect you. Will. I will never allow something like this to happen to you again.*”

“*You can’t make that promise.*”
“No…perhaps not. But I can promise to worship you, can I not? Every part of you.”

What good was he? As a man? As a husband? He couldn’t even spare Will from this shame.

“No, no, no!” Zeller dragged his colleague out in the hall and shook his head furiously, pale faced with a camera shaking in his hands. “Jimmy, I can’t.”

“Afraid of him? That’s just a flesh wound. Jeez. You shouldn’t have riled him up. Out of the two he is the less dangerous you know.”

“No, no—“ The younger man made an abortive gesture. “It’s his—the. Goddammit. The photographs. I can’t take them. There too…”

Vile? Fury crept tension down the underside of the older man’s jaw.

Price leveled his gaze. “I’m sure you’ve seen worse on corpses, Z.”

Will never wanted anyone to see them, careful to keep the scars hidden in public. He chose garments to conceal them. Dressed and bathed behind closed doors even when alone. After a year, he had learned to let Elias see them in passing, but never touch. He never let anyone touch his scars except Hannibal. Then sometimes Will would ask Hannibal to change them, shape them, reclaim the canvas of skin with marks of his own. They would be indistinguishable to anyone else looking on. The older man knew the inflection of each one beneath the press of tender fingertips. The others would see violence and nothing more.

“Christ, look at him.” A camera thrust into the other man’s hands, tapping loudly on the digital screen. “He’s not… he’s not dead. He’s just…fuck. I’ve never seen anything like this. I mean on posters and billboards maybe. But not this close. Not like that.”

Light eyes flicked down to the camera and then up and over to Will.

“Oh…” Murmurs of revulsion or pity were muffled by a palm.

With a weak breath, Hannibal pushed free of the glass and let his gaze fall to the floor. Will was not his victim. He touched a phantom protection missing from his ring finger. They were hurting him. Hannibal could do nothing, but watch and wait.

“Hey. I’ll take him. You photograph Doctor Lecter. Can you do that?”

“Yeah, man. I can… Jesus. I almost feel sorry for him.”

Will had always loathed pity. The fragile teacup. The broken pony. The man too estranged from the concept of love to date, let alone be loved in return.

“Go on. I’ve got Will.”

Good. Hannibal released a stony sigh. Price will be far more gentle with Will. He deserves gentle. Not crass bravado and contention.

Acid burned the insides of his mouth putrid green. What possessed him to think such a thing? When had it become normal to look across the room and favor Will being hauled off in handcuffs because it was done more softly? It reached the corner of his lips and sliced to a crimson frown of self loathing. Abhorrent. To believe for even a single second captivity was acceptable if provided with the right circumstances. Would he too find the noose they put at Will’s throat less reprehensible if it were woven in only the finest silks?
He would not accept this. He clenched teeth till his jaw shook. Grating metal sparked. A thought drifted to the forefront of his mind—*I should have killed you, Will.*—then turned to smoke. All his lengthy discourse on the ethics of humane slaughter and ensuring his intended dinner remained without fear. An ideal. A fairy tale. Profane hypocrisy. Captivity and death waited in the room beyond. It lurked in the halls and rooms they had yet to see. It was not poetic. It was not beautiful. It was gut-wrenchingly ugly. And it wore the mask of Will’s face.

*I let myself believe I could give you a home. A life. Tied to mine. I have brought you nothing but suffering.*

The camera ceased flashing. A shadow shifted from behind the camera. Will was doubled over, forehead bent on knees, sobs wracking his beaten body. Jimmy knelt beside him, silent, before draping a white lab coat over him. Despair clawed free from the older man’s lungs in soundless prayer of forgiveness in a name. Sacrifice was the light vanishing from blue eyes with tear soaked cheeks. The curve of soft lips rippling with anguish. He had led his lamb, his affectionate and docile lamb, to slaughter. Hatred rippled over points of teeth. Hannibal hadn’t even the decency to kill Will himself. To spare him this grotesque dissection of self. At the mercy of strangers. He had denied him a dignified end.

“*You’ll have nothing but indignity and the company of the dead.*”

No... Handcuffs rattled as his fists shook. *I have Will. I could save him from himself. But I could not save him from his nightmares. I could not save him from me.*

“You’re a sick fuck, Doctor Lecter.” A hoarse rasp accused with a flash of dark eyes.

Glint of defiance lifted then fell through a rush of salty ocean air, seeing nothing but blood pooling around his feet and jagged rocks.

“No,” Brian Zeller growled. “Don’t look at me. Eyes on the ground.”

“Like you, Will, he needs a family to escape what’s inside him.”

Crimson spilled in the caverns of a torn chest, rising higher still to seep from unblinking eyes. Hannibal let it fill every hollow and empty space within him, until it suffocated his heart, the way he had held Will beneath its surface and forced him to drown within him.

Will would no longer be the shelter of protection to keep him at bay. Hannibal was no longer Will’s escape or his storm. He would kill him yet. With the most tender of his cruelty. With love. Bound to his side.

Chapter End Notes

:waves frantically: I am here, standing by, with a crash cart as a few of you, dearest ones, have expressed the sensation of your hearts giving out soon and hopeless whispers of, "Tell me they'll be okay."

I can promise you what I promised you in TS. If you can survive the painful arduous journey laid out before them, lend them your compassion from time to time, then they can make it through anything!
Did you know we're on page 182? How does this keep happening? D : (When I see you talking about publishing something and what not, I just, oh my heart does this little flip in my chest and I smile. That's always been a dream of mine. You make me feel great about myself. You're really wonderful and I adore you.)

To Be Alone x Ben Howard

And in the darkness a shallow poison it has grown,
I bite my tongue there’s a fever I will not let it show.
Will counted white tile in yet another hallway and tried to keep stride. *Thirty six, thirty seven, thirty eight.* He felt black ink crease his fingerprints. His cheeks felt raw from where they had shaved his beard to document the contusions on his face. The overhead lights felt too bright. Too raw. Too real. He could hear his lungs fill and deflate with stale oxygen in spite of the heart failing in his chest. His frantic eyes wanted to remain unseen, unable to hide behind a thicket of curls or glasses. He was wearing a new uniform of neon orange, adorned in a set of chains looping form his waist to wrists, connected at his ankles. He felt more exposed now than underneath the studio lights and weight of cameras cataloguing every inch of him.

*Christ.* An entire group of strangers were going to see those photos. The entire Bureau. His former friends. Jack. A goddamn judge and jury if the prosecution had their way he suspected. His skin crawled. He just wasn’t going to think about it. He couldn’t.

A hoarse voice called to him. “Will.”

Will’s gaze snapped up to find Hannibal being led down a cross section of hallway, straining against the grip of two burly men and twisting to see him.


*Fuck.*

“—mind my manners.”

Arms crossed over a lab coat, fingers ticking then coming to a sudden stop.

“If I step out of line, you can shoot me. Promise.”

Brian Zeller refused to look at him. Hadn’t been able to since he fled the evidence room. Will wasn’t sure if he was revolted by the scars—were they as ugly as he had once said? Seen? Some weak part of him stirred.—or taken on some form of guilt for having seen them at all. He let go and nodded to the two guards.

Will and Hannibal hobbled towards one another until they stood beneath the yellow flicker of a lamp overhead. Haunted shadows cast sharp down their faces. They stopped at the edge of illumination and took each other in silently. The older man’s eyes were bloodshot and smudged in grey, ruddy mouth pale and pinched in a grim line. His hair was cropped short against his forehead. A fringe of silver dusted white. Much shorter than it had ever been. Will knew if he ran his fingers through it, it would feel rough like sandpaper, like his own. They were mirror images again. He hadn’t noticed it before. Blue gaze fell on the emblazoned barcode. Hate scoured the back of his throat. Just another form of branding. He wished he could tear it off. He thought he was done seeing Hannibal chained. Tormented. Stripped of freedom. Dragged from Will to survive on forced isolation and what little comfort his memory provided.

*Would you be happy there?*

“They cut your hair…” Will murmured at last.

“Regrettably,” Hannibal said in a low reply. “I know how fond you were of it.”
There was no warmth in his voice. No light in his gaze. The younger man felt like he was seeing him for the first time in prison, file gripped in a clammy palm as he waded closer to the apparition on the other side. Emptiness had clung to the chasms of his face then. It held tighter to him now. Tighter than Will had been able to in the last few months.

A whisper brushed through him. Or ever…

“I know…”

He swallowed. He wasn’t about to cry again. No matter how much he wanted to put his arms around him and bury his face against the strength of a chest, praying to a thousand gods to wake up. Just wake up.

“…you hate it short. This short anyway.”

Maroon eyes flicked across a flinching cheek then down to the barcode on Will’s chest. The corner of lip curled in disdain then vanished. “Coquettish boyishness no longer becomes an old man.”

“You’re my old man…” Will protested with a wavering smile, shifting a soft cloth shoe lightly against a rough cast. “…and I think you look as good as the day I met you. Maybe more even.”

Hannibal visibly winced—pained by the reminder of his freedom or Will’s adoration— and shifted away to hover on the crescent edge of light, tone flat. “Flattery will give you whatever your heart desires.”

Something wasn’t right. Shadowy resignation was cracking the veneer of the face he loved so much. Will felt Hannibal pulling away from him like a tide rushing against his legs. Or dragging them down to the ocean floor as it once had. He fought against it. More violently than before. He would save him. Save them both.

Will thrashed against the sensation, moving through the light and throwing himself against melting shadows. His mouth pressed to an ear, gripping hands hard in his own, whispering, “Please. Please don’t go.”

Don’t let this take you away. Don’t shut me out.

Rough hands hauled him forward by the front of a uniform. The younger man collided against a chest, breath knocking out of him. He didn’t have the chance to catch it before Hannibal snagged a fresh bead of red across his bottom lip, biting until Will kissed back.

“No touching!” A guard barked.

The younger man whimpered against the feverish assault of a tongue prying his lips open. He began to wrap around slick sweetness. Every part of him ached for closeness. A growl made him jump, hand snapping on the front of his uniform, command clear: Be still. A slick tongue pushed something round and hard against the front of his teeth. Will scrunched his brows, tip of his tongue following after. The object shifted roughly along the scar inside his cheek.

“I said—“

“Time to go, William,” Hannibal whispered, lips sliding through curls as he pushed away.

The younger man prodded lightly at metal, fighting to keep confusion and concern from flashing across his face. He held on, knees weakening at the thought of having to walk away.
“Let go, Will. I do not want them to separate us by force. And I would prefer the both of us alive for awhile longer.”

*What the hell did you just…? Oh.* His lashes fluttered over a rush of tears. Hannibal’s wedding band. A pained noise escaped as his lips parted, jamming the ring behind smoothly ground molars.

Clinging fingers shook against hands, raw emotion whispered. “I’m not ready.”

“You will be.” They slowly slid free of his own. “Take care of yourself?”

The older man was pulled from him in a clash of metal.

“I-I will. Hannibal? Hannibal?”

Black stamped numbers were the last thing Will saw as Hannibal was led away. He didn’t turn. Not even a glance. Then he was gone. He was left with only the metallic taste of unfulfilled promises choking him. And the dread of not knowing whether the sensation was loss or the tolling of goodbye.

* * *

Leathery fingertips swiped through a gallery of photos on a phone screen, grip tightening on an arm of a chair. A stitched gash above a brow. Yellow grey hash marks of a shoulder and ribs.

Navy suede shoes stepped in to view a foot from him.

“They said you wanted to see me.” Heavy pine trees fell in a forest.

Nostrils flared. “I requested a meeting with you over three hours ago.”

“There were other things I needed to attend to.”

Silas looked up, mouth drawing to a tight line and asked, “Do you have every intention of a t-trial, Agent Crawford, or are you hoping my clients disappear in the s-system well before then?”

Square teeth glistened. “They haven’t gone anywhere. They are right where you left them.”

“That…” Sharp eyes lifted over a rim of silver glasses as Silas rose from the chair. “…was not what I asked you.”

“Then maybe you ought to rephrase the question,” Jack replied with a languid roll of shoulders.

“You and your men are t-taking liberties. I strongly advise you t-to encourage them against such continued action.”

“Here is where you and I are going to disagree, Silas.” The agent pulled a hand from a pocket and glanced down at a watch. “My men are using the appropriate amount of force against two notorious murderers to contain a dangerous situation. It’s self defense.”

“Violence disguised as self defense is still violence, Agent Crawford. A judge and jury may disagree.”

“Oh…” Another smile. “We’ll see about that, won’t we.”
“I would like to see my clients now.”

“You’re going to have to wait. We seem to be having some trouble locating them at the moment. Now if you’ll excuse me... I have another appointment.”

* * *

Crusting flesh peeled. Rust flecked embers discarded as a fire died within a mantle place. Blunt fingernails picked at the scab on a knuckle to expose raw pink flesh. They dug deeper with harsh scrapes. Crescent blood bubbled up to the surface, trickling between grooves of fingers. Will lifted the ring finger to his mouth, soothing the sting with a wet trail of his tongue. He had been opening the scab since it was gifted to him a week ago. It was infected. He jammed a thumbnail just above the wound. Pain sparked. He let out a hazy exhale. He knew he should stop. It was dangerous to stir awake his inner demons, to give in to their cravings.

The impulse to ground his erratic emotion with pain, to regain a loss of control skittered beneath his skin. He glanced at the healing wounds on his wrists. He had tried to reach that particular control with his teeth in the endless dark confinement of solitary. Like he had when was a boy. He wasn’t a child anymore hiding underneath beds and in closets from nightmares. He had grown and changed and become. Now he was the monster confined to sterile and bleach white of a cramped cell.

His methods of coping fluctuated with the situation. Without the smooth resonance of reason to hold, kiss, touch, he had traded teeth for nails. He drew them away to examine, caked in dried and fresh blood. He was still digging for it. In search of even an ounce of control. Self harm was tricky. An overwhelming rush of sensation masquerading as self soothing, promising false relief from throat tightening anxiety. It wasn’t real. It was temporary and fleeting. His nails clutched tightly around his forearm, probing at developing scar tissue. He would stop. He would fight through it. He let go and watched red turn pink then white. He wished Hannibal would hold him down, set fire to the memories of their past, and brush harsh kisses against his wounds. The older man returned a balance of control to him as easily as Will lost it. Far easier to relinquish knowing Hannibal would shake him apart, admire the pieces, and then reward him with an entirely different design. He had grown accustomed to the calm forced grounding brought him.

Will had no idea where Hannibal was. He was in a private holding cell. Labeled too dangerous at the moment to join gen pop. He didn’t know if his own husband was in the same wing or if they had moved him to an entirely different location. Was he even in the same goddamn city? State? He lifted his wrist, pressing bone lightly to the slick front of teeth. Would he ever see him again? Alive? He pushed points against flesh in a light scrape, scrubbing at tired eyes. How much longer would it be until Silas arrived?

Snow falling lightly against an abandoned field wafted over him. “How are you feeling, Will?”

Shining sapphires swept over him with long lashes inside a glimpse of winter chilled skin. A single rose bloomed red in the land of white with the faintest light of a tentative smile.

“Like this is a final indignity...” Will remarked with mirthless laughter. “Or a punch line.” He rubbed at light stubble on his jaw, nodding at the wall opposite of him. “I hope that glass is more bullet proof than the last one. Would hate to end up with a face full of lead like Chilton. Hannibal likes my bone structure the way it is.”

Alana considered him from the safety of a doorframe. She seemed undecided if she was coming or leaving. Crinkle of a round nose giving thought to if she wanted to study Will from afar or draw closer to be near him. All these years and she hadn’t decided.
Typical. Irritating but typical. Am I so incompatible you can no longer share a room with me?

She leaned with ease of slender legs swept up by thin navy suede heels. A dove pencil skirt flared slightly at knees, hugging tighter to hips clasped by a thin silver belt. A gauzy blouse hung loosely around her shoulders in a sweeping neckline, billowing around her delicate folded arms hugging an FBI file folder. Her shining black hair was long. Coiled neatly against the side of her throat and spilled across the soft swell of breasts.

_Hell…_ Blue eyes darted down and to the side, heart stuttering on an off beat of long forgotten admiration. _She’s still beautiful. Unforgiving in her vengeance. But beautiful none the less._


“Kids. I have two children now…” Alana answered, soft spoken, a smile flitting from her mouth to her eyes as she glided through the room and took a seat across from him. “A daughter and a son. All very well, thank you.”

A twinge of pain touched his fingertips, curling them inward against his palm. _Kids…_ The relentless sensation traveled up his arm and spread tight across his chest. He had wanted to tell Hannibal in Italy. A family. They could have had a family.

*Too late now.*

“Glad to know your life remains relatively undisturbed.” Resentment twanged sharp across his tongue, oil slick burning across the Louisiana bay. “You’re welcome for that, by the way.”

Alana blinked recognition with a slow sweep, inhaling once to keep a reply to herself. Ever the image of self control. She wasn’t ruled by impulse. Will had known that since the day he had kissed her, once, just once, and she had left him with his heart in his hands and his grip on reality scratching inside a fireplace.

“Let’s talk about you.”

“So. This isn’t a personal visit? Not that it ever was with you.”

Hurt skipped across the water of eyes then sunk to a sandy floor. “This is personal, Will. I…” A pink mouth pressed then spoke quietly, “I never stopped caring for you. I care what happens to you now. I care what happened to you all these years. I care.”

The words connected like a blow to his stomach.

*No you don’t.*

He felt the room spin. Will roughed toes against soles of shoes and pressed the ball of his foot against the wedding band hidden beneath. Pressed until it hurt. Till the pain grew sharp, clawing up his leg.

“Talk to me, Will.”

“I’m married to a psychiatrist, Alana, you are going to have to try harder than that.”

The folder fell open. “I’d like to show you some—“
"I'd like to show you some..."

*

“—photographs.”

Hannibal ignored the booming tenor of the voice addressing him and stared at a far wall. Jack had been harassing him for over an hour and a half now. It was beginning to grate on his soul. To be honest he had never been more bored in his entire life. Even their snide commentary had become stale. Other than making several of the man’s protégé cry or scamper away fearing for their lives during attempted interrogations, he had very little to amuse himself. He needed to be amused. To keep the sick churning in his stomach at bay whenever his thoughts turned to Will. It was nearly impossible to think of anything else. He was worried. Not a word from or about him since they had last seen the other in the hallway.

Something cool brushed at the corners of his mind. He refocused attention. He wasn’t sure how he knew. It could have been the ache in his bones. Or the way the structure around him seemed to breathe the scent of winter. He knew Will was in a room nearby, even on the other side, a thin barrier keeping them apart.

Will… He gathered strength, trying to push his amplified presence through drywall as if he could project his image to wherever Will was. I am here. Do you feel me?

Jack tapped the photographs again, leaning over the table until his shadow filled the room. His eye was less swollen than the last time he had seen it. But the last time the older man had seen it, Will was slamming bloodied knuckles into it and screaming threats. Hannibal let a proud smile flicker and fade. He had no doubt if given the opportunity, his loving mongoose, would make good on the promise. He admired his own work, grooves etched deep in midnight skin, and offered a sincere smile up at cold eyes.

“I told you to look at them, Doctor Lecter.”

Oh, I’m looking…

He looked down. His favorite subject was laid out before him. Will. He sifted with an idle sweep of an index finger. There was a mixture of photographs. Some featured specific flesh marks photographed during processing and others had been sampled from either his or Will’s cell phone, stamped images of time. Of their lives together.

He touched a plush pink smile beaming at him against the backdrop of their sailboat proudly holding up a scaly silver blue tuna. Another was the younger man fast asleep in the middle of their bed, arms slung around Winston, face buried against ears without an inch of room for him. A rectangular one hummed with splashing and laughter showing Will chasing Elias through ocean waves with Hannibal in pursuit shouting. (They had run off with a bottle of his Monte Blanc and a handful of puff pastries. Impish miscreants that they were. He had caught them in the end, throwing Will and then Elias, into the ocean. They in turn had forcibly held him down, with Peter’s help no less, and buried him beneath a mountain of sand.) At the edge of the frame, all three dogs chased after all three
men with lolling tongues and wagging tails. Peter had downed half a bottle of wine by the time they finished and was laughing so hard it was a wonder he managed to take a photo at all. There was one more of the same night, all four of them smiling in the photograph on a plaid cashmere blanket. They all had gotten terribly drunk around a roaring fire and fallen asleep beneath the stars.

Plucking through the pile, the older man found the more salacious content hidden underneath. His fingertips moved over a cropped shot of an arcing spine with hands bound lightly by a belt, bite marks dotting from divots to just beneath a right shoulder blade. He heard the echo of pleasured cries, palm warm from smacking a pale pinked cheek. He picked up another, rose flushing his cheeks with a spark of desire. The image was grainy, sunset bleeding orange and red against the sky, retaliation for Hannibal sending ‘artistic nudes’ to Elias on their travels. Sand had been cool and cushioning against his knees. He had heard the click before the flash, growled disapproval, before ocean and salt filled his throat a second later. Will had lain back on the plastic beach chair, sated and entirely too pleased with having a photograph of Hannibal sucking his cock. (It had apparently fallen into Peter’s hands and they had returned to find one of Elias in compromising positions, photocopied and taped from floor to ceiling of their bedroom. Hannibal had never asked if this was because Elias found the photo arousing enough to need such thorough attentions, or if Peter was merely showing off the dexterous flexibility of their youth.)

“Why, Jack…” Hannibal plucked up the photograph to admire it awhile longer. Will never looked more charming than when dusk and pleasure painted his face. He had tasted exquisite. “I never realized you also vied for our young profiler’s attentions. May I ask…what bothers you more? The fact you let him slip out of your hands?” He pushed the photo across the table until it touched tensed fingers splayed on the table. “Or he fell into mine and chose me?”

“Answer the question,” Jack spat, disgust glinting in black eyes.

Hannibal watched the man’s hand twitch. He tried not to smile. Such a visceral reaction spoke volumes. Jack wanted nothing more than to crumple the photograph into a tiny mangled ball. But he couldn’t. It was evidence. He had to keep it. And look. He coughed several times to disguise a laugh. The older man wondered if all Jack’s nightmares somehow now concluded in Will and he fucking in one way or another.

“If you are going to present photos of my husband’s exquisite form in hopes for a show, I am going to have to decline.” The older man leaned back in the chair, draping an arm across it and considered the shortened length of his chains, and how nicely they would look at Jack’s throat. “He is rather specific in his desires not to share me. Now, if you’re offering me a moment alone then…”

* * *

“…I might reconsider looking at these if I could actually see them, Alana,” Will grumbled, squinting at glossy color littering the table.

“Here.”

Slim fingers held out a pair of dark tortoise Cadore Moda glasses.

“You left these in my car.”

A high brow wrinkled. He wondered where he had misplaced yet another pair of glasses. He had almost as many as he did dogs in his old life. He had stopped wearing them almost altogether as his relationship and therapy progressed with Hannibal. He saw no reason to hide behind them anymore.
Even if it did make reading and looking at crime scene photographs more difficult.

“Never took you as sentimental,” Will noted dryly, holding out his hand.

Alana plopped the glasses in his palm, arcing a fair black brow. “Never took you as far sighted. I always thought they were a prop.”

So did everyone else.

“Fair enough.”

Glasses slipped up the bridge of a nose. Will let out a melancholy exhale. He was looking down at a half dozen polaroids. Ones he and Hannibal taken. The ones he had carefully taped to frame the glass ceiling of their little yacht. He shivered and looked up, passed Alana, and studied his reflection in the glass.

Are you close, Hannibal?

A cool palm settled against his knuckles. “May I ask you something?”

“Do I have a choice?” The younger man bristled and pulled his hand away.

There was once a time he would have given anything, anything at all, for her to reach out and touch him, to send his quivering loneliness scattering if just for a minute or two. It felt wrong to touch Alana with their memories, his and Hannibal’s, just beneath his fingertips and looking up at him from happier moments.

Alana withdrew her hand, lips pursed, and carefully folded them in her lap. “Yes.”

“Then…fine,” The younger man huffed. “Ask.”

“Did you know…” She formed each word with a pause of staccato, crystal blue tracing the contours of his face carefully, searching for some micro expression to explain all she had seen. “…you were going to help Hannibal escape when we agreed to let the Dragon have him over whiskey and an open fire?”

Will let his hands fall in his lap and started picking at bloodied flesh. He lowered his gaze, struggling to appear passive and unmoved. His mouth flinched. He hated thinking about that night. At least thinking about everything leading up to their passionate murder of Dolarhyde. It was…distasteful. He was more sure than anything he wanted, no, needed, Hannibal to die to save himself. Right up until he wasn’t. Then it was all wrong. He needed to reach out, touch him. The gun went off. Hannibal was bleeding on the floor. And he couldn’t…take any of it back.

“I saw an opportunity…” Will murmured, slumping in the chair and fighting against vivid flashes of events. “I hadn’t yet decided.”

Hannibal clutching his side, dark eyes staring up at him, trying to hide a flash of true, brutal fear of death beneath wit. The ice cold grip of his gun. The electric shock of pain in his cheek. Loss of balance, floating and then hanging on to a rush of blood. Then red. And cold. And warmth of arms. Blossom of affection. A rush of air. Guilt. A roar of ocean. Mournful regret and desperate prayer.

“You seem to do that a lot. Remain undecided.” Quartz painted nails picked up a photo then set it back down with a slight tremble. “Or did.”

Will’s face went blank, jaw tightening. “I’m not dead yet, Alana. You can refrain from using the past
“tense.”

“What changed your mind?”

“Not being dead? Or being indecisive?”

“Either.”

*Is Hannibal in love with me?*


He was so fucking tired of explaining. What the fuck did it matter to them?

“Why didn’t you? Stop him, I mean.”

“Bewilderment.” The younger man leaned across the table, chin balanced on flexing knuckles. “And I really needed a fucking drink.”

His nose twitched, scent of reedy thyme and sesame seed bubbling in a frying pan filling his lungs. He could hear the rush of flame against metal. Feel the heat of it against his skin.

“What was that? Just now?” Alana tipped her head to the side, gesturing to his far off expression.

“A reminder.”

“Our unconscious gestures speak volumes. Will you tell me what yours is saying?”

He tried to scowl against the fingertips he was pressing unconsciously to his mouth. He felt the pressure change it to a soft smile and then a deepening frown of regret.

“He…tried to kiss me.” Will replied quietly, unsure if it was a question or a statement, lost in a strange warmth of memory settling over his shoulders. “We were in the kitchen. Fugitives on the run, Jack and the whole damn state in pursuit, and all Hannibal wanted to do was cook. I tried to remind him. He actually told me to relax.” Laughter yelped free. “The most uptight, pretentious asshole on this planet told *me* to calm the fuck down. So he cooked. Not surprising I guess. You miss the most fundamental comforts in prison, the simple pleasures. Not that you would know that.”

Slender brows furrowed and then lifted with disbelief. “And he…kissed you then? In the kitchen.”

“No. In the pantry.” Will smirked at Alana’s obvious discomfort.

What did she think? Hannibal wouldn’t relay the entirety of that night in every gruesome and violent detail? He told Will everything. Shared his inner most person. Honest in his brutality. Alana had received vagaries and placation until he allowed her to truly see him. She had *not known* him. Not like he had. She never would. But Will—he tucked the secure flutter of his heart away deep inside him—he knew Hannibal. All of him.

“Don’t sound so jealous, Alana. He gutted me in his kitchen. He just threatened you,” Will countered with a smug smile.

Alana tucked hair behind her ear, paling slightly and shifted in her chair. He cozied up to her over the table, wide grooved smile spreading across his face, and felt instantly lighter for some reason.

“Now that I think about it…the most intimacy we shared before this, before the fall, was in the
kitchen. Hannibal cooked. I observed. I think he knew I was too tipsy to be trusted with anything of importance.”

Gaze straying to a corner of the room, Will saw beyond it and saw light touch shadows, gathering to create a vignette in his mind. He saw himself and Hannibal in the house beside the eroding bluff. He was standing on his left, leaning on the counter, watching the flames consume someone he had probably met, or interviewed, or arrested. His posture was sloped, mouth slightly open, relaxed. Lulled by the sound and watching Hannibal move with infinite ease and grace throughout the kitchen. Two wine glasses partly empty rested to their right.

“The sound of his knife on the block was so…clear to me. Calming. I could hear him breathing. It was quiet. Rhythmic. Like we had waited years to end up in that exact moment.”

He watched Hannibal keep his gaze firmly locked on the frying pan in another rush of flame, line of eyes crinkling when Will looked directly up at him. He felt the lurch of his heart as a slow smile spread across the older man’s face before returning to the cutting board.

“There was this pull and I reached for a glass of wine. I barely touched him…” His voice began to waver, gripping an edge of the table. “He froze, a statue caught mid knife stroke, bottom lip caught between his teeth to catch a gasp. He was shaking. I thought he was hurt. I put my hand on his and it was so…”

His hand slid over the one gripped on the frying pan, pulling it free, and placed it against his chest, brow furrowed as the shadowed Will examined it.

A distant voice asked. “Natural?”

“Yeah. Easiest thing in the world. Easier than trying to kill him. It felt right.” Will confessed breathlessly, tears clouding his vision. “He wouldn’t answer me. Wouldn’t look at me. So when I touched his cheek, he…”

He saw his mouth moving, gesturing at the hand he held and then toward the oven. He watched the way Hannibal was staring at the hands cupped around his, how dress shoes touched the tips of his, how Will was flushed from the heat of the flame and standing closer. He saw the faintest tremble tick his fingers. A tension then release of an angled jaw. How fingertips had scalded across the scar on his forehead, pushing gingerly at clipped curls. Then a glistening maroon gaze lifted to stare openly as a ruddy mouth, fingertips drifting over his cheek, hooking under his jaw. Will had been babbling up until the last second when some part of him saw Hannibal, desperate longing shining in his eyes, leaning in to kiss him.


“So you pushed him off a cliff?” Skepticism broke the vision apart and sent it dark once more.

How dare you.

Of all people to question him. To say his feelings for Hannibal weren’t real. They were violent and unreasonable and insane. But they were his. And he didn’t need to, shouldn’t have to, try to make anyone understand. They wouldn’t. Will still didn’t understand. They just were.

I love him. You don’t need to know why. Or how. I just do.

Will wrenched his gaze away and scowled at Alana, trying to rub at wet clinging to his cheeks. He
smeared palm prints across plastic of a mask instead. “I was trying to kill myself. He just happened to be in the way. He always is, you see. Stubborn like that. Goddamn insufferable at times.”

“I see…?”

“Uh huh.” The younger man snorted and rolled his eyes. “What’s the point of all this exactly? Why are you here?”

Pink lips opened then closed, pausing. “I’m trying to understand.”

“You won’t.”

Alana rose smoothly from her chair and glided around the table. Will watched the trail of spectral dust her fingertips left on the aluminum table in her wake. He felt her presence hovering over him, tensing, knowing the sensation almost always followed by soul shattering connection. She had hurt him so deeply. Caused irreparable damage every time she drew him affectionately into her arms and murmured, _everything’s okay, Will_, then pushed away. He wasn’t okay. He had never been okay. She had refused to see it. Refused him. And offered him jarring, brutal moments of tenderness to carry inside him with his feathered beasts and company of the dead. Hannibal had been violent with him, but it had always been real, and he never once had pushed or looked away from the blaze consuming Will.

“You preferred the _idea_ of Hannibal…” Alana mused, sitting on an edge of the table and ran her fingers across his jaw, unlatching the mask and discarding it. “The man behind his veiled persona, and when he, that soft part of him, wasn’t looking back at you on the cliff, you felt betrayed? I know that feeling, Will…” She touched his hand again and then squeezed his shoulder, softly murmuring, “I know. I felt it.”

“No. No you fucking don’t.”

Will felt sick as the sting of touch sank slowly inside of him, tearing open fresh wounds of longing, need for contact, connection. He fought against another well of tears.

_God, Hannibal, I fucking need you here. Where are you?_

“There was no veil. No persona. Just _him_,” The younger man’s voice shook as it rose louder and louder. “It just…took me time to see it. He was never really human. Not to me. I took us over because I realized I couldn’t live my life without him and I wasn’t ready to let go of all that entailed. Because I have loved him since he wrecked my fucking world with talk of snakes slithering by and a miraculous hand keeping our daughter alive in an ocean of blood.”

“He killed your daughter, Will! Gave you a wounded girl and told you, you were family. She wasn’t even yours. He took her anyway. Abi—”

“Don’t open your goddamn mouth!” His shout echoed over and over again in the room. “Don’t you say her name.”

Alana was washed white, trembling, curled hands resting tight against her knees. "Hannibal left us to die..."

"He left _you_ to die," Will shot back with a snarl. "He's still bitter you didn't have the good grace to kick the bucket. I didn't harbor the same feelings until about three seconds ago."

Lashes fluttered, bright blue stunned by the statement. "That isn't care, Will, it's manipulation. He is still in your head."
“I love him, Alana! You have no idea what that feels like.”

It grew quiet, stream trickling in a lush forest of green and sun somewhere.

“He…wanted me…” Will continued, strength fleeing him as he lay his face to rest inside palms, muffled and struggling to breathe. “The broken, impossible wreck of an unstable man who showed up at his door step drenched in cold sweats and babbling at all hours. He loved her too. Loved us both. And he…wanted me when no one else did. Like no one ever would. Or will.” He squeezed eyes shut trying to ease the sting. “He didn’t see broken pieces. He saw me. He stayed.” He looked up through wet lashes. “You didn’t.”

Throes of sadness fell over Alana’s face with the tip of her chin, curls spilling lush and dark. Guilt rippled through eyes, across a mouth, and slid down a scratchy throat trying to form words. “Then what is he? Not man? Not beast?”

Will closed his eyes, head tipped toward the ceiling, searching through an endless amount of snapshots of moments and time. An expression. A look. A murmured intonation of words spoken. They were all instinctively different. But all the same. They were all Hannibal.

Long lashes fell closed over tears, desperate ache breathing out, “Endless shards of gathering glass.”

Chapter End Notes

:whispers: Hold me. ; ; Then hold on tight for a flashback sequence next chapter inspired by pre-fall and this lovely song rec'd to me by a lovely new friend:

Prehistoric x Now, Now

I would trade this sleep for you in a heartbeat
But this weather will not lift
It leaves us shouting into cliffs without an echo
Each day you come closer
So close I can almost feel your breath on my shoulders
But I know if I turn around you might run away again

How are we all doing? Real life and story wise? <3 (Proud of everyone still resisting and fighting for each other. So beautiful!)

So, I've been thinking and let me know if you think it's a good idea. How do we feel about a 'time stamp' series? Like short little ficlets or drabbles from moments in time in TS, things we didn't see. (Like the darling little beach scenario with Hanni, Will, Elias, and Peter.) It could be fluff, smut, or whatever curious things you'd like me to write~so every time we have a new chapter of Echoes, if you could throw a prompt my way? Anything you want. And I'll write it. :) Yes? No?

It could give us something a little lighter to look forward to~especially seeing as how there's so much darkness in the world right now.
Uncertain footfalls creaked across a slate stone path. A key twisted a lock open before being tossed in a blooming bed of tiger lilies. He had no further use for it. Nothing left to hide. Hannibal paused in the doorway to the house overlooking the cliff, caught between the confines of this world and the prison left behind. He was stricken with a strangely vicious sense of paralysis. He waited until the feeling passed. He stepped over the threshold and stooped to take off his shoes, to line them neatly, perpendicular to a corner, as he was accustomed. The soft clothed monstrosities were covered in dirt and blood. He turned on a thrill of whim and pitched them outside.

A startled yelp made him smile. The kind that spread wide and gathered deep in aching sharp cheeks. The muscles felt strained, worn thin by disuse. He couldn’t remember the last time he truly smiled. Joy washed over him with a dip of the sun.

“Hey! Watch it for Christ sake.” Will ducked as the shoes sailed over his head.

It was the most Will had said the entire time they drove. And how he had missed the inflection of falling snow in his voice. The shoes fell with a thud and tumbled through a bit of overgrown weeds at the edge of the property. The younger man gaped at him, hands still covering his head, perplexed brows wriggling. He was wearing that particular expression—bewilderment and curiosity—often it seemed. Today.

With another rich laugh, Hannibal spun on his heel and shouted, “Come in when you’re ready, Will.”

Ghosts of plastic covered his most precious belongings. Hannibal began to remove them, sinking beneath the crinkling wisp each sheet made, to rediscover his gleaming piano and modernist furniture scattered throughout. He rolled fingers against heavy aged keys, several notes reaching the air. He moved with a quickened spring in his step. He was filled with something. Giddy. Eager to share with Will something he had shared with Abigail. His home.

My life…

Gauzy plastic fluttered through the air and fell away from a four post bed. The thought was unbidden, drowned deep, a long time ago in the blood of his kitchen. Or so he had thought. Pain resonated somewhere in the depths of rooms and doors. He shut and locked every single one, retreating back to the voice calling to him at his back. No matter where he went...Will was always with him. In one way or another.

I have always wanted you by my side, Will.

“You should really go.”

“Nonsense.”

The older man shook his head and turned to find Will leaning in the doorway, taking in the room with a sweep of eyes, discovering exactly which room he was on the brink of entering and took a step back. For some reason the single reverse momentum of motion sent a tremor through his heart. He tried not to focus on the singular form of the sentence implying Hannibal would be leaving alone. Without Will. Once more. He would never survive the separation. Refused to survive him. Neither
would Will. He would not leave him again. Not alive. They would both have to go together.

“We have plenty of time. Jack and his honored guests would never be so rude as to show up without an invitation. Especially given how difficult it will be to find this place. Even if they knew, they’d never come. At least not till I’m dead.” Hannibal offered easily then winked at bewilderment framed in soft drooping curls, motioning behind him. “The master bath is behind me. Would you like to shower first?”

Or shower with me? Images of glistening skin and a warm press of his mouth wafted across the back of his eyelids with an inhale of Will’s scent.

Hannibal forced a smile, trying to reel in a floodgate of emotion and stuff it back inside himself. The seams of who he was, the frail man inside his bones, was beginning to split at the seams. The younger man brought out the worst in him: delicate humanity. He wanted to run his hands through every curl and bring his mouth against the sullen frown that followed. He wanted to kiss every inch of him and whisper, ‘beautiful, how beautiful you are to me, my love.’

Will looked down at tattered trousers smudged in dirt, boots swinging in one hand, and opened his mouth to say something—

The older man felt his heart drop, waiting as he had in the kitchen, when all he had felt were the scattering raindrops on Will’s cold skin, mouth open on the precipice of a reply to ‘we couldn’t leave without you,’ pitiful eyes wavering with blatant agony and longing. Hannibal had cut the reply out of him and left it to drown with his compassion. Neither had remained dead.

“Will?”

—then Will shook his head before shuffling down the hall.

Hannibal heard the dull thud of his heart and wished it had remained where it belonged, caged and forgotten.

If only Will realized he had been keeper of the keys, of the man hiding in skin, the entire time.

* * *

Will stood on the precipice of intimacy. A mere threshold away from something he could never seem to escape. No matter how far he ran. How well he hid. Or camouflaged himself in the trappings of a well adjusted family man. In all the years since, he dreamed and found himself in endless corridors leading through rooms and doors. No matter where he turned, the result was the same. The discovery predictable. But this room. The one where he stood just on the other line between hallway and room was real. He found what he always did. Hannibal. Just within, and out of, reach.

His voice shook out hoarse. “You should go.”

“Nonsense,” A crisp tone replied.

A gaze slid from plastic slipping from hands and fell over a rigid shoulder. The eyes flowing from the tips of his hair to muddy socked feet were the color of caramel, warmed by sun peeking through blinds. Will had last seen those eyes in the harsh ice cold lighting of prison, steeled and shadowed and cutting him open. Here they were gentle and startling and unmistakably filled with what he had not seen before--a fervor, longing. Had...anyone ever looked at him that way before? His empathy rushed his skin cold in bumps. He didn’t just exist. He was the only thing, the only person, to exist.
The only one Hannibal could see. For a man who had spent most of his life in hiding, being looked over and forgotten, it made his palms sweat and his ability to continue breathing strained. It was terrifying.

He tightened the grip on boots he was holding—unsure where to put them, or place himself, in this new light, new life Hannibal was allowing him to see. He realized where he was, who he was, lurking outside of a bedroom and took a step back and then another, shoulders bumping against the wall. It felt dangerous to stand so close to the edge where carpet met wood paneling, a temptation and pull, to let himself fall. Into his own darkness. Into the room. Into Hannibal’s bed.

Just shut up… Will whispered fiercely to the otherness waking inside him. We don’t want this.

Don’t we?

“We have plenty of time. Jack and his honored guests would never be so rude as to show without an invitation. Especially given how difficult it will be to find this place. Even if they knew, they’d never come. At least not till I’m dead.” Hannibal noted cheerily with a wink.

Will felt his mouth fall open. Blinded by the careless flirtation of such a simple gesture. It was playful. This was not the way he and Hannibal played.

You play, you pay.

Their games involved guns, knives, and someone bleeding out on stoned tile outside art galleries or lying against provincial French furniture. His stomach twisted, bolts and screws winding a feeling, a sinking, desperate feeling deep inside him. Or a kitchen. His grip faltered on the boots, palms sweating, some part of him wanting to let go of them, of everything, and push Hannibal against the bed he was tidying.

“The master bath is behind me.” Soft gaze dragged over his cheeks, his mouth, in a hushed heat. “Would you like to shower first?”

He opened his mouth to speak, letting the implication of the question wash over him, sending sunlight and then frigid rainwater through him. There was no way to avoid what he had seen. Now knew to be true. How Hannibal looked at him, dragged the skin from his bones and whispered against the frail organ beating faster inside his chest, had always been the same. Love.

Fuck. Who in their right goddamn mind, who...who the fuck would ever love him?

Bedelia said you’re in love with me, Hannibal. Are you… His heart thudded loudly in his chest. ...in love with me?

Will waited for a response. Steeling every single part of himself. His defenses had always been weak, roting beams of perception of self and need. He started to tremble, mouth going dry. He knew what would happen if the older man said ‘yes.’ The last part of him, of who he thought he was, who he wanted to be but knew he wasn’t—if he had ever been ‘good’ at all—would fall and he would die in Hannibal’s arms, then wake to find he was still in them, and then he would be...someone else.

I want to be someone else. With you.

Hannibal quirked his chin to the side, eyes squinting to unravel the flash of emotion trembling across his mouth and choking down a sliding throat. “Will?”

It took a full minute for him to realize he had not spoken out loud.
“Oh god…” Will barely breathed the words, shook his head and fled the thing, the feeling, the need, pulling him closer and closer to a beckoning edge.

Safe for awhile longer, at least, as safe as he had ever been with darkness inside his own head.

* * *

A shredded uniform lay in a pile beside a laundry hamper. Hannibal considered burning the thing, but was drawn to the shower by a waft of steam, where he still stood forty minutes later. Braced against a marbled wall luxuriating. It was scalding. Years and tension melting as he moved beneath the spray. Skin turned pink as it rushed over his neck, down his back, and snaked the strength of his legs. Foam swirled around his feet in the scent of patchouli and olive oil.

His thoughts turned to the abrupt crash toppling him to freedom. Even if it was fleeting. Freedom was to be cherished. He thought of how quietly Will had slid into the passenger seat, not batting a single lash as leather creaked and blood soaked his shirt from where a living man had once been. How quiet it had been. Busted windows rushing air against his face as he had felt the tremble of a jumping accelerator. Through it all he could still smell Will. His skin. His blood. Even his hideous aftershave which Hannibal now associated with gentle and infuriating emotion. The younger man had stared out the window in complete silence. Hannibal in turn had nearly driven them straight in a ditch staring at him. How handsome the boy had become over time. Skin chaffed rose by winter. Mouth a sullen, deep line. Eyes exquisitely dark and piercing. The careless ease of how Will moved, ever so slightly stretching out long legs.

Hannibal ran the flat of his tongue against molars. It was still sore from where he had been biting as he drove. To focus an ache, a blistering need, to reach out and touch Will. To keep touching him. Over his clothes. Then under them. He let out a harsh breath, sliding a hand down his stomach and curled a palm against a hard cock. There was no one watching here. No chance of interruption. It wouldn't take much. Not after so long. He nipped at the inside of his cheek and stroked up, once, with enough pressure to take the edge off.

The older man groaned and let go. He stretched, tipping his face up in the water and sighed. He would wait. There was enough time yet. Will might still...

Do not continue longing for all you cannot hope to hold.

He felt revived by the hot water and somehow even more tense with anticipation he could not place. It was more than need. There was something else. Something still gnawed at his insides and quite literally knocked on the bathroom door.

“Hann—Doctor Lecter?” Floorboards creaked awkwardly.

He was half turned, heart ticking a bit faster, one hand on the handle of the glass shower prepared to step out.

“Are you...?”

His heart clenched.

“Fuck, Christ, get it together.” Muttering rose to a loud strain of mental effort. “Are you okay? I just...hell...” Something thumped against a door. “It’s been awhile. And if you slipped and are unconscious I would feel... What? Bad. I guess.”
Hannibal stepped quietly out of the shower, towel nearly within his grasp, puddle of water spreading across the pristine white mosaic tile and found paralysis upon him again. He almost did faint and not because some part of him was exceptionally curious to find out what would happen if Will discovered him nude and vulnerable. His spiked body temperature and adrenaline peaked and then plummeted. He gripped the towel rack.

The feeling passed in a dizzying rush before he could call out.

“Okay, I’m, I’m coming in—“

The older man snapped a towel free and wound it expertly around his hips, yanking open the door just as it was pushed to assure there was no need. No matter how gallant or charming it was for Will to be concerned.

Startling blue eyes widened. Will stumbled and collided straight into his chest, sending them both skating backwards across water, sharp porcelain sink smashing his lower spine once and then again as a body fell into his arms. He flung arms around a waist and under shoulders holding tight to avoid a nasty spill on the floor. He had no longer processed the sequence of events, registered Will against him—a towel and nothing else against jeans-- when it all vanished.

With a strangled noise, Will pummeled palms on his chest, slid back across water and glowered at him through a fringe of curls on the other side of the door, toes curled inside wet socks. “Oh good.” He hissed. “You aren’t dead.”

Piercing blue dilated for a moment, falling from a stunned open mouth to a thicket of grey hair on a chest, to a precarious tangle of terrycloth around thick thighs. Hannibal forced himself to swallow, keeping very still, only remembering how to breathe as soon as Will retreated, muttering curses down the hall. He found himself laughing again. It was absurd. He was free. Will was here with him. All these years and he needed to only stop answering when Will called to send him into a panic and straight to his arms.

* * *

Back and forth. Back and forth. Will continued to pace the entire length of the hallway in front of the room he had abandoned for a glass of whiskey. And then a glass of wine. And then another. A glass he still held clenched in his right fist to keep it from shaking. All he could hear was the sound of water, real and imagined, a deafening roar plunging to the depths of jagged rocks below. He shook a sting of anxiety racing down his arm from his left hand. He was drunk. At the very least tipsy. Not in any real conscious state to be considering whether or not to open the door to a room, Hannibal’s bedroom, and soon after go through another leading to a bathroom. Where the man himself was showering. Naked. Vulnerable. Wrapped up in a veil of steam. Or nothing at all.

Fuck. Now his goddamn empathy was materializing, in crisp and sharp detail with information gathered from well tailored suits, what his former fucking psychiatrist looked like naked. Which had absolutely nothing (almost not entirely) with what he was doing pacing like a caged animal in front of the bedroom door to begin with. He had not checked or had the foresight to ask whether or not Hannibal had sustained any head injuries in the crash flipping the police van several times. There was a decent chance if he had, the older man could have fainted in the shower. Or was convulsing. In an unconscious state and needed help. His help.

Or he is perfectly fucking fine... His brain stammered on all the uses of the word ‘fine’ when it came to Hannibal Lecter. Dammit, Graham.
He was not here to think about Hannibal, clothed or unclothed, fine or...no, he was fine. Beautiful, if men could be called beautiful. Oh my god, why was this happening? There was no getting around it. He just needed to know he wasn’t dead. Yet. He wasn’t going to get away from Will that easily. He had a goddamn reckoning to meet.

His wine glass tapped resolutely on an oblong table in the hall. He opened the bedroom door with more force than intended. It banged on the interior wall.

Great. To be fair, I was distracted. And now I’m distracted by something I shouldn’t even be—focus, just focus.

“Fuck, Christ, get it together,” He muttered. “Hann—"

No. Not Hannibal. That was too...intimate.

“Doctor Lecter?”

Will planted both feet a meter apart, jammed hands in his pockets and called, “Are you okay? I just...hell..."

His head thumped against the door. He could just turn around and leave. What if Hannibal was dressing? What if he wasn’t? What if he was just... ? Or even...? His mouth went dry, anxious fingers ticking a damp palm. Why did this have to be so difficult?

“It’s been awhile. And if you slipped and are unconscious I would feel…” He groaned and lifted his chin to stare at the ceiling. “What? Bad. I guess.”

Could one feel bad about letting the man come to harm only to push him into harm's direct path later on?


He began to tap his thumb on a thigh, anxiety growing. He would count to one hundred. If he counted to one hundred and Hannibal didn’t answer then—

“Oh, I’m, I’m coming in—"

He twisted the door handle, shoulder following in a loud thud of anticipation to it being locked, to break it down and rescue Hannibal and—

Oh god.

There was suddenly no door. Then air. Then Hannibal was standing there, expression startled. His feet slid through water, losing his balance. Then his palms collided with a tensed dripping abdomen and heat and muscle. His hands fell to catch himself, snagging on peaked hipbones then terry cloth. Their legs tangled. One or both of them cursed. His cheek flattened against a chest covered in a thicket of graying hair. His entire body melded with a strong frame, large damp palms pressing his back, his shoulders, to catch him. A low groan breathed across his forehead.

Fucking hell.

Will registered the arms around him, holding steady, chest to chest, burning hot against his cool skin, then who was holding him—

Is Hannibal in a fucking towel?! Well, of course he is, idiot!
—and shoved away. He frantically slid across the bathroom, nearly planting face first, and caught the door frame and whirled around.

“Oh good…”

Hannibal blinked at him, both brows lifted high, slicking soaking wet hair back. Jesus, he looked... The younger man swallowed hard. There was a slight quirk of his mouth, shock turning to a suppressed smile. The smile faltered, sliding with the path Will’s eyes were taking, following every bead of water gliding from broad shoulders, down a bare chest, and lingering a second too long at a towel draping over a shapely outline between thighs.

“You’re not dead.”

The younger man shook his head hard and barreled down the hall for a second time. He snapped up his wine glass and stormed the kitchen. He traded glass for a bottle. He felt the damp palm prints on his clothes burning through his skin, settling somewhere to reside in the shadow his soul, and hollow him from the inside out. The shaking returned in his hands. Then his entire body started to tremble. He really needed a fucking drink.

* * *

After dressing, Hannibal found Will deep in a bottle of his finest vintage Batard Montrachet, leaning heavily on the counter for support and blowing at a curl insistent on falling in his eyes. He wondered if the younger man was tipsy or if he was tiptoeing a fine line of hoping, wishing, praying, to be drunk. He could keep pouring. A heated gaze dragged over the strong lines of his spine to where a shirt was hitching above jeans to expose prominent hipbones. He had seen most of Will naked over the course of their...friendship tasted bitter...except for the parts he averted his gaze from out of respect. He gnawed on a bottom lip. He would look exquisite placed on his counter, laid out on his dining room table, with Hannibal firmly situated with a mouth between his thighs. He could have him. He swallowed and moved closer. If he kept pouring. He could have him pliant and gentle, kissing and tasting every part of him within hours. The older man took another step. Will was touch starved. For him. For the way only he could touch him without pretense. Not hours. Minutes.

A heavy sigh was followed by a petulant cry as Hannibal pried the wine bottle away and set it next to the stove, on the far side of a wooden chopping board. It was a danger to them both.

“I was...drinkin...that,” Slight slurring noted with annoyance.

“I gathered as much...” The older man responded, turning to the gravity coffee maker and began to prepare a cup. He looked at Will, cheeks pink, pouting. He had better make several cups. “Now you are going to behave and drink this. Wine is for dinner guests only.”

“And am I...” Will curled hands around a curvy black mug, eyes nearly crossing as he glared up at unruly hair. “…dinner? Or a guest, Doctor?”

The older man nearly tripped on a rug. He pushed out a silent growl between clenched teeth. Need coiled in his belly. The way Will seemed to make him feel, with piercing intensity, every time he spoke, consciously or not, ‘doctor.’ No one had ever made it sound as sinful, powerful, desirable, as Will did. His arousal spiked. He closed his eyes.

Both. You have always been both.

Hannibal gripped the counter, focusing deeply and sharply on his breathing to keep a sudden stab of
hunger from shaking him to pieces. He poured a half glass of wine and knocked it back fiercely. His lips lingered on the imprint of Will's left on the glass. He pushed the bottle farther away, hands trembling. He knew better than to test what little tolerance for alcohol remained after such a dry spell. He didn't trust himself to be this close to Will, in the same room, not a foot of space between them, and drink. He would end up begging. He was not too proud to plea for the embodiment of all he desired. He would get on his knees for the boy without hesitation. It wouldn't be the same. He wanted Will to see him, choose him.

I would love to devour you in or out of my bed. Seeing as how I have already tried the former, I would prefer my tongue on or inside you as the entree part of our feast. We could discuss at great length, once you are writhing and moaning, how you might like the main course to proceed. Perhaps we ought to skip straight to the interruption of our meal and let Dolarhyde put me out of my misery, eh? God knows I have been incapable of doing just that.

Hannibal groaned inwardly. Where had his prideful and glorious self control gone? He had it once. Exercised it with ease and regularity. Before Will. He grit his teeth. Three years of exercising that particular control on a daily basis—especially with the returned scent of Will permeating his confined space where he could not escape it—had been trying and exhausting. And that damn palm print glaring at him on the glass, rush of rage and desperate longing coursing through his veins, had been viscous torment. The scent. The sight. There was no retreat from him. His entire world was yet another cage Will had built to keep him in and watch him pace and dash himself against the bars to get at what he could not, would not, ever have.

Have you any idea the kind of blind restraint one most rule over the body, not only not to deny pleasure but to appear entirely unmoved, by your presence alone?

He turned to find the younger man sipping his coffee, legs swinging, his pert ass firmly planted on his kitchen counter. Right where he had wanted him. Still wanted him. God he wanted Will in a burn of trapped breath and fraying nerves. He took a step closer, fists swinging. And for fuck sake if he kept staring he was going to have a stiff cock and no dinner jacket to hide it behind. If he took one more step, he would take Will, jeans around his ankles against the counter without another thought. There would be no tenderness. No forethought. He deserved the soft affection of his heart and not his shadowed self howling to claim.

“Jūs bandote mane nužudyti...” Lithuanian scoured rusty from a ruddy frown.

Brows rippled. “Huh?”

“Nothing.” The older man muttered, shaking his head and jerking open the refrigerator to hide within it.

He should just crawl into the basement freezer and force himself to remain until he cooled off. Or walk back to his bedroom, lock the damn door (or not) and rid himself of lust with a quick jerk of his fist. His entire house, his kitchen, his lungs, held a scent of sweat and musk. He found it very difficult to think when he was very nearly being choked by Will, permeating every single part of him, like the boy had his life and ruined everything he had built.

You have ruined me.

“What are you doing, Hannibal?”

The refrigerator door nearly clipped the side of his face as it was firmly pushed shut.

Will blinked, materialized by his side. “You should go. They’re going to find this place. It’s not really
“Will…” Hannibal took a step forward, breath hitching at the way Will walked backwards in tandem, hand trailing on the counter for balance. “How can I put this in words you understand? It would do us both some good if you would ‘quiet the fuck down.’”

The younger man bumped a corner and slid free as a shadow loomed, mouth twitching. “Actually, the saying is ‘calm the fuck down.’” Bright blue looked over his shoulder, smile spreading. “Look at you learning all sorts of new hip phrases in—“ Eyes dropped. “S-sorry.”

He took in the drooped posture, eyes lowered. So the shy, soft spoken boy still lingered within him after all. He could have kissed the conflicting emotions radiating in wavering eyes away. Will had not sent him there. Hannibal had sent himself. For Will.

“You can say it, Will. Prison.” Hannibal leaned forward, head quirked with a lopsided smile. “Where I studied the texts of slang dictionaries. Now… if you don’t mind, I would like to prepare a meal. Would you fetch the skillet from the cupboard there? Third shelf, bottom right.”

Dusk had begun to fall in shades of grey and golden twilight brushing twigs, falling over ground, and plummeting to the rock infested ocean below. Hannibal was stranded somewhere between a sense of impending anxiety and reveling in the time he had inherently felt most alive. The older man felt strangely grounded in spite of the knowledge an invited guest was on his way, intent on killing him. He was calm. Soothed by the sizzling scent in his kitchen, the muscle memory of motion and skill, moving in a dream like quality all the while underneath a bright blue gaze.

Will leaned against the counter, right next to him, cheek balanced on a fist with a sullen shadow of one lost in thought.

Are you picturing my demise in all its glory? Is it all you hoped?

The older man tossed fresh garlic from his freezer and watched flame consume it, throwing handfuls of rosemary and thyme in after it. He tried to focus on the act of creation. It was, after all, supposed to be far more paramount than beauty. He ought to focus. Not make a sketch study of how the lamplight overhead cast a silver glow on crooked nose, lighting the corners of a smooth brow, ringing stubble and touching the very tip of a perfectly v-ed upper lip. Would he taste rich and aromatic like coffee? Or sweet and effervescent like the wine before it? He was so very lovely. Every bit of him perfect.

A hand settled on his lower back, arm brushing across him as Will reached for a freshly poured glass of wine. Hannibal dropped the frying pan. It clattered loudly on iron grates, flame spitting and hissing to catch spilled oil, to consume all he had created. There was a shout as a hand flew to twist knobs and turn the oven off. Palms slid down his forearms, encircled his wrists, pulling until his knuckles rested against dirt on a soft clothed chest. Room spinning paralysis turned the world inside out. Hannibal nearly fell to his knees. He could feel Will’s heart. This is what the younger man’s concern for him felt like. So soft. So gentle. It was a fluttering bird, erratic, wild and seeking escape from the cage of bone. He wished to press soothing lips to it and cherish every song it created.

“Hannibal!” A frantic voice breathed hot against his hands being turned over and over by rough calluses as they were inspected for damage. “Hannibal, are you hurt? Did you get burned? Cut?”

Something was burning. It was not him. He was fairly certain.

Hannibal tried to look anywhere but Will. Look near him or past him or through him. Looking at Will would destroy him. But his hands were inside Will’s, cradled gently. He tried to pull, to walk
away, to free himself. He stood still. They were...close. He gauged the space of their bodies and felt the tempo of his breath quicken. Their shoes brushed, knees clumsily bumping one another. How many years had it been since he stood this close to anyone, nearly touching? Then Will touched the side of his face, a faint spark of warmth on his cheek. He felt the entirety of everything he was unravel. The last person to touch him, the last one he had held, dressed carefully to become the final one he ever longed to consume... had been Will.

My William...

“Hey!” The younger man had both hands on him now, gripped by the shoulders, shaking him, eyes round and flooding distress and panic. “Talk to me. I need to know if you’re okay? Are you okay?”

No. He would never be okay ever again. His gaze fell from the most beautiful blue eyes he had ever seen to the second wonderment of existence. An exquisitely cruel mouth. It had wounded him, betrayed and sent him away. But it had freed him and given him strength.

How do you taste, Will? How would you feel willingly resting in my arms? How would you...

Will froze as if a knife was ripping him open, stammering mid sentence, weak noise escaping. "H-hann...ibal?"

Hannibal pushed at curls, dragging fingertips from the scar hiding beneath, then over cheeks. He was hot to the touch without the rain, burning far brighter than the fever had ever made him. He was shaking. He breathed in traces of fear and something sharper he could not yet place. He drew a thumb underneath a jaw, relishing the way eyelids fluttered. The older man balanced a chin between forefinger and thumb, weak noise sounding, either from him or Will or both, sensation of tears skirting his vision. He put a hand on a cheek and saw tears answering his own.

Was there a chance? Even the smallest...that Will, his Will, could feel...anything for him?

For the briefest moment he felt the younger man stop breathing, wild eyes closing to hide what he searched for, and for the first time, just a second, pressed into his touch. His eyes slipped shut, bending slightly to draw Will closer and kiss him. He wanted nothing else.

If this was goodbye, he wanted to know the pressure of his lips once, before he died.

A firm hand planted in the center of his chest, feeling where his own heart was beating wildly. “N-no.”

Hannibal felt something break inside of him, heard shattering glass, and nodded, eyes still firmly shut. He didn’t want to see what Will looked like rejecting him for a third time. He knew exactly what he was capable of if he did. He couldn't kill something of irrevocable and destructive beauty. It would just live on. Without him. Inside himself.

With a push, Will retreated from his grasp, from the kitchen, and made his way down the hall, calling in a shaky voice, “I’m going to take a shower.”

The older man slumped on the counter, mouth pressed grey and white, ache spreading his ribs open until every bit of who he was spilled out across the floor.

He would let Dolarhyde take him from this life. It was the only way. To give either of them peace.

* * *
Will felt Hannibal’s hands sliding around him as if he was a thread of the sensation, the whisper of skin to skin, existing somewhere outside himself. He looked up in brimming eyes of blood and hunger, paralyzed by the way they took in every part of him, both inside and out. Hannibal looked stricken, mortally wounded, and reaching for Will to save his life or end it. He felt the pull of a fall towards Hannibal once more.

He heard his ragged breathing and the pounding of his heart in time to the tempo of a chopping knife that had stopped minutes before. It was clear. Real. A ghost of touch moved across the scar on his forehead. Maroon eyes glistened remorse. Was Hannibal about to cry? Will felt tears prick his eyes. The older man touched the side of his face, dragging fingers down both sides of his cheeks. He was trembling, his hands, his legs, his arms, his heart. A palm lay gently on his cheek. His eyes began to sting then well. He closed them and for a second pressed close. His knees buckled, remembering the pressure of Hannibal all around him, holding him close, keeping him safe. As he had done, year after year. He clutched tighter, spike of fear screaming he would fall apart without it. Without Hannibal. He knew…he knew…

I love him…

The younger man opened his eyes to find Hannibal closing his against a rush of tears. Something inside him snapped. He heard the breaking of his bones, structure collapsing at their feet. His grip tightened on wrists, whine lodged in the back of his throat. If he let go he would sink to his knees. He couldn’t fall. He couldn’t—

“N-n-no,” Will whispered fiercely.

He flattened his palm against a chest, felt the frail and untamed thing within desperate to break free beneath, and pushed. The beautiful, steadying pressure of safety, of belonging, melted away. Will gasped for breath, stumbling backwards and caught himself on an edge of a counter. Hannibal stood absolutely still, face angled towards the heavens above, expression blank and nodded, mouth pressed thin and white like a crescent moon. Harsh lighting above cast his body in violent angles of dark and light, violence twitching fingers. He looked vacant, all of the sunlight from before in those few hours of gentle calm, lost to him now. Lost to Will.

‘Soon all of this will be lost to the sea…’

The younger man moved swiftly down the hall, curving an arm around the scar throbbing on his stomach, reeling from grief. “I’m going to take a shower.”

He all but slammed the bedroom door shut behind him. He shut the other with equal force and slumped against it. He felt like he was dying. Bleeding out. The pain. God, he was in so much pain. He slid to the floor, eyes closed, and wrapped both arms around his knees. He didn’t bother to lock either of the doors. What good had they done him in the past? Physical ones or the ones in his mind. Or Hannibal’s for that matter. They were constant trespassers, no longer violating one another’s boundaries, but traveling through them freely.

What was the point? What was the fucking point? He would always end up here. With Hannibal. Right where he belonged.

When the tears reached his eyes, Will tore off his clothes and stepped in the glass shower, to let water wash away their weakening sensation. He was angry at first. Trying to scald away imprints of fingertips on his cheeks, his mouth, his torso. He ached. Wanted. He shouldn’t want this. Every time he closed his eyes he saw hunger and blood gazing back, imagined the dry rasp of Hannibal’s mouth on his, then the heady demand of a slick tongue pushing in, dragging out weak desperate sounds. Sounds he was making now, muffled against a forearm jammed over his mouth. He twisted
his wrist, cock gripped tight in tensed fingers, jerking furiously. Everything Hannibal made him feel was wrong. Or was he...just wrong?

Is it wrong?

Shame flushed his cheeks. It wasn’t right. He felt the smooth texture of palms pressing him hard against a strong torso. Flesh pink and glistening and hot. Real, it had been real, Hannibal was real. Not a delusion. Not a nightmare. Flesh and blood. Saw the thin towel wrapped tight around muscular thighs, how it draped full and flush against the outlines of a cock. He had thought about ripping the towel away, leaving raw red marks down a back, the two of them struggling against one another, brute strength and teeth. Their kind of a hunt. How the older man might overpower him, flipped on his belly, trousers around his ankles, one hand gripping an edge of the sink and the other palm flattened on the steamy mirror, watching as Hannibal took him hard and fast. Without mercy. Without words. Simply gasps of pleading breath.

Will’s moans turned to soft sobs, tempo slowing as his thoughts turned to a different kind of need, a different version of them. How human, how open, Hannibal looked with afternoon streams of sunlight touching a gilded smile. Unguarded as their eyes met in the hours leading up to contact. The hands that had touched him then were infinitely tender, a hint unsteady with want and fear, moving across him as if they knew Will. Had always known him. Yet prayed, vowed, pleaded to know more. As if he had always belonged to Hannibal.

He panted in the curve of his arm, leaking over his palm, picturing the older man carrying him to the bedroom and laying him there ever so gently as if he might shatter. Or disappear and leave him crushed, alone, trapped. Every act one of reverence. From removing layer and layer of his clothes, to the sweep of his eyes, and then the path his mouth might take intent to kiss every part of him. Make him shake apart, with his hand, with his mouth, with just the sound of his voice, again and again. Only when Will was nearly unconscious from exhaustion, holding tight, crying out his name would Hannibal slide deep inside, and make Will his, slow and steady.

With the older man’s name on his lips and tears in his eyes, Will came with the dizzying sensation of falling. He no longer felt tremors of righteous violence and need for judgement or reckoning. Just calm. Then he was overwhelmed by scent of skin, something sweet and sharp, the scent that had clung to Hannibal with every graceful movement throughout the kitchen, standing just beside him. Out of reach. Until Hannibal had reached for him. He dragged the bar of soap over his shoulders, down his chest, and let it coast very slowly against the puckered smile on his stomach. He braced against the wall, trembling, lost in the mist of steam and the very real feeling of fading into everything he was, all Hannibal was, and what they might be together.

Maybe he could never accept who he was, who he **really** was, who Will Graham had always been, long before and after Hannibal. But maybe...maybe it didn’t matter anymore. Maybe he didn’t need to. He let go.

Water ran over a wavering smile, glimmering seams opening to turn to a small laugh.

There was nothing more dangerous than the intimacy of being understood. Mind and soul exposed, gazed upon. To be fully seen and accepted though? Someone did accept him for who he was, without condition or hesitation. And that man—murderer, betrayer, and confidant of both dishonesty and truth—**loved** him.

And maybe that’s just fine…

* * *
Bottle in hand, Hannibal stroked the corkscrew thoughtfully, sensing a presence stir within the room at his side. He winced. Patchouli and olive oil. And Will. He could kill him with it easily. Not with ease.

This is how you would smell if you let me hold you, Will, your scent and mine languidly pressed against one another as I might stretch you out beneath me, to worship.

The cork loosened with a pop and Hannibal looked up, trying to quiet the beat of his heart. Will waited, hands slung loosely in cashmere trouser pockets, chest tight in a starched white cotton button up. He was wearing the clothes the older man had laid out for him. His hair was still damp. Single curl falling over his brow. He was wearing the most disarming part of the ensemble. A faint smile of amusement and the graceful movement of his form.

The older man set down the corkscrew, gaze and voice softening, “My compassion for you is inconvenient, Will…”

A smile grew wide, light of a thousand stars meeting pale blue eyes, as their fingers touched against a glass of wine, and Hannibal knew in that moment he would die giving his life for what he loved most in this world.

Will.

Chapter End Notes

Don't mind me. I'll just be huddled in our blanket fort. Misty eyed.

I know there's a lot of thoughts on whether or not Will and Hannibal were intimate, given the amount of time between them arriving at the house and Dolarhyde showing up. I am not saying it isn't plausible. It just doesn't feel right to me. They are already so intimate with one another, intellectually, soulfully, riddled with uncertainty and fear of betrayal and longing. Touch has a lot of power. It requires a paramount level of trust.

Personally, I don't feel Will truly accepted Hannibal yet. Wasn't ready to give himself over. He was stranded between two parts of himself. And conflicted about where to go or even if he wanted to go, or if he stayed, if he could survive it, if he even wanted to. Right up until the moment he accepts with 'maybe that's just fine.' When Will sees what he's done, deeply changed by what they've shared together, how horrifyingly beautiful and intimate, the thrill and ecstasy of it all... then and only then, when he finally reaches for Hannibal for the first time and says 'it's beautiful,' is when Will embraces that power and lets himself, and Hannibal, fall. To begin again.

Update: AH I forgot the translation for you: "Jūs bandote mane nužudyti..." (You're trying to kill me...)
Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Can you tell me about these?” A silken tone inquired, nails tapping across a pile of polaroids.

Blue eyes rolled dramatically.

“Can I?” Will balanced a heavy head in his palms, sarcasm dripping from a frown. “Or will I?”

Alana sat rigidly across from a stranger in an interrogation. A man she was so certain she knew. Years ago, when he had been soft spoken, skittish, and doe eyed. She had seen a glimpse of that man as he had described another she had known. Thought she had known. Neither of them sounded like the ones from her past. Not in person. Or the way they described one another. They sounded more like Will had become Hannibal, and Hannibal had become Will. It was all a jumble. A blur. Missing bits of information intoned by how soft or loud their voices became. She wasn’t sure what to believe. What was real. Or if it was all an act. But the man glowering at her from the other side of the table with hard blue eyes and a scowl spoke with such…tender, honest affection. It wasn’t that Will believed every word he said. He emoted with conviction, micro-expressions ranging from a smile of adoration and shining eyes to a twist of contempt in defense of their relationship.

*What the fuck happened to you, Will? Hannibal’s good. He can’t be that good.*

A single cup of coffee had turned to undrinkable sludge inside a Styrofoam cup. She had left twice during the interview. Once at midnight, scurrying through halls to avoid scathing questions and suggested strategy from Jack nipping at her heels. Several fitful hours of sleep on an office couch left her more irritated than before. And sore. Every time she tried to eat, she felt sick. As the hours dragged by she felt more and more ill.

The second time she left had been at six in the morning. She had not been able to escape Jack. He demanded results based on the sole argument of ‘you know him better than all of us.’ The mere sound of his voice grated on her. Given his haggard appearance and wrinkled suit, she imagined he wasn’t getting anywhere with Hannibal either. Instead of escaping on the nearest helicopter, she went back to the hotel for a hot shower and another change of clothes. Then she called Margot. Heard the lilt of concern in her sweet voice and cried.

She glanced at her reflection, picking lint from a soft grey jersey blouse twisted around painted nails now chipped from nervous picking. Worn dried lipstick was slightly smudged at a corner of her mouth by the imprint of a palm. Her hair was pulled high and loose on the top of her head, messy and falling over glossy eyes. Her patience for procuring a confession to avoid a trial and dealing with them—any of them—was waning. The F.B.I. wanted to avoid scrutiny. They had questions. Questions she and Jack could not answer with any real honesty. She could care less about any of it as the hours ticked by.

“Seriously.” Swathes of black hung under bloodshot eyes behind glasses. “Is this really necessary? We’ve been at this for hours, Alana.”

*Almost thirteen to be exact.*

Alana had nothing to show for it. Nothing at all except a chipping gel manicure and sleep deprivation. She sighed. An expensive manicure at that. It would have to be redone. She twirled a
thin gold band on her ring finger. Margot preferred them filed and painted. She wanted to keep her happy.

“We would have finished much sooner if you would stop evading my questions,” A thin lipped tone replied.

“I’m not evading. Or avoiding,” Will snapped. He reached across the table, snatched the cup away, and downed her cold coffee with a grimace. “I just don’t feel like wasting what limited oxygen there is on the planet answering.” He crumpled the Styrofoam cup and pitched it behind him, hands scouring through hair before gripping the back of his neck. “You’ve drawn your own conclusions already. What would be the point?”

She gripped her thigh and inhaled sharply. She blinked through a whiplash of frustration. Her ability to maintain an outward appearance of calm and understanding was becoming brittle. If she wasn’t careful it would crack. She knew yelling and coercion was going to yield even less results. Jack had proven that. It was her job to remain the voice of reason. To call Will out of his mind and back to a place of mutual trust. Where he felt understood. She would handle him as she always had, with kid gloves and an attempt to know him from a distance.


Though I’m beginning to wonder if you are the same man…”

They had tried brute force. Threats. Negotiation. Will had turned it all away. Even food. Though he hadn’t asked Alana to leave. She would offer him the appearance of someone who would simply listen. If she could draw him out of his shell…


Maybe there’s still a chance. If Hannibal really did brainwash him, I can’t just give up. What kind of person would that make me? He used to be my friend.


“Why don’t you tell me about them?” Alana asked softly, sifting through polaroids. “If I didn’t know any better, I would say this is less of a man coerced than one drowned under the waves of well placed influence.”

Snapshots of memory. There were many to choose from. The first of many it seemed from their lives after the fall. Life after death. If it could be called a life. She had hardly ever seen Will smile when she knew him. If he had it was brief, a ripple of false assurance and blatant discomfort. He was more of a sullen, docile boy looking to please than anything else. Praying for acceptance from anything and anyone. For a place to belong. Blanketed in melancholy of slumped posture and resignation shining in lowered eyes.

This version of him, both in the photographs and sitting before her, were different. His posture was taut, shoulders back, chin tipped at a defiant angle. He radiated a quiet sense of power. In the images laid out, Will was smiling in some way or another in nearly every single one. Not as he had before. Genuinely smiling, lines crinkled around his mouth, eyes bright. She imagined his laughter. It was muffled. She had never heard it.


“For fuck sake.” Will closed his eyes, and held his breath for a full minute, cheek flinching. The younger man looked passed her at the tinted mirror beyond. “He sent you here to get a confession as a bargaining chip. Oh Jack. You never could do your own goddamn dirty work. Do us all a favor and give up already. Some of us would like to sleep. And speak to our lawyers who I imagine you’ve conveniently lost somewhere.”

She picked two of the most faded photos from the bunch. The first was an image of Will and Hannibal holding close, slow dancing, dusk falling over a city in the background. They looked at one another as if the world beyond didn’t exist. Its crinkled corners held significance as if it was at
one time tucked in a wallet, drawn out to gaze upon from time to time. Perhaps shown with pride to strangers. She turned the photograph and squinted at looping cursive.

*Our honeymoon.*

The second seemed far more aged. The first. Bleached white by the sun. This was the second time she had seen the two men entwined. She preferred this image to the one she had watched in real time on the video recording of the interrogation room. Static pixels of a photo did not make her insides twist or her heart thud wildly in her chest with sick anticipation of violence. The kind she knew Hannibal was capable of doling out upon those who offended him.

In the photo, Will was kissing Hannibal opened mouthed, curled against one another on a bed with a glimpse of ocean reflected in the windows. She wondered where they were. A hotel. A ship, perhaps? Will had sailed across an entire ocean to find Hannibal once on a sailboat he had assembled from scratch. It would stand to reason they would find each other once more on one. Together. She grimaced. Was Will drawn in by the prospect of violence he saw behind his eyelids? Or being held closely by the one thing, the one torment, he had shared his life with all along?

There had to be an explanation. Something to explain what she was seeing. How had they gotten from where they were when she had seen them last, circling one another with spit dripping teeth, to this haze of apparent affection?

Alana returned to the photograph. The older man’s brow was furrowed beneath a messy fringe, both hands wound tight in spilling dark curls, fragile adoration hinting red in carved cheekbones. Hannibal seemed caught between agony and bliss, lost, struck down by a mere press of lips.

*Endless shards of shattering glass…*

The image of the two men blurred. Who was she seeing? This man, almost fragile and sighing, was not who she had known. Even when she thought she had known him behind closed doors. His manipulation of touch had been kind. Remote. Not tender. He had never kissed or held her. Not like this. Thoughtful, forgiving, completely open. In this moment, Hannibal was the predator resting docile and willingly in the arms of the man who had almost killed him. Resigned to whatever Will had planned.

It didn’t make sense. None of this made sense. When they started hunting—she knew better than to call it by any other name. Jack put a price on their heads and she foot the bill—for the two of them, Alana knew she would find Will with Hannibal again. Even if she prayed she wouldn’t. She never expected to find them…together. At least not alive. What had Hannibal done to Will? What had she done by asking Hannibal to save him that fatal night?

*Am I responsible for this?*

She pushed the photograph with the ocean in the background across the table and formed the words slowly. “Jack tells me… you believe you and Hannibal are…in a relationship.”

“Are you and Margot…” Blue eyes narrowed as Will sat forward, arms and hands coiling around his torso. “…perceived to be in a relationship? Or are you just in one?”

Alana sat back instinctively. She had seen Will this way at crime scenes, drawn taut and ready to strike as the killer he was profiling. She felt the twitch of his hands around the grip of a gun. She had the unmistakable sensation it was being pointed at her head. This wasn’t a crime scene. There were no killers to imagine. Just them.
“Is this who you really are, Will?”

“It is very easy to get lost with Hannibal at the helm, steering both thought and emotion.” She observed with clinical detachment, mind leafing through thick textbooks and skimming paragraphs. “It is not uncommon for someone in your situation to lose their way and form an attachment to their captor.”

“Captor bonding?” Laughter echoed loudly. “Is that the best you’ve got?”

“I’m trying to understand how you got here.”

“You got me here, Alana.”

“You got yourself here, Will. Same as last time.”

“Excuse me?” The younger man bolted up, curls spilling over glittering eyes, chains straining to reach her. “Say it again!”

The former psychiatrist edged back in her chair, glancing fearfully at the glass behind her.

“The first time, you, Jack, and apparent irrefutable evidence got me here despite my protests. No one believed me! This time? You. You did this to me! Don’t pretend you’re innocent in this. Any of this!” Bellowing rose to grating screams. “You dragged me from my fucking life against my will. You took me prisoner. And then you took my husband! For what! So you could soothe your own conscience? To make sure we suffered every brutal—“

“Sit down.” Alana’s voice shook out a cold command, numb fingers curling then pointed at the chair. “Or I will have them take you back to your cell. You won’t see Hannibal at all. Or your lawyer.”

Ashy skin washed white. Two pin pricks of blue widened. They no longer glittered. They held only fear. Sucking in a steadying breath, Will slumped in the chair, subdued by the mere threat. He stared at a corner of the table. His eyes watered.

From savage lion to lamb in a second. What is Hannibal to you?

“Tell me what he did to you.”

“I think you’re confusing me with Bedelia...” Raw laughter rang out as Will rubbed a hand over a rippling mouth, looking at her unsteady grip and then directly in to her eyes. “I didn’t get lost inside the hot darkness of Hannibal. Though I find those parts of him deeply satisfying. I simply saw my own reflection. I didn’t lose anything. I found myself.”

She felt her unease grow, gripping the back of the chair. He held her gaze for a full two minutes longer, unwavering and direct, seeing through her. In to her. Passed her. She could see herself in dilating reflection of pupils, small, frail boned, and easily within reach. She had removed his mask hours ago in a moment of pity. She wished to god she hadn’t.

Don’t make any sudden moves...

The handcuffs seemed taut enough. Was there too much slack? Alana curled toes in her shoes and tried to stay perfectly still. She thought of Jack’s face shredded by teeth and knuckles. This was the man she didn’t know.

We don’t yet have a name for what he is.
Amusement flickered bright blue, dragging across rigid posture. “Now if you mean in a more literal sense. Take this photo for example…” Will offered a Cheshire smile, flicking a polaroid across the table and lounged once more, his own visage of a predator at rest. “I can’t tell you how many arguments I won over the years by simply removing my clothes. As loathe as I am to admit it, I bet you know as well as I do the kind of experience afforded when Hannibal is ‘at the helm.”’

The insinuation fell upon deaf ears.

“Did you share other experiences with Hannibal?” Alana asked, relaxing a fraction only when Will finally broke eye contact.

The photo resting at her fingertips captured broad planes of Hannibal’s glistening back, one hand resting on the top of a lounge chair, bent over Will lying in a towel beside a sparkling pool. Their eyes were locked. Looking at one another. Sharing something with irrevocable intensity. On the verge of a fight or something else. Something entirely other. Someone she didn’t recognize with light lilac eyes waved at whoever was taking the photograph in the blurry background. Alana looked away. It seemed more intimate than seeing them kiss.

“You mean…besides the obvious?” Chains clattered as sweeping hands upturned in question.

“Which I’m beginning to believe isn’t obvious to you.” An irritated sigh was followed by a mutter. “Or any other goddamn person in this Bureau for that matter.”

Fine dark brows knotted. “I mean did you share in…?”

*His appetites?*

“What? Spit it out for Chrissake!”

Alana jumped at the terse shout, a fist thumping loudly on the table, sending the photographs a quarter inch to the left with vibration.

“If we are going to play a game of vagaries and innuendo, Alana, we are going to be here all fucking day. Just say it.”

“When we went to get you…” She bit her mouth. “You were…”

She felt ice of the prison cells seeping through her legs, watching as Will broke skin and drank in a bloodied red stream from Hannibal’s arm. Lapped lavishly at blood.

“He used to serve us dinner. You, me, Jack. Did you get a taste for it?”

“For him? Or for people?” Bewilderment flicked up beneath long lashes. “Contrary to popular belief, I am not a heroine in an Anne Rice novel. I cannot in fact survive off Hannibal’s blood, though I think he would be absolutely fucking delighted by the suggestion.” He shrugged. “A man’s gotta eat.”

“So before?” She touched her wrist, unable to speak what she had seen.

Will cast a tongue across dry lips, amusement turning up corners. “Do you know when we used to give all those lectures on pathology? Or at least I did. Patterns of behavior? Fueled by sexual inclination as much as the innate sense of fight. Well, as it turns out… our dear cannibal enjoys being a snack once in awhile.”

She stared, both hands wringing her sweater beneath the table, perplexed.
“Alana. For god sake, do I have to spell it out for you? I do. Great. I do.” The younger man glared up at the ceiling. But he wasn’t seeing the ceiling. He was snarling up at something or someone else. “You are a son of a bitch. And you can tell the priest I said so.”

A full eighty seconds passed in awkward silence.

Will threw his hands up in the air, chain jerking, before letting them fall. He shook his head, frustration hissing between teeth. He rolled his eyes and sat forward, pointing to the mirror behind her.

“I hope everyone is listening this time. I’m only going to say it once. That includes you, Jack.”

Nostrils flared as a deep inhale filled lungs, coming out in a faint whistle to maintain a degree of calm. “He likes being bitten. He finds it arousing. The sounds I can get him to make…” Will murmured huskily, eyelids drooping over flashing blue. “And if I draw blood? Well, he says it’s better than deep throating, which I find hard to believe because I’m quite good at it. Then again.” He pointed at teeth. “These pearly whites do get him to come almost instantly.”

She choked at first, flattening palms against the table, glancing back at the mirror then at Will.

“What’s it going to take? Huh?” Shouting rose in the background. “Let’s just get it out of the way, shall we? Since the lot of you seem to follow ‘seeing is believing’ to the letter. Not a single imagination between you. Evidently if Rosewell and Area 51 don’t exist then a former special agent and his psychiatrist can’t possibly have ever been intimate. Is that it? Fuck you!” Will flipped off whoever was behind the one way mirror, pacing as much his chains allowed. “You want porn? Fine! Bring Hannibal in here and we’ll fuck each other’s brains out. Kick back. Bring soda and popcorn. Then all of you can stop belittling our goddamn, loving, and consensual relationship to meaningless, baseless sex acts.” A soft cushioned shoe kicked a chair. “You goddamn pieces of shit.”

Her mind raced in an attempt to assemble the jumble of words in an orderly structure. To form it in a way that made sense. None of it made sense. It just didn’t. Alana flashed to standing in Will’s house, his cool mouth on hers, and felt her heart fall flat. He had wanted her then, hadn’t he? Her stomach
roiled. Crystal clear images of Hannibal filtered. His ruddy mouth and tongue between her thighs. Her crying out, delicate palms spread across thick hair on his chest, as she watched his heated gaze waver as she rode him. Had he only ever been imagining it was Will when he was with her? She had kissed Will. Will had told Hannibal. Had the older man been kissing him though her? By proxy?

“S-s-sit down, Will.” Alana commanded. “Please sit. They’ll take you away. I won’t have a say then.”

She thought of the way Hannibal had looked at Will over the years. The sheer intensity he possessed with a single glance. He didn’t just want him. He needed him. Hungered for the mere sight of him. He had only ever looked at Will like that. What the hell did that mean? Did Hannibal love Will... or?

Will hurled himself against the chair, cursing, every inch of him beaded in sweat, shaking from head to toe. “Fuck you too, Alana.”

Pale skin flushed bright red, hoarse voice shaking out. “Will...in all the years I’ve known you, you have preferred women.”

_You preferred me._

“So do you. Apparently.” Will countered with a dry retort, rocking back in the chair, head tilting with a bitter snarl. “So was it more about me being ‘broken, unstable’ than it was about not having the right parts? Your wife seemed less than concerned about either of those issues.”

His abject agony resonated through her. Broke open her own, throbbing through her once fractured pelvis and reached her heart. They had used her. To get at one another.

“How—“

She was on her feet and reaching across the table before she could stop. The heel of her palm connected with a cheek with brutal force.

“—dare you!”

A horrible sound rang out. The sting raced up her fingertips, collision of bone against bone shaking through her arm. She withdrew the hand and pressed it to her mouth to keep a cry from escaping. It burned, hot to the touch.

“I...” Will clutched the side of his face with both hands staring up at her with grey blue pools of water, mouth falling open.

She watched as the younger man transformed. There Will sat. Her Will. Timidly rocking forward, avertin her gaze, holding tight to his cheek. He looked devastated. She thought of all the pain Will had been through in his life. All the hurt he had endured. The anguish he had suffered year after year at the Fate of the world and people around him. She let her hand fall and looked at blotchy skin of life lines. She had stood by out of curiosity of observation and let him be devoured. By the F.B.I. By Jack. By Hannibal. And now she was participating in his destruction.

Some small, dark part of her whispered, _He deserves it._

Another replied. _Not all of it._

Fingertips fell to reveal a red mark. Her palm print. Lips parted to inhale a shaky breath. For a split second she thought she had gotten through to him. Finally reached him. A range of crippling emotion rearranged Will’s features. Pain. Hurt. Some flash of terror she had only seen on the abused. Then
briefly a wrinkle of remorse. She thought he was going to apologize, reach for her, and tell her how sorry he was. For everything. Let her save him this time.

*I like you as a buffer…*

“I…deserved that.” A whisper admitted. “But did I deserve what happened before this? Before you brought us here. Did he? Or were you just using my suffering to get back at Hannibal? For what he did to you?”

*For what he did to me? What about what he did to you! What you let him do to me!*

“I don’t need to justify my actions.”

The boy she knew, soft and helpless, vanished.

“Neither do I!” Will slammed a photograph on the table, mouth trembling. “At least my reasons aren’t purely selfish. You give yourself too much goddamn credit as usual, Alana, as if you made me this way. Let him have me. The crippled boy who just couldn’t protect himself without you acting as a buffer. You didn’t give me to Hannibal. I gave myself. He is everything to me. The rest of you don’t fucking matter. Now get the fuck out. We’re done talking.”

His words stung. Alana stared down at another photo, tears welling. Both Will and Hannibal were well dressed. Will wore a dark suit. Hannibal one of white with blood red accents. They beamed in to the camera, arms around one another in a silhouette of orb light. Wedding bands gleamed on their clasped hands. The offensively delicate, real, human image burned her eyes and the back of her throat.

A hoarse voice shook out, fingertips fluttering across the image, to hide it from her, to keep her from looking. “Let me keep one. You owe me.”

She could hear tears in his voice. It tore at her heart. Then she saw the very real tears in Margot’s eyes over the years and straightened, teeth gritting. She was what was important now. Nothing else. Will was lost. She couldn’t save him anymore. Never could. He had chosen his own destruction. She had just facilitated it.

*What’s done is done.*

At least, that’s what she would tell herself years later.

“They’re evidence.” Alana snatched the polaroid and scooped happy images away, jerking the file folder out of reach and holding it tight to her chest. “I owe you nothing. You fucking deserve each other, Will.”

Hurt fractured a mouth open, shadows seeping out and twisting to furious demons. “They’re mine.”

She would give him nothing to hold on to. Not Will. Or Hannibal. They would live as empty and without comfort as Lecter once had. She would make sure of it.

“Not any more!”

“Did you cut out your heart when you murdered Mason Verger? I never knew you to be a cold hearted bitch.”

“And I never knew you at all.”
Well, the way you think I am isn't always a reliable guide to who I am.

“In your defense…” A lip curled derisively. “You never really tried all that hard to know me, Alana. I’m only sorry I ever let you try.”

She opened her mouth to reply, fist twitching against her thigh. The door shuddered. A tall, thin man barged in to the interrogation room. A uniformed officer was close on his heels. His face was flushed like he had been screaming. His tight suit jacket was emblazoned with a visitor’s badge.

“Miss Bloom…” A leather briefcase banged on the table, fountain pens spilling out, rigid index finger swinging towards the open door. “I think you had better leave. I will not tolerate any further harassment of my client.”

His lawyer?

Legs wobbled as Alana stood and pressed her mouth to a firm line. A scream worked its way up her throat. The room began to spin. Her weak knees trembled. She shoved passed the man, side stepping Jack who materialized in her front of her, and fixed her eyes on the hideous green glow of an ‘exit’ sign. She had to leave. She couldn’t stay here anymore.

A cruel shout followed her down the hall, above the pounding of her feet in a stairwell. “Where are you going, Alana? Aren’t you going to pay my husband a visit? He’ll consider it rude if you don’t. But I’m guessing that doesn’t bother you too much. Or maybe it does. Seeing as how you were on the menu already.”

Chapter End Notes

Hi there. Hello, friends. It is I. Your disappearing act of an author. (I'm not sure if I should lead or follow with an apology here? Maybe a brief explanation.)

I've actually been working on the next two chapters (and a rather long time stamp that got away from me) since our last post off and on for (fucking) weeks. My minds been a circuitous hum of white noise lately. I now work two jobs. (Three if you count my design business which I have all but discarded for blessed sleep and sanity?) My schedule is... Wait. What schedule? Anyway, hectic, up down, emotional roller coaster. And HEY. Would you look at that. It's after midnight. So here's to my birthday.

In conclusion. I'm a mess. Or someone now great at juggling? I love you all and hope you won't be too disappointed. I have *every* intention of seeing EB to its conclusion. It just might be scattered? Intermittent?

Your comments: I will answer them! And thank you so much for sticking by me. Seriously. Sincerely.
“Don’t touch me! Don’t fucking touch me.”

Rough hands sent Silas sprawling, falling back against a broad steel table. His glasses bounced on his nose and fell somewhere to the floor.

“Where were you! Huh!”

His blurred vision rose to watch the shape of possessed shadow pacing back and forth, hands clenching and unclenching. He tried again. He threw both arms around the struggling form and tried to get him to sit down. To sit still. Drink some water. At the very least to stop yelling.

“Calm down!” He pleaded as elbows jabbed his side. “You think they won’t take you away just because I’m here? You want them to sedate you? Will, you attacked the guard. He could press charges! They could—”

The room was windowless. Free of cameras. But he didn’t think it was sound proof. Not at the level the man was shouting at.

“Stop.” Will shoved, both hands clamped over ears, eyes squeezed shut. “Stop. Stop! Stop!”

The floor grazed his head with a burst of pain. Fevered pacing returned. Hands patted across rough carpet and white squared tile as Silas searched for his glasses. This was getting out of control. He had only met Will once. Then he had been lost to sleep and sated starvation in Hannibal’s arms. He had no idea how to deal with him. Not like this. He wasn’t just agitated. His entire body radiated instability. And everything he said or did made it worse.

“How long has he been like this?” A voice boomed from above.

He turned to find Hannibal crouched behind him, glasses in an outstretched hand, eyes dark and fixed on Will. Something flashed against desert maroon, a memory, maybe. The older man was rubbing at a red spot where handcuffs had been removed. They had been too tight if they left marks. He made mental note of it.

The young man got to knees. Silas took the glasses and pushed them with an index finger up the bridge of his nose, struggling to meet a stony gaze. He wished he couldn’t see. This Hannibal was nothing like the kind doctor of his youth. The man staring back at him held his gaze with the glint of nightmare and violence. He tried to scramble away at the last minute.

“Silas!” A hand coiled in his tie, yanking him forward. “How long.”

“I…” He was inches away from fiery red eyes. “I d-d-don’t know. I just got here.”

A tongue ticked over sharp teeth. “Do you no longer wish to be under my employ?”

“S-s-sir, I—“ Silas cowered, shaking beneath pressure tightening around his throat and cutting off oxygen.

“Where have you been?”
The lawyer shook his head, reply gurgling out.

“I expected you twenty four hours prior as was our agreement! Yesterday, Silas. Can you no longer tell time? Read a calendar? What! What?”

A tie hissed free of a fist.

The young man fell forward on hands, gasping for air. “They t-told me they couldn’t find you. I t-tried—“

“They are manipulative sons of bitches,” Hannibal snarled. “In the future, I would advise you to fulfill your obligations as my lawyer. Not try to do so, Mister Silas.” Harsh fingers gripped him by the cheeks and the older man pressed closer. His breath fiery and glint of a smile sharp. “If you will recall, Byron Metcalf met an untimely end by not rising to the occasion. I sent you the news article, did I not?”

“Doctor Lecter.” Silas felt bile roil in his stomach, squeezing eyes shut. “I’m s-s-sorry. It won’t happen again.”

“Very well.”

Fingers fell away as soon as they appeared. He crumpled to the floor with relief. He lay there for a moment, panting, trying to catch his breath. Hands jostled him up underneath arms. He glanced up anxiously. Hannibal placed him carefully against a metal chair. A sinewy hand plucked a checked pocket square free and dabbed at splotchy tears on his face and lenses. The older man smoothed wrinkles from his suit jacket and delicately adjusted the Windsor knot his throat. He opened his mouth to apologize again. Anything else was going to sound like an excuse.

Hannibal shook his head firmly and stood. “Give us a moment. Do not interrupt.”

“Y-y-yes, sir. Of course.”

Digging out a legal pad, Silas snuck furtive glances, tensing as Hannibal moved across the room to Will. He started to spin a pen against lambskin covered knuckles. He wasn’t sure he was prepared to see either of them like this. He braced for impact. He knew what happened when two storms collided.

“Mylimasis, please…” Hannibal watched Will pace back and forth, trailing a light hand on a stomach as he passed for a seventh time, tone as smooth as his touch. “I have missed you.”

Will didn’t look at him, didn’t acknowledge him, reply acidic and accusatory. “Don’t you dare. Not after what you did.”

Weary sighs filled the room. “What could I have possibly done, Will? This is the first I have seen you.” Another pass and Will bumped forcibly against the older man’s shoulder with a cold glare. A peaked nose tipped up, inhaling. Color drained from a mouth. “You smell of blood.”

Silas nearly snapped a fountain pen in half when a predatory gaze fell on him.

“What did he do?” A tremoring bass demanded.

Will halted, turned on the ball of his foot, and stalked forward. “Look at me! Don’t talk about me like I’m not here. Like I’m some object.”

The lawyer sank further in his chair, wriggling until just the top of his head poked above a briefcase,
hoping it might disguise him. Or make him disappear. He was going to set aside his initial decision of docile deference not to interrupt. He selected his next best, safest, option available. To stay the hell out of it entirely.

“Then feel free…” Hannibal side stepped, graceful hand sweeping behind him towards Silas and an empty chair, smile thin. “…to stop pacing like a caged animal, come sit with the adults at the table, and converse. Tell me what happened.”

Will lunged and grabbed the front of a prison uniform, yelling, “I’m so fucking sick and tired of everyone asking me that!”

Elegant tortoise shell glasses glinted in the horrendous yellow light. A strained smile evaporated.

“Will.” Lashes blinked slowly over maroon eyes becoming still and icy, voice sending a chill through the air. “Take them off.”

Nostrils flared, reply even colder. “No.”

“You will remove them or I will take them from you. Which do you prefer?”

“Try.” The younger man shook the other by the front of his uniform, drawing up to his full height. “See what happens.”

Hannibal placed the tip of his tongue between teeth, mentally counting, mouth pressing white then blood red. “I will not ask a second time.”

Peeking from behind a briefcase, a gaze darted from the two men squaring off. Tension crackled in the air. They stood toe to toe. Eye to eye. Nothing but swinging fists between them. Minutes passed. Deathly still quiet.

“Fine. Have it your way, darling.”

There was blur of movement. Then a bang. Suddenly Hannibal was struggling to keep Will pinned against a corner.

“—Christ! Get off me.”

Legs kicked out against a broad torso. Grunts grew louder. The men wrestled against one another. The older man tore glasses from a face. Will snatched them back, throwing all his weight forward. Nails slashed across an arching cheek then a neck. Hannibal banged the offending hand against the wall and shoved, sending them both sprawling against the opposite wall. Wounded howls rose as the glasses were clawed away once more. Glass fractured. Frames cracked. Crushed by an unforgiving fist.

Swinging away, Hannibal dropped the broken glasses with disdain and glided back to the table. He barely looked affected by the scuffle. Breath even, cheeks flushed from exertion and fresh nail scrapes. He smoothed hair back. Adjusted the rumpled state of his uniform with a curt tug. Then sat gracefully, one leg tucked across the other. He reached around the briefcase and took both paper and pen from the man hiding on the other side. The scratch of a pen filled brittle air with terse sketching.

Will gaped at Hannibal, mouth open, eyes flashing between rage and disbelief. His uniform was torn at the right pocket. Blood smudged against a sleeve cuff. He panted, chest expanding and deflating with jerky motion. Blue eyes fell to the glasses. A second later, the younger man stormed across the room, ripped the pad of paper from Hannibal’s hands, and flung it away.
“You want to know what’s wrong! You want to know what’s WRONG!” Will screamed, jerking hands frantically through dark hair. “This! All of this. You especially. What the fuck was that just now, huh?”

Hannibal gazed up at Will through narrowed eyes and held out his hand, reply exacting and even. “I asked politely."

Silas grimaced. Took out another pad of paper and slid it nervously around the briefcase. The palm remained, upturned, empty. He swallowed and held it out. Hannibal took it then went back to sketching. Will began to shake, fists clenched and white, jaw clenching and unclenching.

“You demanded! And what? What?” Raw emotion ground out. “I just needed to fucking comply. Obey is that it? Even in here you need me to kneel at your feet, right? That’s what you want from me?”

Another pad of paper thwacked against a far wall.

The older man shook his head, placed the ball point carefully on the table, and folded hands in his lap. “If you would please stop shouting, William, and taking things that do not belong to you.”

Cotton slippers kicked off. Will threw one after the other over their heads. A fist banged on the table. Silas jumped. Hannibal appeared unmoved, staring at something else, refusing to look at the outburst. A palm lifted. An onyx ring rolled, quivered, and then toppled to a stop on the table. The lawyer sat forward as maroon eyes slid to stare longingly at precious metal.

How in the hell…?

Hannibal placed two fingers lightly against Will’s wrist without looking up. A timid caress. A flood of tears filled blue eyes before pacing began again. The younger man chaffed hands up and down his arms and torso as if he was freezing cold.

“You tore my heart from my chest, forced it in my mouth with your tongue, and asked me to choke on the only reminder I had left of our lives! To suffocate on all my broken promises it symbolized.”

The older man turned in his chair, elbows jammed against thighs, and covered a face with palms to keep quiet.

“And then.” Hysteric laughter barked. “Oh here’s the kicker. Then you made me sit through hour after hour, after goddamn hour, of questioning. About our sex life, Hannibal, which we apparently don’t have because I’m too—what!”

Hannibal glanced up, looking straight at Will, surprise and then anger contorting shadowed features.

“Too broken, too forced, too straight—take you’re fucking pick—to be in a relationship. Even with you! As f-f-fucked up as you are. Even then I’m not worthy!”

Hysteria turned fragile, harsh voice riddled with sobs choked and held down.

“Imagine that! So I can’t possibly be with you. They have reduced us to nothing but base impulse. Do you have any idea how much…how hard that is to hear? Especially after…”

Hannibal stood suddenly and placed a single palm on a stomach. Will stumbled to a stop, inhaling harshly and exhaling a strangled sob. They both kept their gaze fixed to the floor.

The rest came out a feeble whisper. “After everything.”
Fingertips idly stroked a stomach, maroon eyes searching a tiled floor for the right words to speak. For a moment they stood still.

“The ring was intended to give you comfort. Foremost it was to show who you belonged to.” Hannibal’s voice was low, a stone sinking to an ocean floor, desperately trying to breathe under water. “Does the weight of their words, their fickle and flawed perceptions, over turn all you know to be true between us, Will? Let them think what they wish. We will be true to one another, won’t we?” The older man turned, hooking his other hand around a neck loosely, bending close to whisper, “I want to be the only voice you hear in your head, William. When you can hear no other. Listen to mine.”

“This—“ Nails scraped over a scalp, hand shaking, gesturing to the ring on the table. “—is torment. You gave me this. A heartless reminder of all I could not give you!”

Dark eyes snapped shut. Something rippled across a forehead and flinched harshly in a cheek. “Are you calling me…” An adams’s apple bobbed with a pause. “…heartless?”

“I’m saying it with enthusiasm,” The younger man hissed, hitting away both hands.

“You are testing my already waning patience, dearest.”

“Fuck your patience.”

Hannibal jerked an arm around a narrow waist and dragged Will forward, then flattened him against the wall. He gripped wrists in a single hand, stretching them up, and over a head.

Blue eyes misted. “I told you to let go!”

The older man shook his head, drew close, and began to drink against a scowling mouth, languid and slow.

“Will, you need—let me. Please.”

“I don’t need a goddamn thing from you.”

Silas looked away. When he looked again Hannibal’s lip was split and covered in blood. Will licked red off his own teeth.

The older man straightened and forced space between them, tone clipped. “I will choose to ignore this outburst and blame your appalling behavior on sleep deprivation. You don’t know what you are saying. Silas, would you mind fetching us a meal?”

Silas rose, knees quaking, gaze darting to the door. Freedom was in sight. Maybe when he came back everything would better.

Define better…?

“Oh no. No, no, no. Silas, sit the hell down.”

Relief and hope, however, were both short lived. He slumped back in the chair and rummaged through his briefcase. He pulled out a cell phone then a pair of white earbuds. He didn’t have to suffer through this and listen did he? If it was going to turn bloody, he at least wanted plausible deniability of the incident.

What happened to your clients, Councilor?
Gee, I don’t know you’re honor. I was listening to the Arctic Monkeys at full blast. Couldn’t hear a thing. I mean the quality of these headphones, right? Those guys at Apple are geniuses. Anyway. By the time I realized what was happening they were both dead.

“If he goes, we go, and I am not done with you yet.”

“Are you sufficiently done running your offensive mouth?” Blood dragged across a sleeve, wiping teeth in to view. “Or do I have that yet to look forward to while we wait?”

“It’s so easy for you.” A rosy mouth trembled and Will moved, putting as much distance as he could between himself and Hannibal, standing at the opposite end of the room. “All of this. To just walk away from me and forget. Your books. Your drawings. To live with a version of me inside your own head. And a better one to love. To touch. To fuck!”

Silas moved quietly, reached across the table, and dragged the ring in to his palm. He tried not to make a sound. He tucked it in a breast pocket. They would want it later. Maybe not now. Or anytime soon. (Particularly as it was considered contraband. Or at the very least another inmate might consider worthy of carving a shive to steal in prison.) He would hold on to it. Keep it safe. Until he could return it to another family member. Or a friend.

Do they have any friends?

Hannibal followed and slung one arm around a waist, the other against a chest, palms pressing above a heart and stomach, growl vibrating deep against an ear. “I have never left you of my own free will. You saw to it I left once because it is what you wanted. Not what I did. Have you given much thought to what little choice I have in the matter, Will, or are you intent on blaming me all the same?” Hurt flinched across a mouth in admission. “I am as powerless now as I was then.”

Fragile tears glimmered on cheeks. “It doesn’t even bother you. As cold and cool as ever.”

“How—“

“Ah!” The lawyer squeaked, diving beneath the table for cover.

Will landed on top a moment later with a groan of pain. Bare feet swung, struggling to rise. Hannibal pounced and crushed him against it, shaking palm on a chest, the other gripping an edge of the table. Lips curled back, teeth snapping and snarling, helpless emotion pouring free and filling the room in a boom.

“—is it you possibly imagine I remain unmoved from having my freedom, my life, you, torn from my grasp again! Do I have the appearance of man not in anguish every moment both waking and unconscious? Do you think if I was still capable of cutting you out of me and returning to the calloused exterior of a man devoid of emotion, I would not have done so? Years before this!”

Palms banging on the table weakened. Someone started to cry. The older man withdrew, crumpling to sit on an edge of the table. Large hands turned over in the light with a fierce tremor. His voice became a stripped, stark tremble of need and desperation.

“Then I could slit your throat out of self preservation and not because my heart demands to watch you suffer merely to call you mine. I asked you to go. To leave me. You stayed. You have destroyed me, Will...”
This possible preview of them in prison is unacceptable and painful, dear author, please rewrite it.

Angsty make up sex ensues..........after these brief messages from our sponsors.

Look, Silas, man. I am counting on your headphones being really high quality and loud. So you should look in to that while we're away.
The older man glanced over his shoulder. Will was still sprawled on his back, panting up at yellow lights buzzing on the ceiling, fingers clenching and unclenching. Tears quivered in eyes. He rose and turned, closing his eyes for a second, attempting to pull the softer parts of his soul to the surface and provide comfort. Hands planted against the interrogation table, Hannibal tried to catch his breath, rise and fall of his chest as ragged as the one beneath. He tried not to look at the blurred man in the reflection, red eyed and cruel snarl full of teeth. His arms shook with the weight of his screams lingering in the air. He forced hot breath from his lungs, hoping to expel demons with it, wounded and screeching.

_I wanted to hold you, Will, touch you gently. Why must you fight to bring out this other side of me?_

“I want no one and nothing to claim you, William, not even the State.” He said hoarsely, pressing a chaste kiss to a knee. “Nothing, not a single one of them is allowed to own you. You belong to me. Why can you not understand what this does to me?”

_Who you claw out of the depths of my soul?_

He shook with rage. Blood rushing hot. Skin pricking with sweat. The room felt too small, too hot, too closed in. His mouth throbbed from being bitten open at the seam. He could still feel the press of a scar through fabric of a prison uniform, singing his fingertips. The touch had calmed them only for a moment. Heard a harsh lash of his husband’s voice break across his skin and lance bone deep. He tried to pace his breathing, but it kept shuddering free from his lungs desperate and shallow. His legs ached, his knees shook. Light sensation dragged from his mouth to his chest and fell further. He opened his eyes, unable to recall closing them, and found Will staring at the apex of his thighs, teeth sliding over a bottom lip.

He glanced down. Wet stained fabric. His cock strained against the front of his uniform. His brain suddenly registered the source of burning heat and ache. Arousal hit him hard. His shaft jerked, wet leaking and pooling between his thighs. He gripped the table and exhaled sharply, shaking harder. Soft whimpers reached him. His gaze moved up tensing calves then slid between parted knees resting on either side of his hips. An answering stir of desire filled out the younger man’s uniform. The older man held on to the table as he breathed in brine and sweat, lips falling open to taste lingering scent.

_Or is this the part of me you need? To give you what you want?_

Will stared unblinking at the ceiling, breathing fast, as Hannibal reached for the zipper on his uniform. It whirred down to expose a sternum then a navel and quivering stomach. Down and down and down. Flushing skin crept after the zipper. A half hard cock curled against thick dark pubic hair, just a thick vein and head peeking from beneath gaping seams. The younger man’s scent coiled thick in the air. Hannibal groaned, leaning on the table for support, breathing deeper. He wanted to lick up a thickening shaft and tongue at beads of white slipping free on a reddening head. Legs began to shake. He wanted to suck him. Reach in his uniform and palm his balls, squeezing to the tempo of each lick. Until he was dripping in spit before toying with the ring of muscle between cheeks.

“N-no.” Will arched his back and moaned loudly as if Hannibal was buried in him knuckles deep and sucking at just the tip, wet spreading against a stomach. “Please don’t.”
He kept one palm on the table and used the other to ghost over the younger man’s body. Close enough to feel the heat of it. Not enough to make contact. He wouldn’t touch him. Not yet. Will breathed harder, gripping the table, eyes screwed shut. Empathy was enough. His thumb skirted an inner thigh, circling clenching cheeks, and followed a seam to a bulge of tight balls. He used the back of fingernails for the faintest brush. The younger man bucked, knees digging in to his thighs, heels dragging at the back of his legs.

The older man traded a small smile of satisfaction for teeth. With two fingers, he followed the length of a swollen cock leaking against a belly, lifting them away when it jerked in response, remembering, sensing his touch. Will moaned, twisting teeth frantically over a bottom lip. It was beginning to chaff, becoming bloody, lips crimson and beckoning. Hannibal clenched his jaw to fight back a groan. He wanted to suck it into his mouth, bite it open, and lick it clean over and over. A pinky swished a light line from navel to collarbone. Knuckles blanched white, body shuddering, sheen of sweat appearing. Hannibal leaned forward slightly, widening legs enough to step safely between them without making contact. He touched the rough cast on his leg, lucid images of holding Will down and slamming in to a sweet hole until he screamed burning bright. He breathed hot hair against trembling lips. Water streaked free from closed eyes and pooled against the table as the younger man whimpered. He shoved a palm beneath a uniform and twisted the bud of a nipple without warning. Will cried out, cheeks burning red, white fluid streaking up his stomach.

He collapsed against the table, begging, “Touch me, god, touch me, please.”

Running a tongue across a blistering lower lip, Hannibal pushed cropped curls from a damp forehead before winding his fingers in and gave a gentle tug. Then a sharper one. Will exposed the soft line of his throat with a whine, palms frantically searching for a place to hold on to again. Before he could get a good grip, the older man yanked him across the table by hair and ankle. Legs fell open obediently, curled toes roughing up and down his calf. The younger man peeled the prison uniform down his waist, baring a slicked pink cock fully to the air and bright red eyes. He peered up, waiting, trembling with anticipation, wondering where fingers or mouth might touch. The longer he waited the wider pupils dilated until only a rim of blue remained against black. Hannibal leaned back and crossed his arms, slipping a tongue slowly across his teeth. His cock pulsed hot with fluid, untouched, throbbing for the press of his palm. Panting grew more frantic as the older man looked on with disinterested appraisal.

Hannibal tipped slightly forward, blue eyes fluttering closed, and murmured, “I am not going to touch you, Will.’’

Eyes screwed shut as a violent shudder of need shook through Will. The younger man whimpered and reached to take his cock and jerk off. A sharp cheek and nose twitched. Hannibal pulled forward until legs dangled, Will trapped against him, and grabbed the hand in mid air. He tore open the zipper on his uniform and pushed Will’s hand inside, breath stuttering as he wrapped slim fingers against balls and then dragged a rough palm from root to tip. A guttural swear tore free from his chest. The younger man sat up, panting open mouthed against his ribs, watching come spurt through their linked fingers, wet spreading to coat thighs. A needy hand twitched against his thigh to relieve a swelling ache.

“Good boy. Waiting for my permission.”

“Tell me, does this feel cold?” Hannibal growled harshly against the curve of an ear, teeth snapping at tendons in a throat. “Devoid of emotion? In control? Am I still heartless, Will?”
Teeth clamped on flesh, tugging, sucking it raw. “I want you to suffer.”

“Does it excite you to know how much control you wield over me even outside your cursory presence and watchful eye?” The older man asked, gripping curls and forcing Will to look up.

“Yes.” Will snarled, shoving a hand away, and jerking a slick cock tighter and faster, ringing two fingers against the frenulum until Hannibal tipped his head back and moaned. “I don’t want you to forget me. I want them to know. To hear you. Do you remember your mine, Hannibal?”

The younger man shoved away and slid from the table, sucking come from each finger, walking backwards to the wall, beckoning with each swirl of a wet tongue.

“How could I forget…” Hannibal stalked after and flattened Will to the wall, knee nudging thighs open, groaning when a cock began to rub against it. “…when I can think of nothing, of no one, except you.”

A throaty whisper pressed to his ear. “Like Italy?”

“Far worse. Blistering affliction eating at my soul.” The older man bit against a throat, sliding teeth bitterly from pulse to shoulder, sucking livid bruises. “It would be kinder if you had killed me. Or if I had walked away.”

A palm jabbed against his stomach, knocking him back. Hands shoved shoulders. Will muscled him against the wall and tugged his lip between teeth, stretching it out before biting it open again. Hannibal growled and shoved a blood slicked mouth against his, nipping until it slid open. Burning wet heat tangled against his as the younger man licked back then began to suck. Another push parted them, both panting, rutting against one another. An insistent hand burrowed in his uniform and Hannibal shouted as Will gripped his cock in a punishing up stroke.

“You’re not going anywhere. Ever!” Will growled, punctuating each word with a rough jerk of his hand, grip tightening, working him faster and faster. “I’m not kind. I’m fucking selfish. You’re mine.”

“Will—“ Hannibal panted fiercely against a throat, watching a blurring hand on him, his come streaking across the younger man’s cock. His balls lifted and tightened. He tipped his chin to moan. “Close. I’m close.”

Just as the pressure built and his legs began to shake, Will let go and stepped away, lip twitching over teeth, pointing to the ground where broken glasses were, fingertip dripping in white heat. “Get on your knees and fucking apologize.”

Red flashed through his vision. Lust and then fury overtook him.

“I didn’t mean—“ Breath stuttered out, trying to take it back.

Hannibal gripped Will by shoulders and pinned him to the wall, crushing both wrists in a single hand, breathing heavily against an erratic pulse. Trembling over took him again. Blinded by need for touch and comfort of release.

“Hann—“

“Kindly shut your mouth, William.” The older man snapped, wringing red around wrists, watching the way a pink cock twitched and arced every time his teeth came close to grazing skin. “Do you think you can manage such a simple request?”
“I don’t want this,” He whispered airily.

“Now…” The older man slid index finger and thumb up a trachea with a squeeze, hooked a chin, and forced Will to look him in the eyes. His mouth swollen and crimson. Eyes nearly black with desire. “… say it like you mean it.”

The younger man moaned and scoured nails down his back. He gripped short hair and banged their mouths together. Teeth and breath and spit. Will rolled against his thigh, tongue thrust deep in a mouth, and moaned louder the harder he rubbed. Hannibal hooked a hand around his ass to quicken the rhythm and squeezed at the base of his cock as it twitched, threatening to come from just friction and lilts of pleasure growing sharp.

Breathless sighs of pleasure grew more desperate pressed against the heat of their mouths with a needy yes, yes, yes and grew more frantic as Will sucked on the lobe of an ear and licked down a throat to whisper, I want you, I want you, I want you.

It took everything he had not to reach for their cocks and jerk them off.

“On the floor.” Hannibal gripped hair and pulled a mouth from sucking a hickey on his chest, widening his stance. “I will not be made to repeat myself. I am finished indulging you for the day.”

With a groan, Will slid against the wall to his knees and looked up hungrily. Pupils blown wide. His lovely cock bobbed, slicked wet and reddened from rubbing against fabric, come dribbling at the stretched seam of the uniform. Hannibal’s own come was splashed against a quivering belly. Hands hovered obediently against knees. A mouth trembled, trying to repress the need to whimper.

“No.” The older man shook his head firmly, stepping in. “You will speak when spoken to.”

Blue eyes fell to the floor, red staining cheeks.

“Look at me.”

Will winced before looking up, gaze turning from guilt to lust in a single blink. Hannibal kept his uniform on, thick red cock seeming longer and thicker hanging out from the open zipper, pull of the seam heightening his pleasure as he shifted forward. He could feel heat of the younger man’s ragged breath inches away.


The older man licked his palm and wrapped fingers around his cock, sighing relief with a long tug. He worked himself harder, grip loose and even. He didn’t want to come. Not from this. He just liked the way Will kept licking his lips, watching each stroke carefully, desperate to taste him. He slowed strokes then stopped.

“Searching for control that does not belong to you?”

A pink head slicked in and out of fingers as Will jerked himself off while watching Hannibal do the same.

“An unwise course of action.”

He pressed a foot down against a wrist. Will made a frustrated sound before obediently returning the hand where it belonged against a knee. Hannibal lifted his cock and pressed just the tip to firm lines of a mouth. The younger man closed his eyes and inhaled, twisting fabric tighter and tighter against his knees.
“You will ask. As you once did. For me to return control to you. And I will provide it. Hold you. Tear you apart and place your soul where I discovered it with equal kindness.”

“Please.” Lips trembled against his cockhead becoming wet.

“Do you deserve it?” Hannibal asked, smearing come against a mouth, stroking dark curls gently. “After such an awful, petty display of petulance. Disrespectfully throwing about your temper in front of a guest no less.” He felt a tongue rolling desperately just inside parted lips. “Will. Answer me out loud. You may speak.”

“N-n-no.” The younger man bent forward, clinging to the front of his trousers, head shaking fiercely, voice an aching whisper, “No, I don’t deserve it. I don’t deserve you.”

Smoothing hands over bare shoulders, Hannibal began to run his fingers through hair and across a face pressed tight against his thigh, with long and soothing strokes. They couldn’t continue until the boy stopped shaking. He caressed his scalp lightly and then massaged. With a shudder of content, Will slid hands from calves to thighs until he gripped a taut ass with a whine, cheek rubbing where a zipper lay against skin. The tip of a tongue flicked lightly against a shaft. Once then twice. The third time in a thick wet stripe of spit.

“Stop.” The older man hissed, drawing Will away, thumbing gently at fluttering eyelids trying to trap tears. “What you are attempting is a privilege. Do you understand why I am not allowing it?”

Will nodded, brows knitting. “I was rude.”

“And?”

“I demand instead of ask. I raised my voice. I…” The younger man gripped his leg again, kissing from knee to thigh, sliding closer and closer, whimpers pleading to taste. “I made you wait. I didn’t think about what you needed. Or how you felt. I’m sor—mmph.”

Hannibal hooked a thumb against lovely lips and pushed across pricking pearly teeth to press down on a tongue. Blue eyes flashed up. He teased lips with a cockhead until a strangled moan rushed out. Then he slid in to wet heat and groaned. Will sobbed, running the flat of his tongue along a thick vein, waiting for instruction.

“You do far better without speaking, do you not?”

The younger man moaned a reply, nodding, earnest vibration making Hannibal dizzy.

“Good. Only a taste.”

Will closed his eyes and lifted up on knees. He slid palms tenderly around a face and chin to hold him close, to ground him, to remind him he was safe. A tongue flicked tentatively at a head. It prodded a rush of liquid from the slit. Hannibal bit down on his cheek. Lips parted in a rush of breath, tongue curling to slide from beneath his frenulum to the base, tightening on the upstroke. Wavering blue eyes lifted, filled with need for reassurance.

“Very good, Will…” He murmured, smiling as the side of a face leaned in to seek a firm press of touch. He toyed delicately with short curls, stroking flushed skin as a tongue rubbed around the tip, flicking it left and right. “How well you are doing. Head back. Can you take more?”

Heavy eyelids sank over bright blue as the younger man sighed contently around him, widening knees to slide further, chin tipping up to balance. Hannibal readjusted with one hand against the wall and pushed in. Lips slackened, jaw widening, breath exhaling from a nose. He thrust in and out a
few times to feel the rough texture of a tongue seeking out every part of him.

“What a lovely mess.” The older man murmured, slipping free of a shoe, and rubbing toes against a steadily leaking cock. “Do you think you deserve to come?”

Frantically shaking his head no, Will grabbed Hannibal’s ass, and began thrusting his cock deep in his throat. His sucking became frantic. Needy whimpers vibrated against hollowed cheeks. He began to thrust back, foaming spit dribbling down a chin. The older man braced himself with both hands, gaze darting between a red rubbed mouth swallowing him whole and the twitch of the boy’s untouched cock. Hips thrust in the air. Scent of come and beginnings of orgasms filled his lungs.

“Enough.” Hannibal croaked, tugging frantically at hair, knee banging against a shoulder as a grip tightened around his legs. “Enough, Will!”

The quell of an orgasm burned up his throat for a second time. The older man pushed away and stumbled back against the table. He was breathing hard. Skin hot. Dripping against the tiled floor. Will was still on his knees, doubled over, shuddering from denied release.

Gasping air choked out a final command. “On your feet if you wish to finish with me.”

Dazed, the younger man stumbled over and held on to Hannibal as if he might collapse, body jerking, soft sob pressed to his chest. Hands pawed frantically as Will whimpers pitched high. The older man would always give him comfort. He would always provide. But he needed Will to remember he just needed only to ask to receive it. No matter how angry he was or how dire their situations got. Hannibal would be there, waiting, for whenever Will needed him.

“Use your words or I leave us both like this.”

“Close.” Frantic kisses wound down his throat as Will pressed hands tight around his waist, rocking their hips slowly together. “I need you close.”

Hannibal kissed Will tenderly, fingers brushing against his rough scalp, both arms curving around him to hold close. The younger man begin to sob, each press of lips swallowing his cries and whispering *hush, hush, let me hold you*. He cradled the smaller body between knees, rocking until cries lessened. Their mirrored ache for contact brushed against their thighs. He thought of how much Will needed to be lifted, held in the strength of his arms against the wall, as Hannibal moved deep inside him drawing out screams of relief.

*There would be no further talk or question from anyone here ever again of who you belong to.*

“How does it hurt?” Timid whispers and fingertips touched the cast on his leg then his split lip. “Did I hurt you? Before.”

“A bit.” Hannibal smiled, stroking tears from eyes, nose playfully nudging a cheek. “And no. I quite missed your sharp mouth. Shh. That’s quite enough. Let me comfort you.”

Clipped curls fell over watering eyes as Will shook his head and led him to a chair propped in a corner of the room. He fell against it, breath catching as the uniform was peeled down to his thighs, arresting his movement. He would only be able to take what Will gave him. A uniform shimmied down knees then clung to an ankle. The boy straddled thighs, running hands over his face, his neck, the hair on his chest. He shivered as Will began to rub against his navel and held even closer, staring directly in his eyes, open and vulnerable. He could see both their needs reflected in pools of blue, his and Will's, entwined. Their dicks tangled and then pressed in a wet slide against one another. Hannibal moaned, biting the slope of a shoulder, running his fingertips along the curve of a spine and
then slipping to cradle soft swells.

“Please.” Will moaned in his ear.

He shook his head, mouth dry. He forgot how to speak at all when Will lifted, sliding his own hand between legs, and began to open himself up. One finger and then two. By three he was writhing, head thrown back, rocking down on to fingers and against Hannibal’s cock. Moans plumed against his shoulder as the boy fell forward, moaning and licking up his neck. He gripped the chair and tried to remember the last time they had been intimate.

*Italy. On the balcony of our hotel after breakfast. The morning before we were—*

“I *need* this,” Will begged, thrusts becoming frantic. “You.”

“Slowly.” The older man demanded hoarsely, spitting on his palm and then pumping his cock a few times, sliding one hand to Will’s neck and the other to hold muscles of a thigh bunching to stand. “I will not be made to hurt you out of desperation.”

He tensed. They had only had sex without lubrication a handful of times. Usually after fights or a particularly stressful kill went awry. He hadn’t prepared Will languidly with his mouth or tongue. The stretch would sting. He knew it would be rough when it should have been gentle for their first time after so many months. He wanted to be tender. He flexed fingers lightly around a waist, shuddering as Will moaned softly against his neck, cock prodding a tight hole.

“But I am desperate,” A husky whisper pressed to a sharp cheekbone, sliding to rest warm lips against an ear. “I want you in me. I want it so bad.”

Will thumbed at strained knuckles gently and slid on to a cock inch by inch with a whimper. Thighs shook around Hannibal. Knees clenched against his waist as the younger man waited to adjust. Only when he was pressed balls deep did he dare to moan appreciatively, sheathed tight in heat.

“You feel divine, darling…” Hannibal kissed the crown of his head, breathless.

“M-move.” Gasps nuzzled against his chest. “Please. Please move.”

The older man stroked ribs and began to bounce him gently, slouching in the chair to find the best angle. He watched Will loosely stroke himself to ease the pain. Slim fingers rolled and pinched a nipple trying to twist the way Hannibal had. He smiled when the younger man cried out, lapping at the sting as fingers continued to pinch. His thrusts deepened, becoming long and unhurried, quickening only when hands twisted against his shoulders. He rolled hips up. His cock nudged a prostrate. Will scratched nails down his chest, groaning low. Hands tightened around a neck as the boy leaned out, head back, chest arching as a blush tumbled over rosy nipples and spread over a clenching stomach.

He breathed tenderly against a throat. “You are exquisite. Beautiful.”

Blushing bled from cheeks to ears. Will began to kiss him open mouthed, breathing for one another, rolling hips languidly. He lifted up and sank all the way down on a cock, drawing out pleased grunts. The younger man watched his expression, adjusting angle and thrust to draw out Hannibal's pleasure, rocking and swiveling until he sighed or groaned.

Whispers nuzzled against hair. “How do you feel?”

The last part of the question stuttered as the pace drastically changed. Will began to fuck himself on Hannibal’s cock fast and hard.
“Can’t talk.” A high pitched gasp. “Later.”

The older man gripped narrow shoulders, head falling back, unable to catch his breath. He drove through tight folds, hitting a prostrate lightly and then harder. Thighs slapped against one another. Metal chair legs scraped against the floor and banged against the wall. The boy’s sweet cock was leaking all over him, staining his legs, his uniform, the chair beneath. He wanted to touch him, but the room started to spin. It was all he could do to hold on to Will. Two fingers hooked at the base of his dick, thumb rubbing balls. His vision blurred.

Distantly he heard, "Does this feel good? Holding you and moving inside me?"

Their voices rose over one another, cracking and pitching between grunts and moans. *I can’t, I can’t.* Fingers fumbled to grip a wet cock, tightening, jerking faster. *Ah ah ah, Hannnn.* Sweat beaded against grey hair on a chest, thumb hooked against the nape of the neck, fiery red holding blue steady below. *Not yet, hold on, stay here, look at me.*

Will began to cry, clinging to broad shoulders, shaking harder and harder, thrusts become more and more erratic. As heat and pressure gathered, building faster and faster, fear filled stormy blue eyes. Terrified by the twine of their skin and mouths.

“Will—” Hannibal gasped against Will’s mouth, pressing a fluttering palm to his hammering heart, a reminder of the power held over him, to bring him to his knees. “I love you.”

Will sobbed relief, nails and tears scouring broad shoulders, hands and knees clutching as he climaxed. Hannibal held as tight as he could, until they were both shaking, and pleasure tore through him. The younger man came first, stripping hot between their chests, dragging a blinding orgasm through the older man soon after, coming deep in him, need torn from his throat with a groan of the boy’s name.

They clung to one another through the aftershocks. Trembling from the damp press of their skin and cool air. Will whimpered as Hannibal slid out of him, face pressed to a neck, and curled up to be held. The older man kissed a freckle on a shoulder, cradling a head and knees, sighing when tiny kisses dotted all over his face. They dozed against one another for some time.

Paper rustled against the floor.

They both creaked open eyes. Silas was hunched under the table, back to them, files and papers spread in a protective circle, humming loudly to the audible clang of a guitar piercing through earbuds.

“Oh hell…” Will dropped his head against a chest with a thud. “I forgot he was here. This is mortifying. How could you let this happen?”

Hannibal cleared his throat and tried to wrangle a twitch of lips trying to smile. “You, darling, were rutting against me for relief.”

At the moment the younger man was an excellent modesty blanket. His uniform tangled beneath thighs. Will’s had somehow managed to land on the far side of the room.

“You know I make piss poor choices when you touch me. And it’s been *awhile.*” Fists hammered frustration and embarrassment against his waist.

“I would not categorize any of what just transpired by those words.” Hannibal lifted Will and carried him across the room. He kissed a temple and set him down. “This was more necessary than breathing.”
The younger man hopped and jumped back into boxers and uniform, one hand gripped on a waist for balance. He grimaced as it stuck to his skin. Hannibal made the same face as he zipped up. In hind sight, both their uniforms should have been kicked across the room. The room held the distinct scent of sweat and sex.

“Is he okay?” Will wrinkled his nose and glanced beneath the table. “I think we traumatized him.”

The lawyer hummed even louder sensing movement behind him.

Hannibal was generally open in most aspects of his life. Welcoming new experiences. But as his cheeks became ruddy and tipped his ears the slightest hue of crimson, he couldn’t help but wonder if Will sucking his cock and then riding him—while his non-biological, metaphorical son remained in the room—was one he wanted to repeat. Or think about for any given length of time.

The younger man saw him blushing—a rare sighting—and began to laugh. For once not the one embarrassed. Hannibal turned his back to him, arms crossed, nose up.

“I suspect Silas will forget the event just fine.”

_I hope. Or block out the experience completely._

“Hold it—wait. Back up a bit. ‘More necessary than breathing?’” Fingers wiggled through his arms and hugged his waist. “Are you seriously trying to make the medical argument that if you don’t suck my cock, or I don’t suck yours, you will asphyxiate and die?”

Maroon eyes slid over a shoulder and down to meet sparkling blue. “I’m ‘saying it with enthusiasm.’”

“Don’t patronize me.” A fist thudded against a kidney.

Hannibal groaned and dragged Will forward, lifting him several inches off the ground, kissing a nose fondly and smiled. “I love your mouth. I love you. Especially when you are angry with me. I never know what you might say. You surprise me.”

He wasn’t sure he would be able to move tomorrow, but he knew it would be worth it. More so when his cast came off and they could fuck properly.

Pearly teeth flashed before Will nuzzled against his neck, murmuring, “God, I love you too. You know, don’t you? Even when I act so fucking stupid. I didn’t mean it. I’m sorry. So sorry. I just needed to calm down.”

“I know, William.” He shook him a little just to hear him laugh, ears pricking at the sound and trying to memorize each note. “There is nothing you need to say I do not know like the trail of my own shadow.”

Will slid down his body till bare toes touched the floor and looked up. “Are we okay?”

“More than, darling one…” Hannibal murmured, kissing him lightly.

_I only wish to give you comfort. It is what I can control._

They both quirked their heads to look at the young man beneath the table, frowning.

“So…exactly what does one say after practically fucking in front of our lawyer?”

“Thank you would probably be a polite way to start.”
"Followed up quickly by 'sorry for ruining your life and years of therapy you'll require?'"

"...I was going to disagree, but...yes."

Chapter End Notes

Part One of: Angsty Make Up Sex Ensues

Part Two (pending next chapter): Angsty-We Threw Our Lawyer Out-to Have More Sex starring a cameo appearance by ______ .

I hope this was worth the wait! (I'm looking at you, Mae! Hahaha. We are MOSTLY sorry, Silas. Mostly. Look, buddy, you'll be alright. Just...uh...?)

If you need something to amuse yourselves in the mean time, I've been working on a new time stamp, "Run" featuring all four of our boys. I know one of you asked for that particular prompt, but for the life of me can't remember who.
“Arguably he would make an excellent key witness if his back hadn’t been turned.”

Will choked on a laugh and rolled his eyes. He could hear the tinge of cool blue in the older man’s tone. A coy smile. Tongue loosed and body relaxed. He loved the way his accent drawled every vowel when he was sated. He wanted to press his ear against a chest and savor every rumbling note. He listened to Hannibal lazily rustle back in to his uniform. He combed lightly at short hair. It wouldn’t be the first time he ended up with cum in his hair. Not that he minded—though the lack of shampoo was problematic—he just didn’t want to send their lawyer spiraling in a mental breakdown with physical evidence. The younger man snorted at the irony.

_For exhibit A, copious amounts of Hannibal Lecter’s cum covering Will Lecter. For exhibit B, their former lawyer now receiving psychiatric treatment at the hospital._

“I think that might be considered a conflict of interest, Hannibal.” The younger man cleared his throat and touched the back of his neck, looking down as it grew hot with embarrassment. “In an effort for transparency though, I _may_ have told Alana, Jack, and a handful of unknown federal agents…that we would…fuck in front of them?” He mumbled the rest underneath a palm. “There’s a possibility I may have also divulged other bits of information about the physical nature of our relationship you wouldn’t like. Like our interest in knife play and your proclivity for blood and biting.”

Fair eyebrows crept up forehead. “Oh?”

“Yeah. But I was under duress…so…hello?”

As a zipper slid neatly in to place, Will watched Hannibal struggle with conflicting emotions before drifting to daydream. Amber eyes squinted, scanning across the ceiling as if viewing whatever scenarios played out on his head. A chin tipped and a tongue flicked out. A definite sign of interest in the physical consummation. He had a feeling the older man had him bent over Jack’s desk, cock in one hand and fingers inside him. Then a gaze clouded and a cheek visibly flinched with jealousy. The younger man knew him well enough to recognize a faraway fantasy of killing everyone in a room who saw him unclothed and in the throes of passion. There was a single blink and the older man returned. It was one of Hannibal’s more curious habits. Like hypnosis. Brought on by ‘Will’ and ‘fuck’ usually in the same sentence. He tried his best to repress a grin.

Hannibal opened his mouth and continued on from before his mind blanked at the mere suggestion of fucking, smooth tone noting, “Silas has always been an impressively polite young man. If anything I admire the standard he sets for professional courtesy.”

Will looked at Hannibal with both hands hanging in the air, waiting for normalcy or sanity to return to either of them. As if he might grasp at the molecules of it and bring it in to physical being. He waited a hopeful second. What was the use? He dropped hands. Then stooped to look under the table. Their lawyer was tapping a pen erratically against a bent knee. He either had laser like focus on their files or he had mastered the art of thinking about anything but his clients banging several feet from him.

_There’s attorney client privilege for you at its best._
“He’s rocking in the fetal position for Chrissake.”

Bending at the waist, the older man observed nervous shuffling of paper and wobbling side to side to a clash of drums and nodded approvingly before standing again. “Enjoying his modern music. Multitasking it seems. Look how fiercely he studies our case.”

“You’re an idiot.”

He shouldn’t have been surprised. He really shouldn’t have. Especially not given his current position and their proximity. It wasn’t even necessary to account for the come drying tacky on their skin. What they just did very loudly and in a semi-public place was a surprise. This was not. Yet, somehow when Hannibal put one hand on his stomach, the other on his hip, and rocked a half hard cock against his ass while bent over a table, a gasp of shock knocked out of him.

“I suspect…” The older man tugged till Will planted his hands on a metal surface, purring in his ear. “…you wouldn’t have disturbed him at all if you had been more vocal in your pleasure with a few more profane slurs of ‘fuck, fuck me harder, Doctor Lecter, deeper, deeper, baby.’”

His mouth fell open. His vision went blurry.

Hissing whistled between clenched teeth. “Don’t.”

Will stared at the far wall. His ears rang so fucking loud he began to feel dizzy. If Hannibal’s trigger was his name and fuck in the same sentence, then this was his.

*Christ, his accent just makes it blissfully worse.*

Dirty talk was hardly shocking. At least not for his part anyway. He knew pairing choice curse words with the older man’s formal title made them both rough and a little desperate. (Though he secretly wondered if managing to moan out eloquently phrased sexual innuendo would get his husband off without a single touch. He had once jokingly whispered Shakespeare’s ‘*I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be buried in thy eyes*’ on a night drive through the country. There had been buttons and thread in the car for weeks.) He was rough, illicit and impolite in all the ways the older man seemed to enjoy.

But hearing Hannibal say it? Whispering desire without any finesse or structure was different. He groaned internally. It was rare. Unrefined. Rude. And blistering hot.

“Is this arousing you?” A playful chuckle pressed to his shoulder.

“Hannibal.”

*You know very well it is. You fucking fuck. Fuck you. No, fuck me. Goddammit.*

He wriggled toes in shoes, desperately trying to will away blood pooling in his groin. It was too soon for him to be this aroused. He was too sensitive.

“You object to the scenario?”

The younger man registered the rough dip in tone and braced on the table as his knees went weak. He would end up on the floor in a minute. By his own volition or rapid unconsciousness. Two fingers slid lightly down the curve of his spine. He shivered. Another soft laugh curled over his hair and slid along his jaw. Was it fair for something to sound that gorgeous and infuriating at the same time?
Breath coiled hot against the nape of his neck. “Would you prefer: ‘open your mouth, tongue my cockhead, Will, and suck harder, lick me clean’?”

He moaned out loud. Lips curved in a smile against his skin. Memory startling vivid from an echo of the words spoken. He could hear rattling engines and hum of noisy tourists. City of Ancona below them. The bang, bang, bang of a headboard as Will muffled his own screams with a downy pillow, pleasure shaking his arms and knees. After hours of only the older man’s crimson mouth lingering on an ear, a cheek, a neck with only blunt edged filth. Whispered to him over a cup of espresso in a crowded café. While lingering in front of a shop window. Teased low as he was crowded against a full length mirror. He had been shaking by the time a taxi cab sped towards their hotel. He had dragged Hannibal to the elevators and started rutting against him as soon as they closed. Then threw him against their bed. They had a dozen or more verbal and written complaints for the noise. Even one tense visit from local police where Will was forced to open the door naked toweling his hair dry just to get them to leave. They were too distracted by his cock to recognize his face he imagined.

“Christ…” The younger man muttered, yanking on the front of a freshly damp uniform.

Fiery eyes dragged from his mouth, across his chest, and lingered openly on a twitching cock. “Beautiful.”

He turned to face the adoring voice, unpleasantly hard, a jumble of nerves and need once more. He had just started feeling calm and settled with a brain full of oxytocin. Now he was either going to strangle Hannibal or fuck him.

*You are an unbelievable ass.* He sighed. *….Both. Probably both.*

“Seeing as how we’re paying him by the hour, do you think maybe we should talk about our defense strategy?” He scowled and punctuated his irritation with a dramatic eye roll. “Instead of talking one another off?”

A toothy smirk rippled. Hannibal grabbed him roughly by the collar and bit his way up a neck, growling, “Roll your eyes at me again, William, and you will ride my cock until you are too weak and sore to stand, lawyer present or not. On the table I think. Understood?”

“Yes, Doctor Lecter.” Will snapped, groaning as fingers gripped his balls and slid up his dick, and quickly corrected. “Yes, Sir. I understand. Though if you think I’m not going to fuck you until you scream, well, you have another thing coming.”

He rocked against a palm, letting his face fall heavily against a chest. This separation was going to kill him. Could one die from over sensitivity and multiple orgasms?

*What a way to go.*

“Control yourself.” Hannibal smirked against his neck then ducked beneath a table.

Will was left to stare at a rude erection and shapely ass. How the hell did Hannibal manage to make a prison onesie look sexy?

His internal grumbling continued. *Probably makes burlap look en vogue. Ridiculous.*

“Silas. Would you care to join us?”

Their lawyer yelped by the sudden proximity and booming voice, throwing a stack of papers in the air. They fluttered helplessly to the ground. Earbuds tore free from ears. An Iphone clattered blaring out one long guitar chord and shut off. Wavering saucer eyes darted up as Silas wheeled around
knees to face them.

“I-I-I like the floor.” He stammered, huddling against a leg of a table. “The floor is good.”

His gaze flicked across the men crouched near. Flushed and sweat sheen skin. Hickeys on both their throats. Nails marks on the older man’s chest. Soiled uniforms. An undecided erection. Will and Silas made eye contact. It was quite possibly the most awkward fifteen seconds of his life. Then Silas turned pink then tomato red and then an alarming shade of eggplant. Was he choking or as uncomfortable as Will was?

“You're right!” Will blustered, banging his head on a corner of the table. He groaned. He tried his best to shift and cover up his arousal. “He’s got the right idea.” His hands motioned wildly in the air, pointing to Hannibal and then Silas. “You’ve got the right idea.”

His knees bent and delivered him to the floor in a heap.

*Fucking smooth and graceful. What a catch, Will, what a catch.*

He rubbed a knot forming on his skull. At least the new splitting throb in his skull flagged his arousal. It unfortunately did not knock any sense in to him. He could hear the older man trying very hard to stifle laughter above them. At least someone found this bullshit amusing.

“Very campy. Should we, uh, build a blanket fort or something out of our clothes? Make sure we set the right tone for this inexplicably horrid session.”

Silas gaped at him, flushing several shades like a chameleon, tips of his ears bright red. Will heard the words in an echo and grimaced. He tried to convince himself it didn’t sound as suggestive and lewd as it came across. It did. Jesus Christ, how much did therapy cost these days again? With a sane psychiatrist. He sure as fuck wasn’t about to recommend Hannibal for the job. It would become an inception of therapy.

“You know what? I am going to shut my mouth now.”

“What…the hell is wrong with you?” The lawyer turned and began to rake papers hurriedly to a pile.

Strangely it reminded Will of his strays frantically digging up the garden. Was that a panicked whine he heard? He missed Winston. He shoved the thought forcefully away.

“I’m still claiming insanity,” The younger man noted with a shrug.

“You have once already, dearest.”

Hannibal nudged until Will scooted forward and slid behind him, tipping his head against a table leg with a sigh. He touched a cast gingerly. He wondered if it ached. If he had put too much weight on his leg during their romp. Surely the thing had to come off soon. Did the bones heal properly? Would his husband have a perpetual limp? He leaned against a chest, sighing as arms enveloped. He tried not to think about that either. Every time he did he had the distinct urge to break bones and play cat in a cradle with torn out veins and cartilage.

*Those bastards…*

“You cannot. Neither can I. The law prevents it.”

The young man grunted a form of agreement and went to sorting papers according to their number. He nestled in a corner and flipped to a clean page on a legal pad, glancing at a watch to note the date.
and time.

*Maybe I should suggest he charge us extra for pain and suffering?*

Glasses flashed beneath a fringe of brown hair. Will was fairly certain a corner was cracked from when he had knocked their lawyer to the ground. Guilt welled up his throat.

“I’m sorry, Silas,” He said loudly.

Silas fidgeted with his gloves, nose wrinkling and nodded.

“I don’t know what to tell you. The last seventy two hours. No. No. The last decade has been an extreme stressor on our relationship. The whole interrogation was a trigger for me. I act irrationally when provoked…” Will roughed up what little hair he had and spread his palms in contrition.


“Your previous methods of coping are appalling, Will,” The older man noted dryly. “I too apologize for my behavior. It was unbecoming. You have been faithful and steadfast throughout our years. You deserve more than an apology, Silas.”

A fountain pen jabbed their direction. “You are both mad.”

Will and Hannibal shared a look. There was no arguing that. But how in the hell was anyone, especially him, supposed to survive without human connection after so many years of finally having it? It calmed him. He could feel the older man’s heart thudding against his spine. He grew drowsy. His head lolled to the side, exposing a red marked throat.

“Beyond s-stating the obvious…” Silas waved a gloved hand at their disheveled state and kept eyes fixed on the legal pad tucked against knees. “It is clear t-t-to me you love each other—possibly far more deeply or obsessively than one should—but love each other all the same. Let’s s-start there.”

“Silas?” The name rolled off a tongue smooth, but Will could feel a rumbling groan deep in a chest as fingers slid to his waist.

“Yes.” The lawyer sighed annoyance and pushed glasses up his nose. “What is it, Doctor Lecter?”

“After would you be a dear and fetch dinner? About forty minutes should be enough time.”

Will bolted up as he started to choke, slamming a palm on his chest before hiding behind hand and wrist, muttering, “Christ, Hannibal.”

“For…? *Never mind.*” Cheeks cycled through varying stages of embarrassment. “But you’re p-paying me for the full hour.”

“A reasonable request.”

The younger man shot a wriggle of bewilderment over his shoulder, mouthing silently, “I hate you.”

Hannibal beamed at him and kissed his cheek.

For the next two hours, Will tried to pay attention to what was being discussed. He really did. He even squinted and leaned forward, nodding fiercely. (Because every time he tried to open his mouth words came out a stammer or a slur of need.) His concentration, however, was having none of it. His focus bounced like marbles in a pinball machine. He fidgeted to keep fluctuating weight between his
legs hidden. It wasn’t helping that his husband would not keep his hands to himself. (He would have punched him in the shoulder except he was trying not to draw attention to either of them.) Hannibal enjoyed every second of his discomfort. His empathy made him keenly aware of intention every time the older man pressed lightly against his thigh, touched his hip, or pressed a thumb against his pulse. His eyes watered and he had to bite his tongue to keep from moaning when a hot palm slid over the scar on his stomach. His skin broke out in a faint sweat. His elbows clamped against hands tucked beneath arms to keep still. Was it impolite to excuse one’s self to a corner and jack off?

Silas must have sensed—out of the three of them— he was the only one actually interested in the case. If neither of them cared if they lived or died by the end of it then he might as well go get lunch. And then pretend to get stuck in traffic. Then sit in his car. Then linger in the lobby for another ten minutes or so until his presence grew suspicious. He grabbed his briefcase and let the door shut with a thud behind him. What was the point?

“Cut it out!” The younger man finally howled, jabbing an elbow against ribs.

Will yelped when the older man grabbed him by the shoulders and pushed forcefully. He landed against his stomach on the floor. Breath knocked out of him as a heavy body blanketed and began grinding.

“Off right now.” Hannibal groaned, tearing at zippers and fabric. “All of it.”

He groaned as he was rocked back on all fours, uniform splitting at the shoulder seam as it was torn off, fabric and boxers pooling at the bend of his knees. He kicked and wriggled until they were hurled away. Air cooled his naked skin. Will glanced over his shoulder to find Hannibal practically snarling with frustration. His uniform was tangled against the cast, thick erection bobbing obscenely and dripping with each yank on fabric.

Oh fuck me. That’s beautiful.

“Would you like some help?” Will offered.

“Are you actively trying to incense me? Get this damn thing off me now.”

"You get so rude when you want sex, Hannibal." The younger man flicked a smile towards a scowl.

Rolling on to his back, Will slid hands up thighs and lapped lazily at precome with a huff of laughter. A low groan shook through tensing legs. Hannibal was slick, burning up. He made direct eye contact with the older man as his fingers curled around fabric. It ripped down a side seam and slid free. He had a second to grapple a waist for balance. Then Hannibal was sliding along his tongue and fucking the back of his throat. He gagged and moaned as a head hit a swollen palate, swallowing a rush of liquid greedily. He left streaks of red from a taut ass to bend of knees. He wasn’t going to leave an inch of skin unmarked. Not if he could help it. He wanted his husband to press fingertips against each bruise or sting and think of him. Of this. A cock jerked in his mouth as the older man hissed before pulling out. Hannibal flipped Will on his stomach again and surged forward.

“God, yes!” The younger man cried out, inching his legs farther apart as a spit slicked cock dragged between cheeks. “Did you hear anything he said?”

“This is entirely your fault!” Hannibal kept hands clamped on his ass, pushing down to make sure he couldn’t rock back no matter how much he struggled. “How was I to concentrate with the scent of you lingering? Your ass wriggling between my thighs every second?”

“I don’t—ah!”
A thick head rubbed once against his hole and pushed in. Knuckles dragged across the floor as shoulders pushed back. He tried to buck. He was pinned in place. Weight of a shaking forearm digging in to his lower back. Will could see both their reflections in waxed tile. He was biting his lower lip, eyes watering. Hannibal was kneeling on his good leg, eyes glowing red in fierce concentration, easing just a swollen head in and out.

“You were saying?”

Hannibal sounded entirely too composed for Will’s liking. He wanted to tear at his hair. Claw at his back. Deny him release four fingers in him and gloat. Come all over his perfect, smug face.

“Read the fucking transcripts or his notes!” The younger man gasped, shoving between his body and the floor, groaning when his palm curved against a wet dick. He could barely move but the pressure was just enough. “What else was I supposed to do? I just kept hearing the last thing you said to me in my head. Watching you fuck me on a static loop.”

Hannibal wrenched the hand away with a growl and pinned it to the small of his back. Will moaned at the loss of wet heat and relief pressing in to him. Flat of a tongue lapped at sweat and white liquid clinging to a palm.

“Stay.” The order was punctuated with a squeeze.

The younger man kept his arm against his spine, burying his face against the crook of an elbow. If he was able to think straight, he might have taken offense at being commanded like one of his strays. He couldn’t. Mind empty and tongue mute. All he could focus on was physical contact and how he trembled with each slide. He bit lightly at the skin on his wrist to muffle a whimper as Hannibal began to rub faintly between cheeks again. There was a push. Ring of muscle contracting. He tensed in anticipation. He was still loose from before. Ready. He needed more. He tilted hips up as best he could. There was a blissful stretch of an inch and then out again.

“Cocktease!” He growled disapprovingly.

The older man chuckled and somehow managed to give him even less. Barely breaching him at all. Moving in and out against a fluttering hole.

“Now.” Will thumped his head and palm against the floor, demanding. “I want you now! Fuck me right now, Hannibal, or I swear to—”

Hannibal gripped hips, drawing a smaller body back, and thrusting forward at the same time. Will scrabbled against thighs, suddenly seated, struggling to catch his breath. Every inch inside him. He could feel each twitch and throb. He began to pant as the older man shifted him slightly to rest against a broad chest, nudging until Will arched and felt a jolt against his prostrate. White liquid splashed up his stomach. He threw his head back against a shoulder and moaned. His hands were slid between the back of his thighs and the top of flexing ones beneath to keep him immobile. The older man licked down his throat, palms sliding over his body and thumbing sensitive nipples. He cried out, struggling to thrust up and back down on a cock. He trembled with restraint, feeling a deep groan against his shoulder, pulse of pleasure inside him at the visible act of submission.

A pinky traced adoringly across the scar on his stomach. Another palm smoothed the nape of his neck, gripping at short hair and then flesh. Hannibal bowed Will forward at the waist, curled over knees, and begin to pound relentlessly against his prostrate. His vision whitened out. His toes curled. He felt dripping wet of sweat and cum against his ass and between their legs. Ridges of fingers and palm clamped over his mouth. He knew desperate screams of *more, more, more* were his own. Just as he was certain he would come or black out, thrusts and pleasure stopped as quickly as they started.
Slurring pushed a palm away. “Why are you—“

Will felt Hannibal sway unsteadily against him and scrabbled off with a pop. The older man’s face was twisted with a grimace, eyes screwed shut, clutching at his cast. He was growing paler by the second. His pleasure addled brain finally caught up.

”Oh Christ, you’re leg!”

Looping elbows beneath arms, the younger man caught him and dragged them both from beneath the table. He managed to muscle the heavier body in the chair before Hannibal completely wilted, sharp nose falling against his shoulder with a snuffle of agony. This was not the kind of pain either of them enjoyed. He rubbed hands up and down a back cooing gently.

“Should we…?” He looked down at both their swollen erections and couldn’t quite bring him to say the words ‘stop.’ He wasn’t prepared to let either of them limp off in search of icy blasting water and lay alone in their prison bunks. “Do you want me to top?”

Angles of a face caught fire, burning brighter and brighter before the older man looked away, muttering, “And suffer the humiliation of not being able to fulfill my lurid promises from before? I think not!” Then he began to sulk. ”All because a few creaky and uncooperative bones.”

Chapter End Notes

Silas: Fuck it. I'm out.

Hannibal: Okay, great, bye!
Will turned an automatic ‘aww’ to a sputtering cough, avoiding eye contact with a piercing flash of crimson. He couldn’t help it. Hannibal sounded so pitifully wounded. He looked miserable and couldn’t stop blushing to save his life. Was there anything more sweet than a husband willing to suffer to have exquisitely rough sex?

“Baby, as impressive as that was, you don’t have to black out to get me off,” The younger man chided gently, kissing him deeply until a frown disappeared.

Eyes narrowed. “It would have not been an issue if I had managed to bring you release first. William! You will stop making adoring, puppy eyes at me this instant!”

“Am I hurting your delicate pride, love?” Will teased, kissing against a mouth growling and trying to bite him like a feral lion. He pushed the older man against the chair, nuzzling a knee as he draped a leg over his shoulder. “Relax. I’ll take care of you. Try not to lose consciousness, hm? I know I’m good, but not that good.”

He laughed when Hannibal tried to kick him. Then melted a second later with a moan as a tongue licked a trail of briny liquid from an inner thigh. Will scooted hips to the edge of a chair, spreading legs then cheeks. The older man dropped his chin to a chest, eyes closed, panting anticipation. How long had it been since they had done this?

Will mouthed delicately against an inner thigh, gaze flicking up at each soft sigh of content it elicited. His tongue tracked a figure eight lazily around velvety balls. The older man jerked in the chair with a grunt before relaxing. He licked up a shaft and pressed a wet tip against a slit beaded in precome, wriggling in and out as he had been teased earlier.

Faint laughter ruffled his forehead as Hannibal slid fingers tenderly around his ears, stroking a buzzed hairline and murmured, “William, you are exquisite.”

“Stop it.” The younger man whispered, affection, love resounding in each note, clinging to his skin and bringing tears to his eyes. “I’m trying to concentrate.”

A gentle smile appeared and then melted. “My apologies.”

Internally scolding a well of tears, Will began to mouth a wet line down a bobbing shaft to lick lightly between cheeks. Hannibal stirred, sensing his distress and began to run fingertips over his face and hair. He clung a little tighter to the older man. He would not cry during this. The younger man buried damp eyes against a thigh and lapped at the ring of muscle until legs shivered around him. He closed eyes, listening to a hum of flushing skin and groans, focusing solely on his husband’s pleasure. He wanted him to forget all about where they were and why and just feel. To be present. With him. He flicked lightly at first until the grip against his neck and hair tightened. Then speared inside tight heat. Only the tip at first then pushed. He could taste a racing pulse. Heard shaky exhalés, breath hitching in time to the older man’s. He alternated between tonguing unhurried circles to deep quick jabs. He felt pleasure sparking beneath his skin. He sank beneath the rhythm of hips lifting for more, matching each moan with a vibrating one of his own, fingertips sinking in flesh and thrusting hungrily.
“I want you.” A hoarse voice implored. “Please, Will, let me have you.”

Will dragged a wrist across his mouth with a smile and helped Hannibal stand. His vision wobbled and he wasn’t sure which of them was dizzy. He placed a chair next to the head of the table and stacked their clothes on top of it for cushion. The older man hobbled forward and bent his cast leg against it. He felt him shivering, sneaking adoring glances up. He would never admit it, but Hannibal loved to be looked after with the same intensity and care he was able to give. The younger man slid around him, letting hands sweep lovingly over scratch marks, and glanced coyly over a shoulder.

“How do you feel…” Will lay across the table on his stomach, pillowed his head on arms, and spread legs on tiptoes to wriggle his backside against tense thighs. He kept his voice soft and lilting. “…about this? Is this okay, Hannibal?”

Nostrils flared with teasing scent of sweat. Pupils dilated desire. Hannibal drew an index finger appreciatively from swollen lips, down a spine, and swirled over an ass to caress an inner thigh. There was a bite mark, a faint white impression of teeth, the older man had given him months ago. Will shyly glanced upwards to see how Hannibal saw him. Pale skin flushed and soft against the stark harsh metal of the table. Friction from thighs rubbing the swell of his backside slightly pinked. Hair wild and eyes limpid blue beneath a sweep of lashes.

Hands trembled against his hips as Hannibal watched him, tears pricking his eyes, and choked out, “You are so beautiful.”

*

Glancing anxiously at a watch, Agent Charlie Thompson paced the hallway of interrogation rooms located in the lower levels of Quantico. He wasn’t exactly an agent. Per se. In training. He was growing increasingly anxious. He had the feeling his status, as technical as it was, could be obliterated in a single breath. He looked at the time again. The Lecter’s lawyer had been gone for far longer than it took to drive across town and back. Where the hell was he anyway? It’s not like he was supposed to be here. Larson, his immediate superior, had skipped out on him to chase after a skirt an hour back. He was supposed to be watching the prisoners. He didn’t even know who he was supposed to be in charge of. In charge? Not him. He pushed papers and crunched numbers. And he liked it that way.

He stopped pacing in front of a closed door again. Something scraped across the floor. His hand strayed to a firearm strapped to his waist. Should he call someone? No, no. That would only draw attention to himself. It wasn’t his fault their lawyer up and left without a single word. He had chased him all the way to the elevators before the man finally took the stairs and escaped. Should he make sure everything was in order? He paled. Having inmates die under his watch had to be an automatic case for termination. He circled the hallway one more time. It was empty except for a single secretary minding the phones.

He pressed an ear to the door.

“You feel—fuck—so good.” A low voice gasped. “I want to hear if I make you feel good, baby.”

Someone grunted an inaudible response over another scrape.

“Like that? What about…nnn. Jesus Christ, I can feel you in my throat. Can you give me more? I don’t want to hurt you.”
Thompson felt his eyelids strain open till they burned, jaw unhinging. They couldn’t possibly be—

“Deeper!” Scraping turned to louder and louder banging. “Ah! Ah, fuck! There, there!”

There was an audible slap and a growl. “Not yet!”

The agent jumped.

“You’re going to make me come, Hannibal.” A whine turned to a warbling moan of impatience. “Again. Jesus, ah, fuck, baby!”

“If you yell much louder we are going to be caught.”

“Do you want me to tongue you? Suck you?”

“Tell me what you want, Will.”

“I want you on my cock.”

Tips of his ears began to glow and then burn. His mouth was dry. What was he supposed to do? Was he supposed to do something? Was there a protocol for this? Oh god, he was going to lose his position for sure!

Position? Oh JESUS.

Booming startled him. “Agent Thompson?”

“M-m-mister Crawford!” The agent whirled around, holding both hands up defensively, squarely blocking the door.

The shadow of his immediate boss loomed over him. He was so fucking tall. It was unnatural. His stomach roiled sour as panic clawed through him. Piercing black eyes observed with a ruthless sweep. His palms began to sweat.

“Mister?” Jack Crawford lumbered forward, arms crossing, frowning.

“Agent. Aaaagent Crawford.” He laughed nervously. Thompson tugged frantically at the collar of his shirt. “They’re not. Uh, uh, uh.” He jammed hands in his pockets, voice growing more shrill as he blustered for the right words. What was he supposed to do! “Done. Yet.”

“What are you talking about, Thompson? I saw their lawyer leave for lunch forty five minutes ago when I was coming in.”

“N-n-no, they’re still—uuuuummm.”

Leathery shoes took another menacing step forward, meaty hands going for a firearm. “If you lost them, or they escaped I swear to—“

”-Well. NO. It's just.”

Jack Crawford was gripping a thick file in one hand and his gun in the other. He wasn’t going to be fired. He was going to be shot execution style. Oh what had he done in his short blip of a life to deserve this? He missed his stapler and copious amount of comforting paper clips.

“It’s just—“
“Move.”

The agent fell against the wall and scrabbled to grab his boss by the back of his tailored jacket. He would haul him down the hall and out of the building if he had to. Locks rattled and the door opened. It was too late. Between Agent Crawford’s mammoth frame of shoulders and elbows, Thompson saw the scene beyond and nearly fainted.

Slapping skin and wet squelches filled the hall. Both inmates were covered in sweat. And nothing else.

“Oh you’re so tight, Doctor, fuck I love fucking you.”


The slimmer of two men pulled out and thrust so hard the table moved at least three inches. His back was covered in scratch marks. He was pounding another man stretched out on the table obscured from view. A cast leg balanced on the chair, and the other locked rigid around a thigh, arm beneath a knee to keep it bent and open.

“I’m so ah, ah, ah close!”

“Touch me. Touch my cock. Make me come, Will.”

Thompson clamped a hand over his mouth to stifle a squeak as the younger man moved slightly and slid a palm around a swollen cock in a flurry of movement. It was Hannibal the Cannibal Lecter! He was vaguely aware of the sound of a file folder dropping and pages floating away.

“I love you. I love you, I love—“ Hannibal gripped hair and kissed the other man deeply, pulling them chest to chest. “—you, Hann. I, ah ah ah yes!”

Rhythm became erratic, hands and mouths and legs pushing and pulling, then there were two successive moans, one deep and the other high. Liquid spurted between chests and dripped down thighs. Then everything stopped. Will collapsed against Hannibal. A head thud weakly against the table. Both men panting.

Thompson didn’t dare raise his eyes any further than the twitch of a vein bulging hand resting on a firearm. He had never seen Jack Crawford stand so still.


(Stay. Listen. Beautiful boy, beautiful husband, I love you. Do you know how much I love you, William?)

Shaking hands smoothed silvery hair. “How much?”

“Infinitamente. Sempre. Fino alla morte.”

(Forever. Always. Till death.)

“I love you too, Hannibal.” Blue eyes fluttered as the slender one shifted slightly to kiss a jaw then the corner of a mouth, sighing.

Did he see tears in their eyes?

A sweaty palm lifted and waved from beneath a naked body. “H…h-hello, Jack.”
Thompson shrieked and covered his eyes.

“Oh mother fucking Christ!” Something banged. Someone swore. The table shuddered again.”

**JACK!**

He peered through slotted fingers.

Hannibal practically lounged with a coy smile. One leg, and both hands, firmly wrapped around a narrow waist and held Will against him, inside him. Will turned about three different shades of umber and then beet red before dropping on top of the other man and hiding behind palms, face turned against a shoulder.

The agent sneaked a furtive glance at Jack. If he made direct eye contact, the man might burst in to flames, or turn him to dust.

His boss had drawn his gun, pointing it.

“Get off him and get on your knees!”

“I…nope.” Dark hair on a head shook frantically against a chest, muttering. “No. Leave it alone, Will. Just…”

Jagged teeth flashed. “A bit late for that. And physically a stretch given our age. Seeing as how I have gotten Will off twice already.”

“Oh God.” A horrified groan echoed. Heat reached ears and tipped them crimson. Will slid against a chest and threw arms over his head, whispering, “Why do you hate me?”

“If that was hate fucking, darling, I think our audience—God included since you insist on bringing him in to it—might like to know what kind of desperate symphony our love making creates.”

Hannibal cleared his throat, propping up an elbow, and arched a brow. “Will?”

A rigid fist banged on a chest. “Shut. The FUCK. Up.”

“I hate to disappoint, but without proper lubrication I am a bit too sore for another round. Though I am impressed with your refractory period and how hard you are inside me. Tell me, do you enjoy putting me on such debauched display for dear Uncle Jack, Will? Is this your design?”

Thompson jumped out of the way as Jack Crawford barreled past, gun swinging at his side, and charged down the hallway. He had turned a color of raspberry chocolate. He marched up to the nearest desk a few meters away and pointed at a terrified secretary. He was not far enough to be out of earshot of the prisoners conversation.

“I want security! The warden! And Alana fucking Bloom here right now!”

Muffled shouts turned to giggles and rose to raucous laughter.

“Come back, Jack, you didn’t get it on film! How else are you going to be a key witness in our defense?”

“And their lawyer! Get Silas on the phone!” A demon roared, shaking the walls of Quantico.

“Shh, shh! You will deny him the pleasure of processing a crime scene of passion.”

“Ah hell.” There was a wet pop and a groan. “I’ve never seen so much cum. It's everywhere. Jesus. Help me get dressed, would you? I’m not going to be able to walk straight for a week.”
Thompson flattened against the wall near the door, hand on his firearm, not sure if he was supposed to shoot the inmates or his boss if he went ballistic. Unfortunately that meant he could hear even more clearly than Jack what was going on in the room.

A fist battered a desk, drowning out squeaking. “Phone! Now! Right now.”

“We will both enter court with a limp then. You in particular. Should I relieve you of such a spectacular ache?”

“I haven’t so much as jerked off or seen you naked in months, all right, shut the fuck up! Put some goddamn clothes on.”

“I cannot stand, Will, you will have to dress me.”

“Hopeless, baby, hopeless.” Fabric rustled to the audible slide of lips chaffing and tongues meeting. There was a deep wet moan and then, “Oh god, don’t. *Dooon’t.*”

A caramelized rumble of pleasure rang sharp. “Fuck yourself in my palm, Will.”

Jack swung around and pointed both gun and index finger at Thompson cowering nearby and shouted, “Get them the hell out of here!”

“But shouldn’t I—“

“Ah, ah, ah, Hannibal, Haaannibal. Nnnn, Doctor Lecter!”

Jack Crawford dropped his gun and slapped palms over ears. He would never be able to un-hear that. Or drink enough to scrub away the images of his former friend and greatest nemesis, taking it up the ass while his former protege and prodigal son jerked him off.

"OH FUCK!"

The secretary blushed and raced down the hall. A screeching voice was swinging with the telephone cord. Thompson stared blankly at a far wall and wondered what his chances were at staying at his current job.

“How does that make you feel?” Soft laughter echoed.

“…Nnnnnn…”

"Mute and nearly unconscious evidently. Very good."

Five armed guards banged down the hall and followed a shaking hand pointing at an open door.

“OUT! OUT! NOW!”

Just as guards rushed in, elevator doors dinged pleasantly. Silas stepped out of them, eyes on his phone, holding a black paper take out bag.

“SILAS!” Jack Crawford screamed. “I am going to have you arrested!”

The lawyer started, dropping bag and cell phone, paling the shade of custard and visibly shaking. “For b-b-buying lunch?”

Thompson squinted at the lawyer. He was swaying a little. Whiskey and cigarettes wafted off his person. Wait. Was he drunk?
Jack raised a fist to bellow for another twenty minutes. “For—“

“Is that food?” Someone slurred.

Armed guards grimaced, eyes glued to the floor. Will was led out first, arms wrenched behind his back. He stumbled like a drunk, eyelids drooping, cheeks pink. His uniform remained unzipped, exposing a chest covered in cum and sweat. Hannibal was dragged out behind him, worse for wear, hair a disheveled mess of silver and what was left of a tattered uniform swinging around his cast. He was licking at a pleased pout of a smile before winking at Jack.

“I’m so fucking hungry.”

“We did work up quite an appetite.” Hannibal wrenched to the right of his guard and slid a kiss against Will’s cheek. “Take care, darling.” Will jerked, twisting, until their mouths met before being hauled apart. “Silas, could you arrange to bring that to our cells shortly?”

The lawyer gaped at them and then looked at the bag of Styrofoam containers at his feet. His cell phone screen was cracked. He sighed. He just bought that one.

"I need another drink..." Silas muttered.

"I'll take about a hundred of anything eighty proof or higher," Jack returned coldly.

“I would love a fresh uniform.” Will grunted with a grin as he was dragged by. “And some ice. Fucking hell. Definitely ice. And a whiskey on the rocks?” He peered at contents of the bag fleetingly then at Silas. "That's not in there is it?"

“My apologies once more, darling!” Hannibal called sweetly then addressed their lawyer. “As would I. The uniform. Not the ice. Do ask Will if he experiences further discomfort or any bruising on his cock or thighs, would you? You might also admonish him not to masturbate too soon as it may be painful. See you in twenty minutes? Thank you for a lovely day, Jack!”

"Fuck off!” The man roared, turning red.

"Already did!” Hannibal waved cheerily over his shoulder.

“I don’t t-t-think—“

Silas stammered, lifting his eyes to stare at Quantico practically burning to the ground around him then back at the prisoners. He glanced down at his Timex. How long had he been gone? How much had he had to drink to the point none of this bothered him? Enough. Definitely enough.

One terrified young agent slumped against the wall. Infamous Jack Crawford was heaving breaths, shoulders jerking, and looked like he was a second before shooting up the place. Or shooting him directly in the head. And Will and Hannibal were still laughing as they were led away.

“Oh dear.”

Things weren’t so bad. He glanced down at the Styrofoam containers again. At least he still had food. Was rather drunk. And kept most of his sanity in tact.
If you aren't dying of laughter by now, I did something wrong. My sides hurt.

THAT'S WHAT YOU GET, JACK.

(I'm sure this is riddled with spelling errors and grammatical things. Will edit soon!)
An electric current unsettled a packed courtroom set to the tune of hushed voices and creaking wooden benches. Behind the prosecution, uniforms from state to the federal level filled nearly every row. Agent Jack Crawford sat directly behind and to the right of their lawyers, glancing at his watch expectantly with a furrowed brow. Alana Bloom sat next to him, twisting the hem of a crimson silk pencil skirt and staring at a crack beginning to form in the platform of her favorite Louboutins. Behind the legal defense team, seating was filled with reporters and the occasional curious onlooker. Freddie Lounds stood in a far corner in the back with a notepad in hand, pencil tucked in wiry red hair. A digital camera was balanced on a tripod beside her. Jurors squirmed uncomfortably in their cramped box. A single secretary clacked away on a typewriter in preparation for the hearing with a bailiff standing near. Two heavily armed guards stood on either side of the exit, stances tense, alert gazes scanning the room for any sign of trouble.

Whispers rose to a steady roar as two doors on either side of a mahogany judges bench opened. Jordan Silas smoothed a hunter green tie as he pushed out from a chair and stood, quickly buttoning the front of his heather grey jacket. Three guards flanked each man being lead out to the courtroom, hands cuffed against their backs and masks strapped to their faces. Hannibal and Will stopped short of one another by the defense table, swiveling to hold the other’s gaze. Each waiting patiently for restraints to be removed.

Will stared through the fog of his mask at the vision of Hannibal standing a foot from him. His entire focus narrowed to just him. He wondered how quickly either one, or both of them, might be tazed if he jerked forward to kiss his husband through their masks. Nuzzle against his chest and close his eyes to fall beneath the instant calm he knew it would bring. His gaze stroked lovingly over streaks of white tucked neatly beneath finger combed silver hair. He let out a low breath of admiration. The man became finer with age. His gaze fell to a slow blink of honeyed admiration moving over him as if to resonant the same sentiment.

His husband wore a slim cut three piece suit. Subtle windowpane of shadow grey and thin blue intersecting lines. One trouser leg hung slightly lower than the other. Will looked up. He wanted to ask how long ago Hannibal’s cast had been removed. Did the ache still persist? The older man offered a soft smile. Paisley silk looped in a wide balthus knot against a starched white spread collar. Fingers ticked as the guard fumbled with a set of keys. He imagined running peaked cashmere wool lapels through them and adjusting a drooping tip of a deep blue silk pocket square woven with silver star burst design. The younger man cocked a brow as if to ask if it was intended to match the color of his own eyes.

As Hannibal shuffled through the courtroom, he tried to carry himself with the straight backed grace he was accustomed to. It was difficult to ignore piercing pain in his leg. An unfortunate parting gift left after his cast had been removed. He had hoped in time atrophied muscle would appear less shriveled and allow him to put weight on it. Hoping aside, he knew the bones had been set poorly. He had been lucky to stave off infection given the hacks who had accompanied them on their short and bloody journey in to captivity. He sighed inwardly. He would have to let everyone, including his husband, see him limp openly at some point. He put no stock in how strangers perceived him. He only wanted to maintain the appearance of the man Will had married, strong in both spirit and body. Neither of them had any need for the one slightly feeble and weak boned. He had grown used to
being needed, the pillar of strength for Will to cling to. He wasn’t ready to let go of it, or him, just yet.

He busied himself with appearing uninjured, each step measured and purposeful. Concentration so deep he had forgotten to remind himself the act of respiration required him to exhale. By the time he reached Will, his leg was throbbing and he couldn’t breathe. He gulped in a lungful of pine scented skin. He smiled faintly through a dizzying rush. The sensation seemed to worsen as Hannibal dragged over tempting drapes of a simple navy wool suit clinging to a slightly bulky frame. Biceps rippled as the younger man turned to face him. He stood taller, chest puffing out, as a blue gaze slid over his three piece suit approvingly.

His hair had grown out since the last time they had seen one another. Curls gelled and coiled neatly against a brow. It reminded him of when Will had returned in the pretense of therapy. He found himself as caught off guard now as he was then, disarmed and leaning closer to admire. A tie was foregone for several buttons loosed on a slightly rumpled white dress shirt. The older man hummed deep content, gaze fixed on the slit of exposed skin knowing it was meant just for him. He longed to peel it back to discover if the rest of his husband was now layered in a thin veil of defined muscle from working out frustration.

Will was grinning by the time his mask was removed, unable to hide amusement by Hannibal openly fantasizing, eyes glued to a few inches of an exposed chest. His greeting came out husky. “Hey.”

“How are you?” Blue eyes flicked down, index finger lightly caressing the back of a hand swinging between them, tan lines of their wedding rings long since faded.

The older man linked their hands, leaning forward to place a chaste kiss against a shadow of stubble. “A great deal better now that I have you near.”

“Sap.” Will stared at a plush smirk, thumbing at the edge, vaguely aware of clamor erupting from onlookers. He wanted to kiss him open mouthed with a hint of tongue and taste the spark of desire lighting crimson. “You look…mmm.” He tugged on the edge of a piped pocket to bring Hannibal just close enough to feel the stirring of his cock, murmuring against his cheek. “Good. You look really good.”

Dusk rose touched high cheeks. Hannibal tapped fingers innocently over a leather belt and letting them fall just a bit lower on a backside than what was appropriate in public, rumbling quietly, “Are you hitting on me during the hearing of a murder trial, Mister Lecter?”

“Kind of our thing, isn’t it?” A lazy shrug replied as the younger man moved forward for a kiss, fingers splaying against a waist.

Silas watched as Will and Hannibal inched closer and closer. First by looks of longing. Then a caress of fingertips. A thumb at the edge of a sharp mouth. He tried to avert his eyes when the younger of the two whispered something with a low laugh. If he didn’t say something soon, he was certain their first exhibit would be his clients naked and entangled on the defense table. It was one thing to flagrantly disrespect federal headquarters, but he was not about to have his license revoked after a public spectacle of that nature.

“Can you not?” Their lawyer hissed and shoved glasses up a curved nose, flushing, and ushered both men to their chairs. “T-today of all days? I am trying to read over my notes in preparation!”
His clients glanced at one another balefully like reprimanded school children.

“Sorry,” Will said without even a note of remorse, clapping a hand congenially on a shoulder.

Hannibal folded carefully in the chair beside his husband, pretending to stretch before placing an arm firmly around shoulders and pulling Will close enough to murmur teasingly, “I’m not.”

Silas rolled his eyes and tried to vehemently ignore the two playing footsie beneath the table. If this was any indication of the day he was going to be having then he would need a stiff drink.

*

Time belonged to no man. Thin black hands cruelly ticked on a clock. It was a quarter to three.

Silas had a splitting migraine. Anxiety on a steady rise. He had nearly chewed the cap of a fountain pen loose. He had managed to pry the metal clip free in the twenty minutes after Will and Hannibal joined him. He had read and re-read his notes a dozen times. His nerves were shot. He tried to remind himself it was simply a hearing. Nothing of importance would be decided today. He had done it a hundred times. It was very difficult to remain calm though when his clients kept flirtatiously whispering to one another and chuckling. It didn’t matter how well behaved they were. How was he supposed to take the trial—their murder trial, no less—seriously if they wouldn’t?

Judge Napolatino entered, graying hair shining in the light.

“All rise.” The bailiff gestured.

Everyone stood in tandem.

Then the judge took his seat, motioning for everyone else to do the same, gnarled hands paper thin folding next to a gavel. A surveying sweep of a blue green gaze brought a hush over the courtroom.

Silas set down his pen and took a deep breath.

The two men beside him no longer stirred. They sat perfectly still. Will fixing a wavering gaze on the table. Hannibal watching cautiously from his peripheral. Their fingers tightening around one another between chairs, holding hands, safe from view.

Were they trying to hide to hide one another behind careless bravado and humor? Or shielding themselves from the very real possibility of a dire fate?

The judge pointed to the defense table.

“Before this begins…” Silas stood stiffly on cue, swallowing a tremor of nerves he knew would only make his stammer more audible. “I would like t-t-to ask Your Honor to c-consider allowing my clients to post bail? Both have seen the inside of a jail cell once before. It seems unnecessarily cruel to keep them apart for the d-duration of this trial. We are more than willing to put them under house arrest with armed guard of Maryland’s finest.” He made a broader gesture, turning throughout the room, gaze fixed on faces making up the jury. “Who among us would survive without our loved ones to turn to?”

A few squinted and murmured to one another in response. He couldn’t read their faces yet. It was too soon to see who might be sympathetic to his clients.
“Your Honor, this is preposterous!” A chair scraped as a broad backed man in a silvery suit stood, gravelly voice terse and ringing. “Hannibal Lecter—“

The prosecution pointed at Hannibal. He offered a glint of teeth in the form of a smile.

“–escaped federal and police custody the last time he was ‘released’ out of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. And Will Graham—“

The finger swung to Will, repressed snarl twitching down at the table.

“–helped him do it!”

Silas stuffed both hands in pockets and imagined looking at vaulted ceiling to roll his eyes. He should have known they would pick him. Of course they would. Thomas ‘Pit Bull’ Rodriguez was one of the top five prosecution lawyers in the state. (At one time, Silas had been ranked second when he actively practiced law before semi-retirement.) The man’s salary was rumored to be some combination of the other four on the list. Hired only by the elite or government officials. They called him the ‘pit bull’ for the way the man clamped on and lay in to defense witnesses on the stand, eviscerating their character one horrid intimate detail at a time. He had as many fines and penalties from the court as he did convictions. It was a wonder he hadn’t gone bankrupt. However, the scandal only seemed to buoy his bank accounts and status.

Someone muttered emphatically under their breath. “Will Lecter.”

“Hannibal the Cannibal Lecter was so aptly named and caught because he killed and ate his victims if you recall,” Mister Rodriguez continued.

A few in the jury box gasped.

“We’re still not even sure how many there were.” The man glanced behind him. “What was the initial estimate? One hundred?”

Agent Crawford pinched the bridge of his nose and shook his head with a shrug.

The prosecution continued on with sweeping gestures and a booming tenor. But Silas found himself, hands folded respectfully behind his back, listening to the hushed whispers behind him.

“Only a hundred? I guessed more.”

“A good magician never reveals his trade secrets.”

“There’s something fundamentally wrong with you as a person.”

“What does that say about you, darling?”

“Oh. I was looong gone before I met you. Why do you think we get along so well?”

Biting his lip, Silas risked shooting them a sharp stare over his shoulder. The two men sobered and went quiet once more. He hated taking away what little relief and comfort they could offer one another. He also knew the judge ruled with a heavy hand expecting an obedient and orderly courtroom. He didn’t want any trouble.

“They—“

Hannibal squeezed Will’s hand when his shoulder jerked, a reflex of holding still, as his mind churned and conjured other images. A courtroom strewn with bodies and bloody.
“—have murdered god knows how many people between them since their disappearance over the years. In multiple countries. Not to mention the viscous murder of notorious serial killer, Francis Dolarhyde.”

“Your Honor, the p-prosecution is attempting to influence the jury before our trial even begins!” Silas interjected.

The judge nodded solemnly. “Stick to the facts, Counselor.”

“Fine. Facts.” Obsidian eyes narrowed, hand swinging to point behind. “Fact. Both defendants attacked a federal agent of this great country and endangered the lives of his staff while in custody. Repeatedly I might add. Some caught on tape.”

Agitated murmurs swept through the room, audible scratch of pens moving across paper.

“Fact. The accused, Hannibal Lecter, is in part on trial for the attempted murder and sexual assault of his so called ‘partner’ and former FBI agent, Will Graham. Do you truly think it wise to send a man, Will Graham—a man who has shown how easy it is for him to be influenced and imprisoned by Hannibal Lecter—under duress back to a harmful situation?”

Blue eyes flashed, chair legs rattling backwards. “Does he have a death wish?”

“It would appear so.” Large palms slid against a waist and hovered over a forearm, pushing gently at first and then harder, to keep Will seated.

“Alleged! These allegations have yet to b-b-e proven! He is creating a bias for this entire courtroom!” Silas protested again, thwacking a legal pad on the paper, tone rising. As he grew louder his words smoothed and glossed, unimpeded by his stammer. “And you, Mister Rodriguez, are suggesting it is safe for my clients to remain in custody where they have had their basic rights violated and faced physical unnecessary use of force, violence even, by official and unofficial representatives of the nation? Your Honor—”

“You’ve seen the photographs, Silas! Will Graham’s—“

The two lawyers squared off against one another, tempers flaring, shouting over one another.

Will couldn’t take it anymore. His bouncing knee abruptly stopped. His twitching muscles threw him in to motion.

“For fuck—“ The younger man shoved away from the table, rounding Hannibal, and lunged for the man in the silver suit, snarling, “LECTER. Will fucking Lecter. Maybe if I carve it on the inside of your eyelids you’ll remember it!”

Hannibal wasn’t quick enough to shove Will back in to his chair when he rose suddenly. He hadn’t even enough time to contain the outburst directly after. He snapped one arm around his waist and hauled him back by a leather belt, eyes darting between the judge beginning to stand and the baliff moving forward, hand drifting to a firearm. His heart began to thud.

“Sit down!” He ordered sharply.

Silas and Rodriguez continued to argue, too engrossed to notice the snapping animal scrabbling to reach them.

“His body is a topographical map of Hannibal Lecter’s violence. What more proof is there? Unless your job isn’t to keep both your clients alive.”
“Your Honor, I would ask that the prosecution respectfully address my client by his legal name by marriage! Will Lecter.”

The bailiff had drawn his gun, acting as a human shield in front of the judge. The secretary continued to click away on her typewriter, nonplussed by the turn of events. Two bulky armed guards stationed in the back drew quietly down the main aisle prepared to quell the situation. Somewhere a camera was flashing excitedly.

Hannibal got to his feet just as Will swiped forward, barely missing the hem of a grey Neapolitan jacket, and threw both arms around him.

“He never fucking hurt me, you son of—“

The older man bodily lifted Will off the floor with a stifled curse and groan to move him out of temptations path.

A hand struck out against shoulders then a broad chest. “No!”

“Will, quiet!” Hannibal hissed against an ear, struggling to maintain his grip.

He could feel the aim of automatic rifles at his husband’s head and back. They had a clean shot of them both. This time they wouldn’t miss. They wouldn't need an excuse. They would be put down if they were deemed a threat to the public. His heart began to race, adrenaline spiking. He managed to get Will back in a chair, one hand clamped on his left shoulder and the other on a thigh, holding him down as he struggled to break free. His eyes were storming blue, pupils blown wide, snarling up.

“No! I will not lower my voice!”

Silas broke off mid argument and turned to find the courtroom in an uproar. Mister Rodriguez retreated to the safety of the other side of the prosecution table. The judge was standing and banging his gavel over and over again shouting for order. Agent Crawford had risen, smirking, firearm pulled and at the ready. Alana Bloom was being steered by an elbow out the back by a police officer. Observers and reporters were shouting to one another and throwing questions forward for Will and Hannibal to answer.

Will bared teeth at something the older man just whispered, forcibly held in place by shaking arms. “Don’t tell me how to act or feel! Maybe I would be less upset if he would stop fucking provoking me! I’m doing the world a favor by offering to strangle this asshole.”

“You cannot do this here!” Red eyes glinted down, the older man shaking his husband once by the shoulders, watching approaching guards navigate through swinging doors, nearly upon them. “Do you understand me? Will! You must—”

Radiating pain sent Hannibal to his knees. Cold tile seeped up his thighs and sent him doubling over. He groaned, hands sliding from shoulders, head thudding weakly against a lap.

“No!” Will shot forward in the chair, hands sliding around a face, blue eyes darting back and forth over the slumped figure.

One minute Hannibal was standing, a force to be reckoned with, and the next he was on the floor. His chest tightened. Then his throat. He pressed a palm against shoulder blades and felt the faint thud of a heart beating. What was wrong? Why wasn’t he getting back up? His gaze flicked to his immediate right and registered narrowed eyes behind gleaming barrels. Shrill whimpers rose in the back of his throat. He bent forward and blanketed the older man with his body. At this range he wouldn't be able to protect him. The bullets would riddle both their bodies.
“I know...” The older man turned his cheek against a neck, skin damp with tears, whispering fiercely, “I know. Do you hear me? I know you are in pain. You wish to fight for me. You cannot.” Hands tightened at his waist, fingertips pressing enough to bruise, to force answering comfort to settle inside bones. “You must remain calm. This is not our arena. We are the onlookers of the coliseum. We must let Silas fight in our honor. You have to let go. Quiet your mind. Let go, Will, drift...”

Will kissed the crown of a head, shaking, reply cracking, “I don’t want to. I don’t think I can. I don’t want to be here. I want to go home, Hannibal...”

Hannibal clenched teeth until his jaw hurt, agony cracking open his chest. He couldn't even be Will's home, a light on the dark horizon in the distance.

Silas placed himself firmly between the armed guards and his clients, heart thudding wildly in his chest. He gripped an edge of the table and stared blankly at the clock beyond.

It was half past four.

“Order! I will have order in this courtroom this instant! Or every single one of you will be spending the night in a cell.”

Both sides of the aisle seemed to settle in waves until it grew silent.

The lawyer turned away carefully from the armed guards, palms up, and went to his clients. He scooped one arm under the older man and felt him trembling beneath layers of a suit. His gaze strayed to a corner of a mouth drawn in a grimace. Something was wrong.

He held closer, pulling him away from Will and settled him against a chair, murmur low, “Are you well?”

“No...” A gruff breath puffed. “Please. Can we conclude our business here? I would rather not cause Will any more stress.”

Silas nodded and stood between his clients, one hand on each of their chairs, and held his breath. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Will pulling on Hannibal's hand, trying to get him to look, brow furrowed and mouthing silently, are you okay?

Hannibal blanched and turned half away from his partner to stare in the distance. He needed to refocus his pain if he was going to remain conscious. Will would not find him there on the horizon, lights burning, a little boat drifting on the sea of uncertainty.

Slowly the guards backed off, cautiously remaining between them and the prosecution. The stricken bailiff edged nervously down from the barrister.

Judge Napolatino took a seat once more and glowered over the bench. First at Silas, who shivered and waited to be handed over to a cement cot in a cell. Then at Mister Rodriguez who simpered and glided anxiously back to his place behind the table.

The judge considered the state of his courtroom as it had been a moment ago and leveled his gaze on the defendants. Neither was looking at him.

“I am troubled by the accusations of misconduct laid out by the defense...” Judge Napolatino began gravely. “If such misconduct has occurred, then I might advise the prosecution and its clients...” Mossy green eyes fell on Agent Crawford who was sitting with arms crossed, thinly veiled disdain rippling on his mouth. “…to ensure no such further action is taken against the defendants. I will look...”
in to the matter personally. However…"

Will flinched, gaze pleading at the back of Hannibal’s head. Why wouldn’t the older man look at him? Why wouldn’t he answer? Why was he shutting him out like this?

Silas leveled his gaze with the gavel on the bench until his vision blurred. He didn’t like the sound of ‘however.’

“Given the prosecution’s concerns and both defendants previous flagrance for the law, as well as the spectacle displayed in my courtroom today, I will deny bail and request separation for the foreseeable future. To ensure the safety of the defendants and our dedicated prison personnel. We will set a date for this trial to commence in the near future.”

Gloved hands rose in pleading. “Your Honor, p-please! If I could just have a moment to speak with you, surely—“

Will’s head snapped up. His mouth hung open, hanging tighter to the clammy hand pressed between both of his, to ensure Hannibal was still near. His eyes moved from Silas to the judge, shaking his head weakly.

“No, wait!” The younger man let go of the hand he was holding and placed both on the table, fingers clasped in prayer, struggling to make eye contact with the judge. “Please! I’m sorry. I…”

His eyes began to burn. This was all his fault.

When he reached for Hannibal again, he touched nothing but air and then a leather armrest. He looked up and found the older man was being lifted by the bailiff and armed guard, cuff snapping around a wrist. The older man stared at the floor.

“N-n-no, Hannibal….” Will called, on his feet, taking a step forward. A gloved hand fell on his shoulder and pulled back. He hit the hand away and grabbed on to a sleeve, then a hand before it was cuffed. “No! Look at me! Hannibal.”

Hannibal let the throb in his leg take over, fanning the flames, to keep from feeling faint warmth seeping through wool fabric then moving over his wrist. He couldn’t look at Will. Not without crumbling. Tried hard to keep his voice level, harsh tone threatening to betray an onslaught of tears edging in. “I have to leave you for awhile longer, William.”

He tried not to think about how his form bent and stooped, bowing against imminent separation weighing squarely upon his shoulders. He tried not see hurt and need for reassurance radiating in flecks of gold rimming irises. Or recall the silk of skin, only a moment ago pressed safe in the crook of his arm, growing colder with each passing second. He knew with bitter intimacy his suffering was nothing. Nothing compared to what would stalk Will in the endless hours of tedium. There would be no scrolling letters to burn in the middle of the night to remind Will that Hannibal was, and would always be, with him. He glanced up once, *I’m sorry, I’m so sorry, Will,* burned red on his lips.

“N-n-no. You just got here.” Watery blue eyes lifted, fingers tightening as hands were being pulled apart. “Silas, please! Isn’t there something you can do?”

The lawyer shook his head, looking down at tiled floor inlaid with gold to form the tipping scales of justice. With another pull Silas tried to dislodge Will, wincing the harder he tried to hold on to his husband, eyes wild. He stepped aside and let the armed guard take him. There was nothing else he could do.

“Guards, escort these gentleman from my courtroom or I will find someone that can!”
Will slumped against the grip forcibly wrenching arms behind his back. Cuffs snagged against bony wrists. His knees grew weaker, posture drooping as a roar of ocean water pounded against the forefront of his mind. He let the sound pull him down further and further until he was suffocating. He tried to call out again. His throat and lungs filled up with water. What would he say? What could he say? Except to beg. He wanted to, if only he could find his voice, to plea *stay, stay, please let him stay with me.*

“William…” A hand wrenched free and shot out to slip between fabric to touch a chest, pressing a second firmly above a frantic heartbeat. “Think of me.”

Chapter End Notes

Firstly, if any of these court scenes are inaccurate, I will apologize in advance. They're going to be kind of loose and more reactionary than anything else.

Secondly and most importantly: my absence, I am so sorry. You would not believe the last three weeks I've had. To start off with, I don't currently have a working computer. First, I bought a charger. Then the battery died. Bought a battery. Then the computer itself died. So no working computer at the moment. My car then got hit by a drunk driver while I was not in it. 'Good' first date in five years turned out to be super fucking terrible and dude said I was wasting his time. Few days later an emergency vet visit for my cat. Day after, come home after 8 hour shift, fridge is completely out and food spoiled. It takes them a *literal* week to replace. In between, someone hits my car while I'm in it, just isn't paying attention. And then, then…it gets hit yesterday. So. Someone's god help me, I'm fairly certain I'm cursed at this point.

Please send hugs and cuddles and tea and overall just know I miss you.
A carefully folded letter rested above a heart, tucked safely between layers of a fluorescent prison uniform and a knit undershirt. Looping inkblots seeped through thin paper from body warmth and bleed across the thin layer of fabric. Will felt every word hum through him like a forgotten melody. He had no need to look at it now. Every word memorized. Even as the voice they belonged to grew dim.

It was becoming harder to remember how Hannibal sounded, his thickened accent lost to an echo of miles of concrete and bars between them. He closed eyes to imagine them together, letting the words weave a vision inside his mind, one where he could only listen without reply. He tried to imagine the last place they were together. The last place they had simply belonged to one another and were at peace. He let sky and water form as the penned letter pulled him in.

Dearest Will...

I do not know when I will be able to write to you again. Silas is growing concerned that his every move being watched on his separate visitation with each of us. He has assured me on several occasions we will soon be allowed phone calls. I deeply long to hear...

“...the sound of your voice.” Gentle lips touched the side of his neck. “Even imagined, it grows dimmer with each passing day. Becoming breathless, trailing starlight the longer I live on in this silence you have forcibly thrust between us. Can you imagine my suffering? Feel it even now?”

Will shuddered and moved to the far side of a wrought iron bench overlooking the Seine river winking below a stony bridge. The sunlight beaming in a cloudless blue sky paled in comparison to the warmth drawing across the slant of his shoulders and coming to hang loosely around his chest. The older man drew him close.

Hannibal moved to take balled fists in hands, chin resting in the crook of a shoulder and murmured, “You have not written to me, William, despite how I have implored you. Silas tells me you seem well of body. Are you sound of mind? Of spirit? Or do wish to keep the weight of your thoughts carefully sewn in your chest as you once did to drown? As I prowl the perimeter of your walls to discover a way to let myself in to your inner sanctum. Have you built them to keep yourself contained in the arena which you once lived in isolation? Or to shield yourself from my gaze hoping to catch a glimpse of you?”

Will wanted to pull away. He was still angry with the older man for keeping his ailing condition from him. As if we would spurn Hannibal for signs of weakness. Turn away in a time of need. A well intentioned lie. The kind intended to spare his feelings. What good was having feelings, thoughts of his own, if he was not allowed to even possess them, wield them, let them hold Hannibal up when he clearly needed the strength? He was being childish. Selfish in refusing Hannibal even the smallest reply. Some spiteful part of him wanted to remind the older man how it felt when half truths and the unspoken hung once between them.
He was angrier still for the way Hannibal had submitted peacefully, without fight, lead meekly from
the courtroom. He knew there was no other way. No safer way for them to part. The irrational side
of him shrieked its objections louder insisting they should have torn apart anyone standing between
them. For one more second. One minute longer in each other’s arms. He sagged against a mournful
kiss pressed to his cheek and stayed where he was. He had no real right to be furious. But he found
fury comforting. Useful to pace both physical and manifested cages. It channeled him through every
unending day and night. Muffling the quiver of his bones insistently reminding how far they were
from one another. How much it hurt. How much he hurt.

“I love you, William.” The older man whispered, embrace tightening. “Could you find the strength
within yourself simply to pen the words in return? Even if you do not currently possess the emotion
behind them? I only wish to know you are well. Could you not—”

Stale breath radiated against closed eyes. “My my, what do we have here?”

A different voice tore Will from the vision. Even as he tried to hold a sensation of Hannibal pressed
against him. His sight tunneled. The older man lost to him. Forgiveness and longing trapped
somewhere between reality and imagination. He was transported back to the roar of a cafeteria filled
with hundreds of inmates milling about prison grounds. He could thank no other than Agent Jack
Crawford for his esteemed recommendation of being a ‘model inmate’ at the BSHCI to land him
among gen pop. He guessed a week of keeping his head down and going unnoticed was up. He
glanced up from a plastic tray of food untouched. His fingers instinctively coiled around a tarnished
metal spoon. The only weapon currently at his disposal. He formed a congenial smile behind a blank
mask, rage simmering just beneath the surface.

How he had been goading for a fight since the hearing. Not a single inmate or C.O. had taken the
bait. Here it was. And all he had to do was wait for it to come looking for him.

Better late than never.

Four muscular inmates leered. Sleeves rolled up flexing iron arms to expose crude prison tattoos.
Lifers if he had to guess by the faded grey and sun bleached uniforms. Three blocking his view to
the cafeteria exit. One, the largest of the group, was directly to his right with a foot planted on the
bench and leaning down over the angle of a shredded knee patches tearing at sloppy seams. His
shaved head was covered in ugly scarring. Jagged cuts and splits decorating honored years of service
to the system. The other men lingered in the distance. It could only mean one thing. This man was
the leader of their little rag tag group.

“A young looking thing.” An inmate mentioned, smoothing a reddish goatee beard.

The second wore a wiry scar starting from the tip of a brow and ending at the edge of a smirk, right
eye milky white and unseeing. He was the youngest of the group. Nineteen at the most. Voice
quieter than the others. “And pretty too. Right, Thaddeus?”

Thaddeus, the leader, offered a toothy grin and a nod.

“Tell us, pretty thing…” Another slid beside him, knees spread wide, slightly smaller than the first
man with a rabid dog tattooed on the side of a bulging throat. He had to be second in command to be
allowed this proximity to what their leader was currently coveting. “This your first time?”

Red beard moved closer to the table, balancing on palms. “Can get rough on the new ones. You
scared? He looks scared. Maybe you should show him how friendly we are, Josiah.”
The rabid dog tattoo bulged as Josiah laughed low and dark, slinging an arm around Will. “We’re real friendly here. Aren’t we fellas?”

Will focused on his breathing. Careful to keep it airy and shallow. He forced himself to release the rusted spoon he was holding and continue to smile. It wouldn’t do to have his new friends think he was a threat. He was blocked in on all sides now anyway. His gaze briefly flicked to the left and the right. He was not terribly surprised to find all of the guards except one looking the other direction.

“Don’t have to be scared. We wouldn’t mind looking after you.”

The youngest simpered. “Uh-uh, not with a face like that.”

“Have to promise to take care of us real good though.”

“Whaddyyou say, pretty?” Thaddeus planted a palm on Will’s inner thigh and squeezed hard enough to leave a mark. “Open that mouth for me. Let’s see those pearly whites.”

Blue eyes slid to the side to look up through long lashes as lips pulled in a coy smile of teeth. “With pleasure.”

“I think we got ourselves a sissy boy, gentlemen.” Red beard laughed again, arms crossed, gaze darkening.

“You gonna take my cock real good, huh, boy?” Thaddeus gripped hair at the nape of his neck and jerked the younger man’s face up, tongue sliding through a gap in his front teeth in a lewd gesture.

The younger man wanted to vomit. He would be the first. He would die slowly. He would make sure of it.

Will managed a languid shrug and let the tips of his fingertips trail up the hand gripping his thigh, murmuring, “I aim to please.”

“I bet you do. With a mouth and ass like that.”

“This is a bit public, isn’t it?” Will hushed the tone of his voice to the flutter of eyelashes. His blood ran hot even as his skin became icy. He thrust a chin towards the cafeteria’s exit. “I’m shy.”

Gazes slid from him to the direction he had indicated. What they wanted needed privacy.

Will palmed the spoon and slid it up the sleeve of his uniform.

As soon as he had all eight pairs of eyes returned with a menacing gleam. He could feel their presence encroaching. The anticipation of violence churned his stomach with every drag of their eyes. The bruise of their palms and splinter of their knuckles each time they exhaled.

Thaddeus stood abruptly, growling, “Get up.”

“Yeah.” Red beard gripped Will by the shoulder and hauled him upright, grinning. “Let’s go for a walk.”

The youngest inmate tried to muffle a fit of nervous giggling.

Will eyed the meaty fist on his arm disdainfully and shrugged it off, throwing a flirtatious smirk over his shoulder. “No need for that, friend.”

The younger man sensed the prowl of a feral pack stalking after. Just as he had hoped they might. He
kept his pace slow as he strode easily towards the glow of an exit sign. Posture relaxing as the clamor of a cafeteria faded in empty hallways. Cotton lining of his pockets began to become damp with sweat. Anticipation shuddering from the base of his skull down his spine. He was not choked by the very real danger of it all. Uninhibited by being outnumbered and outweighed in most respects. He was calm. Numb except for the whisper of darkness sliding underneath his skin. He rounded a corner and looked back, lingering at a door with a little wave. It swung loosely behind him.

Rows of abandoned aluminum lockers and the stench of grime and sweat of a public shower room greeted him. It was grey with dark. He let the steady drip of water become the steady rhythm of his once forgotten pendulum. Will closed eyes for a just a moment to take it all in. To admire the room as he saw it. A coliseum. His arena. The one he could control. He would not be dragged from this one. He would not sit idly by as another decided his Fate. He saw all of the possibilities it could hold. Swathed in the colors of his house and sacred name. The transformation of it all dripping red. In honor of all he loved.

This…this is my design.

His eyes were still closed as he heard a shrrrk of a wooden bench scrape across the floor.

A smirk twitched up at the ceiling. “How do you want me?”

Gnarled fingers yanked sharply on dark curls, hiss raking up a neck. “Shut your fuckin’ trap, boy.”

“Now, now…” Will chided, sliding a curved handle of a spoon deftly through slotted fingers. “No need to be rude.”

He turned his face, teeth grazing over pocked skin teasingly as the grip tightened in his hair. The man tasted like decay and rot. As good as dead. His lips curved. He bite down and tore a cheek open with a jerk of his head. His knees bent, shoulders drooping, and rushed at the collective shadowed animals howling in the dark.

*

Hannibal,

If I’m being honest, I have had this letter stashed away in the glove compartment of our car for several months. I hesitate sending it. I’m not sure if it will do any good. Or if I should even contact you. I’ve read the papers and followed the case enough to feel conflicted about who you truly are. More confused still over the men I thought I knew. How do I proceed? Should I even bother? Do I owe you that much? Or nothing at all.

Surely you must understand my concerns. Not for myself, but for Elias. He has been stricken with grief every day since you went missing. He has just recently stopped crying himself to sleep. A small blessing. There is nothing I can do to console him. No comfort I can provide except a rumpled newspaper fished from the trash when he thinks I am not looking. I refuse to let him watch any of the public proceedings. It only upsets him further. He begs to write to you or Will almost daily. He is more forgiving than the lots of us combined. Too much for his own good. Always has been.

I’m not sure you deserve to hear from him. To know him. Either of you. This coming from a man who spent years unworthy of even breathing life to his name.

I have tried to get him to see reason. To leave all this behind and start anew. He won’t hear of it. Intent on waiting your return.
What do I tell him? What should I tell him? How do I shield him from the dangers of those he loves? From his own family.

~Peter

Hannibal stared blankly at the letter in front of him, rolling a pencil sorrowfully across his knee. Spider web wrinkles made some of the sentences almost entirely illegible. Frustration and anger seeped across the page in jagged crossed t’s and jabbed blots of i’s. He balanced a gritty sheet of paper on his thigh and began to write a reply. There was no return address. He would give it to Silas to deliver far from prying eyes.

Dearest Peter,

Though you may not agree with the sentiment…I would like to say how good it is to hear from you. I know we both wish it was under exceptionally different circumstances. Or under no circumstances at all. Be that as it may… I do not believe you would have written if you did not wish to receive my counsel. After all, you have spent several years turning to what I might offer.

Elias. Dear kind hearted Elias. We might collectively agree he is far too pure for the lot of us.

It grieves me deeply to know he is suffering for something completely out of his control. I imagine given the loss of his parents at such a young age that this a grievous blow to his sense of stability. He likely feels Will and I have abandoned him just as they did. As you once did.

(I am trying to offer a point of perspective, not a criticism, dear Peter. You might consider reading the rest of this before throwing it out repeatedly as you did your own letter.)

He has suffered underneath the trappings of grief far more than he has ever been filled with a sense of place, belonging, without fear of having it torn from him. Each of us has abandoned him in our own way. A broken family once more.

You are truly all he has now. Elias may fight against your comfort, but I assure you no matter how much he protests, he needs it. He needs to know he is safe as a storm rages on around him and through him. For his sake, hold tightly and never let this—any of the pain Will and I have caused—touch him. It will leave him bitter and empty. He should fill the world only with light.

He needs you, Peter.

I cannot answer your other questions. Who am I to tell you what is right or wrong? Are they not still vague morals of sinners? If I am indeed considered dishonest, then how might I justify whether the men you perceived us to be are who we truly are? These are conclusions you must come to on your own terms. In your own time. Just as Elias must come to his.

Protect and cherish your family, Peter, they are all we have.

~Doctor Hannibal Lecter

Rapping on a window startled Hannibal. The crackle of a fire and office surroundings vanished one by one. Falling away to reveal a narrow cramped cell. Sheets of thick plastic were bolted against cell
doors. A hastily improvised version of the one he was kept in at the BSHCI. He looked up to find a graying man in uniform holding a corded black telephone.

“Phone call. You got ten minutes.”

A slot opened then snapped shut. The guard turned his back, arms crossed, leaning against the glass.

“Thank you,” He said, rising stiffly.

It seemed like he was afforded even less privacy here than when he had an entire federal department listening to his calls.

*Even they had the respect to listen in another room entirely. Such unbecoming manners deserves nothing less than garnish and fine ingredients.*

Hannibal pulled the cord as taut as it would go with a growl of distaste. It grated through the slot before lurching to a halt. He turned away. He leaned against cement blocks, phone cradled between shoulder and ear, staring out a frosted glass window of green and mute blue beyond. The day seemed cloudless and brisk.

“Hello?”

Crackling static breathed relief. “Hey.”

Hannibal sank to an edge of a lumpy mattress, clutching both phone and sheets. His face cooled as blood drained from it. He tried to slow the race of his heart. It was jerky and tampered only by forcefully concentration of breathing. He hadn’t spoken to his husband since the hearing. Each moment since had felt like drowning.

“How are you, Will?” He asked, trying to inflect smoothed glossy edges over a strained voice.

There was a shuffle of noise as if Will was shaking his head and let out a terse laugh before it turned to muffled coughs. “Stupid question considering.”

The older man winced. “You sound…”

The younger man’s voice sounded like sand paper as if he had been shouting or crying. Coughing heavy and wet as if he had emerged from the ocean once more and was trying to expel every ounce of it from his lungs.

Would he spend the rest of his remaining days regretting his choice to drag them alive from that ocean? Instead of spending eternity together in sleep?

He tried to weave together an image of Will standing in his office. Not as they were, but as they had once been.

*The younger man appeared, slumped against an edge of a desk, thick glasses flashing firelight. His knee bounced anxiously. Then his foot began to tap. His curls were incredibly long and hung a veil of dark over cold eyes.*

*“Tell me you are safe, darling.” The older man came to stand to his left, smoothing a palm over tense shoulders before squeezing. “I think of nothing else.”*

*“Don’t worry about me, Hannibal. I’m safe enough.” Will pushed away and began to prowl the first*
floor of his office, steely blue scattering back over a shoulder. “You ought to be worrying about the other inmates.”

Hannibal blinked and found himself looking out at Will through a pool of blood dripping across his vision. He grew still and colder with every second. His shadow self shifted, coiling, then rage against the bars of his bones for release.

“Have they…” He couldn’t say it. He wouldn't. Somewhere the older man felt himself standing in the cell, fists shaking, voice dropping low with rage. He couldn’t bring himself to voice the rest of the question. “I will ram my fist down their throats and decorate their cells with wreaths of entrails and organs!”

He would leave wreckage in his wake. Destruction. A pyre of bodies to offer up to Will. His hands began to shake.

“How very festive.” The younger man threw himself against the chaise with a huff and stared up blankly at the ceiling. “Decking the halls and all.” His mouth trembled for a moment before thinning, hollowed and empty. “It’s nearly Christmas.” A piercing gaze swung over then narrowed as Will sat up, pointing at him. “Stop. I can hear your mind clicking with thoughts of choking the nearest guard with a telephone cord.”

He was only vaguely aware of cold steel wrapped around his hands like a garrote. If he could have gotten to the man on the other side he would have been dead already. He could see the spread of his skin displayed bloodied and wide against the bars of his cell. Wings. Beautiful and transformed.

“Should I call Silas?” The older man knelt at Will’s feet, taking both hands in his in form of prayer, kissing each fingerprint. “We could have you transferred. Or—“

“Stop it.” The vision hissed.

“Are you injured? Are you...are you...? Please.”

“Well…” A smirk ticked up inch by inch to reveal teeth. “I’m certainly not the one missing several digits and a cock. Difficult to sew that back on without a clean cut from what I understand. I don’t foresee any future altercations if that’s what you’re asking.”

He felt his heart drop, head thumping against a lap, clinging to a memory of how it felt to hold his husband. “William—“

How bad was it? He couldn’t choke out more than a name. He was afraid if he tried to speak again he would either start sobbing helplessly or kill anyone he came in to contact with, innocent or not. Anything to get to Will. God, he had to see Will.

He would never make it. They would kill him. He had to wait.

“I have something for you…” Lips whispered against his bowed neck, hand carding through silvery hair.

He struggled to inhale and then exhale a shaky reply “You...have something for me?”

“Yes. A present. I think you’ll like it.” Kisses dotted down his nape.

“Is it a parcel of wax paper wrapped kidneys by chance?”

Will offered a lopsided smile. “Not quite.”
“Are you going to tell me?” Exasperation wrinkled a brow. “Or leave me in suspense?”

“Suspense I think. Until I see you next time.” Will looked around and suddenly stood, moving towards the rear exit swiftly. “I…I have to go.”

“Will I see you tonight?” Hannibal caught him by the hem of a green denim jacket, gaze pleading.

Blue eyes slid from his face and fell to the floor, whispering wearily, “It’s not real. It’s not the same.”

“Will I see you?” He insisted with another tug.

The younger man opened his mouth. Static crackled and popped forth from rose lips. “…I…I don’t know.”

“I love y—“

The line went dead.

Hannibal stood alone in his office. Shaking before collapsing, arms reaching out for someone who wasn’t there. Then woke once more to find himself clutching the phone with a white knuckled grip and pleading for the return of Will. Of his person. Of his voice. His real voice. And not the one haunting him in his imagination.

How long could one survive on the molecules of breath and blood of fading memory? When the vision of all Hannibal could hold on to refused to even meet in his mind.

Chapter End Notes

HOLY HELL. How I have missed you. Terribly, terribly so during our moments of separation!

I’m sorry it took me this long to save up the money to buy a new computer. In that time, I realized how much I needed the comfort of it, of writing, and speaking with you, dearest friends and readers. How lost and frustrated and anxious I became without that connection.

I will be answering the back log of beautiful comments you have left shortly. And hope we are able to get back in touch and on track so far as this is concerned. Thank you for looking in on me and providing me encouragement.

In my absence, this gorgeous gift was left—it is truly lovely.
http://archiveofourown.org/works/10615776
Will considered whether counting the creak of laundry carts rolling by was the same as counting sheep. Or if he was merely trying to distract from a tremor of anxiety nipping at his heels. Fueled by the insomnia he now suffered almost every single night. Both seemed as equally useless and ineffective in helping him get to sleep.

It was far quieter here. They had been forced to give him a private cell in a different wing after ‘the incident.’ To be fair, he had tried to tell them he didn’t belong in gen pop. Now he was labeled ‘a danger to others.’ Uncle Jack had been none too pleased by the move from what he heard. But seeing as how he had been the one to put Will in harms way, it only seemed fair to piss him off by removing himself by becoming the last and only threat to remain standing.

_Barely standing…_

He glanced at ace bandages wrapped around a swollen foot and ankle. Another set pulled taut against bruised ribs. At least two of the toes were broken, taped hastily together by a frightened nurse. He couldn’t blame her. He had been covered in welts and blood by the time she tended to him.

In retrospect, he probably should have expected a foot stomping and violent kicks to the stomach after biting off red beard’s pinky and ring finger. But not before he had torn off part of a face from eye socket to cheek on their leader. Or slammed the youngest against a shower drain and beat him unconscious. Certainly not before the encore. When he punctured the tattoo over a jugular with a blunt edge of the spoon. Even as blood filled his mouth teeth had found an Achilles tendon and brought his attacker to the floor in a screeching thud, wrestling the shiv away, and plunging it in a heart. Thaddeus, on the other hand, turned out to be a coward. He had tried to run. He had gotten as far as the door, part way in the hall, before Will dragged him back in the shower room screaming. At a certain point, he had stopped moving and making sound altogether.

_I wonder how sickbay is treating him now that he is a few anatomical parts lighter._

Will chuckled then grumbled under his breath at radiating pain as he shifted to his ‘good’ side. Though it was debatable whether or not he had one. He suspected he would be confined to a wheelchair in his old age from crippling arthritis and aches.

_If only I was lucky enough to reach an old age. Guess that’s out of the cards now._

He tried to will away pain behind closed eyes and find some semblance of comfort in the quiet. It only served as a reminder of how alone he truly was. A dozen cells and he was the only one on this block. He guessed he had to be a fairly serious threat for such special treatment.

_Practically a vacation._

When was the last time he had seen natural light? The lack there of had to be at least partly to blame for his restlessness. Every day at noon, two guards shuffled him out to a small bricked in area with a single basketball hoop. There was a single ball. Saggy and entirely unusable in a shady corner. What kind of monsters provided a deflated basketball that had begun to rot years ago? Not that he would have been able to participate in such activity even he wanted to. Not that he wanted to. Walking and
napping was more than labor intensive enough. He would have preferred to do laps to run off some of his pent up energy. It was rather difficult to achieve in an eight by ten foot rectangle. Especially with broken toes. He sighed. His circadian rhythm would never sync.

Poor exercise and diet aside, Will knew that wasn’t why he couldn’t sleep. At least not all of it. He missed Hannibal. He missed his comforting scent of patchouli and warm skin. He missed the way he would curl his nose against the nape of a neck and breathe, falling asleep to the sound of their hearts beating. At this rate, he would be more sleep deprived than when they had them separated by mere walls slowly freezing to death.

_Slept like the dead then. Ah...Hannibal would chide me for such a tasteless remark._

“Psst. Mister. Mister.”

Will balanced on an elbow then struggled to sit, peering over the length of a cot to find out who the voice belonged to. It was blunt, softened by a drawl. From Georgia maybe. He squinted as his eyes adjusted to light. A dark skinned janitor was hovering by an abandoned laundry cart and dragging a mop behind him. He kept looking anxiously over his shoulder as if he was being followed then at Will.

“This here’s for you.” The man insisted softly, dropping something in his cell then backing away quickly. “ Didn’t get it from me though ya hear?”

As the cart and man wheeled away, Will crouched (fell gracelessly to his knees was more accurate) and picked up the pale thing clinging to cement. He brought it close and then hobbled upright. It was a polaroid. From Will and Hannibal’s wedding day. Faint scribbling dotted in hearts had been smudged then erased. He peered closer trying to make it out.

_We miss you._

“Wait. Wait, please!” The younger man called out frantically.

The janitor made a full circle before cautiously inching back to the cell. Will held up both hands to show he wasn’t armed. He stayed three feet away from the cell doors. He didn’t want to scare him.

He gestured to the photo, throat closing against a rush of tears hoarsely asking. “How?”

“Man with the gloves gave it to me.” The janitor shrugged and thumbed warily at his nose. “I said, ‘not worth my job.’ Don’t have to worry bout that no more. Paid me real well. My wife and I gonna finally retire.”

‘Man with the gloves?’ The younger man wrinkled his nose. _Silas? How the hell did Silas manage to get a hold of it? Chiyoh? No. Did Peter...or Elias...send it?_

“Please!” Will took a step forward as the man turned to leave and froze, raising palms in the air as the other retreated. “Please,” He implored again. “Can you give this to my husband? I know you don’t have to, but I...I would owe you a debt. We both would.”

He grabbed a stubby yellow pencil and wrote on the back of the photograph. He tore it in half and knelt, pushing the side with him on it under bars.

The man picked it up, glanced at the photo then at Will, nodding jerkily. “Alright then, mister. Who am I lookin for?”

“His name is Hannibal Lecter. I don’t know where they’re keeping him.”
When Hannibal woke from a fitful nightmare, he found Will perched on the edge of his cot smiling down at him. He picked up a torn polaroid delicately as if it might disintegrate. He looked around. He was one of two prisoners housed on this corridor and he hadn’t heard anyone enter his cell. He was beginning to worry his senses were dulling as he grew older. Then again, he hadn’t slept properly in days. He stroked fingerprints lightly over curls and a face, tears reaching his eyes. Indentations marred the background with raised edges.

He turned it over. A few words were etched on the back, ‘I’m sorry. I love you. ~W.L.’

Where are you, Will?

As Will hobbled down a narrow hall with two guards on either side, he couldn’t help but wonder if people were avoiding him. By now, he should have been used to it. Students and fellow colleagues alike would give him a wide berth as he stalked towards the lecture hall with a faraway gaze and a slight scowl. He always assumed he was being paranoid. But by the way other inmates, old and young alike, were practically throwing themselves against the opposite wall out of his path it felt less like his imagination and more like a distinct reaction to his presence. Active responses of fear. He straightened slightly and peered intently over the outline of his mask, forcefully meeting and holding gazes of anyone who dared to meet his. Those that did shrank away. They knew who he was now. Knew to stay away. Or else. The corner of his lip shuddered a smirk.

I suppose I won’t be making any more friends. What a shame.

Static chirped from one of the radios strapped to a guard’s lapel. Both men hauled Will to a halt by his chains like a dog on a leash. He reeled backwards, teetering slightly on his swollen foot. He bit back an indignant growl. He may have been apex predator of the halls, but they were warden of the beast. There was nothing Will disliked more than feeling like he was owned by an institution. First at the beck and call of the FBI then Chilton’s plaything at the hospital and finally the perfect bait for Jack to dangle.

I’m getting so tired of this bullshit.

“You got a call, convict.” The tallest guard said gruffly, undoing a single cuff and shoving him forward. “Got five minutes.”

Will shot a hateful glare over his shoulder and stalked toward a row of metal payphones. Other inmates saw him coming and miraculously vanished. A full ten booths open and he had his choice of any of them. He glanced about, brow raised slightly, at the unusual pocket of silence around him.

Last time I had this much privacy was the black ops prison.

He unhooked the phone from a latch and wiped it on a pant leg of his uniform. He looked down at the speaker quizzically. His calls with Hannibal took place on Wednesdays at exactly two o’clock. He couldn’t imagine why Silas would be calling him when they had just spoken the day before about the trial beginning at the end of the week. He squinted at the phone in his hand as if he might be able to make out outlines of the person on the other end. He pressed it to his ear, tuning out all the other sounds except shallow breathing on the other end.

“Who is this?” Will asked abruptly.
And what the hell do you want?

He expected the voice of a stranger—a threat, a demand, a slew of questions from a tabloid journalist—anything, anyone else’s any voice, someone else to speak. Anyone except who called out.

“…W-will? Is it really you?” A timid hushed tone drifted a reply.

Sunlight scattered over a tree lined horizon in spring, spilling across his downturned face. Earth dampened by fresh fallen dew and ocean air filled his lungs. He saw a minute flash of content looking up at him, half asleep in his lap beside the garden, the last memory of home sharply focused in a glimmer of lavender eyes.

Elias.

A different kind of pain radiated up through his ribs and fell from his mouth in a weakened breath. “S-s-sparrow?”

Will felt the room tilt. He grabbed an edge of the payphone and forced a harsh breath through his nose. He watched the phone clatter and swing against cement blocks with a flash of the cord. He blindly fished it up and shoved it between shoulder and cheek. He leaned heavily against the wall. He watched both hands shaking. Sweat pricked his brow. He felt too warm. His arms were covered in gooseflesh. Too cold.

“Are you still there?” A tiny voice whispered frantically.

“Why…” The younger man called hoarsely, fingers curling against his thigh. “God, why did you call here?”

“I needed to hear your voice.” An audible swallow tempered a warble of tears. “To hear you. I miss you, Will. I miss you both so much. I want you to come home.”

Home…

Bile filled his mouth. Before he could gather defenses, Will felt a stab of agony at the image of Elias curled up, phone cradled in both hands, eyes red from crying. He sounded miserably pitiful and hurt. As if Will had chosen to leave him. Chosen to wreck the only family he had known since childhood. The only one he had left. As if it was his fault. As if he had more fucking control over this situation than the priest did.

A flash of anger tore through him. “Don’t say that. Don’t you fucking—”

No. He shut his mouth and bit down on his tongue. He lay his head against the payphone, eyes closed, pleading as a knife twisted in his chest. No. No. Elias, please don’t think we left you like they did. I’m sorry.

Faint sniffles began softly at first then louder. Dampered again by the press of a palm. Sharp squeaks turned to wails of need before Elias burst helplessly into tears.

Will slumped against the wall and forced himself to keep swallowing. Choking on repressed sobs. His eyes began to sting. He watched fingers flex in and out of a fist. He wanted to put it through the wall. Or someone’s face. He hated this. He hated every fucking thing. And now his only living friend in the world was sobbing half a world away and all he could do was listen and know. Know after all his promises, he would be the one to cause all he loved to suffer.

“Fucking please don’t cry, sparrow…” Will begged, garrote cutting off a windpipe as his voice
strained to washout strangled sobs trying to loose. “Goddammit, Elias, please. Forget about me. About Hannibal. I don’t want you to be a part of this. Any of this. Okay? I need you to be safe. I need you to be happy. Live a good life.”

Hannibal’s words as he was bleeding out in that alley way echoed in his head. ‘Go home...live for me. Have a good life.’


He saw the last one to call him family. Abigail standing in grey light of the kitchen, cerulean eyes filled with tears, hands at her sides as a gash opened on her neck, whispering, ‘We were supposed to go together.’

Yet another promise I was unable to keep.

Will dented the payphone with a swing of a fist. “Don’t! D-don’t love me at all, Elias. I’m not—I’m not a good person.”

“You were to me. You always will be!” The priest shouted back, something breaking in the background.

The younger man gripped the phone till his knuckles went white. He saw the boy bleeding, praying for a broken family to gather itself together as he wasted away.

As they wasted away, before being forcibly taken from each other, from the world.

He did the only thing he could. The only thing he knew how to. He hadn’t been able to save Beverly. Or even Alana. Especially not Abigail who needed him the most.

But I can save you from me, Elias. Even if you hate me.

Will clamped teeth together until his jaw ached and growled coldly, “Don’t fucking call me again. Don’t write me. Don’t think of me. Just leave me alone, Elias, you hear me? Forget everything!”

Another choking sob sent Will to his knees and he clung to the cord. He should have hung up. Instead he kept close to listen to the sound of his destruction. This is what he did to people. To Hannibal. To Elias.

A harsh voice cut through on the other end. “Give me the phone.”

“No. No, Peter, it isn’t fair. I just wanted—”

“I don’t care what you wanted!” Peter’s voice rose from a grate to a terse shout, fingers and palms scratching static and hissing over the speaker as he tried to wrestle it away. “I’m trying to do what’s best for you. To care for you. And sometimes what you want is not good for you. Why can’t you stop being so stubborn and understand I’m trying to help you? Sparrow, sparrow, come back!”

Somewhere a door slammed shut. Will jumped.

A hiccuping cry answered. "Leave me alone! You're being cruel. I never want to speak to you again!"

“You son of a bitch.” Snarling seared through the speaker.

“Peter—” Will struggled to rise, to defend himself, his actions, his words.
“No. You shut your mouth, Will.”

The younger man did. Nothing he said would make a difference.

“How do you have any idea how many fucking months it has taken me to get Elias to stop crying? To eat properly? To stop waking in the middle of the night?” Fury crackled against the speaker, heels of shoes echoing across wood floors as he paced. “And all in a span of a few minutes, you have managed to undo every unbearable goddamn hour of my efforts. So thank you. Thank you for that!” He suddenly stopped walking and several minutes of tense silence stretched. His voice returned hollow and strained. “Can you possibly fathom what it’s like to have your own husband—“

The word connected like a blow to the stomach. Will stared down at his left hand bandaged in gauze, rusted ring of dried blood clinging to a ring finger. Of course they had gotten married. He was the best man. He promised Elias he would be there.

_The world keeps moving on without us…_

“—blame you for the loss his family? To ask for you and Hannibal as I hold him? Unable to console him. Can you?”

Will pressed a palm to the cold metal surface of the payphone and nodded, burying wet eyes in the crook of an elbow. Apology streaming salty over trembling lips before falling to the floor unspoken. Asking for forgiveness. From Peter. For Elias. Even from Hannibal.

“I care for you deeply. You and Hannibal are family. I’m sorry for what happened to you. For what you are going through. But you made a choice. They were not his choices. Don’t make Elias carry their weight.” A tremor shook through Peter’s voice, the only audible sign of affection he could show, before leveling out. “The damage you have caused him is harmful. I am trying to protect him.”

_I know. So am I._

"And I am not going to lose him to you, Will, not after all we have been through. Stay away from him. From us.”

'Stay away from Hannibal Lecter. …He’s dangerous.'

There was one more breath as if Peter wanted to say something else.

"Goodbye, Will."

Then nothing.

With a single click and a mournful dial tone, Will lost his friends, his family, and his home once more.

“…I’m sorry…” The phone slipped free, swinging to a soft whispered remorse. “Tell him. Tell them both…I’m so sorry…”

Chapter End Notes
(This is fine. NO IT ISN'T.) (We have a surprise guest testimony for next chapter. You're not gonna like it. I don't like it. In fact, I kinda hate it. And am 120% against it.)

Up All Night x Best Coast

You left me here alone.
You left me here in the cold.
You left me here by the sea
Oh well now all I wish I could see
Is you and me.

I don't know what day it is
Because I've been up all night
I don't know what week it is
Because I've been up all night
I want to see you
Forever and ever
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Anticipation came with a sort of heaviness. A burden to be carried throughout the drought of reality. Hoisted upon the backs of men staggering beneath the weight. One carried squarely upon their shoulders. Neither hot nor cold to the touch. Just lungs shuddering as they suffocated on stale air. An oppressive dust settling underneath layers of skin until both spinal columns and quivering muscle stooped and bent to its will. To create the rounded posture of one on the verge of fracturing or the kind not yet willing to give in. The desire of time to leave men both weary and broken. It had a way of breaking most.

Hannibal Lecter was not most men. He carried the weight in a heart. One formed of gilded high walls of fine stitching and imperious detachment of elegant speech. The most exquisite cage crafted to keep it safely in his chest. He had learned to rise and continue even with sensation of stone scuffing every step. Even as arteries strained and grew tight within. It was once a sensation he had grown to rely upon, as a reminder to cast off all he could not have or hold, and keep himself from drowning. Once he had considered it his only companion.

Until swift currents of a stream found their way in. Dashing his walls until they became weathered stones. Slid in and around him, tighter and tighter with every glance of fair eyes and light touch. Filled lungs with flushed cheeked promises of becoming. Etched his bones with mystic designs to divine the future. Then he no longer breathed. He became weightless. Content to let this one weight, of flesh and blood and a blooming camellia smile smudged black, drown him. Finally at peace.

Without his protective runes or the one who had held tight to the casting of Fates, Hannibal felt brittle beneath his once cherished burden of self. Felt it flow through fingers clenched on his knees. Expelled in minute breaths whistling through clenched teeth. It took the form of various hands upon his shoulders. An orderly. A prison guard. A bailiff. Each leading, each deciding, no longer the master or diviner of his own fate. With every one resentment of having freedom and choice stripped from him grew.

Its latest embodiment was a gloved hand pinching hard on his shoulder to keep him seated. Even as it slipped away, as so many of the others did, he could still feel it there, every imprinted fingertip burning fabric and bruising his skin. To bear the reminder of all he could not control, controlling him.

“Your Honor, this is an outrage!” Silas shouted, letting his hand fall from Hannibal’s shoulder. He stepped from behind the table and gestured passed the witness stand. “Look at my client!”

All eyes ticked to the left.

The distinct shuffle of footsteps subsided as handcuffs clicked free.

Anticipation was not just weight of a millstone. It was the choking of balmy air from a storm yet unleashed.

The bailiff stepped aside to reveal a stooped, haggard figure.

Will glared at his escort before jerking free with a curt snap. “I can walk on my own. Thanks.”

Hannibal kept his jaw tight. Nails digging at upholstery of the chair he was struggling to stay seated in. Where Silas had aptly reminded him he was to remain with a jab. He choked on green bile of
obeying his promise to stay still and silent.

Will picked his way across the courtroom with furrowed brows and a peevish glare of determination. The older man watched the limping gait. He was favoring his right leg. A sheer palm spread was visible beneath a tightly buttoned collar. He glanced across the shadow of stubble barely hiding a swollen cheek. Butterfly bandages dotted up a split brow. Swaths of poorly placed concealer ringed yellowish orange around a healing black eye. Gauze was tied around a left hand, knuckles crusted in scabs.

His nose twitched in a barely controlled snarl.

*This is far from ‘fine,’ Will.*

“Would the prosecution care to explain the horrifying state of the defendant?” The judge asked, gesturing with his gavel.

“And while you’re at it, can you e-compel them to answer for the systematic abuse and neglect both my clients have suffered while under the care of the State! Or the FBI for that matter.” Silas growled.

“From what we understand,” Mister Rodriguez said with a shrug. “The prisoner provoked the ire of a rival gang.”

“You cannot possibly expect this court to believe—“

The others voices faded.

Hannibal could hear only the plaintive scuff of dress shoes on marbled floor. The weight of Will, and everything pressing down upon him and inside him, causing him to crumble. He reached out to the one person who would hold him up. The younger man drew near and stared expectantly at Hannibal. Waiting for a helping hand. A guiding arm. A chair to be pulled out and pressed delicately in to. Hannibal remained embedded to his chair nails deep, afraid even a tick of muscle would leave the entire courtroom in bloody ruins.

"Excuse me." Will sighed and pushed awkwardly passed in the narrow space."Or just stay where you are. I like a challenge."

He folded in a chair with a wistful sigh. He stayed perfectly still, head tipped against the chair, eyes closed. His chest rose and fell. For moment he seemed at peace. Almost in a deep sleep.

“William…” Hannibal shook the paralysis away. He forced words to come out flat and monotonous to keep from shouting. He retrieved his claws from torn upholstery and curled them inward to delicately push at a lingering curl on a forehead with a knuckle. Two fingertips glided up a tense throat to turn a chin. “You lied to me.”

Fingertips twitched protectively against ribs, left brow arching. “I never lied. I would consider this more of an omission. Or vagary of a particular statement. You asked me if I was well, not the specifics. Given the outcome, I consider my current physical state a job well done.”

Sliding a palm over the one on his husband’s waist, Hannibal pressed until Will winced and released a soft groan. “You are a vexing creature even now.”

“Curious to know when have I not been? Maybe we can compare notes.”

He squeezed again, gentler this time, insistent.
The hand relented to allow the examination with a sigh. “Not my fault you have a type, angel.”

The older man squinted at a lopsided smirk. He would have added an elaborate eye roll, the kind his Will favored so much, but it was far too undignified to entertain. Even if he had, Will would never have the pleasure of seeing it, heavy eyes remaining fast shut.

His husband placed a hand over his and let out a huff of laughter. “Go on then. I can feel the aura of your disapproval radiating from here.”

_Utter nonsense._ He rolled fingers lightly over ribs, checking them one by one, until he found a knot of muscle swollen above them. _Tell me, dearest, when did you decide to trade your well founded empathy for all knowing mysticism?

He warily lifted the hem of a rumpled powder blue shirt, uncertain whether he wanted to discover the extent of damage beneath. Patches of bruising ran from the peak of a hip bone to beneath an arm. There were no bandages beneath to compress swelling. His mouth pinched thin and white. When he glanced up, Will was intensely examining him with bright blue eyes, head tipped to the side with a coy smile.

“I didn’t lie…” The younger man repeated huskily. “They frown upon exchanging trophies of victims with one’s lover. I asked.”

Hannibal swallowed his response with a tense groan, sliding back as Will leaned forward in pursuit.

“After all…” Will smiled wide, eyes flicking after a tongue rasping across a mouth. “It’s not like they were going to be able to put the inmate’s liver back in. It was only viable for consumption. For you. Eye for an eye, liver for the threat to my well being kind of thing. So you see, I didn’t lie, Hannibal. Not about that. The institution disagreed.”

Intense blue fixed on a pair of spectacles hanging from black cording. Thick plastic wayfarers squared and slightly upturned at the edges. Marbled near the brow and clear at the base.

“You…”

A full minute of silence stretched.

“…need to see a doctor.” The older man managed hoarsely, unable to stop staring at the mouth nearly pressed to his.

Fingers moseyed up the length of a burgundy tulip tie to lift the glasses. “Looking at one right now.”

His heart pounded, palms leaving damp prints on leather. A tantalizing twinge of fingers flexed around his knee. Teeth worried a lower lip as Will placed the glasses on his face. Blushing darkening sharp cheeks with a stain of wine. He averted his gaze to a stack of files and documents he had been studying. The glasses were far from any kind Hannibal would have chosen for himself. Far better suited on a younger man. Will, perhaps. But not himself. He was going to say just that when he found Will paying rapt attention to his mouth and leaning in. All thought fled when a bandaged hand moved up a plaid thigh and flicked across an inseam.

A voice cut through the static. “And what do you have to say about this ghastly incident, Mister Lecter? Lecters!”

Both men froze.

Hannibal tried to straighten and maintain an air of dignity. He supposed they were passed that point.
Current quarters being uncomfortably cramped gave little room to maneuver. Even less with Will nearly in his lap. He flung glasses off sheepishly, trying to ignore a churlish chuckle of delight warming his hairline. Yet again, the boy had somehow gotten his way. It was infuriating. When would he learn to accept Will would always best him and resign to a life of defeat?

Mister Rodriguez snapped his wrist and flung several copied photos across the table with a steely glare. “Yes. What do you have to say about this?”

Hannibal cleared his throat in an attempt to get Will to sit down. His husband stayed where he was, pleased to have what he wanted pinned and unable to break free. He tried to duck out. A thick hand planted firmly on his chest and shoved. The older man chased after air knocked from his lungs. Fingers squeezing his thigh growled a silent, ‘you’re mine.’ A glint of blue commanding a surly, ‘Stay.’ He gnawed at a lip, eyes half sinking closed as a kiss of praise brushed across his forehead in the form of ‘very good.’

Will shot a bored glance over his shoulder at crime scene photos, sarcasm grating his reply. “One might argue self defense, Your Excellency. Got a stern talking to about my behavior as you can see. I would prefer to be spared a secondary lecture from you.” The younger man turned to face narrowing maroon eyes, leaning in to whisper over a mouth. “Or you for that matter. So keep your scolding to yourself, Doctor.”

Shouting erupted on all sides of the courtroom. Insults hurled. Threats made. Arguing timed to the bang of a gavel. Questions and speculation yelled from every corner. The occasional handmade card or red stemmed rose from an admirer sailed through the air.

Hannibal thumbed absently at bruising underneath sweeping eyelashes, looking beyond a slant of shoulders to peer at photographs. He flicked aside ones of overly saturated bodies strewn at grotesque angles on a tiled floor. By the dishwasher grey of their uniforms he assumed they were fellow inmates. Some bludgeoned. Others wide eyed and gaping. Nothing of interest. Not the usual finesse of a design or careful planning. Then his breath caught. His thumbprint smudged the last photograph. Glimmering red against a stark white wall. A single blood smeared heart with the initials H.L. and W.L. at its center.

Will caught the hint of an adoring smile and nuzzled against his neck. He flashed a grin before setting the photo aside and obstructing his view. Intent on being the sole focus of attention.

“See.” Lips brushed against his ear in a low whisper. “Said I can protect myself. Do you like it?”

The older man tensed, eyes fluttering shut as Will moved his hand to an inner thigh. He melted against the familiar pressure, heart slowing to a pleasurable thud of want. “So you did. And it is quite exquisite. Thank you.”

“So stop worrying. When we’re together, you can take care of me then. You’ll think of a way, won’t you? I get so lonely without you.” The younger man murmured, mouth teasingly moving from cheek to neck. “I’m awfully ‘pretty,’ Hannibal, as you like to remind me. Bet I could have my pick for a prison fling.”

Hannibal snapped eyes open and glared up at his beloved’s face. The absolute gall! Eyes the color of mist envied by the Blue Nile. Dusk rose lips plush satin and an impish curve of temptation. Mottled by bruises and barely able to walk any better than he, dared to even tease him about such a thing. He would have him over his knee at some point. His beauty would hardly save him now. He may have been maneuvered exactly to where Will wanted him, as was so often the case, but he had options.

*And I have absolutely no reservations about exploiting this particular weakness.*
Twisting, Hannibal pushed glasses up his nose with a spiteful jab and let his eyelids dip over a smoldering fire. Will bent hungrily forward for a kiss. He gripped at a fringe of hair and jerked back. He held him close enough to feel one breath. Sense the faint hint of skin. Near enough to see the reflection of himself and Hannibal melding as one in the sheen of glass. The younger man teetered to grip the back of the chair, sliding a knee forward to balance. His breath was quick and shallow, following the drag of fingers loosing a tie. Then popping two pearl buttons loose. Pursuing every tilt of a head to capture each angle of the older man wearing his favorite fascination. Hannibal dragged an index finger lightly across the smooth side and adjusted the glasses to peer just over the rim with a look of deliberating punishment. He watched the bob of a throat swallow a quiet groan. He took small pride in the win even if it did require a bit of rakish behavior.

“Fucking fine,” Will licked his lips, breathless. “You made your point. Take care of me now and forever, Doctor.”

Hannibal growled through a gleam of teeth at the request formed as a demand. Pleasure coiled in his belly. He was all too happy to give in. He gripped Will by hair and lapels, darkening gaze following another pass of a tongue on lips. Their bodies then mouths met in a clash.

Flash of cameras popped in the background as an entire galley of reporters got to their feet. Then clambered over one another. Then the aisles. Then perched and balanced on top of the banister to get the best shot. Freddie Lounds was the first to jump the barrier and snap away, zig zagging this way and that to keep out of reach from a rush of guards swarming in to contain the surging crowd.

They would be splashed across every tabloid and newspaper in the nation come morning. But at the moment, Hannibal discovered he couldn’t be bothered to care.

Hands wound in his hair and suit as Will pushed his way in to a lap. He shoved a chest once more to keep the older man in place, lifting on knees to get a better angle. Hannibal gasped for breath as a tip of a nose then cheek smudged across glass. He relinquished his mouth to teeth and then a swirl of tongue delving in. He held tighter, palms sliding down the arc of a back and chasing after its retreat to suck slowly on sweet damp and salt. How had he hungered for the taste in their absence.

The younger man smiled against a crimson mouth before he leaned back, swollen lips touching the center of a palm, murmuring, “You’ve gone and scandalized my good name, Doctor Lecter.”

“I would never presume to take credit for such a thing, Mister Lecter.” The older man chuckled. “It would be unbecoming of a gentleman.”

"Actually it would make you a cad."

"I claim no knowledge or credit for either."

“You’re right.”

They both looked at Freddie tossing her digital camera to a colleague who darted out the back doors.

“I still blame her.”

“Is that so? I feel I have a great deal of gratitude for her timely intervention.”

“Collecting snippets again for your scrapbook?” Will snorted as Freddie was hauled out by two guards. “Just admit you sent her an anonymous email coining us ‘murder husbands’ already.”

“I plead the fifth, darling.” Hannibal grinned, admiring flushed skin and bright eyes sparkling with bulbs of cameras going off in the background.
Will, has a single day come to pass where I have not loved you?

With less prying eyes, he had no doubt his husband would have shed his shirt and several other choice garments. Was it wrong to miss the privacy their icy cold cell had afforded them?

"Incoming!" Someone from the crowd shouted.

Both men ducked as a heavy law book flew over their heads. By the gold print on the spine and worn leather, Hannibal was certain it was *Rastall's Statutes 1566*. Why their attorney possessed a copy of it was anyone's guess.

Flurry of chaos reigned around them. Silas nearly in a fist of cuffs with Rodriguez. Bailiff and judge abandoning unheard threats of contempt to play a strange role of referee. Dozens of reporters still struggled to break free from the group and take their photograph. And one forlorn FBI agent kept still. Jack Crawford stared purposefully at the floor, hand shielding his forehead and eyes.

Will touched the profile of a face. “...Hey?”

There was nothing more enticing than Will’s silent requests for attention. He turned to discover falling rain of mist clinging to the moment of tenderness. Uncertainty wavering flecks of gold.

“...I really must teach you a better form of greeting, Will.” Hannibal teased, nuzzling the palm stroking his cheek. “May I ask what this is? Another injury I am to endure for the sake of your battles fought in your own honor?”

In the midst of a courtroom in uproar, they were forgotten. A few precious moments stolen. When they might imagine they were entirely alone. He closed his eyes to memorize unraveling bandages scratching gently from forehead to jaw. The dot of kisses following after. How he lifted and pressed in to each and every one of them. The ache subsiding. Knowing all he truly needed was Will.

A chuckle pressed to his hair. “Wrong again. A gift. Come on undo the ribbon. Or don’t you want your gift? Hm?”

The older man shifted warily. He very much doubted his husband had smuggled out a treat for him, liver or otherwise. Which only meant trouble. There was something devilish about Will when it came to gifts. Or surprises. Clever and sweet certainly. But his mischief almost always sacrificed Hannibal’s remaining sanity pre-surprise or post gift giving. Emotional well being. Or at worse, ruined some precious part of his wardrobe. The last ‘surprise’ Will had planned ended in a rather intimate engagement with a speeding Porsche and subsequent blood loss.

*And months and months of being bossed around by the little imp as my broken bones and wounded pride healed.*

He frowned at his *Brioni Colosseo* two button suit with perfect edge stitched lapels and slimming double vents of silky Italian wool. He was reluctant to give this one up. Especially now that he only had three in his entire possession.

*The blood would never wash out of its silk linen blend lining.*

“I’m offended,” Will noted dryly, catching his forlorn longing aimed at a star anise silk tie and not him. “Here I am trying to be romantic and you’re pining for that damn color coordinated closet.”

For the sheer pleasure of vexing his husband, Hannibal dove headlong in to one of his many speeches. “How many times must we discuss the dire importance of well organized garments? The
uniqueness of tone and shade varies. And how a man cares for his possessions is equally as—“

The younger man clamped a hand over his mouth, nose wriggling peevishly. Then unraveled his tie and tossed it the ground. Hannibal stared after its crumpled form now lying bereft in years of dust and wax. A growl reverberated against a palm.

Will smiled sweetly. “Accept your gift graciously, heathen, before I take it away from you.”

Hannibal pursed lips as fingers of a left hand wiggled in his face. He gave the nearest one a playful bite. Will yelped, nose scrunching before he began to laugh. His heart swelled at the sound, wishing he could press it like dried lavender between pages of hymns.

“And what is it, dear boy, I am expected to accept?” The older man launched forward nipping playfully at anything within reach. “Your steadfast heart?”

He kissed a crooked nose.

“Your soul’s pledge of timeless devotion to me?”

Nibbled the lobe of a blushing ear.

“You promise of eternal youth and beauty to gaze upon even as I become grey?”

Gnawed lightly on a fluttering pulse jumping with each shriek of laughter.

Blue eyes sparkled as Will wriggled free and replied, “Why don’t you stop harassing me, Doctor Lecter, and find out. It’s a surprise. Not an interrogation.”

“You and I both know those two concepts have never been mutually exclusive, dearest.”

"I'm beginning to think you don't want this."

"No, no, come back. I most certainly do."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Uh-huh. If you are about to launch in to your 'I gave you a rare gift' sonnet, I am absolutely leaving. Mmhm. That's what I thought. What? What are you waiting for?"

"No helium balloons or kitsch party hats then?"

"Oh for god sake, Hannibal!"

Chapter End Notes

As you might have gathered, this new work schedule of mine, while I find delightful and rewarding, does not leave a lot of time for the pleasure of writing. With that being said, I have missed you fiercely, dearest readers. As I finally had an entire day off, I spent it with a cup of earl grey and our little story, writing from the time I woke till well, dream time.
I believe one of you darlings requested glasses Hannibal. And as one of my favorites--right up their with sassy, phantom Will--I was all to happy to oblige. <3 Realistically, I cannot make every chapter of this particular journey light given the circumstances of our two fools in love, but they will have their small comforts sprinkled throughout.

(Which I recognize is not favorable, or welcome by all. However, I am unwilling to sacrifice the depth of emotion or the love I place in creating this work in my spare hours. If this fic is simply not your cup of tea, there's no need for disparaging commentary--it acts as a deterrent and discourages many authors from continuing, or displaces them entirely. We should be here to support one another.)

In conclusion, the fact that any of you, dearest ones, read my work at all and shower me with the kindest friendships is something I cherish.

Let's leave off on this *gorgeous* fanart inspired by TS created by catnapcannibal
Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After some struggle (an elaborate romp of wrestling and brief interlude of a chase and capture) Hannibal had finally secured his gift. Will. He cared very little for what the intended gift had been. He was perfectly content. Pride a smug smile at having his prey curled up and pouting in his lap.

“Now may I have my surprise?” He purred against curls sticking up at every angle.

“No.” Will pointed his nose up in the air with a sniff, reminiscent of their midnight black greyhound. “The window of opportunity has closed. You missed your chance.”

“Very well.” Hannibal drew closer, sighing dramatically, forlorn eyes downcast. “I suppose I will have to settle for the consolation prize of having the ardor of all I desire, the man I love, in my arms instead.”

Tips of ears turned pink then red. “Oh… fine. Jesus Christ, how am I supposed to say no to that?”

_I might suggest you don’t._ Hannibal hid a smile. _But I will keep that to myself._

Will lifted his left hand. The older man took the offering and gingerly plucked at the bow of bandages. His husband wriggled anxiously. He lifted a fine brow. He had a sneaking suspicion this was all a ruse on Will’s part. Wanting nothing more than a kiss to aching knuckles to make them feel better. Not that he would ever turn down such an opportunity.

_I would soothe every single ache, take every affliction that pained you, and bear the weight of each within my own to care for you._

The final bandage fell away. The weight he had been feeling lifted. In its place, the glow of candlelight bouncing off stony saints of their abandoned church at midnight and scent of dew soaked wild flowers returned.

_Oh William…_

Rings of fresh scarlet of slain kings and rough scabs of exquisite purple encircled a ring finger. Skin carefully torn by teeth and nail. He ought to have been angry, furious, at Will for indulging in something he had promised to desist. Then he saw the vision as it would be. How the skin might crack, healing slowly, before its color faded over time. An intricate design far more lovely than he had been able to provide. A wedding band scarred permanently against skin. Will had marked himself for Hannibal.

Will watched shyly through a sweep of lashes. “Well…say something. Don’t tell me you’re at a loss for words.”

His reply was lost to a weak whine lodged in his throat. His mouth shut in a dry click. He brought the mark to rest against the soothing cool of his lips. His poetry a mere quiver against it. The older man nodded with a hoarse whisper of beautiful, uncertain if he had been able to speak it or if the younger man simply saw it mirrored in his eyes. Will began to tear up. He blinked at an answering rush of tears and clung tighter, ducking his head to mop at eyes with a corner of a sleeve.

“Hannibal?”
The soft lilt trailed across his forehead. Will disentangled. Curt hands tugged firmly at a dark suit jacket. The younger man shoved curls in place on his forehead. He stood a little straighter, chin tipped, blinking lovingly down the length of nose.

“Would you…

Will gripped an edge of the table for support and lowered himself to one knee. He cupped the older man’s hands, mouthed up the beginning of scars on his wrist, before kissing each fingertip. Fragile blue struggled to meet widening crimson.

“…marry me? Again?”

Hannibal forced himself to fill lungs. Hold his breath hoping for this moment, this surreal bit of time, to meld with every element within. His breath and blood made up of the sight of Will bent once more on knee, gaze as earnest as the tides that claimed them, asking for Hannibal to belong to him. As if he could be another’s. As if there had ever been a choice. Except to entrust all he was to the one to destroy and rebuild him from within.

*I have existed only in your presence. And not a moment before.*

“William…” The older man breathed, pushing fingers across cheeks and curling them lightly over ears. They shuddered against one another as their lips met, timid and trembling. “As many times as you will allow.”

Amusement wrinkled Will’s brow. “Is that a yes then?”

“Unless I imagined it, I believe I said yes to you the first time and then married you for good measure.”

“All the same. I’d rather be thorough.”

“Yes.” The older man drew his thumb over a trembling mouth, voice soft. “Lo sono tua. Il tuo marito, il tuo amante, tuo amico. Hai preso la mia vita come il tuo? E la promessa che mi tiene compagnia tutti i nostri giorni?”

(I am yours. Your husband, your lover, your friend. Would you take my life as your own? Promise to keep me company all our days?)

A tender smile flickered as blue eyes drifted to their hands clasped. “I already did.”

Placing a final kiss of blessing, Hannibal watched Will lift his left hand to a mouth. His expression sobered. A thumb smoothed over the flawless skin of a ring finger, waiting patiently to continue. The older man nodded. Will licked a thin line up the finger, passing once over knuckles then sensitive skin beneath. He sucked delicately at the tip, lips flexing against its middle, then pushed passed it. Teeth rubbed lightly at first to test the depth.

Hannibal sat forward, running his free hand through curls and murmured a soft encouragement, “From now until death, dearest, I will become whatever design you would have me be. However you see me. Whatever you need. Make it so.”

Lips twitched. Will bit down. A jolt of pain flared up hand and wrist. Hannibal gripped at a broad shoulder and arced his back with a hiss. Teeth bore down turning the jolt to a dull throb. He felt the press of bone as skin split. Will looked up, stormy gaze dark. Blood trickled from the corners of his mouth then dripped down a hinged jaw. A gilded glimmer of rubies. His stomach twisted then billowed with the beginning smolder of pleasure. The older man moved his hand to cup the side of a
tender face, palm staining then smearing red up over a cheek, down a throat, against a wrist.

Hannibal brought a thumb close to lick at the blood, then leisurely swiped the shape of a heart against his husbands dress shirt and punctuated it with an x with what remained, murmuring, “Cross my heart…”

Will snarled at the unspoken trail of words and bit harder. Blood gushed across a dress shirt. Toes curled, eyes closing as lips parted in prayer. Leather oxfords twisted against a waist to draw the boy closer, head leaning against a knee, as Hannibal curled over. He groaned and kissed against the stretch of a throat. With a hum, Will eased the finger from his mouth. Lapped languidly, tenderly, at the new mark. His design. He tipped his face up for Hannibal to see all he had made him, given to him, promises of all there might yet be shining against blue eyes.

“Thank you, William…” Hannibal drank slowly from the red mouth offered. “How exquisite you are to give me such a rare gift. How I cherish all you give me.”

“Mmm…” A sated smile dripped with blood. Will rested peacefully at his feet, head pillowed against a lap as Hannibal stroked his hair. “Love you too.”

The older man let his head fall back, eyes close, pleasure and pain lulling him to the edges of sleep. Calling quietly to gather Will in his arms to tend to cherished wounds. Then rest side by side and make love to him when they woke. He drifted back to familiar laughter filling their house far louder than the soothing gurgle of ocean waves beyond it. For a second, they were home.

The moment did not last nearly long enough.

A signaling shriek from someone in the crowd drew the judge’s attention. “Oh god! Help, someone help! There’s so much blood!”

“Good Christ!” Judge Napolatino bellowed. “Get everyone out of my courtroom!”

Baliffs swooped in to hustle officers of the law, onlookers, and reporters out the nearest exits.

Barely stirring, Will pressed his face against a thigh, mumbling, “Could you all do us a favor? Quiet the fuck down and go about your own damn business. Some of us are trying to sleep.”

“Take these men in to custody! Get them to medical immediately.”

The judge pointed to the exit. “As for the rest of you—Counsel, in my chambers right now!”

Will groaned, one eye opening to glance at cautiously approaching guards then at his husband. “I’m not sure I’ll make it through this trial without sleep and blue balls. Think you could do something about this in the near future? It’s still your job to satisfy me, isn’t it?”

The older man tipped forward to admire lush outlines of a straining cock matching his own.

“If my attentions have been remiss in my marital obligations, darling, I do apologize,” Hannibal noted with a husky purr, reeling Will in by a collar. “Top or bottom?”

Blue eyes sparked. “Either. As long as it’s a good fuck.”

“William Lecter, are you suggesting I am not, or have at some point, not been a—“ The rest of his sentence cut off.

Blue veined hands clamped hard on his shoulder. Then another. And another.
"Jesus! The younger man hissed. "Not so rough! You aren't exactly my type. And we aren't resisting."

Hannibal snapped at the bailiff taking Will from his arms and pushing him to knees.

He received a blow to the skull for his trouble, but not before saying, “Consider it a date, dearest one.”

As his vision whited to red then black, he heard Will laugh before shouting, “Hey Jack! Think you could interrogate us again? We can’t very well be expected to fuck in a courtroom. We have morals and standards. And marble is absolute hell on my knees.”

*

In all the years the judge had been practicing law, he had never had such an outrageous debacle occur in his courtroom. Not so much as a peep from a barrister testing the waters of contempt. No doubt his colleagues had gotten wind of the incident now. He had come up with no better explanation for it than one might have to explain away dried underbrush resulting in a forest fire.

It had taken over an hour to clear the courtroom.

Thirty minutes of mopping and astringent bleach only smearing the floor. Both a rusty patch and acrid scent to burn the nostrils remained of the incident.

The rest of the room was a state of disaster.

Reporters driven out in droves and leaving behind their usual mess in their wake. Littering pristine marble with discarded notebooks, handheld tape recorders, and cracked plastic pens oozing ink.

Assuming they would be capable of behaving themselves, a select few had been promised reentry after an extended recess.

Half the local police force and federal agents had been tossed out on their ears for squabbling among themselves on who had jurisdiction to contain the situation, instead of actually containing it. The judge would not stand for it. Those that stayed sat sparsely spread throughout aisles, neither looking left or right, but straight ahead with hands meekly folded in their laps. Except one who sat stiff backed, arms crossed over a broad chest, glaring at the judge with dark eyes. The slim woman beside him was digging through a black leather Versace purse before locating a bottle of aspirin and staring longingly at a pack of slim cigarettes.

On the opposite end of the courtroom, the jurors had taken the opposite approach, huddling close like a school of fish hoping to avoid being mistaken for prey. Every single one was fidgeting. Painted fuchsia nails twirling auburn hair. Another dabbing a damp brow on a wide bald head. Several hunched to whisper among themselves. One stared with glazed eyes at the minute hand of a clock praying for lunch. The judge had no idea where juror number six had run off to. Rumor was he had fled the courthouse entirely screeching in terror. He had been replaced with a sour faced alternate torn away before happy hour.

“Gentlemen…” Judge Napolatino glowered over his bench, voice grave and strained from shouting. “Let me make myself perfectly clear. There are to be no further interruptions or antics in my courtroom today. From any of you. Of any kind.”

Both members of the counsel shuffled anxiously from foot to foot in front of the bench, hands respectively placed at their back.
“Mister Silas, I would highly recommend you remind your clients of the very stiff penalties both you and they will face if there is even the slightest outburst. Do we have an understanding?”

Jordan Silas flushed from forehead to neck, head bobbing sheepishly. “Yes, Your Honor.”

“And you, Mister Rodriguez, will stop throwing barbs at the defense and learn to control your temper. I will not have a brawl break out in my court for a second time. Act like a professional or you will be become well acquainted with the inside of a cell. Understood?”

The prosecution grunted a measly noise of agreement, popping joints of fingers one at a time.

“Now back to your seats.” The judge waved them off. “And what about you, Lecters?”

Hannibal Lecter and Will shared a long look of amusement, secret smiles twitching the edge of their lips. They seemed equally proud of the upset they had been responsible for causing. Upon return, both had been restrained and placed in cuffs. Each personally assigned a guard standing directly behind them should either get any more ideas. Knees pressed playfully together underneath the table.

"Mister Silas, please inform your clients that I asked them a question!” The judge snapped.

Their lawyer scurried over to the table and whispered something fiercely.

The youngest shrugged with a yawn, settling in as if intent on slumbering through the proceedings. He stared off at some imaginary place in the distance. The older man tried to reign in a pleased smile and wrinkled brow. Approving the nonchalant response of his husband. He absently caressed the mitten of gauze and medical tape plastered to his hand, far more interested in staring at Will then the judge addressing him.

It was no use waiting. He would never get a response from either.

Judge Napolatino caught his dour disposition reflected in the grain of the bench, positive his grey hair was turning white by the minute. He had always thought he would preside over cases up until the day someone put him in the ground. Now an early retirement in a secluded stretch of woods with a rickety fishing boat sounded more appealing than ever.

He motioned to a bailiff standing guard at the back of the courtroom. The man stepped out before holding open the door. Several reporters filed back in. Even the fiery haired one who had caused far too much trouble already for the judge’s liking.

“Since the defendants seem to have no interest in the outcome of this trial…”

He caught a roll of blue eyes in his peripheral.

“Mister Rodriguez, you have the floor for opening statements.”

Chapter End Notes

Because let's be honest. You guys deserve another chapter. xoxo

There is fruit punch and party hats in the back for any of you would like to celebrate a second marriage proposal.
Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The prosecutor flashed a wolfish smile of satisfaction and swooped to the floor with a brief bend at the waist in a bow. “Why thank you, Your Honor. Ladies and gentleman of the jury, as prosecutor representing our great state, it will be my privilege to present to you the facts of this trial. While it has been some years, I am still sure it’s fresh in all our minds the day Doctor Hannibal Lecter ‘escaped’ the Baltimore Hospital for the Criminally Insane. Released by the FBI in an attempt to lure out and capture an equally egregious serial killer, Francis Dolarhyde. A deeply disturbed individual most recognized by his coined nickname, The Tooth Fairy.”

Fiery eyes glinted at the prosecutor, lip curling on the emphasis of being placed even in the same realm as colleague or equal to such a man.

“The agent leading the sting, head of the Behavioral Science Unit, Agent Jack Crawford—“

The man in question hunched forward in a ripple of muscle, frown pulling deep wrinkles against cheeks.

“—never knew that his inside man—one who had worked closely with him as friend and colleague for many years—would betray him. Turn his back on the law and justice. The same man that lead to the arrest of Hannibal, putting him behind bars. No, Jack Crawford had no idea that his agent and friend would plot and succeed in unleashing a known sadist and convicted serial killer. That man sits here before you in this courtroom. Former special agent, Will Graham…” Mister Rodriguez pointed at Will who leveled a sneer in return. “…conspired to help his former psychiatrist and alleged friend escape federal custody. And what a team they made. Vanishing from police and the States for many years.” He began to clap his hands, slow, derisive echoes of noise filling the silence. ”What a magic trick it was, ladies and gentleman. Probably the best we will ever see in our lifetime.”

Will flexed stiff fingers draining white around his knee, cheek flinching.

The prosecutor drew closer to the jurors, voice dropping to a graveded crunch. “This case is not about the escape of Doctor Lecter. Or disappearance of former special investigator, Mister Graham. But about the events that transpired after the escape. The escape that resulted in dozens of law enforcement injured or killed, I might add. But they couldn’t just be satisfied with their body count of good, innocent men. Oh no. On that night, these two men colluded to kill another man instead of delivering him rightfully to the proper authorities. Francis Dolarhyde came to his end most gruesomely at the hands of the defendants, rather than given the opportunity to face a jury of his peers.”

Mister Rodriguez paced in front of the jury box, feinting to move away, before dramatically spinning on his heel and gesturing towards the defense table.

“Ladies and gentleman of the jury, the defense would have you believe these two men acted in self defense. Perhaps try to convince you it was all part of their plan to assist the federal investigation. That they were seeking justice. And when they could not capture Francis Dolarhyde, they were forced to kill him. When police found the body it was nearly unrecognizable. Initial crime reports suggest the victim had been both stabbed by a knife and hacked by an axe over twenty times. The victim’s throat and trachea torn out by teeth. And he was gutted. Intestines and organs spilling from a knife wound in his stomach. The same kind of wound that Will Graham suffered at the hands of
Hannibal Lecter at his Baltimore home before fleeing the police the first time. Does that sound like reasonable use of force or self defense to you?”

A few of the jurors paled. One placed a hand on his stomach as if feeling phantom pains of a knife.

“Can you imagine? I can. I’ve seen the crime scene photos provided by the FBI. Gruesome does not begin to describe it. The defense might say this was a crime of passion. But let me ask you this. Evidence aside. If these two men were truly innocent of premeditated murder or acting in self defense, why then did they disappear and go in to hiding all these years? Isn’t that what the guilty do? Flee the scene of their crime?”

Muscles in Hannibal’s jaw began to tick, expression darkening to harsh angled shadows cast by lights overhead.

“Do you know what?” The prosecutor leaned on the jury box, chin propped in his hand as if he was preparing to whisper a secret. “Opposing counsel will say I misspoke. They would prefer if I said this incident, this murder, was a crime of love. They will try to sway your emotions with a heartfelt argument of two men. Flesh and blood. Fallen victims of unrequited love. They might say Will Graham was so besotted with Hannibal Lecter, he had no choice but to kill for him, with him. So lost to the haze of romance, he had seen what they had done and tried to kill them both by pushing them off the edge of a cliff. They will try to convince you after a miraculous survival these two men, these remorseful killers, ran off in to the sunset. Former patient and psychiatrist. Friend and enemy. Serial killer and federal agent. Our very own modern day Beauty and the Beast. Sound like an improbable fairy tale yet?”

Will sunk lower in his chair with a scowl of disdain, sensing the next words before they were spoken. Hannibal nudged an ankle with the rounded tip of a dress shoe to comfort, keeping his gaze locked on the man pacing and slandering their relationship, reducing it to nothing more than a bit of fiction.

“The prosecution has no such disillusions. And neither does an entire federal agency. Or local law enforcement. The evidence speaks for itself. Both former and present. Difficult to argue with stacks of crime scene photos and evidence that put Doctor Lecter behind bars for killing, dismembering, eating, and displaying his victims. Organs and body parts he served up as appetizers to guests at dinner parties in great ostentation. The very same victims of crimes that Will Graham allegedly was trying to help the FBI solve. Strange motto for a special agent to live by: ‘if we can’t catch them, we eat them.’”

Will snarled something under his breath. Silas turned and placed a hand on a shaking forearm, staring until he looked away. The younger man began to pick furiously at the scab on his ring finger with a thumb nail.

“This case is about a sociopath, NOT a love sick teenager, who turned his former patient—an unstable individual suffering from mental illness underneath his care and abusive influence—in to a killer. Methodically manipulating and pushing him to commit greater and greater acts of violence by drugging him and hiding a dire case of encephalitis and using it to his advantage. A success story I would say. Will Graham, as we know and see him now, is a man of violence as he so willingly demonstrated earlier in this courtroom.” Mister Rodriguez paused and pointed at a smudge of blood on the floor still visible. “And when he got what he wanted, Doctor Lecter decided to make sure no one else would be able to reach or help the former special agent ever again. He faked their deaths. He took Mister Graham against his will, threatened the lives of his wife and son, and held him hostage.”

Nails bit in to a thigh leaving marks until Will stopped shaking, growing cold and distant at the
mention of his estranged family being dragged in to a harsh spotlight.

"Hannibal Lecter made Will Graham his final victim and the perfect killer. And at the conclusion of
this case, we ask you to find the defendants guilty."

Jordan Silas smoothed the front of his suit and rose. Rodriguez collided in to him with a smug smirk. He bit back a sharp remark. He glanced at the judge hopefully for some kind of rebuke. The man stared down with a stony face of detachment, clearly still punishing him for earlier behavior. He straightened and walked toward a sea of faces stacked in their assigned seats.

“While my defendant, Doctor Hannibal Lecter, may have been formerly prosecuted and sentenced
for crimes he committed in the past…” Silas shot a challenging look over a shoulder at the
prosecutor. “I might remind the prosecution, and this courtroom, that he was serving his time with
merit as a model inmate of the institution. For crimes that have no sway or bearing on this trial. And I
might add, the law explicitly states he cannot be prosecuted for again.” He turned squarely on the
jurors, hands sweeping over them then towards his clients. “I would ask the jury not to allow the
prosecutions clear attempt at manipulation to color your judgment or decision, but proceed with an
open mind. After all, are we not taught to disregard the notion that a man cannot repent for his sins?
Can be rehabilitated by the system of justice we put so much faith in? Why then would it be so
difficult to believe Doctor Lecter is capable of change? That he could not feel genuine remorse for
his crimes? Is beyond the help every single one of us deserve to receive if we needed it? Could love
a man he once considered an adversary? The stuff of moral fables or Biblical stories we were all
familiarized with in our youth.”

The prosecution scribbled future rebuffs to the claims furiously on their legal pads.

“Ladies and gentleman, this case is not about premeditated murder of two faceless individuals who
ought to be judged by mistakes they made in the past. No. This is about two men…” Silas hushed his
tone to implore and search the eyes of all looking out at him. “…who despite the most bizarre
circumstances formed a friendship. Found a companion in the other over the years. And in spite of
seemingly insurmountable odds and hardship—at one time hospitalizing and imprisoning the other
for their alleged crimes—they fell in love. All of us in this courtroom saw them kiss, clinging and call
out to one another when they were separated, and display affection with the intensity of men starved
for the other. While the prosecution might like to harp on Doctor Lecter’s alleged inclination of
former cannibalism, I would suggest that the only one he hungers for now is his husband, Will
Graham, now known as Will Lecter. And as they showed this court by essentially renewing their
vows are entirely committed to one another during this hardship. Was it a shocking display of
devotion to many of us? Even seemed violent? Probably. But we are not here to judge how two
people express their love, are we?”

Will shuffled his chair until he and Hannibal were pressed at both shoulders and knees, soft gaze
lifting to maroon eyes stroking over the planes of his face.

“Can you fathom the kind of strength these men must possess to overcome their staggering
differences, to overlook what some might consider fatal flaws, and love the other for who they were
all the same? And not just love. Marry. Till death. Are you, the jury, expected to convict the
defendants because in the face of imminent death threatening both their lives they acted in self
defense to protect the one they love? Something I think every single one of us would act upon if
threatened. If a dangerous killer went after your wife, your husband, your brother or sister, or even
the lives of your children... would you let them die? Or would you do whatever you could to protect
them?”

A light murmur answered as a few jurors nodded sympathetically.
“I would like to pause just one moment to inform this court that to avoid confusion, I will be using my client’s former name, Will Graham, not his married name, Will Lecter, for a brief spell. And his name, Counsellor,” The young lawyer glared over his shoulder at Mister Rodriguez for emphasis. "Is Will Lecter. You ought to write it down or request a copy of the transcript to commit it to memory for the duration of this trial. But I suppose memory is the first to go when you start to age out of a young man’s practice."

Mister Rodriguez snapped the clip of his pen clean off and glared at opposing council. The court recorder stopped typing, painted pink nails pausing on her typewriter. She glanced up at the judge above her for instruction. He waved a hand for her to ignore it. She shrugged.

“My clients,” Silas pointed to Will and Hannibal before continuing. “Defended one another against a man who slaughtered entire families and desecrated the mothers after. A serial killer that the FBI meticulously drew out of hiding by using former special agent, Will Graham, and Doctor Hannibal Lecter as bait. Jeopardizing both of these men’s lives by putting them in direct line of danger. The prosecution says they fled the scene of an initial crime to elude the authorities and plot their escape. But were my clients really expected to remain sitting ducks after Mister Dolarhyde ambushed their federal convoy, shot at police, and killed the driver causing their van to flip a dozen times in the process? Were they truly expected to take that risk and wait for back up? Was Will, an officer of the law, not within his right to escort a highly publicized inmate to safety? As was his duty to protect and serve? Could it be possible that Will Graham was not in his sound mind after receiving several blows to the head from their vehicle collision? Perhaps even sustaining a concussion. And that he may have been cognitively impaired, or unable to comprehend, who or where he was, let alone that he needed to relay that information to the FBI?”

Will and Hannibal exchanged a curious look. The older man allowed a small smile and nod, impressed.

“The prosecution might then say it was upon Doctor Lecter then to turn himself in. Did they consider that he also may have sustained a concussion in the crash? Or more likely…” Silas gestured, gloved fingers tapping against a stern mouth as if lost in thought. “He was terrified of Francis Dolarhyde returning to finish the job. To kill himself or Will. And in the heat of the moment, decided his only option was to get them to safety. There’s also the matter of injury. As a former surgeon and doctor, he knew the danger of blows to the head and whatever other injuries they might have sustained. Will Graham needed immediate medical attention. So without any thought for himself or his own well being, Hannibal Lecter drove his friend, his jailer, and former patient away from the scene of the crash Mister Dolarhyde had caused. He took them to a safe place. To tend to their injuries and hide from a killer who was hunting them. Does that sound like a man fleeing to escape the law or heroically trying to steer his injured companion from harm’s path? Harm that the FBI sent after them.”

Mister Rodriguez leaned over as his second chair whispered something to him, crumpling a corner of his legal pad.

“But Hannibal and Will didn’t reach safety, did they?” Silas asked softly, moving close to stand near the jury box, hands placed behind his back. "No they did not. Because what they were running from was lying in wait for them. Just like the FBI wanted. The perfect bait. Except now, they had no one but each other to rely on for protection. And when these two men were at their weakest, most vulnerable, and far from the help of Jack Crawford and his agency… Francis Dolarhyde struck. Caught in yet another ambush, my clients had no choice to fight for their lives and try protect one another. Even when they received life threatening injuries. Like a gunshot wound to an abdomen when Hannibal Lecter stepped in front of a long range pistol to protect Will Lecter. Desperate to save him even as he was bleeding out. Or Will being hoisted from the ground by a knife protruding
through his cheek. A scar he bears to this day. He was then thrown through a shattered window and stabbed once more in the shoulder when he tried to come to the defense of the one he loved, his friend, his charge. Both managed to rise again and again as they were beaten down, losing gouts of blood between them, to save the other’s life. Hannibal and Will Lecter did not commit murder. They fought off an attacker as best as they could with what was available to them. Is it not our right to defend the lives of whom we love? Perhaps, perhaps…it was not love, for they didn’t have a name for what transpired that night, but something much more powerful, transformative, something we may never understand…saved their lives.”

Will strained against handcuffs and dragged a pinky down the side of his husband's hand, murmuring, "Thank you."

Hannibal twisted in his chair to stare at the hand he longed to hold, searching pale blue eyes. "For what?" He whispered.

"For..." The younger man swallowed to keep his cracking voice in check. "For saving my life. For staying. Loving me. For everything."

The older man shifted until the handcuffs turned red against his wrist, curling two fingers gingerly around a pinky, tears pricking eyes. "No matter what happens..." In his mind, he ran his hands through soft curls and cupped them around a mournful face. "I will always love you, Will."

Will nodded jerkily and let his gaze fall to the floor.

“We might never know if Francis Dolarhyde’s death had to happen. Maybe it could have been prevented if the FBI had acted differently. If they had decided not to put a valuable special agent and an inmate in the path of a serial killer. Maybe Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter would have never had to decide whether to save themselves or take the life of another to survive. No man should ever have to decide whether to save his friend or let him die to do his duty and take another into federal custody. There is a moral obligation to uphold if not a legal one. But should my clients have to face these accusations threatening them with a death sentence for the gross negligence of the government? For being dangled as bait and asked to die for the cause instead of overcome it?"

Jack sneered at the turned back of the young man, brows knitting above glittering black eyes. “I said something saved their lives that night. But the truth is... they saved each others.” Jordan Silas strode across the courtroom to stand behind his clients to show support, voice ringing out resolution. “These two men should have died. Perished from the injuries they sustained. Bleeding out and staggering against one another before losing footing and falling. To face death once more, plummeting to a rocky sea below. But for some reason, be it divine intervention of miracle or sheer dumb luck, they survived. Again. Gifted with a second chance. To discover one another. And out of fear of separation or being wrongly prosecuted of yet another crime once more, yes, they ran.”

Eyes of the jury shifted to the two men struggling against their restraints to maintain touch.

“The prosecution wants you to believe, Doctor Lecter, is a monster. How did they put it? A beast. A sociopath. A serial killer. A man unfeeling. Worse incapable of it. If he was that monster…he would have left Will to die. Given him to Francis Dolarhyde as sacrifice to save his own skin. Or let him drown in an unconscious state after the fall. Would a monster carry someone to safety upon the shore after nearly drowning or battle up a steep cliff side as the life literally drained out of him to get them desperately needed medical treatment? Hannibal saw to it that Will lived. Personally stitching up wounds and cauterizing arteries. Even after sustaining broken bones and blood loss of his own. Will had to live because Hannibal was in love with him.”
Will placed his head on a plaid shoulder and closed his eyes as the scene of that night began to unfold before him.

“Will Graham was not a victim, nor a brow beaten hostage, taken against his will. He was also a man in love. Even if he did not know it yet. With sound mind, he decided to follow the man who had saved him, even if it meant giving up everything and everyone he had ever known. Why? Companionship? Gratitude? Love? All of those things I suspect. My clients were thrown in to an impossible situation. They only had one choice. To defend themselves from the dire threat of a serial killer the FBI willingly sent after them in the hopes of making an arrest. Hannibal Lecter saved Will’s life. And Will saved his. If it wasn’t for one another, with heroic actions and fortitude, I truly believe neither of my clients would alive today. In summary, I ask that at the conclusion of this trial, the jury find the defendants innocent. The state has not met its burden of proof and we would ask for a not guilty verdict. Thank you.”

The judge cleared his throat with a solemn nod. “Now that the court has heard both opening statements from prosecution and defense, we will continue. Mister Rodriguez?”

“Your Honor, the prosecution would like to call its first witness…” A chair screeched across the floor as the prosecutor stood, fingertips poised on the desk in front of him. He straightened gaudy diamond cuff links, holding out for a dramatic pause. “…Father Elias Svendsen.”

Will Lecter jerked his head up, mouth hanging open, color draining from his face. “Like hell you will!”

Chapter End Notes

I hope Rodriguez ends up roasting over an open pit fire before all this is over. That's how much I dislike him. : < Please feel free to submit recipes (or shout your general dislike) for his demise below!

Also the return of our little bird. I am *extremely* unhappy about this. For so many reasons.
Chapter 30

Will tried to jump to his feet to protest, blue eyes wild. He hissed at the restraints binding his wrists to arm rests. The tap tap tap of chair legs on a floor grew louder as he tried to jerk free. Red scoured from wrist to forearm as he twisted. He gripped arms of the chair an attempt to drag it along with him, ignoring all shouts and pleas to stay calm. He would not stay calm. He was not calm. He was farthest he had ever been from a quieting stream and if Hannibal even suggested it he was going to scream!

Hannibal shouted at Silas who was gripping a file shoved in to his hands by the prosecution. “What have you done!”

He lunged to the side. His chair tipped. He began to fall. He braced for impact. For the snap of a wrist bone setting him free. A curse died on his lips as fingernails swiped the back of his neck and gripped his collar. Will was forcibly shoved back down, chair and all, by the guard standing watch at his side. His stomach plummeted with the motion, wrenching violently from a bought of nausea. Swinging doors whooshed. He scrabbled beneath a bruising hold, craning to see down the aisle. He blinked furiously against bursting bulbs of cameras going off. White fog and spots of red lighting filtered in.

“Quiet down! That’s enough.” The judge crowed from his bench. “Everyone take their seats immediately!”

He was drowned out by voices. Ignored in favor of sating curiosity.

Will didn’t feel Hannibal touch his arm as a cold sweat broke out across his skin. Couldn’t hear his plea of please, Will, please breathe as the pound of his heart grew deafening. His vision swam through negative space as reporters folded out of view. He began to shake.

They were bluffing. They had to be bluffing. They couldn’t have found him. Will and Hannibal had been captured a continent away. They had been careful. Mindful of their movements throughout the years.

But if we were so careful, why didn’t we realize we were being followed? We wouldn’t have gotten caught. None of this would have happened.

Squeezing eyes shut, Will tried to gain control of breathing rasping from his lungs. His vision tracked behind eyelids, pulling out fragments of images and piecing together the evidence they had been shown. Photographs. Elias and Peter had been in some of them. Neither had a record. They wouldn’t be in the system. Peter had been erased years ago. They couldn’t track a ghost. Their cell phones were the only other existing link between them. The four of them exchanged them for new models and numbers every few months. They had been instructed to immediately dispose of their phones if Will and Hannibal went missing. To lay low. Not to look for them. Live off the money Hannibal had set up to be deposited in the sparrow’s account. Strict instructions given. To be carried out by his accountant in the event of not checking in after several months.

How the fuck did they find him then?

His insides knotted. Was their home, the only refuge they had truly known, a crime scene roped off
by garish yellow tape? Had they displaced the two men that needed the safety it provided the most once more? Without shelter, without means, without hope.

How? How did they know where to look?

*Did you come looking for us, Elias?*

He wrenched his neck, trying to free himself from a buttoned collar constricting his air. He couldn’t breathe. Handcuffs rattled as his panic crested. They were too tight. He was too closed in. Everyone was too close. Too close. There wasn’t enough room.

“*Please!*” Someone called. “Free one of his hands! He is having an anxiety attack. Silas!”

“My client isn’t a flight risk, Your Honor! I implore you!”

Another voice whispered through darkness tunneling his vision. “*I am not going to lose him to you, Will, not after all we have been through. Stay away from him. From us.*”

*I tried. I tried to keep him from this, from us. Not the priest.* He shucked a hand up and down his knees to push at chills running through his body, feeling the ghost of Hannibal chasing after to hold his hand, hold him still, keep him present. *Anyone, but the priest. Elias…* He saw the spark of dancing lilac eyes against pale skin from a memory of a spring day turned grey by pouring rain.

Ghost of fair skin shifted across the after images of bursting light receding. He caught the glimpse of a dainty rose gold wedding band twirling anxiously on a thin finger. Satin crème piping of linen trousers bunched in a trembling fist then moved to tuck wavy strands behind a shell ear tipped in freshwater pearls. A glimmer of a cross sent the back of a hand against his mouth to stifle a curse. Lashes blinked recognition, searching in the direction of the sound. Startled pupils dilated to pins of midnight crystallized inside amethyst.

Elias emerged from behind an armed escort in a fading light of morning sun streaming through rain clouds at dawn. A simple light weight suit the color of dove feathers draped on his delicate form. Sprigs of lavender were pinned to his lapel with a thin ribbon. His arms tightly pressed to his sides to make himself smaller, desperate to take up as a little space among strangers as possible. He pushed frantically at his hair once more, strands falling free to linger at the curve of a throat. Will and Hannibal were not more than five feet from him. He took a step forward and froze, quivering as he fought the impulse to run towards them for an embrace. Diamonds clung to corners of drooping eyes. He touched the cross against a pale blue v-neck sweater as sadness furrowed his brow. Near enough to see them, but not close enough to touch. Dawn of understanding stiffened a tulip mouth.

“You know now, don’t you? You may never reach out to hold either of us again. Except in a fitful sleep of dreams.”

Will shook his head, paling as his limbs succumbed to the struggle, and he sank defeated, all his fight coming out in a tearful whisper still hoping to expel the vision. “Sparrow?”

Praying for once the tricks of his imagination were just that. A trick. A cruel trick. He wanted to beg ‘take flight, go, disappear.’ Because he couldn’t be real. Not here.

*They’ll crucify him on the stand.*

Doors at the end of the courtroom began to swing. In and out. In and out.

*Thwum, thwum, thwum.*
The crowd of people faded one by one. Elias turned to mist with a sad smile. In the priest’s place a white stag drifted along the banks of a stream like an apparition. Green tipped cloves and lilies wove up albino antlers. Another set of heavy hooves echoed eerily in the distance. Black antlers ducked in on the fourth swing of a door. Sparks of fire and smoke trailing off sharpened points. A sleek body of gleaming feather and fur rippled in to view. Grey plumed from a velvety muzzle. Dark unblinking eyes searched the room. The shadow of the Ravenstag trickled after it like oil dispersing and gathering on foaming waves rushing over stone. It dissolved for a moment before reappearing behind the shimmer of pure white.


The white deer lifted its head, soft eyes bright from sun reflected in the water. Elias reappeared and moved to come to him. With a stamp of hooves, the Ravenstag bent its head and lunged. The priest cried out in pain. Antlers impaled his small frame, breaking bones and sliding between ribs in a gush of blood. He reached for a cross, holding tight until streaks of red pooled in his palm and ran down his wrists with a weak plea of Will’s name. Shaking hands clutched at antlers protruding from flesh as he was lifted. A gaping hole tore open the frail chest. Another cry for mercy pierced the air. Lilac eyes rolled in to the back of a skull. Elias slumped, helplessly suspended in a mist of red rising from the floor and pooling against the ceiling in a river of red.

*

Hannibal caught Silas by the wrist and yanked him down to eye level, hissing, “What have you done!”

“D-d-doctor Lecter!” The lawyer lifted gloved palms defensively. “I swear I did not know! I did everything you asked t-to the letter!”

“Evidently…” Red eyes glowed. “…not well enough!”

Metal grated vivid pink and red as Hannibal wrenched at cuffs binding his hands. Barely able to touch a violently shaking arm with a glance of fingertips. It was enough to feel sweat then gooseflesh breaking out over every visible inch of skin. Will became white then grey, eyes glazing over as he slipped from the present.

He snarled up at the guard. “Take your hands off him. Please! Free one of his hands! He is having an anxiety attack, Silas! You have to do something.”

Silas pawed and pushed at the two men in charge of them. “He c-cannot breathe! Give him some air already!” The lawyer turned to the judge. “My client isn’t a flight risk, Your Honor! I implore you!”

“Please, Will,” The older man called sharply, hoping the sound of his voice might bring him back before anxiety crested and shock set in. “Please breathe. Can you do that for me? Do you hear the melody of the stream calming you?”

Expressions twitched across a dark brow. Confusion. Anger. Guilt. Remorse. Devastating loss. Struck mute by the sight beyond. The loom of a shadowy stag reflected as the bloom of irises wilted. He sniffed at the air. Sweet, fevered heat reached him. His husband was burning from the inside out. His breathing turned to panicked wheezes of pain. Will was terrified. By what was real and what he imagined. Desperate to exorcise both with murmured prayer as if ghosts had come to haunt him once more.
And perhaps they have.

Guards stooped on either side and freed them of their restraints. The younger man mumbled frantically, sluggishly rising to walk across the courtroom toward whatever called to him in fevered dream. The older man caught Will as his knees gave out and lowered him to the chair.

He pulled him close, lips sealing over a threading pulse and breathed, “Stay here. Whatever you see…it isn’t real. Darling, this…” He flattened a sweating palm beneath his, over his beating heart. “This is real.”

“Sparrow?” A plaintive voice whispered.

“No, Will.” He cradled a damp brow against his chest. “I have you. I’m here.”

Hannibal lifted his eyes from the crumpled figure and glimpsed a slim silhouette ducking to hide from encroaching cameras. He held Will close, palms sliding over his ears to drown out the noise around him. Elias came in to view, shoulders slumped, rose gold chain cutting white across fingers as he reeled it close for protection. His jaw tightened until it ached. The young man’s skin seeped color. A translucent cherry blossom sinking in a muddied puddle. He curled in like a wilting lily, hands sliding around his waist, to soothe trembling. He looked passed the crowd toward the exit. Where was Peter?

Or do you only espouse your devotions to care for family as the well of ink dries? Abandoning them to the wolves when they are dragged off to the den to be devoured?

"Do something, Silas! Or I will!” Hannibal snarled.

And I assure you I will leave mangled bodies in my wake.

He watched Silas try to push his way through the crowd to reach the priest only to be swept by the current of bodies over and over again in vain.

Journalists, cameramen, and reporters surged forward in a flash of light and shouts.

“Excuse me, excuse me! Over here.”

“No! No! Father, Father! Look this way!”

A shrill voice drowned out the rest as one reporter pushed their way forward. “Freddie Lounds for Tattle Crime. Can you tell us did the Lecter Murder Husbands invite you in to their nest as a lover or were you one of their intended victims that got away?”

A handful of other reporters chimed in one after the other. Freddie bounced around in the background trying to disguise her voice to interject with more questions.

“Did they try to eat you?”

"Father! Can you tell us how you escaped their clutches?”

“Or do they prefer to eat you out instead?”

"Are you really a man of God?”

“What is your relationship to the Lecters?”

"Are you in love with them?”
"Are you sleeping with them?"

"Is it a love triangle?"

"Does that mean Hannibal Lecter has learned to share Will with others without needing to slit their throats or dissect them? Or are you just keen to pleasure, I mean please, them both?"

“Father, Father! Over here! Do you condone what the defendants are accused of?"

Elias wrapped arms around himself, hunching forward as strangers crowded in, timidly pleading, “Please. I don’t have anything to say.” He hugged a crinkled sealed envelope to his chest, light sheen of sweat appearing on his forehead, paling. “Let me through.”

“Tell us…” Freddie Lounds pushed her way to the front and thrust a recorder forward, green eyes sparking. “Are you afraid to be seen in court today, Father Svendsen? Afraid for your life? Or do you find serial killers and violence to be more of a turn on?"

“HEY!” Someone shouted from the back of the courtroom, doors swinging in their wake.

Dress shoes hammering across marble sent reporters dodging and diving for the safety of benches. Tightly combed blonde hair gleamed in the light above the crowd. The person advancing snarled. A cameraman dove across the aisle to a group of police with a frightened yelp. Piercing gray eyes zeroed in on the last reporter standing her ground. Two armed guards were shoved to opposite sides of the aisle. A looming tower of a man in a rumpled suit stalked forward, fists swinging at his sides, half smoked cigarette smoldering and nearly bitten in half between bared teeth. The knees of his trousers were caked in dried mud.

Elias turned toward the disturbance. He dropped the envelope in his arms. His knees buckled.

Ah. At last. Hannibal allowed tense muscles to relax a fraction. A smirk twitched on his lips. He was in for treat. He will not take kindly to you attempting to cage his song bird, Miss Lounds.

“Bon après-midi, mari.” A fiery bud glowed in the reflection of silver mirrored aviators as burning smoke breathed, filtering out in a silvery hiss to veil lavender eyes.

(Good afternoon, husband. How goes it?)

The priest said nothing. Peter and Elias looked at one another blankly as if they had never met. Both their eyes were swollen and red. A small hand pressed to a wrist and then withdrew as if struck by static electricity. Peter froze for a second, fingers twitching at his sides as he looked toward the ceiling and released a smoky breath. Mumbling a curse, Peter got on his knees and picked up the envelope. Elias drew a knuckle timidly down the profile of a face before sliding fingers through hair. Peter stopped breathing. He buried his face and threw both arms around a delicate frame, embracing the boy until they both trembled with relief. They parted slowly, carefully, by measured degrees of separation. Lilac eyes drooped as the priest sniffled, holding tightly on to his hand.

A camera went off directly to their right.

Peter slowly wheeled around, blood shot eyes raking threateningly from tips of spotted boots to the last strand of red curls on a head. He sneered at the woman. He inhaled and spit embers of a cigarette at her feet in disdain. He drew back broad shoulders and straightened to his full height. He snapped the hem of a dark navy suit jacket wrinkled by what looked like hours of wear, yellow staining the collar and cuffs from copious amounts of nicotine.

Even at a distance, Hannibal was certain he scented an odd mix of aftershave laced with cheap red
wine and stale brandy.

Peter moved in front of Elias to shield him and growled. “I will politely ask you not to photograph either of us, Miss…”

“Miss Lounds. Freddie, if you like.” Freddie tilted her head back to stare defiantly up at the man looming several feet above her and offered a sweet smile. “And who might you be?”

Peter bent at the waist, lip curling, thick accent grinding between teeth. “His fucking husband!”

A cameraman in a baseball cap emblazoned with a logo reading *Tattle Crime* adjusted a zoom with a whirl of a lens, hovering just behind the reporter to capture Elias clinging to the hem of Peter’s jacket, cautiously peeking.

Grey eyes sliced up. “Get that thing out of his fucking face before I take it from you, goddamn vulture.”

Freddie tipped her head to the side, hand on her hip, fair brow arching. “And why would he want to do that? Something you have to hide, Mister…? What is your name?” She tapped a key on a recorder and held it in front of his face. “For the record.”

Hannibal sucked in a breath. His gaze darted from aisle to aisle. He counted three individuals with cameras, seven respected journalists, three anchormen, and one red headed soufflé that didn’t know when to keep her pretty mouth shut.

It’s one thing for her to splash Will and I across every tabloid on the East Coast. We have no say in the matter. But if Miss Lounds started digging… His grip tightened on sagging shoulders. If anyone were to recognize them. She might expose Peter and Elias to the very monsters he has spent years hiding from. If you wish to stay in favor, you and I are going to have to converse at length about boundaries, Miss Lounds.

Peter tracked another bold reporter inching forward from behind with an Android cell phone, microphone stamped with an acronym of *CBS*. Cool eyes flicked from camera to camera then glowered down at the green eyed women waiting with pursed lips. He guided Elias carefully in front of him, wrapping an arm around to shield his face. It was all he could do to keep him out of line of sight.

“I won’t ask you again…” The man warned, aviators flashing at a baseball cap. “Stay the fuck away from my husband.”

Baseball cap snickered. “This is America, buddy. It’s called freedom of the press. We can film—“

The rest of his sentence cut off in a shriek.

In a blur of movement, Peter tore the video camera from hands and pitched it. It sailed over people scurrying to take cover. Glass and buttons cracked on impact against the far wall. It came to its final resting place sliding beneath a bench. The cameraman’s mouth fell open, staring at Peter then at the damage, before diving after what remained.

“In my country, we call that consequences for failure to follow explicit direction, *morceau de merde,*” Peter spat, flipping off the man on his knees.

(Piece of shit.)

In spite of the circumstances, Hannibal beamed. He couldn't have been prouder. He considered this a
tremendous encore to his and Will's performance earlier in the day.

Elias whimpered softly and Peter drew him back to his embrace, gentling the tone of his voice. “I'm here. They're not going to bother you anymore, little one.” Glinting eyes peered over bronzed waves, searching blanching faces in the courtroom in challenge. “Now are you? Not if they value their pathetic reputations.” He shot an icy glare at the reporter with the microphone. "Not unless they want to be dealt with accordingly."

"S-s-sorry, sir!" The CBS reporter dropped his cellphone on the floor and scrabbled to his seat.

“Who do you think you are! That was company property! I demand you reimburse me for the cost of the equipment and pay for the emotional distress you inflicted on Kenneth!” Green eyes gaped after her employee pawing at equipment as if it would salvage either footage or shattered parts. "We have every right to be here!"

Peter used the distraction to snatch the tape recorder from the woman’s hands. Freddie gasped and went to jump for it. She looked like a small cat trying to climb an oak tree. He let it drop. It landed on the ground with a whine and a thwack. She dropped to her knees to retrieve it. He crushed it with the heel of a black suede boot until the plastic casing cracked and the whirring tape began to unravel.

It was the most beautiful scene of destruction and retribution seen in years. Hannibal nearly stood and applauded.

Peter kicked the broken recorder towards the doors he had entered and tucked the priest shivering from fright inside layers of a peach skin suit, growling down, “You want something for your record, Miss Lounds? Go fuck yourself. No more goddamn questions."

He shoved past the woman and took the priest with him. She stared after them, both impressed and horrified.

Elias rubbed smarting eyes with delicate lace edged sleeves, murmuring, “I thought you weren’t coming. You said you weren’t coming.” Long lashes fluttered over wide eyes lifting. “You made me get on the plane alone. I thought…” Thin fingers balled to fists. “You said it was too dangerous! You s-s-said I didn’t love you.”

“I never said that!” Peter shifted, shrugging weight of guilt from his shoulders, gruffly replying, “I am a shit husband. Not a complete fuck up of a man. There is a difference. Though I expect you to give me credit for neither.” He pulled the boy to a stop, wincing when he kept his back turned and stared at the ground. He raked nails through hair, loosing several strands from the bun coiled tight at the base of his neck. “Sparrow, I’m sorry. It was wrong. I fucked up. And I am sorry.”

The priest chewed his lower lip, stiffening. “Then why did you do it?”

“I didn’t…” The older man sighed. He snapped aviators off and slid them inside a breast pocket. He turned the boy in his arms and stooped to be at eye level with him, thumb brushing across a sullen mouth. “It isn’t safe for me to be here. And I didn’t think you would actually leave me, Elias. Not for them. And then you got on that fucking plane and I…” Need laced with fear shook his voice. He pressed a delicate ring to his lips, eyes closing as Elias slid a hand down his arm, fingers threading together. “Do you have any idea what I went through to get here? Please don’t ever do that again. I don’t want to lose you. Not a second time.”

“You shouldn’t have let go. You shouldn’t have made me choose! It wasn’t fair,” Elias protested, wrapping arms around his neck to be lifted on to toes and held. “You won’t lose me. We’re safe here.”
A thread of fear pitched to a whisper. “You don’t know that.”

Peter found Hannibal watching them from afar. Their eyes met, steely grey and fiery red. Peter grimaced, expression blackening once more. His arm tightened around the priest’s waist, storm gathering in his eyes as if to say ‘I promised to keep him safe. You promised to keep him out of this. Now you have jeopardized all of us.’

*I’m sorry, Peter.*

The older man was the first to look away, but not before Elias caught sight of him. He watched the soft doe skinned young man freeze in the middle of the aisle, caught in the cross hairs of sacrificing his good name or endangering the man he loved to save them, entirely unaware of the danger. Stranded between where he had come from and where he was being forced to go. The priest rushed forward to run to them. Peter clamped a hand on his shoulder and squeezed to keep him still. His nose twitched, longing to reunite and concern filling lilac eyes.

Hannibal slumped wearily and jostled Will half unconscious against his chest, kissing a temple. The one he loved clinging to him for protection and their gentle hearted companion looking to him for guidance. He stared at handcuffs swinging on his chair, fury tightening his lungs and hissing through nostrils. He made a vow within himself to protect them.

By any means necessary.

*My family will not be lead to slaughter here.*

“Come along.” Peter tugged Elias reluctantly, nodding towards a bench several aisles behind Will and Hannibal. “The sooner we get this over with, the sooner we can go home.” He sagged against the bench, arm encircling a smaller frame to hold him with a confidence he did not feel. He watched his expression blank in a marbled reflection. “If we can ever go home…”

* * *

Peter had smoked nearly three cartons in the last forty eight hours. A half more if he counted the chain smoking that occurred during the worst screaming match he and Elias had ever had as a couple. He didn’t. (Both caused by, of all inane things, an email. Sent to their encrypted account by an anonymous source. A few pixilated lines requesting important documents to be sent to a given address in Maryland for a murder trial. The *Lecter* trial.) Several slammed doors and the click of a button later and he was watching the love of his life climb in a taxicab headed to Charles du Gaulle with that damn yellow suitcase. Ignored even as he got on his knees and begged him to reconsider. Streaking red taillights in the distance was the only reply he received.

He burned through two more as he jammed through grinding gears on the 1964 black Pontiac Will had been helping him restore. Windows down to drown out his cell phone and leather wallet rattling in the cup holder. Nicotine staining fingertips as the filter ashed and the odometer jumped to one hundred and twelve as he swerved on the A16 in pursuit. Because fuck it all if Elias Alouette Svendsen (now Elias Moreau, though he wondered if divorce now loomed on their horizon) thought he was going to leave him, the man he had *married*, without saying goodbye. As if the first time was not still seared against their souls.

A quarter of a burnt cigarette was wasted on the airport sidewalk labeled ‘departures.’ Discarded
along with keys in the ignition of a Pontiac sloppily parked across two spaces in the garage. Someone might steal it. Or they would tow it. The fuck did he care. He didn’t want it. Didn’t want any part of it. Not another thing from the Lecter family. It wasn’t registered. They couldn’t trace it. They would be doing him a service.

He stared at a ticker tape blue glow of departing flights until his eyes burned. It didn’t matter. Any one would do. Whatever got him through security. Neither of them was leaving the country. And after he slammed both passport and credit card in front of a frightened travel agent demanding just that, he went in search of the only thing he did want. Had ever wanted in his entire life.

He lit up on an automatic walkway and blew smoke in the face of a businessman suggesting he shouldn’t. Left him in a cloud of smoke. Finished it off before reaching the gate of direct flight A2516 to BWI. He found Elias crying at the end of a milling queue restlessly waiting to board, slumped on his suitcase, head in his hands. He was wearing Peter's favorite sweater. A sharp blow to dampen his anger. Taking him hurtling back to the day he had left the boy at the train station. He snapped a virgin cigarette in half, marching forward to retrieve what was his. Throw both boy and suitcase over his shoulder and be done with it. He never wanted to see the fucking thing ever again. Set fire to the pale yellow curse and watch their troubled youth go up in smoke.

“Elias!” Peter called sharply.

The priest started, hopeful watering eyes darting up. “P-p-peter?”

“Who the fuck else would it be, sparrow!” He jammed hands in silk lined pockets, wheel of a cheap zippo lighter scraping his palm. “Who were you hoping for? Will, perhaps? Well, I am sorry to be such a goddamn disappointment to you. Because I cannot ever be what it is you want or need.”

_Idiot._ He grit teeth. _Continue yelling at him, Moreau, surely that won't alienate him. He can't possibly leave you then._

Elias shrunk, cheeks blooming pink then red, whispering fiercely, “Please, please don’t cause a scene.”

_Tell him you're sorry. Tell him you know he loves you and you can't live without him._

"Why not? To spare your feelings? Or mine! I am not the one running away from our life! Or are you running from me? I wasn't clear on that fact while on my knees in the damn rain!"

_For Chrissake, what are you doing!_

Several female passengers looked up from their boarding passes and fashion magazines, mascara thick lashes batting judgment across the brooding man towering over the petite one clutching a battered leather suitcase.

“What!” Peter snarled their direction. “Avez-vous quelque chose à dire?”

(Have something to say?)

A blue eyed brunette shot him a dirty look, bubblegum popping pink around her mouth.

“Lower your voice, please!”

He clenched teeth. He needed to keep his mouth shut. He was going to be detained or arrested if he caused any more problems. The night was still young.
He jumped. Slim hands rucked up his cashmere suit jacket. He tensed, shocked by the sudden contact. He glimpsed the delicate curve of a freckled shoulder peeking from a loose grey silk sweater. Fingers curled over tailored sleeves then followed seams of piped pockets. Peter shuddered as Elias moved closer, scent of vanilla wafting off fabric. His lungs stuttered on an inhale as palms pushed up snug cotton stretching across his chest then dragged down the broad of his back. His toes curled. He was painfully aware the priest's skin heating against him. He dragged knuckles against a denim covered thigh, following the stitch line to a bony peaked hip, recalling the pressure of it on his tongue, in his mouth. He stifled a gasp as fingers splayed on his ass, followed a leather belt, and jammed wrist deep in front trouser pockets.

“Jesus, fuck!” Peter growled, lust and fury colliding.

He snapped an arm around a waist and dragged the priest forward to kiss him, to strip him bare, reclaim every ivory curve with his mouth. His mind whirred to recall every exit and restroom sign he had seen since entering the building. Thumbs skirted a narrow ribcage, picturing its frantic rise and fall as Elias gasped, pinned against a metal stall or straddling him inside a black leather interior to accept his apology. To take him back. To stay. Christ, he hoped the car was still in the hourly lot.

“N-n-no.” Elias turned his face and squirmed free at the last second.

The older man disentangled, wrinkled and struggling to catch his breath, croaking inarticulate confusion. “Sparrow?”

The boy produced a plastic neon green lighter and a cigarette. A few of the girls in line giggled behind their hands. Peter flushed bright red, stunned and deeply humiliated. Elias hadn’t wanted to touch him, hold him, comfort him, to show he was sorry. No! He had been searching him for a goddamn fix to calm his nerves. The older man gaped as foiled packaging wrinkled open. A menthol was shakily tucked between tulip lips. The wheel of a lighter clicked pitifully by a thumb desperate to set a spark. He offered the carton back for Peter to take. His hands shook too much to reach out.

“Excuse me,” An imperious voice rang.

Peter glared at a curvy blonde dressed in a peacock blue dress suit behind the ticket counter pointing at them.

“You can’t smoke in here.”

Elias whimpered, on the verge of bursting in to tears again.

“Fucking saints! Do none of you have any compassion!”

Peter snatched up the suitcase and steered the priest by an elbow to a glassed in area. A symbol of lit cigarette hung over a steel door. He yanked it open. He tossed the suitcase in. It tumbled to a stop in a corner. He entertained a fleeting moment of remorse for treating his song bird's belongings thoughtlessly. What was he doing? He wanted to apologize. He sulked in an empty corner and tried to get a hold of himself.

A man in his forties wearing a blue tweed sports jacket glanced up through the fog of grey, blunted Manchester accent puffing. “I know the feeling. Flight inexplicably delayed by chance?”

In another life, he was sure he and the smoking man could have been friends. Might have bantered about greed driving up costs of air travel even as quarters became increasingly less comfortable. How death had come to a gilded age over a whiskey. But his patience had vanished two cigarettes back and the man was merely taking up space and affording them no privacy.
“Get out!” He jerked his head toward the door. “Haven’t you heard smoking kills?”

“Alright, chap.” The stranger chuckled. He nodded agreeably and stamped out a spark of red with a heel. He moved towards the door, bowing politely at Elias still furiously trying to spark a lighter. “A good evening to you both and may your travels be far more pleasant. Or at the very least, easy on the eyes.”

The door clicked shut.

Elias turned his back and stared at blinking lights of the jumbo jet waiting on the tarmac to go to America. The priest had never flown a single time in all his life. He had always been too frightened.

With a heavy sigh, the older man went to stand beside him and retrieved his belongings. He watched them carefully avoid one another, even in their reflections, gazes averted and bodies poised in different directions. He jammed a cigarette in his mouth and inhaled sharply. Smoke burned all the way down his throat.

“You don’t smoke,” He noted irritably through a plume of grey.

“I do after sex sometimes,” Elias replied quietly. “Or when I’m overwhelmed. Or scared.”

Peter’s mouth ticked a frown. “And which were you when you felt me up like a certified TSA agent exactly? You didn't have to make a fool of me. You could have asked. Not like I can say no to whatever the hell it is you want anyway.”

Lilac eyes strayed to pained ones looking out at the world beyond the glass.

“We are now boarding all remaining passengers for flight A2516 going to Baltimore-Washington airport,” A woman’s voice announced over the speakers.

“Peter…” The boy turned, reaching for his suitcase.

Peter caught his wrist and flattened him against the window, fingers tightening as the boy shivered, voice rough with want. “No.”

Don’t ask me to let you go.

“I have to go. That's my flight.” A soft voice snuffled against him, palms lightly pushing at his chest. “I have to. They’re family. They need my help.”

The older man shoved free, gripping Elias by a tear streaked face, voice breaking over a strangled sob. “I am your fucking family, Elias! Does that mean nothing to you? Have I not pined after you in our absence? Given up my life and traveled the earth to be with you? Vowed to lay down my life to ensure your safety? Tell me what to do. What else can I do? Christ, please, tell me what to do!”

Elias looked away. He picked up the suitcase. He reached for the older man’s hand to embrace him goodbye.

“Are you kidding me?” Peter sidestepped, chest puffing out as he held a burning breath.

We've hardly spent a day apart since I showed up on your doorstep, Elias. What if you don't come home? What if you can't? What if you don't want to? What if you don't want me?

A low whine of pain trailed to the flickering red exit sign, determined grip tightening on a worn leather handle.
“Elias.” The older man stared at the silhouette of his husband being enveloped in a haze. “I’m not going to get on my fucking knees again. I’m \textit{not} going to beg.” He banged on the window, fists shaking white. "You know. \textit{You know} what this is going to do to me. How it hurts me.” He tore at buttons of his dress shirt hoping to be able to breathe better even as smoke choked him. “You know I can’t go back to America. Not after what I’ve—“

He cut the sentence off. The priest squinted at him through the dark. He had never told him. Never spoken about it after. Tried to forget about why they had to run. Tried not to dream of the man he and Will had killed that dreary day in his apartment.

“I’m asking you to stay." The older man wiped fiercely at tears with a drag of a wrist. "Please fucking stay! It’s too dangerous.”

\textit{I love you, Elias.}

The speaker buzzed once more. “Again, this is a final boarding call for passengers wishing to travel to Baltimore-Washington on flight A2516.”

"You can’t just \textit{leave me}, little one!"

Elias placed his palm on the door and mournful eyes drifting over a shoulder, quiet. “I’m sorry, Peter.”

Then he was gone.

In the minutes that dragged by, Peter inhaled two more smokes and gripped the railing outlining the perimeter of the glass room until he couldn’t feel his fingers. He waited for Elias to come back. To walk through the door and kiss him. Tell him they were finally safe. That it was too much to risk. How he couldn’t be away from him for even a minute. Even as his legs grew numb he waited. Waited as the jet plane rolled steadily from the gate and a voice inside his head screamed at him to move, to go, to run, to do anything to keep Elias from being taken from him. Except his shock riddled body took a nose dive, adrenaline plummeting in sync. He blacked out.

When he came to, a blue tweed blazer was stooped over him with a damp rag in one hand and bourbon in the other. The man had kind eyes and tanned smile lines. He gestured to the crumpled carton, trying to lighten the mood with a quip. “Maybe you ought to consider giving up the cancer sticks, old boy, and amuse yourself with lovely boys with sad eyes instead, eh?”

Peter groaned, touching a lump on his forehead and searched for Elias. “…Where…?”

The room was empty. The plane had vanished. He was alone. His entire life, his whole world, was gone.

He broke down and sobbed next to the stranger who stayed to sit quietly beside him. After a quarter of a carton soaked in tears and a lighter running low on fluid, he learned the man’s name was Oliver. A soft spoken Englishmen who traded stocks and was visiting his sweetheart. A bright eyed Midwest girl from Chicago, who he had asked out after suffering severe caffeine shakes from ordering one too many espressos at her place of employment.

For a few minutes, at least, he was calm.

One bang of an opening door and three TSA agents later, Peter found himself in an interrogation room the size of a small walk in closet. Where he spent approximately one hour and forty five minutes explaining why he had yelled at two separate ticket agents, pushed a French native on the crosswalk, and presented signs of ‘menacing behavior’ to a group of American girls waiting to board
their flight. He was questioned about accosting a young, distraught looking man waiting for the same flight before spending a ‘suspicious’ amount of time in the smoking area. And why on earth did he have a ticket to Buenos Aires if he wanted to travel to the United States anyway? It was the third worst official interview he had ever been dragged to. Primarily because he was not allowed to smoke and had to listen to a detective ramble about who John Cusack was when didn’t understand the reference in butchered French.

They eventually released him in to the custody of the Englishmen he had only met hours before. Buying in to some long winded yarn explaining he and Peter were not strangers. How they had attended Oxford two years apart and were traveling together on business. (How he had come up with the back story of them bonding by drunkenly winning a collegiate rowing competition after stealing one of the boats was difficult to guess.) Several drinks in the airport bar later, Peter found himself in first class with the promise of Oliver helping him navigate the plague that was Chicago O’Hare to reach Baltimore. He slurred about how much he loved Elias long after the cabin lights were dimmed. Until he eventually nodded off. Most likely to the relief of all the crew and passengers around him.

He reached the States littered in tiny wine bottles. Woken to a devastating hangover and thirst. And made a promise to God that if he would make his head stop pounding, he would never get drunk on a trans-Atlantic flight ever again. Oliver and he exchanged numbers and said their goodbyes after purchasing another boarding pass. He bolted for the nearest ATM to buy a few paltry packs of sub par smokes to get him through the wait of a connecting flight. He bought a three way battery charger for his phone and rented a car after landing in Baltimore. He drove to the address burned on the back of his retinas in the form of a grey and white email, yelled at the secretary in both French and English until she gave him the location of the courthouse, and returned to a cherry red little Hyundai to chain smoke. He tore the scented evergreen hanging from the rear view and kept driving, only stopping once at a local gas station to comb water through his hair and splash on curious aftershave with a horse on a green glass bottle. He looked about as well as he felt. A goddamn train wreck.

It took exactly two hours and fifteen minutes to drive to the courthouse located in Washington, DC. Most was spent hitting the steering wheel or screaming at every third Dodge Charger to veer into his lane without a hint of a turn signal. Or banging his head against the driver’s chair cushion as traffic came to a standstill at a construction site. What in saints name was so damn fascinating about a bulldozer? Or a crane? They were repainting white lines on cement for Chrissake. Was it the shiny orange and white cones that distracted American drivers so? It couldn't possibly be to ogle the workers themselves, none flattered or enhanced by yellow and silver mesh vests. He was on his last three cigarettes after twenty five minutes of circling and circling and circling a four block radius to find a measly parking spot finally relinquished by a cheery blue Prius.

While puffing on a second half of one (cursing the unnamed architect who had decided fifty-seven steps was necessary to get up to a building located on a grassy hill. He simultaneously maintained the disillusion it was the stairs and not smoking making him wheeze) he was certain he was dying. That Elias would come to this place and find him expired at the foot of the door, pale and lost to this world with a broken heart and black lungs. He managed to weave like a drunkard through security and stumble in the correct direction. A set of swinging oak doors waited. He shoved them open with a bleary noise of relief. He had finally arrived.

The courtroom was packed. He spun around and let them shutter, each swing a floodgate of noise or swoop of blessed quiet.

*Trial of the century and here I was hoping for peace and quiet.*

He drew out another cigarette and sparked it to life. He grimaced at the thought of bodies pressing in and around him as the room closed in on itself.
Who would have thought years of being locked in cramped quarters against my will would result in mild claustrophobia?

He squinted at a bronzed statue of a woman holding scales.

I am entirely too sober and exhausted to eloquently handle any of this shit.

He stood, in some courthouse in the United fucking States of America, slightly winded and begrudgingly bargaining with his body to treat it more kindly if it would only maintain consciousness. At least long enough to work up the courage to walk in.

Doors swung open in a burst of commotion and light. “Father, Father! Over here!”

Peter bit open the filter of his cigarette and growled a curse. He shoved through doors, searching tops of styled and capped heads circling the middle aisle like famished sharks. Cameras went off from every direction. His eyes ached behind silver aviator sunglasses. Reporters clawed at one another to hurl questions. He caught sight of bronzed waves threading through trembling fingers as they were tucked behind a pearl studded ear. A nervous habit he would recognize anywhere. His chest tightened. He realized what they were circling. Elias. His Elias. His husband. The one terribly frightened by large crowds and anxious in small spaces. The same one hesitant to press boundaries and fearful of small changes. The one who climbed on a plane despite being scared, now thousands of miles from home without anyone to turn to. Drowning in a sea of unfamiliar faces.

“HEY!” Peter bellowed.

Get away from him. Can't you see he's scared and alone?

He gripped the lapel of a man with a microphone and threw him to a huddled group, shaking them apart like bowling pins. His dress shoes ricocheted, growing louder as voices became quieter, all eyes shifting to him. Smoke trailed in the wake of his snarls sending men and women scattering.

Elias turned, hugging a file to his chest and froze, glossed mouth falling open, either surprised or dismayed.

Lingering hurt singed the older man’s greeting. “Bon après-midi, mari. Comment ça va?”

The palm stained envelope slid to the floor. Elias stared, standing perfectly still.

He wanted to wrap the boy tight up in his arms and carry him from this place. Away from prying eyes. Far from the clouded aura of ill intent and schemes glinting off lenses. He wanted to kiss his mouth swollen and shake the precious life out of him for the hell he had put him through, making him relive every exquisite detail of their first separation. Instead he drew up short and considered the possibility of his lungs or heart giving out at any moment. Quietly hoping they might spare him.

God... Tulip lips trembled as sweeping lashes tried to fight tears. He was dressed almost entirely in white, wearing the same fresh water pearls Peter had given him on their wedding day. You're as gorgeous as the day I met you. The most lovely, maddening fucking thing I have ever been given the privilege to call my own.

In just two days, the older man made peace with death. He wasn’t sure he cared. It would have been kinder. More humane. Less painful then catching sight of the way Elias had to control himself to keep from reaching out. Needing to touch him. He contained a billowing scream of anger, relief, and longing. Far fucking easier then—

The boy lay a hand hesitantly on his waist, eyes brimming tears, pressing until his flesh indented to
make sure he was real. As scared as the first time he had come to find him.

—Peter sucked in a breath and held it. Death would have been less cruel. Elias was still shaking from fear. One he had harbored the moment he left his husband standing in an airport, glancing back once, not knowing if Peter would be there when he returned. Or if it was the last time.

“Fuck me,” Peter muttered, exhaling a cloud of anxious smoke skyward.

I don't deserve you. None of us do.

He stooped guiltily, shaking his head, and reached for the unmarked envelope on the ground. Timid fingers slid around the curve of his ear to tuck a stray blonde curl. He shivered as they lingered at the nape of his collar smeared with soot. He followed a delicate soothing sweep of hands as they retreated. Choked on a low whine as Elias tenderly cupped the back of his head. He gladly pillowed his forehead against a waist, eyes drifting closed. He could be forgiven on his knees. Understood with striking clarity how much quiet power his little bird wielded over him. The strength he possessed. Dragging him across continents in pursuit with a single glance. Twice in one lifetime. Craved his touch far more than fleeting addiction. Needed the small curve of his body to hold, molded against the gaping caverns of a broken chest stamping him as hollowed out, unworthy, spent by careless and viscous men. Bones brittle from years of yellow aged ‘missing’ posters in his youth, only to be forgotten, abandoned as he aged. Neglect weathering smile lines smooth and replacing them with hideous scars.

Found and kept. Held and cherished. Only by one.

Peter wrapped both arms around the boy and squeezed until his arms shook, strength draining away at last. He was bone weary. His blood shot eyes flooding with tears. His head pounded from lack of sleep and an unforgiving hangover. He wanted to lie down. He wanted to hold Elias naked in his arms and fall asleep to the sound of him reading poetry. He wanted to lie with him after and cover his fair skin in red lipped marks of affection. He cleared his throat and stood. He handed over the envelope without looking. Fingertips brushed the back of his hand, encircled his wrist, then smoothed the pulse of a throbbing vein heating. Manila paper crinkled as Elias took it without a word.

Somewhere a light bulb flick, flick, flicked then flashed.

Peter sucked in a steadying breath to keep from lashing out. He glanced around and sighed. Still not empty. Still surrounded by a crowd. Interspersed by the worst kind. Tabloid journalist.

"Fuck, this better be worth it," He grumbled, fishing out a mangled carton. "An absolute shit excuse for smokes."

He peered inside. Empty. Of course. Why wouldn’t it be? And this cigarette. The one with a cracked filter, stale and covered in saliva, seeping toxic chemicals. It was the last one. He rolled it to the other side of pinched lips.

And I didn't even fucking get to enjoy it.

He spit the cigarette out at leopard print boots and stepped in front of Elias, eyes narrowing in the direction of a fiery redhead with a cell phone in hand. “I will politely ask you not to photograph either of us, Miss…”

Chapter End Notes
idly flips through Rolodex of recipes: Duck a la Attorney with roasted red tomatoes and
smothered in red wine. Rodriguez tartar garnished with sprigs of fennel, served on
whole wheat crackers and brie. I dunno, guys, how do you feel about dessert instead?

Also, I've thoroughly enjoyed reading your reactions and the sheer amount of dislike for
opposing counsel. :)  

WOW. Was this one long.  

Out of all of them, Will is going to have the hardest time with this testimony I think.
Family, keeping them safe, is everything to him. He empathizes so deeply with the
people he loves. He doesn't have much of a choice but to silently watch them, as well as
events as they unfold, from a distance.

And in case any of us had any doubts, hellish saints, our songbird and his keeper
immediately need to be flown away on a private jet to some island for R and R.

This is entirely too emotional. If anyone needs me I will be weeping in that corner over
there.

Goner x Twenty One Pilots

Though I'm weak
And beaten down
I'll slip away
Into the sound
The ghost of you
Is close to me
I'm inside out
You're underneath
Don't let me gone
Chapter 31

Chapter Notes
See the end of the chapter for notes

Judge Napolatino had a splitting migraine. Reminiscent to ones he had as a married man. No wonder he had gotten divorced. Three separate times. He wished he could quit his courtroom as easily as he had quit his gold digging ex-wives. By third he had wised up to the usefulness of a pre-nup. He took a long swig of water, hoping it might miraculously turn to wine, and listened to his surrogate children argue.

“We were given no notice of this witness being present!” Jordan Silas gestured emphatically to a slender young man in ivory perched on a bench in the audience, eyes glued to the floor. “There is no need for Father Svendsen to be here, let alone called to the stand to testify.”

Thomas Rodriguez barreled forward and nearly shoved opposing counsel out of the way, booming voice echoing to the rafters. “Actually, there is every reason for him to be here. If defense wants to invoke spousal privilege for the duration of this trial, then we want proof the marriage is legitimate. Hence the summons, Silas. Which I delivered personally to your office.”

“The marriage license—“ Silas stomped over to his table, rummaged through a brief case, and withdrew a bright red file folder. “—was both verified by an outside source and sent to opposing council as proof. There is no question of legitimacy of the union, Your Honor, just Mister Rodriguez’s personal bias based on beliefs of his clients!” He slapped the folder on the judge’s bench and glared at the silver shark in a suit. “I will not have a good man harassed because the prosecution has a need to sink his teeth in to someone.”

Silas and Rodriguez folded arms across their chest and stared the other down.

Thumbing through contents, the judge picked up the marriage certificate and lifted it to the light. Watermarks shown through the thin paper. He saw four penned signatures. Two were the defendants. The third was an officiate he didn’t recognize. And the fourth was the prosecution’s first witness. One Elias Svendsen.

“And are we just expected to believe the ceremony wasn’t performed under duress?”

“The only people under duress are my clients!”

Jack Crawford leaned back, arms slung wide across the bench, and stared at the ceiling praying for sudden death by an act of God.

“Enough!” Judge Napolatino roared, thumping a fist against the bench.

Both lawyers jumped and immediately went silent. He had quite enough of their squabbling. This was his court. And he expected order!

“Young man.” He pointed to the one sitting quietly, waiting politely for his turn, in the galley.

“Please stand.”

A brooding man sat beside him. Sunglasses high on his head. Fingers tightening against a shoulder. The young man in ivory stood, hands clasped respectfully around a manila envelope he was holding, and waited.
If only all young men in this courtroom might take note of the proper way to conduct themselves.

“Please state your name.”

“My name…” A clear voice of wind chimes in the distance rang out. “…is Elias Svendsen, sir. Though…Elias Moreau is more accurate. I was recently married.”

Hannibal stretched an arm around Will to keep him from turning around, one hand squeezed against his knee for comfort. The younger man stared blankly at the floor, color not yet returned to his cheeks.

“May we call you Father or Father Svendsen for the time being?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And are you a member of the clergy?”

“I was a man of god. Though…” There was an uncomfortable pause. “I no longer practice.”

“And during the time of this marriage?”

“I was entrusted with a small parish. St. Alban’s church in Denmark.”

The judge’s chair creaked as he sat forward. “And why did you leave the parish, Father?”

“I…” The young man tucked hair behind ears, cheeks becoming pink. “I fell in love, sir. I could not follow my heart and openly practice my faith. So I chose a new path.”

Will covered his eyes with a palm, stooping forward to catch his breath. The older man followed suit, whisper pressed to his ear, and rubbed his back attentively. Will shook his head in reply.

“Were you at any time prior to, during, or after, coerced in to marrying Hannibal and Will Lecter?”

The judge pointed to the defendants, voice dropping to a low octave of warning and promise. “Think about your answer carefully. This is a safe space. Answer honestly. If you were, know that I, and this esteemed country, will do everything in our power to protect you.”

Chairs of everyone in the courtroom collectively creaked and groaned, breaths held, to see what the young man would say.

Father Svendsen straightened, lifted a glimmer of violet, and maintained eye contact across the room, voice a toll of a church bell. “No, sir. I’ll swear to it.”

Jack Crawford rose abruptly, stormed the aisle, and banged out of swinging doors without a single word. The woman he had been sitting with turned in her chair, painted nails pressed to a distraught moue.

“Under oath? Understanding the consequences of perjury?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Thank you. Have a seat.”

Elias nodded and let himself be folded carefully in the embrace of the blonde man, eyes closing briefly. Sigh of bittersweet relief on his lips.

The judge summoned both lawyers forward and covered his microphone, murmuring, “You
understand Father Svendsen will still have to testify to the legitimacy of these documents in open court? Which means he will have to face scrutiny from the prosecution and answer any questions they might have.”

Jordan Silas pinched his mouth and nodded.

“Satisfied, Mister Rodriguez?”

Thomas Rodriguez let a predatory smile ripple and then vanish. “Almost.”

Folding hands across his chest, Judge Napolatino leaned back and sighed. He had hoped to adjourn for lunch twenty minutes ago. This trial was draining. And it had only just begun.

“This document might be legitimate, but the marriage of Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham is a complete sham. As you can see, Will Graham is in fact NOT dead.”

Cerulean eyes flickered lighting, lifting to stare at the back of Mister Rodriguez’s head, narrowing by degrees.

“As such, legally, he is still is and was married to Molly Foster Graham at the time this supposed marriage took place with Hannibal Lecter. Ergo, this marriage contract between Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham is void!”

Will started forward, lip curled, fists swinging. The older man caught him by the waist and jammed him in the chair by shoulders, hissing something audibly at him. Nails raked down plaid shoulders and gripped biceps.

“And we, the prosecution, would not only like this court to dissolve the spousal privilege only extended to legitimately married couples in criminal cases, but separate the defendants to face charges at two separate trials.”

Hannibal Lecter pivoted a fraction on his heel, glow of red eyes smoldering and going dark.

“We would also like to amend our complaint to file additional charges of bigamy against the defendant, Will Graham.”

Silas blinked at the prosecution, going grey then white, shock draining his face.

A snort broke the tense silence, sarcasm dripping acidic. “Did you ever sit back one day and think ‘you know what would be great? Being tried as a bigamist and a cold blooded murderer?’”

Hannibal returned a cold gaze to his husband, tone frigid. “Quiet.”

Elias stood, pale eyes widening, envelope clutched to his chest.

“I need a fucking drink.” Will pitched forward, bridge of his nose pinched between palms of prayer, contempt and frustration twitching his cheek. “And a goddamn aspirin. And someone to rewind about a decade of my life.”

A darker voice of snapping bones cracked. “William!”

The younger man stared at Hannibal slack jawed, acutely aware of the pressure of palms on his shoulders, slumping submissively in his chair. The doctor flinched. He tipped forward and kissed a cheek. Will swatted him away and scowled at the floor.

“Mister Silas.” A sweeping hand beckoned. “If you please.”
Jordan Silas backed away before nervously skirting the defense table. Hannibal reeled him in by a lapel and murmured something in his ear. He pointed over a shoulder to the galley.

“Oh.” The defense lawyer straightened, eyes flashing up to look. “Are you sure?”

The young man in ivory waited. Silas waved him forward. Shoes tapped anxiously down the aisle. Envelope rustling as it was clutched to his chest. Dark grey eyes kept careful watch on him as he walked forward. Jordan stepped around Hannibal and brushed passed Will sulking in his chair. He took the envelope. He unraveled red twine and looked inside. Elias gripped the ledge till his hands shook, waiting, mouth taut.

The defense lawyer smiled. “Your Honor…”

There was a quick flash of movement. Will twisted in his chair just enough to grip Elias by the wrist and kiss the back of his hand. Someone whimpered. Their eyes met. Then they parted. Turning in chairs and hurrying down an aisle. Hannibal and the blonde brooding man hadn’t moved an inch, neither looking at their spouses or each other.

Hushed curiosity stirred the courtroom.

Mister Rodriguez stiffened, hawk eyes narrowing, and jabbed a thumb at the men behind him. “Pleeease, Jordan, make my day and tell us this prick is married to those two as well. Marianne and I would love to ‘sink our teeth’ in to a polygamist cult angle in regards to Lecter.” His co-counsel, a woman wearing a pin stripe suit with red hair, stood after hearing her name. “No pun intended. You know, really delve in to the brainwashing and abuse of traumatic events they endured under his care. No one can blame you for misplacing evidence. You have only just come out of retirement. Or are you returning? One can never tell.”

A tan mouth thinned, hazel eyes gleaming as a terse voice shook out. “Has anyone ever told you the only good use for your mouth is lying and sucking cock, Thomas? Or isn’t that a requirement now that you’ve made partner?”

Jurors gasped. Will and Hannibal looked at one another, brows raised. Then looked at the prosecutor.

Thomas Rodriguez flushed three shades of scarlet, mouth open, stunned to silence.

“Counsellor!” Judge Napolatino banged his gavel once, sharp with warning.

“Apologies.” Silas noted dryly, gaze flicking away as Rodriguez tried to compose himself, gaze fixed on his gator leather boots. “I sometimes forget the general public isn’t aware of how Parker, Rodriguez, and Newsom Attorneys at Law operates behind closed doors.”

“Your next words had better be evidence, young man!”

“This, Your Honor…” The manila envelope crinkled as it was passed from lawyer to the bailiff and then bailiff to judge. “…was just handed to me by Father Svendsen. I would ask that if it pleases the court, copies of all documents be distributed to both defense and prosecution to file under discovery as a matter of record. Documents carefully collected by a party who wishes to remain anonymous and delivered in person to Doctor Lecter.”

Papers carefully tabbed by color and clipped together spread across the bench. “And what am I looking at, Mister Silas? Do try to keep your answer devoid of any colorful language.”

“An annulment.” Jordan tossed a smirk over his shoulder.
Will and opposing counsel both stood and chimed in unison. “What?”

The younger man spun, grabbed his husband by the shoulders and shook him, shouting, "That better not fucking be for us or so help me fucking Christ! We're married and that's fucking final!"

Hannibal smiled smugly, settling against his leather chair, fingers folded lazily against his chest and winked. "So we are."

“More specifically,” Jordan gestured wildly at them to shut up or sit down. "A declaration of presumptive death under the Family Code submitted by Molly Foster Graham’s attorney of record, one Gerald Hamilton. Which was filed after a two year wait period, as required by law. Strict guidelines mandate the declaration can only be filed if the disappearance of a spouse takes place under circumstances deemed ‘danger of death.’”

“Yes, but did she—"

“I was not done speaking, Mister Rodriguez!” Jordan wheeled on his heel and pointed two fingers at the man, nose twitching a snarl. “Mind your manners. And sit down!”

Thomas staggered and sat heavily on the edge of his table.

“As I was saying…” Silas cleared his throat, nose tipping imperiously up in the air. “Miss Molly Foster Graham also placed a notice of publication in all local papers along the East Coast announcing the wish for an annulment of her marriage a year and a half after Will’s disappearance in the hopes to reach him if he was still alive. Another requirement by law. There is a copy of the article under the blue tab. Having no response, her attorney petitioned the court to dissolve the marriage at a summary hearing after receiving both notice and the declaration. Presiding Judge Carlton ruled in favor of the spouse. The marriage was annulled.”

Will crumbled to his seat with a sharp curse, palm clutching at his chest as if he were in pain. The older man pat him lightly on the back, smirk sharpening, watching Louboutine heels click nervously down the aisle to rush after Jack with the news.

Silas sucked in a long breath and held it, smile splitting his cheeks, impressed with the fluidity and passion of his speech. Hannibal blinked warm admiration at him with maroon eyes.

“In case you weren’t following along, Rodriguez…” Jordan crossed the center aisle, put one hand on opposing counsel’s shoulder, and leaned in as if sharing a private bit of conversation. “An annulment awarded by the court rules that the marriage never even existed between Will Graham and Molly Foster. As such, the union between Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham taking place almost three years after their disappearance is legally binding and cannot be questioned.”

Rodriguez shook him off and flopped in his leather chair, steepled fingers pressed white against a scowl.

Glancing across the evidence on his desk, the judge couldn’t help but feel a sense of pride for Jordan Silas. The boy had practically grown up in his courtroom. Coloring in charts of constellations with crayons as his father took lead on a case. He appreciated hard work and commitment. He had earned his respect.

“Everything looks to be in order.” Papers tapped sharply on wood then set aside. “I will have these verified and copied by my clerk. The trial will proceed accordingly after a brief recess.”

“Yeah, got to be fucking joking!” A fist slammed on the desk. “How do we know these aren’t forgeries, Your Honor?”
“Mister Rodriguez, while you may conduct yourself in an ungentlemanly manner in your free time…” Judge Napolatino pointed to the prosecutor and leaned out across his bench for emphasis. “When you are in my courtroom, you will lower your voice and address me in the tone befitting a barrister. Take a seat and quiet down.” His gaze flicked with a slight nod of appreciation in the defense attorney’s direction. “You too.”

With a nod and a bow, Jordan strode proudly across the court to the two men waiting for him.

*

Voices dimmed as occupants filed out of the courtroom in pairs and small groups. It was nearly empty. A guard stood at each exit, impatiently staring at their watches. Several reporters mingled in the corners. Freddie Lounds among them. Digital silver camera dangling from a strap on her wrist. She was too skittish to come speak to them. Which suited the Lecter family just fine.

“A job well done, Silas.” Hannibal grasped Jordan’s hand with both of his, shaking it fondly. “A triumphant return to your arena.”

Jordan ducked, face becoming ruddy. “T-t-thank you, sir.”

“Will you relay a message of the same nature to our dear priest, please. Let him know we are, once more, further indebted to him. And to his spouse if he will accept the sentiment.”

“Yes, sir.”

The older man turned his attention to Elias and Peter milling at a distance in the galley. He offered them a sincere smile. The priest tiptoed forward before being plucked back by the collar. Elias frowned, head bent, and offered a little wave. Peter’s face remained stony, dark circles under his eyes, never a step behind and in constant contact with his husband. He wondered if the gesture was out of need to comfort or trauma was driving it. Had they been separated?

“Doctor Lecter?” A timid hand touched his shoulder.

“Yes?”

Hannibal turned and watched a mixture of self-deprecation and remorse fill wide eyes before Jordan dropped his gaze to the floor, voice soft. “I never meant f-for him to come in person. I only asked he send the necessary paperwork on your behalf. I didn’t t-t-think Jack Crawford would interfere. We bumped in to Rodriguez outside my office and there was nothing I could do. I’m sorry.” He chewed a lip nervously. “W-will you excuse me a moment? I’ve a meeting in the judge’s chambers and then I’ll return to collect you. Will you be fine on your own?”

“Not at all, Jordan. You should think nothing of it,” The older man replied warmly. “Now go on. One should never keep a respected member of the community waiting.”

Will and Hannibal watched the lawyer slip through the swinging barrier and make his way to an oak tree overshadowing a delicate bloom of wild lilies. He exchanged a few words with them, shook their hands, and then left the room.

“Guess it couldn’t be helped…” Will muttered. His gaze drifted to stare at the back of a shaven head. “Stubborn little twit.”
Hannibal glanced over, surprised, reply softening when he saw the pain radiating lines across a forehead, dampening blue eyes. “You ought to curb your anger, William, he was only doing what he thought was in our best interests. Have you not given some thought to how he might have missed us? It might do some good for him to be here.”

“Yeah, but I told him—” Will bit his tongue and stared blankly at the ceiling, his breath hissed between teeth. He took another and then another. His reply slow and searching like a stream. “I know. I’m not…I’m not angry. I don’t want to see him hurt. And Peter, you know he shouldn’t be here.”

A thumb brushed bandages of a scarred wedding band tenderly. “He is well equipped to deal with the threats of the world, where Elias is not. He will keep them both safe. There is no doubt in my mind he wishes to see us as much as the priest. You and he are quite alike…” Lines around maroon eyes crinkled. “Stubborn.”

“See us?” Will snorted. “You mean Peter wouldn’t pass up the opportunity to direct murderous rage at my back for the duration of this bullshit.” He shrugged his shoulder as if it ached. “Being knifed hurt less.”

Peter bristled as if his ears burned, grey eyes slicing over to stare at them. He curved an arm around the priest and pushed him towards swinging doors.

“He means well.” Hannibal noted quietly.

“I fucking know that.” The younger man started to go after them, wrenching as Hannibal caught him by the hand and pulled him to a stop. He stared at their fingers entwined, eyes misting. “Sorry. I just…”

Will gripped the banister and watched a swinging door sweep a final glimpse of violet eyes peering out from a forest away.

*Take the fondness of our eyes warmed by hearts with you, little dove, and hold it close. You are not alone. We are with you both.*

“Let them go.” Hannibal moved to stand behind him. He placed a palm on the small of his back, drawing him in and kissed a temple. “They will find any excuse they can to discredit Silas. Especially with such a public embarrassment. Accuse us of coercing or influencing the witness. We must keep our distance.”

Dark lashes fluttered, voice resonating an ache. “So that’s it? We never get to speak to them ever again?”

The older man touched a white knuckled hand gingerly and lifted it to his mouth. He thought of an inkblot stabbed letter penned to him most recently. He chose his next words carefully. “Is that not what you wanted by indication of your last conversation with the priest?”

“Fucking Peter.” Will hissed, gripping short curls, agonized expression directed at the ceiling. “I was trying to give him what he wanted! What they both needed! Mother in heaven, why can’t he try see something from a different perspective for once? I want to apologize. To both of them. Is that so much to ask?”

“After his testimony. I will ask Silas to arrange it. They cannot deny us religious counsel.”

They stood side by side, head resting on a plaid shoulder, hands searching grooves and textures.
Will turned to him, chin tucked against a clavicle, eyes bright. “So we are hitched then? Not just on paper?”

“You sound disappointed.” Hannibal sighed, curving arms around a waist.

“Not disappointed. Surprised.”

The older man pushed some distance between them, bewilderment etching corners of his mouth. He wasn’t certain whether to take offense or show genuine concern that the prosecution had managed to get a rise out of his husband. He was tiptoeing a line of irritability at the idea Will had doubted his sincerity and meticulous nature, even for a second. He had thoroughly and carefully disposed of countless victims for years. He was capable of tracking down a little paperwork. Even if it did being mean indebted to Daniel, the friend of his youth, once more.

“Did you honestly think I would ask your hand in marriage without doing the appropriate research to see if it was even a possibility first?” A frown turned to a red lipped pout.

Dark brows crinkled pleasently on a forehead. “Honestly?”

Some men wielded their best pressed suits to get what they wanted. Will, his darling boy, wielded his pretty face. He knew this expression well. Engrained in his memory as a flirtatious ‘pretty please.’

“Should I be concerned?” Maroon eyes narrowed warily as Hannibal took two steps backwards. “You are gazing at me with the same ardor you inflict upon poorly crafted draft beer.”

Which you hold and consume with such passion.

“I was hoping…” Will smiled again, a flicker completely devoid of innocence, and toed after him, lowering his voice to a husky southern drawl. “…to be lured down a path of wickedness. Waiting in the shadows to fulfill your every desire, Doc-tor Lec-ter.”

Hannibal growled deep in his chest. His oxfords banged on a chair, hard edge biting the back of his thighs, and was forced to abruptly sit on the defense table.

“Isn’t that where you like all your faithful devotees to be?” Will planted hands on either side of his knees and stepped between them. He licked a wet line across a bottom lip, teeth gleaming as they brushed passed a cheek and nipped at an ear. “At your beck and call? On their knees?”

A digital camera chirped eagerly in a corner of the courtroom.

“Why do I have a feeling…” The older man turned his mouth against an ear in a low whisper, thumbing open a line of buttons on a dress shirt. “…you are using this particular venue to your advantage, darling?”

Deep laughter vibrated against his fingertips as they splayed across a throat, palm slipping to rest between plaid thighs. “Because I want to give them something else to write about. And it isn’t going to be the priest. It’s not front page worthy news.”

“Hmm…” A wolfish glimmer of teeth chaffed against a chest as a placket was pulled open. “If we are to commit then I expect you to go about it properly. For accuracy’s sake of course.”

“When do I—“

Breath hitched. Will bit his mouth, eyelids fluttering as Hannibal slipped a hand beneath his suit jacket and discreetly flicked a nipple.
“—unn, not do you right, baby?” In a smaller voice he confessed. “You can’t do that. You’re turning me on.”

“Oh?” A mock innocent smile played on red lips. “I could say the same.”

He dragged it between forefinger and thumb. Once. Twice. A third time for good measure. On the fourth Will let out a low pitched whine. Hannibal cherished the sweet aria as he slid his hand from chest to waist and pulled till the younger man was pressed against him to hide the evidence. He rocked hips slightly, friction sparking as their swelling cocks touched at straining seams.

Blue eyes glowed. Will gripped Hannibal by the roots of his hair, jerked his face up, and bit hard beneath his jaw with a growl, “I was just trying to play a part!” Palms banged him against the table. Will wound a tie tight around his fist, leather shoes lifting to wrap around calves and thighs eagerly. “I wasn’t competing.”

“And how marvelously—“ The older man arched against the bite and pressure on his throat, nails scratching down a suit jacket, breathless. “—well you played. However, you must play by my rules if you hope to remain my devotee.” He groaned as a snarling mouth alternated between biting and sucking. He tore open Will’s dress shirt. Buttons went flying. He dug in nails and raked flesh red from shoulders to waist, reveling in the pleasure his hiss tore free. “If you have come to meld with the darkness, Will, then I might suggest you have willingly placed yourself in its shadowy embrace with the hopes to be consumed.”

“Ah fuck that’s hot.” The younger man groaned, breath warming from neck to ear. He lapped at a stinging hickey and balanced on elbows, struggling to catch his breath. “Leave it to you to make a cult sound sexually suggestive and intriguing.” He glanced down at his tattered dress shirt then at the way they were melded at the groin. He blushed, impish smile creaking up a corner. “But I think we had better stop.”

“You are probably right.” Hannibal nodded, face red, panting a reply. “Here I was thinking we were merely speaking in metaphors. Though we may want to stay as we are for a moment longer. Until the…” He tried to word it delicately. “The moment passes?”

Will chuckled and let a damp forehead fall to a chest, purring as Hannibal began to toy with his hair. “That isn’t going to help.”

He was right. Their current position was doing nothing to alleviate his stiff cock. It was very aware of how hard and thick Will was pressed to an inner thigh. He was (for once) wearing too many layers, hot, trapped by damp seams. No matter how many threats and commands he sent to his brain, his body couldn’t help itself. He was undulating his hips minutely. The little motion painted pristine images of his hands gripping Will’s ass, both unzipped with a palm on their bare cocks, as they frotted against one another frantically until they came.

He felt a smile curve on his chest. Will must have sensed the audible broadcast of his thoughts and thrust lazily back. Hannibal whined pitifully, head thumping on the table, groaning louder as a sweet I told you so reached his ears.

“How can you be so cruel, dearest, when you know what the very thought of you naked does to me?” Hannibal asked.

“Easy.” A delicate nose brushed against his sweetly, pools of blue peering lovingly through lashes. “Practice.”

They gripped one another by the face, mouths sliding open, closing the gap between them to kiss.
Strident disdain echoed off walls. “Do you rut like animals every opportunity you’re alone?”

A muttered fuck me ducked and bit frustration against a shoulder as Will tensed, pushing up on rigid arms and taking Hannibal with him.

“Jack.” Offered a glint of teeth. “A pleasure.”

“Doctor Lecter.” Hard black eyes glanced off them.

“Is it though?” Will countered under his breath, taking a step back and to the side, trying to lift his eyes as momentary discomfort bloomed on his face.

Jack Crawford clasped hands at his front, stance rigid, jacket pushed back enough to reveal a leather holster of his government issued firearm.

“He is not entirely incorrect.”

Tipping up to his feet with a helping hand, Hannibal snaked an arm around Will’s waist and reeled in by clipped curls. He bent him at the waist and kissed his mouth until the weight of him shuddered and went limp. The younger man surfaced for air, body relaxing against arms wrapped safely around him. His light smile returned, gaze more shy then panicked.

“For example…” Hannibal continued where he left off, chin tucked on Will’s shoulder, looking out at Jack with an amused smirk and begin to fasten what buttons remained on the boy’s dress shirt from behind. “When the female hedge sparrow is in the absence of her mate she often branches out to seek dozens of other male consorts who can often copulate up to one hundred times a day.”

Silver blue eyes tipped over a shoulder, dark brow arced. “Exactly how many times have you and the heathen discussed this in terms of the priest?”

The older man felt another mischievous smile ripple and shrugged.

“Christ. Never mind.”

“What I am trying to explain to our dear Uncle Jack…”

Agent Crawford pinched the bridge of his nose and half turned to stare off at a clock hanging over an exit, eyes glazing over.

“…is that while many species mate to reproduce at vigorous rates, they, much like their human counterparts, become weary. However, evolution has been far more kind to us in offering alternative ways to give and receive pleasure when we begin to ache.”

When he was certain his former friend was tuning out what he presumed to be a flowering speech, Hannibal took the opportunity to press against Will’s back and mouthed quietly against his ear.

“Our hands.” He slid his right hand against Will’s and lured it behind his back, guiding it against a bulging plaid fly front. “Fingers.” He parted a piped pocket, palm sliding in, and gripped an ass. He choked when the younger man gripped him through fabric and tugged. “Ah, and…”

“Mouths.” Will rumbled against a caught wrist, tonguing lightly at deep scars.

“Yes.” The older man lifted to tiptoes on another upstroke, bucking against the palm, swallowing a gasp. “A clever boy’s tongue and teeth.” He gripped the hand on his cock, squeezing once, before placing it neatly back at his side. He withdrew his hand from a back pocket reluctantly and nibbled
teasingly on the lobe of an ear, murmuring, “And as I’m sure you know, Will, when manual stimulation fails, technology has made quite the advancement in providing hands free release.”

A small needy plea breathed a reply. “Oh god.”

Hannibal placed a chaste kiss on the back of a neck, pleased to be able to leave Will and his vivid imagination, exquisite memory, and sound of his voice, alone to spend intimate, quality time with one another.

“Are you still with us, Agent Crawford?” The older man asked, returning to stand shoulder to shoulder next to his husband, snapping fingers in the agent’s general direction.

Jack startled, blinking rapidly and turned to face them. “What?”

“…Why are you even here?” The younger man asked dimly.

Hannibal had to look down to hide a smile, grey hair falling over eyes. His combination of voice and touch stimulus was far more effective than any kind of light therapy he had ever tried.

“An adjourned trial means back to holding cells,” The agent answered automatically, straightening, blinking as he waited for his attention and focus to come back to him. He motioned the two guards. “Your separate ones, gentlemen.”

Maroon eyes shot the man a withering look. “I think I preferred the outright torture, Agent Crawford.”

“Finally.” Cold eyes blinked. “Something we can agree on.”

Will released a shuddering breath, momentary spell of bliss shattering, becoming fully aware of how much he ached and whom he stood in front of. He mumbled curses in two separate languages and slouched.

Hannibal stepped in front of him, lifting a chin. “Dinner?”

“Lunch…?” Will replied, confusion quirking his brow.

“Mm. No, thank you.” A honeyed gaze glanced behind him. “I was thinking something of less substance. Sweeter. Something we might look forward to at a future date.” He lifted knuckles to his lips and kissed them, prompting, “One of your favorites, my dearest, how could you forget it?”

The younger man began to make a face at him—a reaction often preempting a question punctuated with several expletives—before his eyes lit up.

“You’re right.”

Hannibal and Will turned. They linked arms around the other. Hands entwined between them.

“It is a great idea.”

“Is it not fitting?”

“Very. Chocolaty and delicious.”

"Should we tell him?"

Their mouths ripped in tandem, splitting at the seams, growing wide, becoming rows and rows of
congenial teeth.

“Petit Gâteau.” They announced cheerily.

Glittering fire of a hearth and an ice drilled lake glanced at one another and then over.

Jack Crawford took a step back, hand moving to the gun on his hip. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“Why, Jack…” Hannibal tipped his head to the side, pleasant smile crinkling his face. “You, of course.”

Chapter End Notes

:cackling: Ah. Boy. :wipes at tears: This is my new favorite thing. Our series will just revolve around torturing Jack by having him constantly walk in on Will and Hannibal in compromising positions. While simultaneously reminding him, he's 100% on the damn menu, and not in a fun way.

Silas, what do you drink and should we send you a bottle of it?

Elias, sweet angel, you saved the day!

Delving back in to an interlude with our sweet idiots, Elias and Peter, in the next few chapters. (You know how you asked for that vignette, Mae, well...it's whatever a vignette is that turned out really, really, really long.) One of these days I ought to write their story. Try out my hand that publishing thing you lovelies keep encouraging me about. (I think we all know I'd publish the hell out of TS and EB if possible. :)

Gimmemore, your little sweet (pun intended, hint!) side story is up next on the writing docket!
Afternoon sun dwindled high in a cloudy sky as footsteps scraped up a set of cement stairs. Elias flexed fingers round a clammy hand clinging to his and covered stinging eyes with a palm to block light. They were dry from fighting back tears for the last hour. Still ached from the ones spilled the night before. He jammed a hand in a satin lined pocket. He touched a leather stitched tag then a metal ring jangling a set of motel keys. He squeezed tight until jagged edges cut his palm to calm prickling nerves numbing his wrist and feet every time he thought about the weight of eyes sliding off him with the swing of a court door.

Will and Hannibal had watched them go with a mix of relief and concern after the judge ordered a brief recess. They had stared at one another from a distance. His heart ached knowing they were not free to follow. It had hurt worse to see them in person than he had anticipated. He had not even been allowed to speak to them. A single brush of a kiss on his wrist, a whispered apology scorched his skin hours later.

_I don’t want an apology, Will, I want you. And Hannibal. Home. With me. With us. Where you’re safe. Where you’re loved._

He swallowed a lump gathering in his throat and rounded a corner roped off by iron wrought lattice of a balcony.

_Am I ever going to speak to them again? Or will I lose them just as I lost my parents?_

He thought of the last time he heard Will’s voice straining to reach him through static, razor sharp and threatening. Told to forget him, both of them, and let go as if they hadn’t walked in to his life and changed everything. Changed him. Another set of ghosts to keep him company in the middle of the night. Heard wailing screams of a child lifting to the heavens on an abandoned ice covered road in his mind, pleas unanswered.

_“Don’t take them from me! Please. I’ll do anything.”_

Elias stumbled on the last step and fell, fabric tearing on his knees. He watched blood seep on the cement.

_“Mother, please, please wake up.”_

A pained breath called to him in the present, arm curving tenderly around his waist to lift him. _“Sparrow. Slow down.”_

_“N-n-no. Let go.”_ He choked on a sob, hit the hand away, and picked himself up as he had grown accustomed to. There had been no one to help him. He had learned to take care of himself. _“I’m fine.”_

_“Look at me.”_ Peter leaned heavily on the rail, holding ribs and watched Elias through the reflection of silver glass. He glanced across a well of tears, brows twisting down on his face, worried and berating himself for having caused him pain. _“You aren’t fine. Won’t you talk to me?”_

_Neither are you._
Silver eyes dulled to a grey weathered stone. His mouth a white lipped grimace. Pale skin reflected agony and remorse with the same blue grey of clouds of above. The older man looked sickly, weak and swaying as if it took too much effort to stand.

*You look like the man I took away from that place.*

Devastating loss filled the space between their bodies. The older man took a step forward and tugged to embrace him. Elias shook his head and stood his ground, arms rigid at his sides, as if to convince both of them he could still survive on his own. The boy who never cried in front of others. Tended to his scrapes and bruises. Who needed the solitude of books and empty spaces. Not a calloused palm on his cheek for encouragement or a sweet mouth to kiss him goodnight.

*My parents left me. You left me. Now Will and Hannibal. It can't hurt you if you stay alone.*

Wincing, Peter let his eyes and hand fall away. The priest stared at his palm scuffed red from the weight of the few belongings he owned folded in his yellow suitcase. How empty the spaces between his fingers seemed without its missing pieces slotting together to make them whole. To bring comfort in the form of starlight. His wedding band tarnished. He reached for the hand, for what he truly needed, without thinking.

Peter made a low noise in the back of his throat, taking a step back to retreat and leaned against the wall, looking at the set of stairs they had just climbed. “No…”

Both hands hid safely in trouser pockets. His posture slumped defensively. Desperate to protect frail organs within. Shoulders instinctively rounded inward and arms tensing, reacting to memories of when he sensed danger and needed to prepare to ward off physical blows to his body. Peter hated to be touched when they fought.

Elias pretended not to need it, not to notice, when all he craved was to be held by someone he loved, assuring him everything would be okay.

“S-sorry…” Elias sucked in a bottom lip to hide a slight tremble and leaned over the railing to look out across trees disappearing beneath roofs of blacktop.

*But it isn’t okay. You aren’t okay, Peter, and I don’t know how to fix it.*

The younger man knew he didn’t need to touch Peter to hurt him.

*For Christ fucking sake, Elias!” Booming fear shook paintings and photographs on the walls ascending to the second story of a house. “Talk to me! Why can’t you just mail the documents and be done with it?”*

*Because I can’t! Hannibal left them to me! You don’t understand.”*

“You’re right. I don’t fucking understand! So try explaining it to me for a change.”

A bedroom door cracked open. Elias darted passed Peter and took stairs two at a time. They had been fighting for two hours straight. Peter wanted him to stay away from the Lecter trial. From the people he loved. But Hannibal and Will needed him. He couldn’t stay here. He had to go to them. He didn’t trust anyone else. What if the documents got lost? What if someone else picked them up? Their lives were at stake. They would be separated. They might not see each other ever again. He
couldn’t let that happen. He couldn’t abandon his family. Why was he supposed to choose which of them to protect?

“Elias, please!” Dress shoes scraped frantically after. “Tell me what’s going on.”

His palm sweat against the handle of his suitcase. He kept his gaze on the front door. Tried not to focus on panic slamming in his chest. Two dogs barked and jumped around him, nails clattering anxiously after their masters in confusion. A wrist latched on his bicep and hauled him to a stop. The suitcase tumbled out of reach. Peter pinned him between two oil paintings depicting a cliff side at dawn and dusk, palms shaking shoulders, eyes a grey haunted mist. Elias turned his cheek and huddled, tears streaking his face.

“Where are you going?” The older man asked, forcing his voice to a mute tremble of smoke and stepped back. “Sparrow, I need to know.” He hung his head, shame bright on pale skin. A trembling hand stretched out, fingers ghosting over the curve of a freckles, voice a hollow ache. “Are you leaving me?”

A reply stammered free as Elias grabbed a hand and pressed it desperately to his mouth. “N-n-no. Please don’t make this so hard. Why won’t you just come?”

“I can’t! I can’t and neither should you!”

“They need me!”

“I need you!” Peter crumbled forward, leaning his entire body against Elias, forehead pressed white against the wall. “God, I need you. Don’t you understand?”

The older man shook. Scent of salt tears and cigarettes wafted from his suit. The priest mewled pitifully, balling up lapels and began to cry again with hiccuped pleas of ‘please, please, I have to go.’ The older man growled, lifting the boy off his feet, arms and legs wrapping his torso.

“You can’t go.” Desperate affection slid hot on his throat then shoulder then chest in welts of red. “I won’t allow it.”

Gravel crunched up the drive, beams of light sweeping through front windows. A horn beeped. Gloom of a yellow taxi idled in the dark.

Shoulders jerked, frosted silver lifting to stare out the window, rumble of thunder rising. “What in the hell is that, sparrow?”

The older man turned a cold stare down. Nails scraped a ribcage and squeezed until the priest couldn’t breathe. An apology stuttered out.

Peter let go with a vengeful shove of a man used to being forgotten, hurt rippling his brow. “So you are leaving! You don’t need to lie to me! Just fucking go. If that’s what you want, I won’t stop you.”

Elias dropped to feet with a resounding thud, hand curved over his ribs as if each was cracking, bleeding heart spilling out between them and staining their hands red. He tried to say everything, anything, whatever comfort he could provide. A choked sob came out. He grabbed the suitcase and marched to the door. His skin burned from lips and teeth. Chilled by the distance growing between their bodies. He froze in the doorway, nails embedded in the frame, watching sheets of rain pellet a garish glow of yellow metal. He closed eyes. Heard the whistle of trains in the distance. His knees grew weak.

I’m not that boy anymore. I’m not. Elias pushed out in the rain and came to a stop in the drive, face
upturned, teeth clenched to keep sobs quiet. I have to go.

Black mist collected against the light of their home.

Will you be here when I return, Peter?

He stumbled to the taxi and wrenched open the door. He threw his suitcase in. His hand shook on the sharp frame of the door. He clambered in, paused a moment longer, and shut the door.

“Charles du Gaulle, please,” He whispered and buried his head in hands.

He couldn’t stand to see Peter shrinking in the rear-view. He had watched the older man leave once. He prayed it didn’t hurt as much. He curled knees to a soaked sweater and muffled lurching cries. He couldn’t do this. He shrunk as green eyes peered over leather seats, swept over him, then glanced at the man paralyzed on the house stoop. Looked as if he knew them. Judged them. Just another lost boy running from a broken home.

Elias stared at fists, mouth thinning. Don’t you dare think of me as broken. The two of us… damaged. Forgotten. Easily discarded. He isn’t like that. You don’t know him! He’s a good man.

Cold violet eyes snapped up. “I told you to drive!”

The cabbie nodded and returned to the wheel. “You got it.”

Tires whined, cab swaying as gears shifted and the taxi circled the fountain and began to pull away.

Fists hammered he trunk of the car. “Wait! For fuck sake, wait!”

Brakes screeched to a halt. “The hell—“

The taxicab door flung open. Elias started. Peter stooped inside the frame, one hand clenching the door and the other digging at paint, as if he could hold the car in place by sheer willpower. Rain poured down a heaving chest and ran rivulets over braced arms. Drenched blonde hair stuck to withering dusk roses pulled tight across clenched white teeth, snaking empty grey eyes.

“Please,” The older man dropped to his knees. Glimmering halo of water dashing the ground and falling apart. Wide hands clung to a small waist. A stricken face buried in his lap, voice raw and cracking. Peter trembled violently, fingers tightening and twisting a sweater. “Don’t do this to me. I'll change. I'll...be good to you. Just don't. Don’t go.”

Elias curled over the body in his lap, forehead scraping a spine, shaking his head vehemently with the words ringing in his head. Come with me, come with me, I can’t do this without you. I can’t.

He clawed at a suit jacket dragging Peter up by drenched lapels. Earnest devotion flickered in grey eyes lifting to tearful violet. There was so much hope in a single glance. The priest crushed his mouth to a cold one, knees trapping a chest against him, fingers raking wet hair then down a neck. He licked the seam of a mouth until it opened with a moan. Hot and needy and real. He drank and breathed Peter in to his lungs. To keep some part of them together.

He sobbed as their lips parted and shoved.

Peter sprawled to the concrete, puddle splashing up the front of his dress shirt, and sat there stunned. A frantic gaze snapped up, growing wide.

The older man touched his mouth. His lips parted to call out, head shaking weakly, breathing.
“Don’t.”

Another sob wrenched free and Elias slammed the door, punched locks, and shouted, “Just drive!”

The taxi took off down the drive spitting rocks and twigs. He could hear Peter’s desperate screams growing distant as they turned a winding corner and lost his figure chasing after in the distance. Elias curled up in the backseat and cried, suitcase pressed to his knees and chest, and silently begged Peter to forgive him.

*

It was the last time they had truly spoken. In anger. They had said far less to one another in the airport. Reacting to one another like flame to the tip of cigarette. Heated. Smoldering. Then dying out.

*Am I losing you all over again, Peter, or were you always lost to me?*

They hadn’t exchanged more than a few sentences to one another since the trial began. Not when they left the courthouse at a distance. Or side by side in silence as the cherry red car steered them through crowded streets of a foreign city. Elias never uttered a single sound when the older man had slid him up against a cement wall and stooped for a kiss. Merely turned his face and pushed, low curse of confusion following after like soot streaking narrow shoulders of his ivory suit jacket. He was not prone to anger. Or withholding forgiveness. It went against everything he believed. But still he shook with fear. Every minute they had spent apart painful. He had been frightened and ached from loneliness. All his calls had gone straight to voicemail. Not knowing Peter had decided to follow. Trembling equal parts fury and relief from the moment Peter had reappeared and held him close.

Here they were. Side by side. Same space. Same country. Still miles apart.

His cross swayed gingerly against a beating heart and he wondered if its weak stutter was the sound of it breaking. Or if he was hearing Peter’s in the silence.

“Are you ill?” Elias asked softly.

The older man nodded with a groan. “If ill is a candid euphemism for teetering on the brink of certain death, then yes, I am quite ill.”

Pursing lips, Elias took a step forward and reached out. The older man flinched. He waited patiently, hand out stretched, coaxing a shivering suit near him. He slid an arm around a waist. Peter sagged against him like he had lost the will to live. He caught him around a chest, knees shaking to keep them both upright. Tears welled in his eyes. He had held him once like this before, memory blistered in his mind. He watched their clasped shadows shift on the ground, dwindle, and become small then disappear in an overhanging shadow of coming night.

*

“Elias…” Peter touched a knee shaking against his, pressing till it stilled, struggling to speak, jaw swollen. “Look at me.”

The priest rocked pitifully on an edge of the bed, fists clenched, staring hard at a shift of moonlight.
tracking a half rotted beams of their little flat. Where Peter had collapsed in his arms an hour before. Elias was barely able to hold him long enough before his head cracked wood and he lost consciousness.

An innocent run to the open air market at twilight, a quick turn through the stalls, to bring something sweet home to the angel he had fallen in love with. A single wilted lily lay in the dusk of a lattice window spattered in drying red. He had only saved one. He had watched the pristine bouquet sink in a mud puddle churning with blood, his blood, as he lay face down on cobblestone in the rain. Teeth clenched tight to keep silent as thick ring encrusted knuckles gashed his cheek open. Stared at the grey sky as steel toed boots kicked him over and over again against a brick wall. Listened to the audible crack of breaking ribs and snap of a wrist when he tried to cover his face. He only had one thought when he struggled to stand, fist coming in for another swing, as his knife plunged beneath a jaw. To see Elias one last time. And that he would die first before he would ever be taken alive. He left the man from the brothel bleeding out behind a dumpster. He stumbled across town to the apartment and begged every god he knew to make it home. One last time.

Rain pattered heavily on the tin roof, almost drowning scared sobs clenched between teeth. Elias had managed to get him to bed, strip him of clothes, and found widening bruises pooling on every part of his body. Organs traumatized at hideous purple centers. Broken bones protruding inside thin skin. Wrist bound to his chest with strips of a torn cotton t-shirt. Breaths shallow and pleading as a fever broke out across skin. Collecting against a bruised sternum as Peter began to shake from agonizing pain, unable to move.

Their precious time together seemed to be up. One way or another. If he survived they would be forced to run. What kind of life was that for his frail bird? He knew. If he made it. He would have to leave alone. If God was going to give him a second chance, he vowed not to endanger the life of all he loved. The world needed the boy’s light.

“Please look at me.”

“No!” A little fist hit the mattress. “You need a doctor!”

They both sat in silence. It wasn’t safe. A risk they couldn’t take. Not now that his former captor and accomplices were on the look out for him. Knew he was still in the country. Endless amounts of money made for a good bounty.

He was happy to die if it meant keeping Elias safe.

Peter drifted fingertips up a face hidden by shadow, flicking apologetically at tears. “If I don’t make it—”

“Don’t say that!” Elias cried, gripping a hand and pressing it hard to his mouth, as if it could heal him.

“If I don’t make it...” The older man began again softly. “Know my—“ He gripped the boy’s shoulder hard and cried out as another wave of pain tore through. “—very last thought will be of you.”

“No! No.” Elias shook his head, tears spilling, gripping damp blonde curls. “You said. You promised we would leave together. You promised to stay with me!”

“And I will be.” Peter whispered, smile faltering, eyes stinging wet. He followed a gleaming cross up a heaving ribcage, fingertips tracing the rhythm of a heart. “Here.” His hand shook as it brushed blessing across a pale forehead. “And ah, here.”
He blanched as his breath caught, sending fire spreading through his chest, and sweat dampening thin sheets. His vision dimmed. Consciousness tunneling black. Fragile pale violets crushed against a tread of thoughtless feet began to disappear.

With his last remaining strength, he squeezed a cold hand and murmured, “Je t’aimerai toujours, Elias.”

(I will always love you.)

Chapter End Notes

:rocks pitifully in corner: Make up already. You're slowly killing me, you two idiots.

Colors x Halsey:

Everything is grey
His hair, his smoke, his dreams
And now he's so devoid of color
He don’t know what it means
And he's blue
And he's blue

You were red, and you liked me because I was blue
But you touched me, and suddenly I was a lilac sky
Then you decided purple just wasn't for you
Chapter 33

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The priest pointed to a black painted door labeled thirty two. A ribcage shuddered beneath his touch for breath and draining strength. They wove unsteadily to the end of the corridor, shadows entwining far more intimately then they were. Far more passionately than perhaps they ever could. Elias slotted keys in the door and pushed it open. A ‘do not disturb’ sign swung on the handle.

The room was narrow and barren. There were two small twin beds made up neatly with peacock blue and hunter green paisley quilted throw covers. He had hoped to feel less lonely in a smaller bed. Staving off the chill of tears by curling up, a ball of nerves, on the bed nudged against a far corner. His yellow suitcase, latched and at the ready, sat neatly at the center of the one closest to the door. He knew the single window in the bathroom was unlocked, cracked open to ensure it hadn’t been painted shut. A habit formed in his youth in case he needed to run from members of an orphanage or foster parents pursuing him. A sea foam green summons was on the nightstand next to a single cup of water. His cell phone blinked up at him with a dozen unread frantic texts and voicemails. He wondered if all of them were from Peter. Chipped paint peeled on a three-bureau dresser where an ice bucket and laminated menu remained untouched. He hadn’t any appetite. Never ate when he was too anxious or stressed.

He hadn’t been sure what waited for him in the States. Had only been able to think about surviving the flight, nails embedded in armrests, pleading to reach land safely. He had taken a train and cab to a small office in the heart of Baltimore. Where he was met by a young man wearing suede kid gloves. Another man had been waiting for him outside the office. Tall and dark, leering as he handed him a summons. It had been torn from his hands with shouts of ‘get the fuck out of here, Rodriguez!’ The lawyer, Jordan Silas, had driven him to a motel near the courthouse in silence, brow furrowed, and paid for a weeks worth of the room in cash.

Slipping free, Peter stumbled to the bed and collapsed against it face first with a drawn out moan of relief. He dragged sunglasses off sending hair scattering. Leather oxfords hung limply off the end of the mattress. He looked cramped and entirely uncomfortable. Far more weary and alone than Elias thought possible. A hand twitched on the bedspread before dragging a pillow blindly to tuck between chin and chest. The older man nudged his nose against a fair scent of lily of the valley perfume clinging to its case with a sigh. The closest they had been to one another in days. Months even.

Latching and bolting the door, Elias tugged on cords till a moth eaten linen shade shh-ed in to place on the window over looking the balcony walkway. Pin light dotted blonde curls to create a constellation clinging to a peaceful profile. He thought of rain sliding down his face and clinging to hair, fear knotting his brow and painting a kind mouth black. The younger man slid out of his suit jacket and brushed soot from its back panel. He folded it neatly on the dresser. He touched sprigs of lavender pinned to the lapel. Soft petals crumbled to dust. He supposed it was for the best. Fragile beauty was not meant to survive without roots securing it safely to home.

We are supposed to be one another’s home.

The bed sagged as Elias sat on its corner, exhaustion swathing under eyes. “Did you leave the dogs enough food, Peter? Or did you just abandon them?”

The older man stiffened slightly, thumbs digging the pillow then relaxing. His reply grated between
clenched teeth. “Is that a question or are you accusing me of something? Or do you just assume I am the same man prone to abandonment because I am fucking incapable of change?” A soft rose lip curled. “You left me, Elias.”

Fingers ticked trembling knees. Both of them flinched.

“Well would never have—” He started, lash of anger pitching to a high register.

Stormy grey sliced up in warning. “Do you want me to leave?”

“How dare you threaten me with that!” Tears welled in lilac eyes. “I didn’t ask you to come!”

“You’re right.” Peter snapped. He stood, jamming sunglasses back on to his face. He stalked to the motel door, tearing a set of car keys from a breast pocket. “My mistake.”

“Where are you going!” A wail pierced the air.

A bolt hammered open. “Leaving.”

The motel door slammed shut.

“P-peter!”

Elias scrambled to the door. The beat of his heart fluttered and dashed his ribs. Cold sweat broke out across his skin. He flung himself out to the corridor, looking left and right. The hall was empty. Peter wasn’t there. A bubble of panic worked its way out a constricting throat. Muttered cursing rose from below. He rushed to the balcony and leaned out, searching.

“Peter!” He cried after the figure retreating across the parking lot.

The older man whirled on his heel, eyes flashing to the balcony, shouting, “I won’t stay where I am not wanted! And you, sparrow, made it very clear you do not want me. I’m only sorry I wasted both our time. An infinite amount of years neither of us can get back!”

“Stop! You can’t—“

“And why not? I only came to be with you! Endangering my life to support you. This fucking family. And for what? Now you can be rid of me for good and move on with your life! Forget me like the rest of them!”

Elias clutched the heart sinking in his chest. Memory flashing back to when he used to find Peter around every corner, grain of his face black and white smeared by rain. Missing posters. Except he knew who was looking. The men of the brothel. He cried as he tore down each one and hoped that no matter where Peter was, he was safe, unable to forget him.

Ivory fabric rustled as knees began to shake weakly. “You’re in no condition to drive.”

“I’ll call a cab to the airport then!” Car keys sailed through the air and pinged a window on the second landing. “Will that make you happy?”

“Please.” Elias crumbled to a crouch, hanging on slots of wrought iron, forehead pressing until red lines appeared, insistent whisper trailing off. “Come back inside. You aren’t well. Stay the night. You can leave in the morning. If something happened to you, I…”

I wouldn’t be able to live with myself.
The older man released a string of expletives, shaking hands clenching blonde hair. Shoes furiously scraped blacktop cement. Banged up stairs and echoed on surrounding dry wall. The motel door clacked against its frame in the breeze. A quivering shadow paused over the pitiful figure crouched by the railing.

It stooped to retrieve keys, hand hovering above a trembling shoulder before jerking away. “You can’t stay out here. Let’s go.”

Shuffling to feet, Elias kept his eyes on the ground and stood in a motel door waiting. He felt as if he had always been waiting since he had met Peter. Waiting to know him. Waiting to keep him safe. Waiting to be held. To be kissed and caressed. Waiting for him to return. He trembled in the frame. Its peeling paint the only thing keeping him upright. Terrified the long cast shadow looming in the corridor would shift across walls with the dipping sun and fall over the balcony to disappear.

Ducking through the door, Peter brushed passed with a curse and pitched car keys. "Bordel...pourquoi suis-je ici?"

(Goddammit... why am I here?)

Keys clattered the ice bucket and landed with a sharp jangle on the floor. Sunglasses tumbled after. The older man climbed the bed, curled up on his side, and screwed eyes shut with a shaky exhale. Tears smeared the pillowcase.

Elias closed the door softly and slumped against it, whispering. “Because I don’t want you to go. I don’t want to move on. I want…”

I’ve never moved on from you. I want you. Only you.

He knew how foolish it sounded. How cruel it was to say those words. When he had not been able to listen to them. Pushed away and ran. Tense silence hung in the air. He stared at the back turned to him. They had spent the last few months staring at one another’s spines in the night. Throat raw and churning with an acid burn of repressed tears. He wrapped arms around his chest as he began to shake. A dozen apologies and pleas to be held remained mute and heavy on his tongue. He lowered himself to the bed beside his suitcase. A wary glimmer of grey fear drifted to the suitcase, brushed over him, then lingered on the door.

“It isn’t locked,” Elias said. You have to trust me. I’m not going anywhere.

“The dogs are fine.” Peter announced gruffly and turned his face completely away, mumbling into the pillow. “I called Daniel when I reached Chicago. They’ll drive up tonight from Italy. He and his daughter will stay with them until…” The older man went quiet. He struggled for the right words. He had no idea whether to choose I or we. He refused to pick either. “I took care of it. They’ll be fine.”

You want to know if I’ll go home with you? Or if you will be leaving alone...

“How…” A raw throat constricted a sob and swallowed it. “How long have you been awake?”

“Seventy two…no…eighty…..” A palm scrubbed closed eyes before falling limply. “Days, little one. I cannot think with the room spinning as it is.”

Elias stared at hands twisting in his lap, stab of guilt drawing a frown with deepening lines. “You didn’t sleep?”
“Difficult to accomplish in an airport interrogation room. Or on a flight for that matter. I nodded off several times in the lobby when you went to retrieve the car. My body seems to think it insufficient.”

He still felt cold glass at his spine and press of Peter’s body against his front. Fingers sliding around his torso, clinging to the nape of his neck, breath hot and shakily whispering for him to stay. Afraid to let go.

Mournful grey tipped down the length of a nose, mouth pinching white then pink, surveying the cavern of space between their beds. “Are you...are afraid of me, sparrow?”

The older man’s second greatest fear lingered in the air. To become like the men who had hurt him, used him up, the kind others feared.

Elias shook his head, wiping at a glimmer of tears with a wrist. “N-no. I just don't understand what's happening and I'm scared.”

I don't want you to walk away from me. I love you.

Peter rolled on to his back, hugging the pillow to his chest, softly saying. “I didn't mean to raise my voice. Everything is different now. And this...” He tapped above his heart, gaze fixed on the ceiling to blink at tears. "This hurts. And I don't want to hurt you because I don't know how to handle the pain. Sit near me." Pained grey eyes drifted to the floor. "Will you sit near me, please?"

The younger man returned to his perch cautiously, knees folding gingerly, panic rising as the mattress dipped. Disturbing the delicate balance of quiet between them.

"I..." His gaze darted to a sullen mouth, voice hushed. "I didn't mean to hurt you, Peter. I was only trying to help..."

"But you did. You did hurt me. Deeply."

Elias twisted the hemline of his shirt, fresh tears welling. "I'm sorry."

"I don't want you to apologize. It was wrong of me to ask you to choose." Flinging a forearm over eyes, Peter reached out and settled a hand carefully on a bent knee, voice rough from throes of sleep edging in, deepening with a need to be touched. “I may be getting too old to chase after you, little bird. Too brittle boned to cope with the idea of all I love leaving me. And I do...” His mouth flinched thin, whispering. "I do love you. So fucking much."

Insinuation of fault and hurt wrinkled his nose. You wouldn’t have needed to chase me had you just agreed to come. Not then. Or now.

"Let's talk about it later." Elias touched fingers splayed on his leg with a glimpse of a thumb, voice becoming strained. “How much did you smoke?”

He didn’t want to shout. Or raise his voice. He was too tired, too frustrated, and too confused for another fight. He shivered as Peter squeezed his leg and slid it to rest on his hip. He squeezed the hand once then moved it away. He wasn’t sure he was ready to be touched.

A weak smile of understanding creaked. “Not enough evidently as I’m still breathing.”

Peter began to laugh, husky and low, before the sound turned to a rattle and he began to cough uncontrollably. He curled on his side, hand scrabbling buttons loose on his shirt. The younger man glowered at rough carpet. He hated how weak wheezes made his heart clench and stomach drop. Sympathetic pains drew tight across his chest. His hands wobbled. He knew his husband normally
only smoked socially or for pleasure. He smoked to excess when they fought. Hannibal had once said he could tell Peter’s state of mind by counting how many cigarette butts were discarded in their drive.

“You’re an ass.” Elias frowned, scooting forward to timidly rub and pat his back, scolding softly. “I wish you would quit.”

Sensing the quaver in his tone, the older man rolled until his head rested in a small lap and nuzzled like a large cat against hands stroking broad planes of his back. His chest continued to shake, stifling coughs with backs of a wrists. Peter patted a breast pocket in a wrinkled suit jacket and pulled out a slim cylinder of plastic. It glowed white in the dark before receding in a curl of vapor as lungs relaxed.

The younger man snatched it away, inhaled a cooling sensation of mint, and tossed it to the other bed with an irritable hiss. “That isn’t quitting. It’s just delaying the inevitable and I’m positive it will give you cancer just as effectively as the others.”

“Can you take pity on me for a moment?” Peter pleaded, sliding his palm up a flushed cheek, dragging his thumb over a quivering bottom lip. His eyes stayed closed, memorizing a flush of skin with fingertips. “You may yell at me all you wish when I’m feeling better. Right now your voice grates and I cannot stand to have you furious after I have missed you these last few days. I apologized, sparrow. Why can you not let me alone for a little while longer? Let me be with you?”

Elias couldn’t help pressing into the palm on his cheek, quiver of comfort rushing his body. Undone by how soft and cool it felt against his warm skin. Silvery eyes looked up from long lashes, searching his with sincerity of starlight sliding through rain. He resisted smoothing a wrinkled brow and kissing remorse from beneath closed eyelids.

“Let’s get you undressed.” He sighed, roughing waves of copper and stood. “You have had a long day.”

Peter quirked his head to the side, gaze darkening. "And you?" Arms wrapped the priest’s waist, palms moving up his chiffon blouse, as a warm mouth pressed a kiss to the base of his spine. “If you want the pleasure of my company, sparrow, no need for excuses. Just say that you want me.”

“Please don’t.” Elias disengaged carefully and tugged Peter to the bathroom. “I don’t want to talk anymore. Not until we both get some rest.”

Disappointed sighs grumbled after him. "I could think of far better uses of our time."

A square tiled shower spit cold water at first then hissed to hot. Its frosted glass door squeaked shut. Peter rested on the closed toilet seat, face buried in the crook of his arm slung on the marbled counter. He seemed far too pale in the harsh light. Knees tightened against thighs as Elias stepped between them and ushered for him to sit up. He leaned in, pushing the navy jacket from slumped shoulders and hung it on a towel bar. It smelled of smoke and alcohol. It would have to be sent to a cleaners if they had any hope of salvaging it.

Elias quivered as a mouth kissed a chiffon hemline rising on his stomach, whispering, “I said don’t.”

Long fingers hooked its hem. “I heard you.”

The older man looked him in the eyes before dragging the blouse over his head, exposing a pearly ribcage, shocked cry inhaled.

“What...what are you doing?” A flush stained cheeks as Elias shyly curved both arms around his
bare torso to hide it.

Grey eyes dragged down the front of him hungrily. “Helping.”

“Well.” The younger man felt a blush bleed down his torso, toes scrunching in shoes and socks. He would pink from head to toe in a matter of minutes. The dress shirt smudged in cigarette ash was opened in an anxious flurry of buttons. “Don’t. Just listen for once! Get up. Take this off.”

Elias jumped as a hand drifted to the nape of his neck and reeled him in by a cross, warm lips pressed to his ear. “Is that what you want? For me to listen and do as I’m told? Will I be allowed back in your good graces if I comply?”

He shivered, hands balling against thighs, want stirring low and thick in his reply. “Take off your clothes, Peter. I’m too tired for you to fight me.”

Peter rose slowly, eyes half lidded, shrugging lazily to draw attention to a ripple of muscle flowing from a dark v on a stomach. Sheer white pulled taut, buttons straining on a chest as arms lifted to stretch. The older man shrugged out of the crisp crepe shirt inch by inch. Mother of pearl buttons dragged the beginnings of inked foliage splaying up a clavicle. Half bloomed poppies mingled with sprigs of astilbe and tiny sketched violets twining on a shoulder dipped, scattering a shoulder blade. Camellia roses bloomed grey and black against the background of wilting leaves hiding scars lanced in skin. They wove together to create a delicate half sleeve ending at the elbow. The older man pulled the shirt off, stepping out of shoes and peeling off socks.

“How’s that?” A husky voice asked.

“You know very well…” Heat bloomed cheeks as teeth slid over a bottom lip, gleam of lilac lifting from skin to lazily blinking eyes. “I meant all of it.”

The older man thumbed a black horn button on a waistband. Elias bit his lip, attention drawn to seams straining on the front of a stitched fly. The first button popped. Fingers pulled it aside to reveal a row of four more metal buttons on the inner lining. Peter pretended to struggle with each one, mimicking how Elias clumsily fumbled them, hands too small to get at what he wanted. Buttons slid free one by one. Veins on a swollen red shaft appeared. Thick blunt tip wet and gleaming. The priest whined low in his chest.

The older man pushed trousers to hipbones, smirk rippling. He peeled fabric down, exposing inked watercolor spray roses and magnolia starting small at his ribcage and becoming larger as they wrapped his hip. They bled down old knife marks on his right thigh. Peter had spent hours illustrating each intricate detail of the tattoos, transforming scarring on his body to something of beauty. Flesh the likes of the Sistine Chapel and eyes the color of rain. Curls loosed from combed hair and tumbled down a lean chest, standing tall as a violet gaze swept over a naked body.

*Have you forgotten, Peter? You have always been a masterpiece to me.*

Elias stared at leaves of a sweeping fern shadowing an inner thigh to keep from fixating on the swelling line of a cock. He flushed as his body began to respond with a thickening need. He wasn’t certain the last time they had stood this still together in a room. He could see a blurred reflection of strong thighs and a shadowed cock in the tiled floor. He touched skin behind his ear self consciously, fingertips resting on a dainty inked crescent moon of pale pink delphinium and drooping lavender. A gift to Peter. Once sensitive and prickling from love bites of the older man’s appreciation. When had they last touched for more than just comfort? For pleasure.

Knuckles tucked beneath his chin and raised his eyes to rest on dusky lips sliding open as Peter bent
to kiss him. The older man moaned softly, palm moving from a slim shoulder to the small of his
back. A tongue flicked curiously at chapped lips to be granted entrance. Fingers splayed on his ass
with a rumbling groan of want. Elias was backed in the counter then pushed to lie down against it,
breath coming out quick and fragile, swelling cock digging his thigh. His foot twisted on a dingy
latch hook rug. The sudden motion set the room spinning. Peter tumbled forward, grabbing the
younger man for support. They banged against the counter, the towel rack, and then a corner of a
shower door as they spun. Elias yelped as Peter paled and began to tip forward. He struggled to get
the door open. It relinquished with a screech. The younger man flung arms around a waist, tottering
to the left and then the right, before he managed to pin Peter to a tiled wall. A hand wound in his hair
just as knees buckled.

“O-o-oh, okay…” Elias chirped frantically, knuckles scraping tile as he protected a head.

Peter dragged him to the shower floor and drooped with a tiny helpless moan. The priest propped the
older man in a corner, water drenching his spine and trousers. He rocked back on heels to feel a
forehead with a wrist. Peter was hot to the touch. He wriggled out of trousers, kicked off shoes, and
stepped back in the shower. He stood on tiptoes, swiping at the removable showerhead. On the
fourth try he knocked it down and jumped back to avoid being coshed in the head by it. He gripped
blonde hair on a lolling head and stooped to clean his husband’s naked body with a bitter scented
white soap. Eyelids tracked beneath closed eyes. A hand twitched against his bare foot. He kissed a
fair brow and stood. He washed grime of the day from his skin. Water flowed down the lithe length
of his body, rivulets snaking between thighs and touching sensitive parts until he shivered.

“The things I would do to you if I could only think straight…” Peter slurred watching with a bleary
gaze, snaking a hand up his ankle to pull him closer, lips trailing from a scabbed knee to thigh.

He swatted at hands roving up the curve of his backside. “I’m sure.”

“You do not believe me?” Glassy eyes flashed with challenge.

“I do.” Elias pushed free and snapped a towel off the rack, wrapping it three times around his waist
to avoid further pawing. “Now be quiet.”

“My dove, I must lie down.” Peter groaned, head falling back against the tile, groaning even louder
on impact.

“Hold on.” Scampering from the bathroom, he threw open his suitcase and rummaged for a bottle of
aspirin. He returned with two in his palm and a glass of water. He nudged them against a damp cheek. “Take these.”

Lashes fluttered as Peter tried to focus on what was being requested. He shook his head, cheek
pressed petulantly to tile.

"Take them."

"No."

"Stop whining and take them."

"No!"

"Fine! Suit yourself." A snort of frustration breathed across a forehead. Elias thumbed open a mouth,
squeezed pills through teeth, and made the older man drink. He held his jaw shut till a throat
swallowed. He swore his husband would rather die of delirium or alcohol poisoning then take a few
little pills.
Peter glared at him, far less threatening half asleep and drenched, like a lumbering kitten.

“Do you think you could eat something?”

A pale grey face twisted white, water droplets sliding down a scrunched nose. “How do you feel about holding my hair over the toilet for a duration of the evening?”

“So no hamburgers then?”

“Dear Christ in heaven, stop mentioning food.”

There was approximately six feet between the bathroom and nearest bed. It may have well been several miles. Elias was not sure he could get Peter to his feet, let alone struggle with the sheer weight and height of him before they both toppled. He worried his bottom lip. There were too many hard surfaces about for a head to crack. He didn’t think tile or carpet would be very forgiving on skin if he had to drag all one hundred twenty pounds across them. He shot a withering look at thin arms and stork legs. They barely managed to keep him steady when a gust of wind tried to knock him over in springtime. Will and Hannibal had always been around to help him hoist a feverish or drunken fiancé to bed. If he waited too long, there was a very real chance of Peter blacking out in the shower. He pursed lips.

Trouble, Peter Moreau, you’ve always been far too much trouble.

The older man moaned pitifully again about needing to lie down, gooseflesh scattering his torso and limbs. Kneeling, the priest put arms around him and rested the tip of a nose against a throat. He was miserable, cold, and wet. He had to move him. Hoisting a shivering arm round shoulders, Elias growled, jostled, and cursed until Peter teetered to a standing position then slumped. He balanced the weight of him on the nearest wall, dragging them against it and around the corner. He squinted at the bed. It might as well have been a different country. He clenched teeth determinedly and pitched them forward. The momentum carried them to the bed far faster then he intended. Their feet tangled. Peter was sent sprawling on his back. Elias yipped surprise and landed on top of him a moment later, straddling a naked chest, cross jangling.

Dimming stars peered out of slit eyes, blinking approvingly as droplets of water and towel slid from pointed hipbones. “…Nnn…divine.”

“Shhh. Not another word!” Blushing furiously, Elias clamped a palm over eyes and ordered, “Go to fucking sleep before I smother you, Peter.”

A drowsy reply lifted a fading smile. “Yes, dear.”

*

For several hours, Peter drifted in and out of consciousness. Distantly aware of temples throbbing. He shivered beneath a cheap polyester duvet and held tight to the curve of a waist tucked near. His pitched and mumbled frantically in sleep. His dreams kept bringing him back to the afternoon in the train station. The current swept him forward to the airport. No matter how fast he ran, he couldn’t catch up to Elias. He couldn’t hear him. He begged him to turn around and look at him. See him. Stay.

“Shh, shh…” Someone whispered. “I’m right here.”

He woke once, briefly, long enough to take deep swallows of something. It tasted of basil and red
ripened tomatoes. Cold pressed his head. Warmth enveloped his mouth. He was safe. He let sleep claim him once more.

When he woke again, his eyes remained fast shut and heavy with a crusted layer of sleep. His head was quiet, no longer buzzing static and pain. He wasn’t sure if he was awake or dreaming, caught between worlds of sensation. Something thin and cool trailed his chest. It followed the dip of his sternum and tickled ribs. Something softer, silky and damp, glided over his shoulders and pushed at aching muscles in his arms. He shifted as cool prickled a thicket of hair veeing beneath a navel. It swayed against his cockhead. Then tapped light, uneven strokes along a thickening shaft. He jerked, hips bucking, but was unable to move his legs. He moaned slightly as silk pushed between inner thighs pressed tight together. He reached blindly, fingers winding in hair, then dragged a shaven scalp.

“Nnn, saints. Elias.” Peter arched his back, lashes fluttering as he willed eyes to open. “I cannot feel my legs as it is, I don’t think I can—ah.”

Texture of a flattened tongue dragged up his cock, sultry voice filling the quiet. “I think your nerves and biology work just fine. Hold still. Don’t be so difficult.”

Eyes creaked open then settled at half-mast to peer out across a gleaming torso.

If this is a dream, don’t wake me from it.

Elias was bent on all fours, cross swaying from his neck, running hands down his naked body shimmering with massage oil. He dipped to push at a cluster of knotted muscles on broad shoulders. His thin arms trembled on each upstroke. Muscles stretching and tightening creamy thighs and calves on the way back down. Light hair hung disheveled around lilac eyes entirely focused on providing comfort. His rosebud nipples taut from the chill of air conditioning. A slim pink cock bobbed sheer ivory spandex, pearl drops beading on the head peeking from a thin lace lined waistband. The older man groaned, knee nudging a back to bring the perfect thing to his mouth. He wanted to taste it, feel its smooth texture on his tongue, sucking gently before warmth spilled down his throat and he allowed the boy to drink it off his lips. Elias resisted, hands sliding along the mattress to rest by his shoulders.

Peter shuddered as a palm slid around his balls and lifted, gasping. “If you could wait? I’m not yet awake. Use my mouth for now.”

“Oh.” He ached as Elias released him and rocked back on quivering haunches, swiping a glimmer of oil down a pinking chest. “I don’t need anything. I was just making sure you were still alive.” The boy glanced down imperiously at a blunt cock, wet and ready for touch, then back up. “Clearly you are. No need to continue.”

“I think you should put that mouth of yours to better use,” Peter growled, rising on elbows.

A thin hand shoved him back down. “You’re done telling me what to do for the moment, Mister Moreau.”

A fair brow arched. Peter crooked a finger under lace edging and let panties snap on a hip, heat coiling in his belly. He was so rarely afforded the pleasure of Elias telling him what to do. “Am I?”

“Mmmh.” Sandy brown waves tumbled over a face as the boy slipped off the bed. "Ferme ta bouche.”

(Shut your mouth.)
“Pardon?” A growl seeped from teeth as Peter felt heat prickle his palms, dick stirring at the sharp command. It sounded much more filthy and hot coming from an innocent mouth. He imagined swells of an ass pink against sheer lace as he reprimanded with light smacks. Heat wafting off skin as he tore panties to thighs and tongued an apology out of him. "Do you want to find out the consequences for ignoring me, sparrow? I won't be spoken to that way. Now come here."

"I'm busy." Elias leaned over the adjacent twin bed, glancing back once with a teasing smirk. "And I don't remember asking for your opinion."

Latches clicked free on the yellow suitcase. He wasn’t sure it was a ruse to be free of him or give him far too long to stare at an exquisite ass held high in the air. Peter cupped himself and let his gaze travel lush legs. They should have been wrapped around his face or wide spread indenting a mattress, not willfully disobeying him. Delicate lace paneling hugged tight to curved cheeks and balls, a dainty bow at its center edging. The sweetest gift courtesy of HommeMystere he had unwrapped on their wedding night. He thought of white silk stockings shaking against his torso as he had touched the boy through fabric until it was wet. A knee rose to the bed as contents began to rustle. A glimpse of bare silken skin enveloping a sweet hole exposed as another knee joined. He glanced at slim trousers drying from the shower then at the view before him.

Peter propped up on an elbow, scowl tightening his face. “Were you wearing those in court?”

“I couldn’t have worn the others. They would have shown. You know the linen is too thin,” Elias informed calmly, before peering over a freckled shoulder, dragging fingertips from his ribcage to trace lace. “But that isn’t what you were asking, is it?”

A spark of jealousy stirred Peter’s blood as he sat up. "Don't test me, little one."


Peter found himself rising, hand and knee balancing on the other bed, drawn to heat radiating from the body below as his voice dropped rough accusations. “Who were you hoping to inspire by bringing this along?”

“I expected you to be less stubborn and come with me. Not that you seem to believe me.” Lipstick swiveled in its tube before it was capped with a curt snap. “Maybe…” Elias tipped his face over a delicate shoulder, pout of stained lips turning to a hiss of pretty teeth. “I wanted to leave my mark on Will’s cheek when I kissed him goodbye.”

A hand shot out and gripped a face of mock innocence between thumb and hooked knuckles. “Let me taste your mouth, priest.”

Elias shook free and tossed wavy hair back. Marks bleeding from his face and blending to a shimmer of pearl skin. Display of need and possession far less permanent than Peter wanted. The boy picked up his compact, legs swinging, determined to ignore the request. Violet eyes surveyed the man bent over him with disinterest and boredom through curving lashes.

The older man exhaled a hot curse. "You're testing my fucking patience, dove."
"Is that what I'm doing?" Elias smiled in the reflection, maintaining an air of indifference.

There was a slight smudge of lipstick on the corner of a frowning mouth. Peter couldn’t look away from it. It was as almost as beautiful as Elias wet and writhing.

“You would deny me?” Peter asked, lowering until the weight of his chest and hips pushed delicate shoulder blades and elbows to submission, pressed flat against him. He picked up the lipstick and connected dots of freckles on a torso to form a heart. He smeared it with a palm, picturing how the color might look on his abdomen and cock with each glide of a lovely little mouth. "Or do you want to see what happens if you continue this line of appalling behavior?"

Fine cut nails shimmered as they were inspected, monotonous tone replying. “For someone exhausted, you seem to have enough energy to speak and function at will. Maybe you could do something useful and find us dinner.”

“Asked me to shut up again?” Fingers flexed on a hip wrapped in lace.

“Not asking. I told you to shut your mouth, Peter, and I expect you to do as I say.”

His dick jerked against his navel in a stream of white, hot breath hissing out. He shoved the suitcase. It and all of its contents toppled over the side. Peter flipped Elias on his back, frustrated growl clenched by teeth, thumbs digging delicate hips. A hiss answered on taunting colored lips. He fixated on its sweet cruelty, starved for the pressure and taste of it. He planted a hand firmly on a shuddering ribcage. He sat astride the smaller body trying to wriggle away and pinned the boy with his weight. Knobby knees trembled between the press of his calves. He cupped a cheek gently and bent forward to listen to panicked breaths turn to half choked moans. He smeared lipstick from gasping mouth to cheek to throat. Coral fingerprints swiped after disappearing nail marks on a smooth chest. He gripped a chin and bent to claim a mouth.

“I didn’t say…” Fingers twisted and jerked him back by roots of his hair, smeared lip lifting. “…you could kiss me there.”

He growled, scalp tingling. “You delightful fucking tease.”

Peter flattened Elias, rubbing his leaking cock between twisting legs, and began to bite a curving shoulder. He wanted his scent to permeate the boy's skin, possess him inside and out, to show the world who he belonged to. He replaced every smudge of lipstick with a suck bruise, working his way from chest to stomach. He shoved knees open, wrists hooked under them, and lifted the lower half of the boy to his mouth. He whistled cool breath against fabric sticking to tight balls then mouthed lace edging. The priest moaned louder and bucked, trying to push the mouth where he wanted it. Peter dragged him from the bed by hips and pushed Elias up against the dresser, gripping hands holding tight to the edges for support. He kicked legs apart, cock leaking a stream of wet between shoulder blades. He bent teeth to lovely freckled shoulders and ringed them red.

He gripped wrists and commanded, “Don’t you move, priest.”

Elias whined, pillowing a head on arms. He rose up on tiptoes and pushed his ass up the air. Peter ran an index finger across a swell to ease the blatant temptation being offered. He dropped to his knees and held tight to thighs to keep them apart. He licked and nipped, leaving red marks winding from ankle to an inner thigh. The priest moaned as a tongue left a wet stripe across a perineum. He scratched nails up the bend of a knee then gripped an ass on the other side. He smoothed stinging marks as he stood. Peter pressed thumbs to every single rib until he reached a narrow waist. He pushed them in divots of a lower back, widening his grip, knuckles flexing round a waist. The tips of his fingers splayed on a stomach wet, shivering anticipation. He squeezed. Whines turned to moans.
God, he loved holding him this way, hands encircling him from back to front. Feeling a heartbeat and breath pulsing underneath his fingertips. Small and fragile and his to care for.

*My pretty little thing. Mine.*

He picked the boy up and deposited him on top of the bureau, flattening palms to the dresser, command rough. "Stay. Or I’ll have to punish you."

Stalking to the bathroom, he tore open a cabinet door beneath the sink and yanked out a white and red plastic first aid kit. He opened the flimsy latch and trifled through it. He plucked out a band aid and an antibacterial ointment. Elias watched curiously, gnawing at his lower lip and shivering, hands clutching the bureau edge exactly as he had been told to do. The older man placed a small foot against his stomach and inspected the scab on a knee cap. He squeezed ointment on it, gripping an ankle when the boy tried to pull away with a whine. He tore open the band aid with teeth, spitting out the wrapper and peeled at plastic sides. He lay it carefully across the scrape and sealed a wish for speedy healing, for skin to remain perfect and untainted from scars, with a press of his mouth.

*If any harm should come to you under my care, I will tend to your broken wings and hold close till you fly once more. All I ask...*

“T-t-thank you,” Elias murmured, tears pricking eyes.

*...is for you not to go too far, where I cannot see and cannot follow. If you must, will you vow to return to me?*

Pain radiated his chest. His gaze fell to small hands squeezing his gratefully. It had been years and Peter was still not used to being thanked for something Elias didn’t seem to think he deserved. To be handled gently when needed. Cared for when he thought he didn’t.

*While caring for the world, have you forgotten you too deserve to be cared for?*

“It’s…” His reply was hoarse, fingertips shaking near a blush knee. “It’s nothing.”

Thin fingers tunneled blonde hair, kiss pressed to the center of his forehead, painfully tender. “It’s… everything… to me.”

He brought a hand to his mouth and kissed a rose gold wedding band, mouth drifting to sensitive skin of an inner wrist, breathing. "You deserve so much more.”

"Hold me..." Elias whispered. "That's all I want."

Running palms up legs, Peter nudged them open and stepped between, touching every freckle and bite mark along the way. A shy gaze eclipsed a sweet mouth leaning in. He watched the vision of a perfect face blur, heart slamming in his chest, and groaned when warm lips slid over his. He lifted the boy in a crushing embrace, smothering pleas and moans and drinking in tighter, tighter, don’t let go.

He tasted hot and sweet like vanilla icing dripping on a cooling cake. He cupped a head, tilting his chin to gain better access, and ran his tongue along one wriggling against his.

He licked at its tip then lapped at wet swollen tulip lips, groaning, “God, Elias, I missed you.”

Knees chaffed his torso, hooked ankles leveraging to rut a slim cock clothed in lace against a chest. He jostled him to a single arm and palmed fabric translucent with come. He toyed with a pink cockhead eliciting pants then mewls from a wet mouth pressed to his ear. White tipped nails scored the back of his neck and clenched strands of blonde hair. Elias claimed his tongue with a moan, sucking slowly at first then faster, thighs quivering round ribs. He shuddereded and pushed the boy...
against the dresser again in a roll of hips. His cock throbbed feeling the pull of lips on his tongue sliding up and down its shaft, stirring with each teasing flick at the tip. He reached for his shaft with a sticky palm and hissed, eyes closing, on the first firm upstroke. He matched the pace on his tongue to his hand, heat coiling tight in his belly.

Elias retreated playfully, smile coy. He chased after the tongue with a growl of displeasure, dresser rocking on the wall. A foot planted against his chest and kicked. He fell to the bed, teeth snapping. The priest hopped off the ledge and crawled the length of his body, smirking, proud of having toppled him with such an easy ploy. He couldn’t tear eyes off the minute sway of hips causing an opalescent cock to strain lace trim, liquid spilling and dribbling on a thicket of hair between his thighs. He knew if he pulled open cheeks his husband would be dripping wet from balls to a fluttering hole begging for attention.

“Let me have you,” He gripped lace panties and pulled, desperate to bare him and mouth at what lay beneath. "I know you want what I can give you."

The boy smiled and shook his head defiantly. "If I want something, I can take care of myself."

Two fingers dragged around an open mouth. Elias drew fingertips away stained faint pink. He knelt, stretching to arch his fair chest, narrow waist accentuating as he leaned back. He smeared marks down his stomach. Peter held his breath, entranced as Elias touched each stinging bite mark on his body. His thin hand pushed passed a gleaming cock and reached between legs. He pulled ivory lace aside, rubbing the sensitive area behind balls, widening knees to push further. His sharpened teeth bit a pout, eyes fluttering closed, tense at the first press of fingers breaching. He shivered as Elias let out a plaintive moan. His delicate cockhead pooled white as another finger was added. The older man swallowed hard, gripping the mattress instead of an ass to lift the perfect, beautiful boy to his mouth. He had never wanted to suck him more. Elias threw back his head and moaned louder. He was so close. Peter licked dry lips and widened his thighs to ease a persistent ache. He wasn’t ready for their little game to end quite yet. Two could play keep away.

“I don’t think so.” The older man wrestled Elias to the bed, fighting to grip wrists to pin him properly, flare of jealously and want pressed tight to an ear. He lightly slapped a hand away from jerking a needy cock. “You made me wait. Left me for another man. Two if we’re being accurate. What makes you think you get to have me now? That you deserve it?”

“Because…” Elias moaned. Nails dug deep in shoulders and stung down flowering scars to grip a firm ass. “You like it when I sin.”

Peter grunted as their cocks tangled and bit an angry mark on a shoulder. “And why should I pay any attention to my sinner? He angered his false god.” He wrapped small wrists in one hand and pinned Elias to the bed, stretching him out for sacrifice, gaze sliding to a panting mouth slicked wet and waiting. He thrust forward twice and lifted, loving the way the priest arced his back and gasped. “He ought to open his pretty mouth to sing hymns in my honor. Get down on bended knee and pray for me to be merciful.”

Elias glowered, devilish smile twisting. He licked lips slowly with just a tip of a tongue and then its edge. Heels lifted to drag up tensed calves, hips lifting off the bed and wriggling. “I know you can’t resist keeping a watchful eye on your greatest temptation.”

Peter watched panties distend as a cock snapped free, fluid spattering a navel white. Lace seams strained as they slipped from hips to thighs.

“I don’t need to be on my knees to gain your mercy or attention. Just give in.” A burning mouth lifted to suck his neck. Knees pressed together until panties slipped down them, before widening in a
tear of seams. “And open my legs.”

The older man adjusted the grip of his fist then tore the fragile thing off. He brought ruined panties to his nose. They were soaked through. Sweet musk and sweat filled his lungs. He locked eyes on Elias with a twitch of a smile. He wrapped material around his cock and began to stroke with a free hand. Elias whined, gaze fixed on a swollen head reddening in a tunnel of white lace and squirmed.

“You’re so wet already.” Peter groaned at how slick the lace was, grip tightening and picking up speed. “You want me to have you. Fuck you until your sweet little cries muffle sheets and pillows. Even when you’re angry with me. I think you want me more then. Look at how much you need it. How long has it been?”

"I..."

"Answer me..." The older man tapped the tip of his tongue against a shaft, sweat beading on a slim stomach as it clenched. "And I’ll give you what you want." He slowed jerking and pushed teasingly against cheeks, rubbing a hole. "Or do you not want me? Do you think it was fair to make me wait all this time?"

"I want you! I'm sorry." Elias was biting his lip hard enough to draw blood, knees and ankles jerking desperately to draw Peter on top of him. His cockhead was leaking steadily, far more when he whimpered and lifted hips from the bed to allow it to pool and dampen sheets. "Too long. I don't remember. Touch me already!"

He dropped panties to the floor with a smile. "I guess you've been good. You deserve a reward."

The older man released a single hand from his grasp. The boy’s left. His non-dominant hand. To appear merciful. He knew full well it would only serve to frustrate him. He would have to ask for what he wanted while Peter watched.

“Oh god!” The priest bucked on the first grip, heels digging the mattress. He rutted inside a clumsy tunnel of fingers, grip unfamiliar and not what he needed, fine sheen of sweat covering his body. Sandy waves plastered a forehead. Tears edged at the corners of eyes. “P-peter,” He sobbed, motion slowing then stopping, knuckles covered in liquid. "Please?"

“Yes?” The older man asked, lapping at come dripping from his navel.

“I n-need you.”

Darkened eyes rose from between damp thighs widening in invitation. “Yes.” Peter leaned up to kiss a quivering mouth, thumbs sliding between legs. “Yes, you do.”

He ducked his head and licked a slim cock once, rough and hot. He sucked the tip and wrapped lips tight. Elias wrenched free, hands in his hair, and thrust to the back of his throat, coming in a torrent of salt and a cry of his name. He mouthed and sucked until the priest twitched with pleasure, faint and weakly slumping on the mattress. He swallowed. By the time he finished licking his body clean, Elias was half asleep.

“I consider that an act of contrition, little one…” He uttered darkly in an ear, rolling the priest on his stomach and then positioning him on knees. “Not a sin.”

Elias teetered unsteadily, eyes struggling to stay open, thighs quivering against the front of thick ones. “I need you in me.”

“So eager. You do, don't you?” Peter slid his cock between wet cheeks and groaned. “Did you bring
The priest went still, hands twisting sheets anxiously.

“Mm, taking a vow of silence at a time like this? I ought to chastise you.” A light slap to his ass rang out.

There was a sharp intake of breath and then a stammer. “N-no. I didn’t.”

“Do you want me to bend you over my knee? I don’t appreciate dishonesty.” Peter kissed the back of a neck turning scarlet and toyed with a flaccid cock filling and lifting once more. He was going to make him come hard enough to see his god. “Do you want to know how I can tell when you’re lying to me, Elias?”

He moved from the bed and crouched over contents of the suitcase on the floor to sift through them. The priest remained trembling on hands and knees. He flashed a smirk up at wide lilac eyes glowing inside ruddy skin.

“Or shall I keep that little secret to myself?”

He sorted several blouses to a pile and stopped. He touched three familiar opal buttons. He moved a robins egg blue sweater and stared down at his black Yves St. Laurent suit jacket. Matching trousers were slung across a hanger. Pressed shirt folded neatly to a square on cardboard stock. He released a shaky exhale. They belonged to him.

_You really did plan for me to come with you. And I just let you leave. What's wrong with me?_

“Ah.” He tossed several condoms and lube to the bed. "Here we are.”

The older man stood, unfurling fingers to reveal what he held. A pale plastic blue ring rested at the center of his palm. Edges scalloped like a dainty daisy. Tiny hearts stamped the design. A single button controlled its vibration. He was pleased to find the cock ring had made it safely through security and customs. He suspected the matching vibrator remained in the nightstand of their bedroom. A few gifts to keep the boy company while he was at work. Elias had teased and made him suffer through enough. It only seemed fair to return the favor.

“Was this…” He kissed the corner of a mouth then slid it open with a thumb. “…for Will too? Or do you just take pleasure in seeing my reaction?”

Elias flushed hot as the ring was pushed in his mouth, index finger dragging down the center of his tongue. Peter slid his mouth after it, tonguing at teeth. They relented and allowed him entrance. He tugged lazily on the boy’s cock as it grew harder. He settled on the dry side of the bed, mouths entwined, and lured the ring out with a tongue. Gripping thighs, he lifted Elias to his mouth and slid the ring on with teeth, breathing hot down the length of a shaft. He wiggled a tongue between it and a pulsing vein to make sure it was secure. Then he nestled comfortably on pillows and turned it on.

“Please.” The priest gasped, arcing.

Peter tucked an arm tenderly behind knees until they buckled and knelt on his shoulders. “Say it.”

Hands grabbed the headboard as another vibration began, plea breathless. “I want your mouth.”

"That sounds like a demand. Try to be more polite. And a bit more explicit if you don’t mind."

"Pleeease..." Elias whined. "Suck me."
Inwardly, the older man groaned his pleasure. It was nothing like it used to be. When he had to coax Elias to fearfully whisper what he wanted as if someone was listening.

“I need you to tell me what you want.”

“I c-can’t. Please it feels good.”

“What feels good? This? Or this?”

“Aah, ah, God.”

“Has nothing to do with it. Use your words.”

“P-p-peter, Peter, ah. No, no, don’t stop.”

“Then say it.”

“Touch me. I want you to touch me.”

Elias squirmed and flushed a shade deeper. “Please? I need it. I need you. I need nnn-”

“Not yet.” The older man smiled and kissed a freckle on a stomach then a leaking cockhead tenderly. “I haven’t forgiven you.”

Tipping his chin, Peter rolled a tongue between shivering and clenching thighs, mouthing at balls. He admired the way knees tensed around his ears as the vibration whirred louder, anticipation of climax dripping white, only to be unable to reach release. Flighty pants turned to a chant of please, please, please and rose to colorful moans of fuck, oh god, fuck me. The headboard banged as Elias tugged and pushed it, toes curled then dug hips, head thrown back. He reeled the boy closer, relishing the slap of a dripping cock on his tongue, wriggling a tip beneath the ring to offer a little relief. He gripped an ass and thrust a sweet cock to the back of his throat. His teeth chattered with vibrations as the boy rutted until he couldn’t feel his lips or tongue. He smoothed open cheeks and breached a ring of muscle with an index finger.

“Peter.” Elias cried and yanked his hair, sliding to a crouch to fuck himself open on fingers. He was far too tight, woefully neglected by their separation. His cries turned to sobs for relief. “Oh god, Peter, please!”

“That’s right,” Peter murmured, leaving light nail tracks down a thin torso, mouth hovering above one slicked red and pleading. “You’re going to pray to me by the end of this, love, feel it sliding up your tongue and resting upon your lips. Devote yourself to me each time I push you to the brink of release. I want you to remember I am the only one you need.”

Elias clung to him as another vibration tipped him to the edge then restrained him, wail pitiful. “Peter, I need to come!”

The older man crooked for a prostrate, hissing as nails furiously scratched his chest. He tugged the ring free and the boy came with a shout, spurting white across their chests and twitching dry aftershocks.

“Oh god!” The priest sobbed, nails clamped red on skin, trembling from head to toe.

Peter kissed the top of a head sweetly and carried the body quaking from pleasure to the other bed. He laid him out and reached for the blue glass bottle of massage oil. He loosely slicked up. Then lightly smeared his cockhead between cheeks. His stomach twisted hot need. He squeezed the shaft.
He needed to be inside him. He watched Elias, flushed by sweat and heat, unsteadily pull his legs open. He dragged a nose along a dot of freckles on an inner thigh and kissed it before lining up his cock with a clenching hole. He tried to tease, to rim his entrance, to give nothing but the tip. Ankles hooked around his back and yanked forward.

“Fucking saints.” Peter choked, buried root to tip. He reached blindly for the headboard to maintain consciousness and waited for a dizzy wave to pass. “You’re so tight and hot.”

“Tell me,” Elias whispered drawing close, resting his face in the crook of a shoulder, trembling. “Say you missed me, Peter. Tell me I’m all you need.”

The older man lifted misting eyes and drew a thigh to his ribcage. He brushed his mouth over a knee. Elias nuzzled his neck and pushed tentatively for encouragement, mattress creaking as their weight shifted. Peter turned his face to kiss a pattering pulse, murmur against an ear, thrusting in and out of tight heat, shallow and quick. “I didn’t miss you, sweetheart. I have died without you. A little more so every time we part.”

Lipstick stained nails gripped shaking biceps and scattered inked roses. "Do you still need me?"

“How could you ever—“ He thrust hard and shook with the moan of his name piercing the air “—doubt how much I need you? How much I will always need you?”

Peter grasped timid bones, threatening to break them and thrust faster, trying to hold on to Elias, keep them together, shaking and desperate for every time they had ever been apart.

“You’re perfect! You always have been.” He kissed tears pooling on a sternum, palm sliding to cup the side of the boy’s face, and locked their gazes as he moved. “You’re my fucking light, Elias. My life. My whole goddamn world. I’m nothing, nothing without you.”

The priest scoured fingers up his throat and gripped hair, gaze wild and spilling tears. “I…I don’t ever want to forget what it’s like to be this close to you. Connected. Like you carry my soul within yours. See its darkness reflected in your yes. And know for some reason you love it all the same. Love me. Why do you love me?” He brought a palm to his mouth and kissed its center, trailed up a thin wrist, and kissed a winding scar created by a night of ice and shattered glass. Rain fell from his eyes and pinged freckled shoulders where frail feathered wings of an angel had once been. “I can’t lose you again. You were my only reason to live. You still are. I…” He lay his head on a chest, bowed in devotion, clinging to the only goodness he had known and prayed, sobbing. “I’m no good. No good. I won’t make it without you.”

“Peter…” Elias curled around him, delicately tracing brutality and transgressions from his skin, and pressed a mouth to his hairline, murmuring. “Peter, you’ve always been right here.” He flattened a
palm on his heart and covered it. “With me. And…” He held close to a frame beginning to shake apart and crumble. “I will never forget you. We’re twin stars, remember?” He tapped the crescent brand on Peter's clavicle and then the clustered freckles on his own, kissing the side of a tear streaked face. "I'm destined to be with you."

"Elias?” Peter stroked a cheek.

The priest kissed his palm, eyes wide and shining. "Yes?"

"Everything..." He offered a timid smile. "...is going to be okay."

*I'll do whatever I can to make you happy. Hold you close. Even if our family is torn apart. I'll love you. Even if you long for him.*

Elias flung arms around a neck and started to cry. They drank salty tears of all they could not yet say from each other's mouths. Peter tunneled hands beneath a body to cradle Elias, palm cupping the back of his head, and watched his beautiful smile melt beneath a rush of welling tears. Determined hands wrapped his waist and neck, pulling until they began to move as one. The boy held him tight, gazes locked, as if they might go up in smoke, having never existed. He felt his entire world shift inside Elias. Struck down by sensation of love trapping him in a vivid light and burning heat.

*If this is what it's meant to burn for my sins, then set me on fire, love. I have no regrets.*

“Forgive me, forgive me. I love you, Elias.”

His heart wrenched at the beautiful hymn of twin cries rising one after the other.

“N-no. I don’t need to. I just need you. Just, oh god, just you. Hold me, Peter.”

“Always, sparrow, you’re mine. Forever.”

They caught fire in burnt orange of a sunset. Fell against one another like starlight entwining and falling to the heavens. They landed just as quietly. Without a sound. Light sparking then dimming to a dreamless sleep of shivering limbs and protection of each others arms. Where they found peace listening to the soft beat of hearts calling out to one another.

* *

Peter startled awake an hour later by a grinding noise. His body ached. He couldn't imagine the boy was conscious enough to be pleasuring himself already. He creaked eyes open. Elias was snoring softly in his arms, pale face burrowed against his chest, pearl earrings askew and tangled in bronze hair. There was a little smile twitching at his mouth, dreaming sweet things, and practically glowing in the dim light.

*My fallen star. My little bird.*

He nestled a frail, perfect body and tried to fall back asleep.

But the damn sound persisted.

The older man groaned and rolled over to find the source. He watched a cell phone shake its way furiously across the nightstand. He caught it as it fell and considered throwing it against the nearest wall to remedy the blatant disturbance to his sleep. It stopped. He smirked at it. Apparently a silent threat was enough.
Then it started again. Blinking and buzzing and overall being a goddamn annoying son of a bitch. The older man hated modern technology. What happened to the days when you could simply ignore everyone by slamming a door in their face? Or disconnecting the phone to enjoy peace and quiet?

Peter jammed a thumb over the green accept button, flopped back on the bed, and howled. “What? The fuck do you want?”

A timid hush answered. “Mister Moreau?”

He didn’t recognize the voice. It was deep. A man.

Grey eyes blinked down at the unknown number. “Who in fuck’s sake is this? And why are you calling my husband? He's married and he's mine and I don't appreciate strangers I don't know trying to harass him.”

“Oh, s-s-s-sir, my name is—HEY!”

There was an endless amount of tedious rustling and crackling and far too many noises for Peter’s liking. He hung up. The room was quiet again. He closed his eyes. The phone vibrated menacingly in his palm. He sighed, clicked the button, and listened.

“Peter!” A familiar, too good for thou, voice shouted. “Where the fuck is the priest? You were supposed to be here twenty minutes ago.”

The older man smirked at obvious frustration, words simply rolling off his tongue. “Otherwise occupied on my cock and moaning for more. Whaddyou want, Will?”

There was another sound in the background. A collective gasp of disapproval?

What was the big deal? He had said far worse, much more explicit, things to Will to get him to leave them alone. This seemed terribly tame in comparison. After all. He was over due for an annual monthly reminder of whom his sweet angel belonged to. Him. How could he resist their little jab of ‘who gets the pleasure of fucking whom’ followed by their second favorite game of ‘who gets to simply look from a distance and pine after how pretty they are?’

“He’s due in court if you recall.” Honeyed caramel dripped smooth and sweet through the speaker, drifting close then far away, chuckling. “Though an admirable excuse for being late, don’t you think?”

Who in saints name was Hannibal talking to?

“Oh, Mister Moreau…” The first voice returned, a strained whisper, fierce and deliberate. “The judge s-says he won’t find you in contempt if you get here in the next f-fifteen minutes.” A throat audibly swallowed after a long pause. “Also. You're on speaker.”

Peter drew the phone from his ear and stared at the clock ticking off minutes of conversation. Lips drew to a thin moue of murderous intent. He could actually hear Will howling laughter in the background. Echoing more like. Had he just said what he said to an entire goddamn courtroom?

“Peter?” The priest stirred, sleepy eyes struggling to open.

The older man stroked matted hair, seething, and stared at the ceiling. “Make it thirty five. Unless that prick wants an exhibit of me licking the priest clean. I suspect he’ll just end up dirty again and then where would be. I’d just have to start over.”
Hannibal leaned in, amusement coloring light. “I’m not sure you should be saying that to a judge. Particularly not ours. He is not one for displays of affection. Or public cock sucking.”

“We asked.” Will chimed in. “So I imagine this hands free phone conversation is not brought to us by blue tooth technology. So either the priest is riding you or your banging him on all fours. Or is he ignoring your sorry ass? A far more likely scenario given how none of us can understand why he likes you. Which is it?”

“You have a very captive audience, Peter, we shouldn't keep them waiting in anticipation.”

“Fils de pute!” Peter snapped, glaring at the phone indignantly, because of course Will and Hannibal would act this way. “I wasn’t talking to the judge.”

(Son of a bitch.)

“Who then?”

“I was talking to Will.”

Peter jammed ‘end call’ on the phone before anyone else—god forbid the judge himself—replied, and pitched it to the other end of the bed. He was going to fucking kill that man. Fuck the trial. He was happy to do it. Save the institution some costs.

“Who was talking to Will? Did he call?” Elias blinked up at him with an array of bed head, sleepy confusion wrinkling his brow. “Is everything okay?”

Peter sighed and ruffled sandy hair. The boy was entirely naked and too beautiful to be anywhere except in his bed. Or on it. Or near it. At the foot or between them. Or in the proximity of being able to see one hideous paisley corner from the mirrored bathroom as they fucked. Repeatedly. Until he was satisfied all the unrelenting sexual frustration built up between them over the weeks was worn out. He wanted them to sleep off their aching bodies and wake the boy with a gentle kisses in the twilight hours to make love to him, slowly, properly, as softly as he knew how.

Peter supposed he needed to be responsible. And wait.

Though I do not, and have never, found Will to be a good reason to do so.

“I could just blow you on the witness stand and call it a day,” The older man mumbled as his thoughts began to form vivid imagery.

“What?” Elias squeaked, shrinking to hide behind sheets pulled up to his ears, eyes growing wide.

“Nothing, nothing. My dove, I never thought I would say this to you, but…” Peter leaned down and kissed a deepening frown softly. “I have to take you to court. And it pains me to say that is not a bedroom game or an erotic euphemism. Also, we're late.”

"What!" The boy bounded across the bed and grabbed the phone, shrieking at the time glowing up. "Oh my god! How could you let this happen!"

Crawling lazily after, Peter managed to trap kicking arms and legs between his own as he blanketed the priest's body on knees and hands, and laughed huskily against an ear. "If you give me a few minutes, I'd be happy to reenact exactly how this happened. Blow by blow. Stroke after stroke. Maybe a mouth full of my dick will help jog your memory to remind you exactly who woke whom up."
"You-" A pillow thumped him in the face. "-are the worst! Now let go of me this instant!"

The priest scampered to the bathroom as Peter sat momentarily dazed. A shower hissed on, barely drowning out frantic mutterings. He glanced at the phone. They had twenty five minutes. He caught the reflection of a bare ass stooping to pick up a towel in the mirror and smiled. There was a lot he could do in half that time. He slipped quietly in to the bathroom.

A shower door creaked open and shut. Someone yelped. A deeper voice chased playfully after a higher one whispering no, no no, thinning to a whine. Glass shuddered once with a struggle of bodies then twice as wet palms pressed against them. Whines pitched sharp with a sucking sound and peaked to reedy moans as knuckles deepened. White splattered the tile floor. Knees buckled. A pale spine melded with frosted glass as it began to shake. Cries turned to groans and choked screams of yes, yes, yes muffling the shrill ring of a phone in the other room.

Chapter End Notes

Looking forward to catching up with each of you and hearing your new thoughts. <3

Colors x Halsey

You were a vision in the morning when the light came through
I know I’ve only felt religion when I’ve lied with you
You said you’ll never be forgiven till your boys are too
And I’m still waking every morning but it’s not with you

You’re dripping like a saturated sunrise
You’re spilling like an overflowing sink
You’re ripped at every edge but you’re a masterpiece
And now I’m tearing through the pages and the ink
“I leave you alone f-for five minutes and you do this!” An irritable voice crowed behind a cupped hand trying to be discreet.

“Well, we didn’t get to do anything.” Dim blue eyes rolled. “That’s the point.”

A snaggletooth peeked behind a rippling seam of lips. “Not for lack of passion mind you.”

“Or effort.” Huff of laughter followed.

“And…” A mont blanc fountain pen tapped against a wood table, crow dropping to a reprimanding hiss. “…what’s this I hear about you t-t-trying to eat Agent Crawford!”

“If the prick would have let us eat out each other, or someone would have done their part, it wouldn’t have been an issue.” A surly voice replied.

“I have apologized on three separate occasions for the interruption and role I played, dearest.” Blood caked knuckles traced handcuffs encircling a torn cotton cuff adoringly. “Until I am able to provide you with a more stimulating plea for forgiveness, I can only promise not to let our dessert interfere with our romance ever again.”

A copper fringed forehead flopped wearily against palms. “You can’t just eat people!”

“Can’t?” Shimmer of blue flicked left then right to survey curving red lips, pinky linking around an index finger. “Shouldn’t? Moral grey area there.”

“Hannibal!”

“My husband makes a valid argument. Who am I to dissuade him?”

“Jesus Christ on a—“

“—a ham sandwich?” The other offered.

A peaked nose wrinkled. “I thought we agreed Uncle Jack was more of a dessert and less of a distasteful deli counter meat.”

“Shut up! Both of you!”

“Is there something you would like to share with the court?” Booming reached high ceilings and descended on men seated below in the courtroom with a steely glare.

“N-n-no, sir.” Jordan Silas shrunk in his chair, hiding sheepishly behind a yellow legal pad. He shot a glare at his clients. “Nothing at all.”

Will and Hannibal blinked sweetly at one another, once more cuffed to chairs, knuckles and faces marred. A poignant, albeit brief, reminder to Agent Crawford where he fell on the food chain. Well. Their food chain.

The man in question was nowhere to be seen.

Courtroom doors creaked loudly. A huddled figure followed by a long cast shadow tried sneak in unnoticed.
“Ah.” Silvery glass of a Timex flashed disapprovingly in the light as the judge rose to peer over his bench. “Good of you to finally join us, gentlemen. Father Svendsen…” The man curtly pointed with two fingers at the witness stand directly to his right. “If you wouldn’t mind.”

Elias squeaked when he heard his name, saucer eyes gleaming in headlights of a stern stare. He stopped dead in his tracks. Broad shoulders and a wide chest plowed directly in to him, rainwater grey stare fixed absently to the floor. Peter swore under his breath. The priest tottered unsteadily by the force and lost his balance. Fingers splayed against his ribcage to gently right him. They were warm pressed against cool crepe of a terribly wrinkled blouse. He shivered, cheeks staining cherry red as lips drifted against the curve of an ear.

“Best not keep them waiting, little one,” Peter advised with a low laugh, swatting him lightly on the rear.

Sweet pouting lips gaped at a salacious grin crinkling cheeks, the corners of eyes, pleased by the reaction. Elias rearranged a suit jacket certain his husband could see the outline of slim black shorts beneath thin linen. The unraveling lace pair left to drip dry in the sink.

The priest’s teeth chattered a low growl of irritability. “This is your fault!”

“I believe…” The older man bent at the waist and brushed fingers beneath a stitched cuff to press a thumb against a quickening pulse, silver gaze lighting. “You may have had a hand in it.”

The absolute nerve! Elias spun on his heel and crossed his arms, glowering like a Persian cat when Peter nudged him down the aisle.

He certainly hadn’t asked Peter to surprise him the shower and then refuse to let him leave no matter how much he squirmed or protested. He clearly recollected shouting demands to be let down after being pinned to the shower door. He did not, and had never in all his life, possessed the upper body strength to fend off anyone let alone someone of the older man’s stature. Then there was the issue of roaming hands and a scandalous mouth making a slow descent. Peter knew very well he had difficulty saying no after a certain point. He had, after all, been a literal saint of questionable moral standing for most of his adult life. What else was he to do but give in? Then to be blamed for their collective lateness to a trial where he was to be the first witness…

Heavens! There is only so much one ought to be asked to endure!

“Sparrow, you’re squinting angrily at me. And while I find it amusing and adorable…” Peter informed with a quirk of lips. “The judge does not seem to share my sentiments. Shouldn’t you be hopping along?”

Elias squinted till his husband blurred, pupils glinting, and was about to thump a hand on his chest, hard as he could, before walls reverberated once more.

Nails drummed on the gleaming wood bench. “While we’re still young, Father.”

“I’m so s-s-s-sorry, Your Honor.” Elias stammered at the judge then snapped his gaze sheepishly to the floor, fidgeting with satin lapels of his ivory suit jacket.

He hurried down the aisle, palms sweating. His limbs and mind moved disjointedly, lacking rhythm, propelled by the request for his immediate presence. The boy hurrying to the alter to avoid a sound lashing. His mind was filled with cobwebs of sleep and blankets swaddled in a safe embrace. Elias adjusted sprigs of lavender pinned to his lapel, frowning as crumpled petals flaked and trailed after. Eyes from each corner seemed to watch his every movement. What were they staring at? Him?
He bit his lip and walked faster, listening to a melodic clack of dress shoes following at a leisurely pace. He glanced over his shoulder at Peter, lazy smile rippling, wide hands hanging from dark wool sateen pockets, fingernails still stained coral from lipstick. The sight both soothed and agitated him. There was a singular smudge, a lip print, behind the older man’s left ear. The rest of Peter remained exquisitely untouched and pristine.

*How remarkably unfair.* Elias tucked waves shakily behind his ear.

“For me to look a fright and for you to look as handsome as ever.

“So very sorry, Mister Silas.” He nodded to the young lawyer who turned bright pink upon catching sight of him and looked away, busily shuffling papers then rifled through his briefcase fervently. The priest circled around as little doors swung behind him, running a hand through disheveled hair for the hundredth time, and muttered apologetically, “Sorry, everyone. I’m so sorry for the delay!”

Glazed stares of strangers answered silently.

“Looks a little worse for wear, Peter.” Smoothed stones of a river noted. “What did you do to him? You’re only what…” One pale hand turned a handcuffed wrist to glance at a pearl watch face beneath a plaid suit sleeve. The last button was chipped and had begun to unravel. “An hour and twelve minutes late? Practically a new record of being on time.”

*Oh.*

Elias took a deep breath and held it, rush of cold settling his nerves and freezing him in place. Fingers curled to soothe trembling. He tipped a timid gaze down an upturned nose and found Will leaning out, chair tipped back against the banister, amusement flicking bright blue up at Peter sliding in to an aisle to sit. His hair was cut short, tips curling above a fresh bruise on his forehead. His face was ghastly. Mottled in cuts and bruises, left hand bandaged, wearing a smile beneath the abuse Elias feared he faced both in this life and the one before they had met. Will didn’t belong here. None of them did.

*Everything is wrong.*

He stared at the palm upturned on the table, lifelines etched deep in grooves of skin, and wished to reach for it to be reminded of where theirs had met.

*Or have we changed too much to ever find our paths entwined?*

“You’re the one with the imagination, Will. Figure it out…” Peter countered, reaching down to grip Will’s jaw in a single fist with a glint of feral teeth and kissed a cheek to growl, “And if you ever have me on speaker phone again, I’ll knock your teeth out your fucking skull.”

Dark brows rose, amusement crinkling brow and cheeks as Will craned to smile at Peter. “Is it strange to say I missed you?”

“Troubling, perhaps…” Hannibal responded dryly, jagged cut splitting the left side of his lip as he nodded. “Peter, a pleasure to see you.”

*How easily we all fall back in to the lives lost to us.*

Fallen snow streaked the doctor’s hair and fell over a face creased by far more worry lines than Elias remembered him having. Grey touched crescents of his eyes and bled upward, hollows worn by time. Deep defensive scratches ran from an arced cheek down his neck and disappeared under a rumpled collar. The priest bit a trembling lip as his heart swelled with a flair of pain and helpless need to comfort. What had this place done to them? Hannibal mustered a bittersweet smile of
encouragement for Elias as if to whisper everything is all right. Firelight in his eyes dwindled, smothered by walls caging him in. The light seemed to extinguish when glancing across Will’s profile to find his husband trapped beside him.

Peter spread arms wide across the bench, blonde hair falling free from sunglasses perched high on his head. “Undecided on my sentiments on the matter, Doctor.”

“Fair enough. Would you like to discuss your current sentiments then or something safer for conversation like the weather?”

The older men faded to sepia tones, voices hushing to a hum of pleasant noise. Figures then scenery fell away. Elias stood in an empty white room with Will seated at the table looking up at him, bright lightening turning to mournful rain. His heart slowed eking out a reedy whine of pain. A wide jaw clenched apology. The priest swallowed a lump of remorse. Their eyes misted before welling with tears. They surveyed wounds of the other, both seen and unseen, imaginations whirring in tandem to flicker images behind eyelids. He felt Will in his mind as clear as he saw him. Where, for a moment, he and Will existed as they had been, not as they were. Standing on a shoreline, breath smoke on a cold air, watching the first signs of winter blanket the trees white. Ghosted palms slid down his arms, curled over wrists, and brought pale knuckles to drooping lips. The sensation was as clear as the kiss placed earlier in haste. Each vivid and splintering.

It was far easier to cope with having forgotten what it was like to be quieted by your touch.

“Hi, Elias…” Will said, gaze soft as his voice, chiffon gauze billowing against wildflowers on an ocean breeze of memory.

He saw their connection, a web of silver shimmer, threads upon the dim afternoon light. Fainter than the ones binding Hannibal to Will, blood red glimmer of knots and intricate tapestry. Real. Less complex, but equal in beauty. Tangible. He could pluck each one and it would reverberate. Conversations. Their voices, pitches of high and low. Laughter tonal. Emotions a vibration of sensation, distinct or distant.

The priest opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out, dull ache of separation becoming sharp, dimming irises to wilting lavender. Hello, Will. Won’t you come home?

Will winced, fingers flexing and stretching across the table to the grinding sound of metal cuffs becoming taut. His knees buckled as Elias took a timid step forward, clothing rustling as he shivered beneath them. Fearful of reaching out. In his dreams, Will had appeared countless times, but he never stayed. A mouth softened slightly as another step was taken.

“IF we are all done exchanging pleasantries?” The judge rumbled.

Noise and light clashed, bringing the courtroom hurtling in to focus.

Elias started as a firm grip latched on his shoulder and forcibly steered him to the witness stand. He looked up at a towering bailiff then at Will, pleading, watching him lead away with a lash of anger. It rippled across his features with terrifying darkness before fading to the center of black pupils to vanish in their depths. As the priest turned to walk up a set of steps, he saw Hannibal settle a hand over the one still stretched out and draw it beneath the table with a squeeze. They exchanged a long look of silence before blue drifted to fix unsteadily on an edge of the table, hand withdrawn to ball alongside another fist pressed between knees. The older man sighed and stared at the empty space of his fingers, thumb tracing each one as if somehow Will might feel their texture and weight on his own.
Tension clouded the courtroom. Feet shuffled anxiously. Gazes darted from all present, sensing a collective shift of emotion. Peter hunched, distinctly aware of the scent of fear breathed quietly from lungs, instinct drawing his limbs and fists taut. To flee or to fight. To protect what he loved from the onslaught of unknown wearing masks of strange faces and garb of intentions they did not recognize.

Wood creaked as Elias took his seat. His fingers and palm numb from a sudden chill. Dozens of people surrounded him yet loneliness wrapped over him in a rush of gooseflesh. He tucked legs beneath the chair, ankles crossed to keep from bouncing his knee. A nervous tick from his youth when the head master would draw near with a ruler scraping across desk.

A worn leather bible was held out. “Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, so help you God?”

Lavender eyes followed the crisp press of gilded pages to corners smoothed, untouched, words unread and never heard, not felt by the sweaty press of palms to a black leather surface. Why were they asked to swear to a god they did not believe in? What good did it do them? Surely they would not be fraught with guilt for not abiding by a set of rules chiseled in stone. His metallic cross burned skin clothed in silk. He wanted to draw it out, cool it inside his palm, not for the comfort faith brought, but an understanding. It was not a gift from God. Nor a rosary he used to pray for absolution of what he could not change, what he had hated within himself for years. It was unadulterated acceptance given to him by a man who loved him as he was. His faith unsettled and shaken for years. His trust in flesh and blood of three men—one of heavens reflected upon water, ash of hellfire turned grey on dead forests, and weathered tombstones of resurrection—remained steadfast and true.

Elias placed a timid hand on the bible, fingers settling in grooves, and like so many before him, lied. “I do.”

Judge Napolatino motioned to the defense, apparently satisfied by the proper display of procedure. The young lawyer swallowed and glanced across his notes one more time.

“Father,” Silas carefully set a fountain pen parallel to the binding of a yellow legal pad and stepped out from behind the table. “Could you s-state your full name for the record?”

“Elias Svendsen.” He replied quietly, forcing a quaver to rise to a hum. “Um, previously Elias Svendsen, now Elias Moreau, by marriage. But you may address me as Father Svendsen if it avoids confusion.”

The mention of marriage brought a curious flush to olive toned cheeks. “Could you t-tell the court how you know the Lecters, please?”

A long pause followed. Elias bit his lip. In tandem a fading sunrise, hush of ocean blue, and steely grey of the shoreline lifted to focus on him with quiet expectation. The weight of an entire world mapped in their eyes. He, somehow, at its center.

Chilled fingers touched the back of a heating neck, gaze darting from Hannibal and Will then back to Silas. “I’m a close friend of the family.”

“You were the officiate at the defendants wedding were you not?”

More like a wrangler of two titans locked in battle.

“I presided over the ceremony, yes.”
“Would you mind telling us how you perceived their marriage?”

“Perceived?” Elias echoed.

Silas adjusted glasses, frowning, considering how to form the question. “How…did you see them? Their union?”

“One cannot always rely on perception to describe something of such complexity, Mister Silas.” His response was automatic, blunted, defensive.

A bemused smile formed. “But if you could describe it, please?”

His gaze strayed from anxious lines creasing a tan face to the two men who had taken him in. Had changed him. Taken away the life he had chosen, had ever hoped to know, and then replaced it with one of peaceful chaos. Shining a light on empty corners of his soul, dusted by isolation and a weary need to blindly continue forward to forget about what he had lost to the darkness.

They had come to him in a hail of fire and blood. Vengeful gods tearing mortals apart. Demons with kind eyes stalking him long after they departed. Ones he had been taught to fear. He was far too intrigued to pay any mind to the danger. They became men in softened hues of burnt orange and red sliding down their faces in the frame of a window overlooking the sea. When he had known he loved them. In the moonlight, stars had clung to their hair and charted constellations in their eyes, where they had become one, bound to one another for eternity, with a sealed kiss of promise.

“A union of utter devotion.” His nose crinkled briefly, hearing their voices playfully bicker in a drafty cottage kitchen none of them had stood in for years. “And bizarre circumstance.”

“Understanding the implication of perjury, you are able to state that the marriage between former FBI special agent, Will Graham…” Silas looked at the jury and pointed at his clients. “…and his once psychiatrist, Doctor Lecter, is legitimate?”

Will stiffened, disdainful frown pointed at the floor. Irritation bristled Hannibal’s brow. Elias rolled fingers in his left palm anxiously. Were they angry with him? He hadn’t meant to cause them any more pain.

“I am not only able to state it was solemnized by God, and the law, but have presented my personal copy of their certificate as evidence.”

Silas nodded thanks and turned to squarely face the judge. “Defense would like it on record, we submitted a certificate of marriage certified and signed by both a separate magistrate, Luca Arbello, and Father Elias Svendsen, currently present. We would also like to remind the court, we have provided our copies of reports verifying the document’s authenticity.”

“Let the record note these documents are verified and authenticated by myself, as well as, a third party outside this courtroom.” Judge Napolatino roughed wide shoulders against the back of his leather chair to ease tension and looked pointedly at Thomas Rodriguez who was scowling at a glass of water. “As such, it is not a valid argument for the prosecution to build their case upon. Mister Rodriguez, you may begin questioning the witness.”

Elias watched Silas respectfully take his seat with a sense of trepidation. There was a weight to the air, suffocating, drawing near as Mister Rodriguez rose slowly to his feet. Black eyes narrowed and his smile became disquieting, wide, jaws of round teeth. Nervous anxiety drooped small shoulders as the priest fidgeted, unsure where to put his hands, wanting to tuck them at his waist for comfort. He gripped arms of the chair. Moved them to his thighs. His fingers twitched, struggling to remain flat
instead of rounding to balled fists. He jammed them between knees and stared at a faint reflection on the banister. His eyes wide beneath batting lashes, mouth tight, teeth indenting a plush corner. He sensed three men who cared for him shift, keenly aware of his discomfort.

“Have you watched the news?” Mister Rodriguez began, hands clasped loosely behind his back as he drifted about the courtroom. No matter where he stood, darkening eyes never left Elias. “Do you know what the defendants are accused of?”

The priest whispered. “Y-yes…”

“Louder, Father, so the rest of us might hear you.” Came a brisk command.

“I am aware of the allegations, yes.” He tipped his head to murmur into a mic, grateful for a tumble of hair covering his eyes to avoid a cold stare.

He was accustomed to standing in front of congregations and rallying crowded protests, looked at by hundreds of strangers, without the slightest on set of nerves. This was different. He wasn’t being looked at. He was being watched. Gleaming gaze peeling him layer by layer to the bone. Hunted.

“And yet…” The prosecution circled the jury box hungrily, fingers sliding across the banister, leaving thinly veiled sarcasm in his wake. “Here you are to testify on the behalf of killers all the same.”

“Who would not come to the aide of their family in a time of need?” Elias tampered a twitch of anger at the corner of his lip with a bite. “I only want to help this court see them for who they really are. Innocent.”

The word tasted acrid on his tongue. He had never turned a blind eye to who Will and Hannibal were. How could he? Conflicted, but never uncertain. They were dangerous. Elias could still see them. Mangled bodies of men in his church. Copper stains on stones staying days, even weeks, after he had scrubbed them on his knees. Till his legs ached and his hands bled. He had left his former life printed red on the pews alongside souls departed there. Shuttered guilt and indecision beyond the doors of his church to follow after men. Two he recognized with startlingly clarity set aside morality of good and evil to find a different kind of worship in each other.

Old testament religion. Protect what you love and kill what might threaten such a union.

Mister Rodriguez drummed fingers at the end of the box, threatening gaze drawing over the smaller figure, searching for a way in. “According to the defense, you married Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter. It says their given names right there on your very legally binding document. Are you saying you had no idea you were marrying two fugitives on the run?”

“That’s correct.” Elias stared unaffected down the slight upturn of his nose.

“I find that hard to believe. As a modern society, we are bombarded by all sorts of information by social media and the internet. Anything we could ever want at our fingertips. Apps for everything imaginable. My bible. I’d hardly survive without it.” The man withdrew a sleek silver cell phone from a breast pocket and waved it, smirking at the laughter it garnished. “Or are you old fashioned, Father? More of a reader than a texter. Would you have us believe in all these years, you never flipped through a newspaper or occasional magazine? Did not recognize the defendant’s faces splashed all over television news bulletins reporting their crimes to the public?”

“I am a simple man, Mister Rodriguez. I lived without many vices to better serve God and continued to survive without them even when they became available to me. Unlike you, I learned to cultivate a
great deal of restraint. Something you might benefit from if you picked up an actual bible.”

Rodriguez’s nostrils flared red at the soft spoken insult. There was a flicker of a proud smile and gone again on Hannibal’s mouth. Peter failed to hide a smirk behind a flourished hand twirling an e-cigarette, leaning to whisper in an ear. Will cleared his throat to disguise a chuckle then bent his head, shoulders shaking with quiet laughter. Hannibal gnawed at the corner of a twitching lip until it obeyed and thinned out. Ears of the young lawyer tipped pink then seeped to the rest of his face before he began frantically scribbling notes on the legal pad to pretend he was not privy to their conversation.

Elias did not need to be within earshot to recognize teasing and crossed his arms. They were likely trading barbs at his expense. Discussing the several ways in which he failed to exercise restraint and likely the ones he excelled in.

“I had no suspicions—“ The priest glared, nose wrinkling irritably, at the three of them. “—or reason to suspect they were anyone, but who I thought them to be. What is the world coming to if we cannot trust the words and actions of our fellow man? Or believe they are capable of conducting themselves in a gentlemanly fashion.”

Will struggled to regain his composure behind chaffing palms. Peter winked at Elias, tucking the plastic cigarette in a corner of his mouth. He scowled. If they had been at the dinner table Hannibal would have back handed them by now and forced them to apologize.

Mister Rodriguez stalked across the floor, glancing between the men and his witness, fury twitching his friendly smile to a minute snarl, not a man used to being disregarded. “Wouldn’t you consider that trust misplaced? Betrayed now that you know who and what they are.”

“Not in the least.” The priest countered.

“Were you not fearful for your life and safety, Father, after your discovery? Realizing you had mistakenly befriended two known psychopaths.” Rodriguez drew up directly to the witness stand to block his view, leveling Elias with a calculating stare of promise to return him to how he expected his witnesses to rightly behave, frightened and praying for mercy. “Murderers. Cannibals. Men rife with blood and sin on their hands.”

“Never. Men are not an entire summation of parts or adjectives. There are many facets, ever changing much like a prism in light, to become something new. And if I had to ascribe one to them…”

Elias looked over a silver padded shoulder to find Hannibal had successfully reigned Will’s hand back in to his own to hold, either to scold or comfort. His tone quieted, dandelion seeds floating on the air. His heart warmed to see their affection for one another had not dwindled.

“I would say they were gentle.”

“Gentle?” Obsidian glinted, crooked nose scenting vibrations of the air resonating fondness. “Is that how you describe two individuals who desecrated your church and flooded your floors with carnage? Men viciously slaughtered. Why didn’t they kill you, Father Svendsen? Why let you survive? Because they needed you alive. To threaten and blackmail you in to marrying them! You can’t tell us you know them because they told you to keep your mouth shut. Isn’t that right?”

Silas threw his fountain pen on the table and knocked back his chair as he stood, shouting. “Objection, Your Honor! The prosecution is accusing my clients of a crime they were never linked to by witness or evidence. One that occurred in an entirely different country and I repeat, has no
“precedence for this case!”

“The court will disregard the prosecution’s last claim,” The judge said in a monotone, casting a withering glance at Rodriguez.

“Do you wish the court to believe these men, on trial for collusion to commit cold blooded murder of Francis Dolarhyde—stabbed dozens of times and hacked apart—to be ‘gentle?’”

“Yes, gentle. They care for one another deeply.”

“Do they care for you?”

“They are kind to me.” Elias said gently, lowering his eyes.

Hot stench of overpowering mint from the man’s breath rolled against his cheeks. Darkened gaze sliding over the folds of fabric clinging to his body. He had the urge to pull his jacket tighter, to hide skin exposed by sheer fabric. The priest flexed muscles in his jaw, forcing himself to remain still instead of recoiling. There was a presence to the man. Smoke seeping under doors to smother out life in the night. It twisted his stomach. Pupils dilated wide, pleased, sensing his turmoil. Rodriguez smiled.

Elias took a quiet breath and held it. He thought he had forgotten. His kind were difficult to forget. Engrained on his mind in the hideous pattern of lanced scars exposed by a slip of silk. Welled in frightened eyes in the middle of the night, air grating with hoarse screams.

Heaven and hell may not have existed. Demonic spirits, however, had slithered in to being from the beginning. They took the shape of gold and diamond rings encrusting fingers to wield wealth like a weapon. Everything had a price. Taking the souls of men by trick or by force. Pretense of power unspooling from merino wool of a sharkskin suit. Formed the hot blooded pulse of a man used to being obeyed.

*But I see you. Who you really are, Mister Rodriguez…* He glanced at Peter in the crowd. *And I will never forget.*

“Are? Present tense? How kind, Father?” Thin lips peeled back on bleach white teeth. “Kind enough to invite a lonely priest in to their bed? Presumably to do more than just sleep.”

Grey eyes sliced up from beneath a fringe of blonde, long fingers flexing on the bench. Hannibal and Will straightened, both leaning forward, faces blackening. Chains on handcuffs twanged as their strength was tested with a roll of wrists.

“Shall I repeat the question?”

Elias met the stare unblinking, mouth a thin smile, silent in his defiance. His kind hated nothing more than being defied.

*My husband’s body is proof enough of that.*

“Were you, or were you not, having sexual relations with Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham? Or did you repay their ‘kindness,’ much like your thankful prayer to God, performed solely on your knees.”

The priest bit his inner cheek and stared at ivory oxfords scuffed by the journey. He wondered if the same kinds of markings showed on his face.

“I’ve heard enough.” Peter stood, knuckles scraping the bench.
“Sit!” Silas ordered. “Sit down, Mister Moreau.” He pointed to the bench, hand shaking, aware of imminent danger coiling muscles of men surrounding him. “You must sit.” He whispered more quietly. “Or they will throw you out. He will be alone.”

Peter saw the twitch of fingers, skin a shade too pale, his husband sitting far too still to control trembling. He sat with a helpless thud, hands scouring up his face and aching to split open skin of the man crowding Elias in a confined space.

“He is not alone,” Hannibal growled.

Will bared teeth, nails scratching the leather armrests. “He might as well be.”

“This is outrageous!” Silas gestured vehemently at the judge. “He is not questioning the witness! He is bullying him!”

“Sustained.” The judge cut in.

“Withdrawn.” Mister Rodriguez cut off the protest, leaning in to whisper low enough for the priest to hear. “For now.”

The prosecutor strode to his desk and picked something up. Three pairs of glinting eyes watched him move, calculating the distance, testing tensile restraints of physical and mental effort.

“You claim the accused are ‘gentle’ and ‘kind.’ Given their public and volatile history with one another have been anything but. Hannibal and Will Lecter, married or not, are a prime example of an abusive relationship.” A massive hunter green textbook thudded on the witness stand, index finger jabbing at a yellow marked paragraph. “Would you read the highlighted portion of what is defined as an abusive relationship?”

Would I or will I, Mister Rodriguez? Because no, I don’t think I fucking will, but am grateful for the opportunity.

“It wasn’t a request, Father.”

Elias stared at the text till it hazed to grey splotches, teeth gritting. “A pattern of abusive or coercive behavior. Often used to maintain power and control over a partner. Forms of this abuse can be: emotional, verbal, sexual, or physical including threats to well being, isolation from family or friends, and intimidation.”

The book snapped closed. “Do you consider those acts ‘kind?’”

“No. I do not. But—”

Rodriguez waved Elias away, tossing the textbook on the desk. “The good doctor framed Will for his murders and put him in prison for those crimes. Will tried to have Hannibal strung up and bled out by an orderly at that same facility. Hannibal Lecter cut Will open with a linoleum knife and left him to bleed out in his home in Baltimore. After isolating him from his friends, murdering his coworker Beverly Katz, and taking the life of the one person he claimed to care about. Abigail Hobbs.”

Will snapped forward, lip curled, snarling. “You don’t get to say her name!”

Elias jumped.

“Do those sound like the actions of ‘gentle’ men?” The prosecutor carried on. “Or do you consider
slitting Abigail Hobbs’ throat an appropriate sacrifice? Will Graham offering up his figurative daughter to a vengeful God like Isaac almost gave his son?”

“Say it again.” Will lunged. The chair left a ten inch black mark on marble, forearm reddening as it shook against the handcuff. “And I’ll cut out your tongue!”

Peter braced on the banister, both fists latched on the collar of Will’s jacket to keep him from breaking free. “No! Calmez-vous!”

The priest had seen the image once. After math of a crime scene. Flash of blood, pooled black on a kitchen floor, and then copper red of a woman’s hair. A reporter. Another image of a young girl, doe eyed blue, scarf tied at her throat. Pretty. Eyes empty like an ocean in a storm. Grief hurtling waves against ships and dashing poor souls bloody on rocks. Searching, always searching, for something she had lost. It was all his empathy needed. Then a crushing lash of pain and hopeless despair before he was sick in the bathroom sink.

The room slid away to the whisper of Will’s imagined voice saying *please, please don’t* and a ring of a blade silencing sobs. Rivers of red filled his vision. Gouts of it splashing across granite counters and seeping through floorboards. Heard the crisp gasps of pain and begging for someone, anyone, to help her. To save her. To make it all end.

“Where was your God to protect her then, Father, as she drew her last breath? Dying in the arms of men she thought loved her. They didn’t love her. They *used* her.” A frigid voice rang out. “Like they used you. How long do you think you would have lasted? A few more months? Another year? Before they cut your throat.” The prosecutor pointed at Peter. “Fed him to you in bite sized pieces. Before they cut his.”

His mind shifted, palm automatically covering his throat from a wound that wasn’t there, burning. Saw the life draining from Peter’s eyes, calling out his name for help.

Hannibal wore a faint smile, mouth peaked at corners, violence glittering at the edge of irises rimmed red. Peter had two arms thrown around a heaving chest, reeling Will to safety inch by inch as he struggled. The chair clattered on the banister as he fell, hitting the hands away with a terse *fuck off.*

Elias flinched as his husband grimaced, taking a seat, hissing. “Gladly, if only it was an option.”

His eyes began to cloud, tears itching the back of his throat. Elias began to tremble. Everyone he loved was in so much pain. Tormented. He wanted it to end. To end it.

Rodriguez cast a cursory glance their direction, smiling. “Their entire relationship sounds like textbook abuse, Father, on both their parts. Wouldn’t you agree?”

“P-prosecution is testifying,” Silas ground out, brow knotting as he gripped Hannibal by a forearm flexing against handcuffs. Mouth pinched grey. The older man’s chest rose and fell with a mere beat of quickened breathing. “They cannot expect the witness to testify to events he had no prior knowledge of before this trial.”

“I will allow it for the moment.”

“Did you ever witness abuse of any kind in their relationship?”

“No.”

“Would you like me to explain different types of abuse so you have a better understanding and can answer more accurately? Seeing as how you had only the company of a Bible for simple instruction
Pale nostrils scrunched, knuckles blanching white. Anger flared then burst. Elias closed his eyes for a moment and saw the faces of ivy league boys who had bullied him in the streets. Knocked away his bible. Muddied his robes. Smelled beer on their breath as they laughed at him. Left him to watch them return to their privileged education, bitter their parents lived while his did not.

“No.” Amethyst flashed a withering glance, plush lip pinching to check a slur of vulgarities, tone pitching high and low. “Thank you. I am perfectly capable of comprehending the question. Hannibal and Will lived with one another in a state of content.”

“Content?”

“They were happy, Councilor. Is that simple enough language for you?”

“Would you have us believe—unlike most married couples—they lived in such utter bliss they were not prone to arguments or outbursts after a miscommunication?” Mister Rodriguez leaned on the box, blinding smile returned. “Well, I’ll be. If a murderer and a serial killer can make it as a married couple then I guess there’s hope for the rest of us.”

A few in the jury chuckled then blanched, ashamed by the words.

“What’s their secret, Father? Or was that told to you in confidence?”

Elias slotted fingers together one by one till they formed a perfect triangle, each shh of skin forcing him to take a breath, scraping to find inner calm. He pressed his wedding band between thumb and middle finger till they stung then ached.

“These two men…” His small voice shook from his throat, starting as whisper of thunder. “…who you are so quick to judge and belittle are far greater than you will ever be.” Hung upon balmy air in a flash of lightening. “They have overcome. Courted and fought each other’s demons. Transcended their sins. Accepting all they could not change and found peace by putting their pasts to rest. Found love where only hate existed.” Rattled like windowpanes keeping a storm at bay. “It is not a secret. It is the basis of faith and religion. Spelled out in scripture. It is the most pure form of love. Is there anywhere on this Earth or in the Heavens above that transcribes a man who has killed is not worthy of, or cannot express love? Are we not taught to love our enemies, our fellow man, as we would ourselves?”

“And…” Mister Rodriguez hunched to stare passed a protective fringe of wavy hair, smile turning to teeth at the righteous indignation he found hiding behind it. “How did the Lecters court you?”

Elias lifted his eyes slowly, voice frigid. “They didn’t.”
“So you lied when you said you were ‘a close friend of the family’ then?” Knuckles rapped triumphantly on the witness box.

“That isn’t—“

“So you were close to the Lecters?”

“Yes.” A hiss returned.

Lips coiled up. “It’s a simple question. Father Svendsen, how close are you to Will and Hannibal?”

“I love them!” Elias shouted.

The words echoed. It was too late. He couldn’t take the words back. He felt the force of them sting his lips. Lash across the faces of the men who he had come here to protect. Crack the calm of the one who had followed to protect him.

_I shouldn’t be here…_

The gaunt grey of Will’s tensed features drained white, eyes glazing to look away, hearing the click of talons. Hollows of sharp cheeks darkened as Hannibal bent his head, flames fanning from his eyes and flinching to a snarl. Peter pressed palms over his face, body tensed, silvery gaze the glint of a knife, poised and prepared to strike.

_I’m hurting them._

Lilac eyes flit this way and that, frantic, aware of the predator swooping in to snatch him out of thin air to be devoured or dash him against the rocks.

The first prick of claws landed squarely on his chest. “Were you romantically involved with the Lecters?”

“N-no…” A feeble breath eased out, Elias shook his head weakly.

“You’re so dear to me, Elias. More than you know.” Arms shook as space pushed between their bodies. Will tucked waves behind a shell ear, smile painfully tender, chaffed red from where Elias had kissed him. “I know I’m not him. But that doesn’t mean you aren’t wanted or needed. We need you. I…need you.”

_Elias slumped against the kitchen counter, knees buckling, vision swimming, guilt and fright shaking across his tongue. “Are you angry with me? For not asking permission?”_

_Calloused palms slid around his jaw, thumbs tipping a chin. Blue eyes intently searched his, mirroring the brutal loss pooling tears against his palms. Will’s brow twitched, breath catching on pain, muted by the intensity of sensation as if the emotion was his own. He shook his head once._

_“He may not be—“ The unmistakable latch of a knife clicked open. ”—but I most certainly am. You_
are touching what belongs to me.”

The priest shoved free of Will with a yelp and scrambled to the other side of the kitchen, boxed in by an island and a shadow looming at the only exit. “It was a m-m-mistake.”

Violence burned red as a slate blue jacket yielded on a kitchen counter. “One you are not likely to make again. You can be certain of that.”

Derisive laughter filled the air and brought him back to the present. “So either you aren’t aware of contradicting your own confession of loving the Lecters or you are lying.”

Hands curved around a ribcage stuttering for breath as Elias curled inward, fingers splaying to protect vulnerable organs, unable to stifle the roar a quickening heart drawing the finely stitched predator near.

“Everyone believes once something is deleted it’s gone forever. Luckily for us, that isn’t the case.”

Printed pages fell like smoldering ash of burning buildings. They smelled of heat and fresh ink. The priest reached for one, hand shaking, teeth chattering against a chill.

“Prosecution is handing the witness screen captures of text correspondence between defendant and witness. Please read the portions indicated, Father. Starting with the message you sent to Will Lecter on May the twenty fourth at eleven forty one p.m.”

There was a sharp breath. Will doubled forward, blood draining from fists pressed between his unseeing eyes.

“Your Honor, these messages are p-p-private!” Silas blustered, struggling to stand. “Between the witness and my clients. What can the prosecution possibly gain by sharing them in such a public forum?”

“They are evidence of a weak willed man corrupted from an early age who sits before us now in the guise of meekness while preaching scripture and lying to our faces!” Mister Rodriguez crowed. “If the witness will not be honest with this court, then we will let his own words speak for himself.”

“Sit down, Mister Silas.” The judge nodded gravely. “I will allow it.”

Hannibal put one hand on the young lawyer’s elbow and pulled. His face had blanked to marbled stone, perfectly still and removed. Silas deflated in his chair.

“Father Svendsen, “ Judge Napolatino prompted.

“Will…” Elias choked on a lump in his throat, paper rustling between numb fingers, reading aloud. “I can never thank you enough for all you have done for me in the last few months. You and Hannibal have gone out of your way to take such good care of me. I don’t…” He crumpled the edges and fought down a small noise as his heart clenched. “I don’t know how I will ever repay you. I love you both so much. You’re everything to me.”

The priest looked out at Will and Hannibal, neither able or willing to look at him.

You’re everything to me. That’s why they wanted me here.

“Now Will’s response. Second paragraph.”
“S-s-sparrow—“

“I’m sorry. For clarification, who is ‘sparrow?’”

Light faded from lilac eyes. “I am.”

“Continue.”

As Elias read the word, shame and guilt flowering cheeks, he heard the words in the drawl of sunlight he often associated with Will’s voice when he was happy. “Sparrow, you will always have a place in our home. Our hearts. I love you. We love you. Now stop spending your nights in that shit motel and move in already. Hannibal says if you are not here by breakfast he will come to collect you whether you like it or not. And you and I both know how cramped that trunk is.” He stared at the next sentence, hesitating, and forced himself to read it while meeting Peter’s gaze. “Our bed… as you now know, is not. So come home.”

“We care about you, Elias. You are so precious to us. Tell him, Hannibal.”

“You are very much beloved by us both.” The older man brushed a thumb down a damp cheek. “Your place alongside us. Our steady guiding star in the night sky and the first fleeting rays of light at morning to be cherished. Do you not wish to be held by those who love you?”

Wrists cracked as Peter let them fall, wedding band winking as hands hung limply between knees, grey eyes hardening to stone.

A harsh exhale flared Will’s nostrils, eyes squeezed shut. “It isn’t what you think, Peter.”

“Fils de pute.” Peter snarled at the back of a curly head.

Tears pricked hot. I can explain…

They had been through enough. Elias pleaded silently, shaking his head, trying to find the strength to say he was sorry. Sorry for the pain registering in his husband’s eyes. Sorry for not listening to Will. Sorry for not being what Hannibal needed him to be.

“Sounds sincere enough.” Mister Rodriguez noted sarcastically, snatching the correspondence away and tossing them Will’s direction in a flurry of pages that fell at his feet. “But the best kinds of liars often do.”


“Oh, I’m sorry…” The prosecutor feigned remorse, pulling a silk pocket square free and holding it out, a gesture of sympathy. “Did you think they really loved you back? That they were capable of doing so. Is that why you came? To protect them.”

When Elias did not take it, Rodriguez placed in on the witness stand.

His knee began to bounce, anxiety running up his legs like fevered chills. He wanted to go. He wanted to leave this place. He wanted Will and Hannibal to hold him, tell him it wasn’t true, tell him everything was okay. Wanted them to walk out with him and come home. Why couldn’t they just
come home?

“Are you protecting the accused by lying to this court because you are in love with Will and Hannibal?”

Elias half turned in his chair to hide. “No.”

He couldn’t steady his breathing. Had no room to do so. There was not enough air or space. Found no kindness in the crowd to soothe him. He did not cry in front of strangers. Small fists shook in his lap.

“Relationships can take on many forms. Sometimes they are purely physical. Did you at any time participate in sexual intercourse or activities with either Hannibal or Will Lecter?”

“N-n-no!”

“Really? Then would you mind telling me what these are?”

Images slapped down on the wood ledge. A few slipped and fell to the floor inside the witness stand. Several skid across the courtroom floor. A strangled sound came from Silas who jumped up and chased after each one, gathering them to his chest. He stood in the center of the floor, glossy paper crinkling, apology dampening the corners of his eyes and misting glasses.

“Photographs.” The priest said flatly, staring straight ahead.

He knew what they were. Who they were.

“Yes they are. Photographs retrieved from Hannibal Lecter’s cell phone.”

Knotted fingers flexed slowly around a plaid knee as the older man inclined his head, balancing an imaginary blade on the crook of his nose, eyes glowing. Fists thudded angrily on the table. Will forcibly hauled his chair until there was a full foot of space between them, spine hunched to face away from his husband, blue eyes flashing.

“Containing images of a…pornographic and sexual nature of what appears to be the defendants. And what appears to be you, Father Svendsen.”

Several members of the jury bowed close, furtive gazes shot his way as they whispered.

“Could you please read to the court who the recipients of this photo message are, Father?” Mister Rodriguez asked with a smug grin.

His focus faded, blurring the room, Elias refused to look. Not at the prosecutor or the jury. Not even at Hannibal or Will. Would not, under any circumstances, raise his voice more than a whisper. If he did… the fire consuming his chest would break free, bubble out his lungs, a scream of a man flayed open by a knife, an agonizing death.

“I…I am.”

“Can you explain how compromising photos of yourself ended up Hannibal Lecter’s phone without your knowledge?”

“Peter, how could you send these!”
“Consider them a trade off for the one’s we receive of Will.”

“This isn’t a game!”

“It is. Our own little game, sparrow. Our little secret. See this one? You’re so beautiful. So gorgeous in the firelight. And…I think you enjoy knowing he’s seen them. Don’t you?”

“Shut up…”

“I’m…” Elias closed his eyes, skin heating and bleeding down the neckline of his blouse, throat tight. This couldn’t be happening. “I’m not sure.”

“You’re not sure if you ever sent nude photos of yourself to the Lecters? Or you don’t know if they were received?” A clipped pause followed. “If you were wondering, they were. Dozens of them in fact.”

The priest’s cheeks flamed crimson.

“Is it not true then, based upon the evidence, you had both a romantic and sexual relationship with the Lecter family? Long before you married your husband. Even during your marriage to Mister Moreau.”

The priest jerked forward, nails scraping across the wood. “You’re lying!” He stood, fist banging for emphasis. “That isn’t true!”

The prosecutor talked over him, voice rising to an accusatory grate. “You would frequently send and receive explicit correspondence of both a verbal and photographic nature to, and from, both Hannibal and Will. Because you are in fact engaged sexually with either both, or one, of the accused.”

Aviator sunglasses snapped inside a tense grip. Shards of blue green glasses lay like wings of butterflies blown across the sea to die on the shore. Peter saw every version of himself, of Elias, even Hannibal and Will, refracted in its surface. Were they damaged? Or had they always been fractured? Blood seeped. Laceration drawn across the flat of his palm. Had he not been able to see it? There were many things he hadn’t seen. Now he wasn’t sure if he wanted to see them. Not in the light of broken glasses or the eyes of the boy he loved so deeply.

“Peter…” Elias cried softly, tears springing to his eyes. “I swear it isn’t true.”

Grey eyes drifted up, saw him, storm clouds darkening as they descended to fix on the floor.

A reedy voice called out. “Judge Napolatino, don’t you think we could call a recess?”

The judge leaned over, voice hushed. “Do you need a moment, young man?”

Biting his lip, Elias shook his head hard. He did not cry in front of others. He would not. He would stop. He had to stop. He was better than this. Stronger than this.

“So. If you are not protecting the accused out of love, then were you taken against your will and forced to live with the Lecters?”

Folds of a pocket square stayed on the perimeter of the witness stand. Waiting to be plucked, dabbed at eyes, confessions blubbered out as tears dried. It was offensive.

“I said no!” The priest lashed back, knocking the pocket square off.
“I’m sorry. I’m a bit confused. So you are admitting to a romantic or sexual involvement, not a coerced one?” Mister Rodriguez asked, making a show of retrieving his crumpled, scorned offering from the floor and placing it neatly in a breast pocket.

A bouncing knee halted then began again to an agitated swell notes, *detaché porté* drawn across strings of a violin. “…I admit to having a vein of emotion for men, who devoted their life to returning mine to me, far deeper than anything you can categorize or hope to know. It is not romantic. It is *not* love. It is a quality of memory when you first wake and find you are harbored inside a shelter of those who see nothing but beauty inside you. Even if you do not see it. True acceptance.”

“And…” The prosecutor lifted a glass of water and took a deep swallow, staring pointedly at Elias over the rim. “When did you first start seeking acceptance?”

His reply came out a winded croak. “Excuse me?”

“Acceptance, Father Svendsen, for who you are. Not from God, but from the people around you.”

Will jerked his head up, stormy gaze flicking between the man speaking then to the bird flitting against cage bars without a chance of escape. He latched on to a tie and dragged Silas across Hannibal, brows drawn dangerously low, lips reddened by teeth hissing instruction.

“We often find it at a young age from our parents. Instills a sense of confidence that we might find unconditional love.”

Glass echoed with a tap on the desk. Water sloshed from side to side. Dribbling down a smudged side of prints and ringing wood grey.

“But you, Elias, didn’t have parents. At least…” Coal eyes glowed. “Not for very long.”

There was hushed gasp across the room.


His fists clenched. The first blow felt like a rap from a ruler. Knuckles crimson and swelling. A lesson in how weakness was dealt with in the orphanage. His wrists blooming red to the sharp reprimands of *stop crying, boy, real men do not cry.* He would later learn strength would be instilled in him, one way or another.

“Did you not find acceptance from your religious family when they took you in?” The silk pocket square snapped open, wiping away the mask of a smile, only teeth and a primal green glow of wilderness remaining. “Or did they too disapprove of having a gay son?”

The tie knotting tight around Silas’ windpipe unraveled from Will’s fist with a scorched gasp for air and a hollow command. “You get him off the stand, Silas. Get him out of here right fucking now.”

Hot tears trickled down the priest’s throat, vision blurring, on bruised knees watching innocent letters passed in class burn in a fireplace. Fingers and knuckles bleeding, body aching from a sound lashing, no longer warmed by boys holding hands in the cold night. Geraulte. His first sweetheart. Eyes like amber. Turned to punishing gold. The only affection after the headmaster’s beating was the kind Geraulte showed with fists alongside the other boys, the good ones, who understood it was the *right* way, the only way, for a boy to properly behave.

“Oh, I see.” The cruel voice continued. “That look on your face tells me you didn’t approve either. Maybe you still don’t. No approval or moral compass to guide you from your parents. Your church.
Yourself. No wonder you went looking for it in the streets. In the arms of murderers even. So desperate to be told your thoughts, you, weren’t unnatural. Not a sin.”

Small choking sounds rose. The same kind he made after Father Finley had hit him, once and never again, on his thirteenth birthday. Blister burn of a palm against his chin, mouth grey violets withering on a hot day for weeks, marking his very first and last kiss. Desmond had been dragged out in the middle of the night and sent to a different parish. He never saw or heard from him again.

“You could overlook the Lecters questionable morality if they could overlook yours, is that it?”

A broken feeble plea. “…D-d-don’t.”

“Is that the same reason you sought out fleeting moments of acceptance from a whore in your youth?”

Plastic crunched then cracked between grinding molars, slicing open a snarling upper lip. Vapor plumed. Wires cracked and sparked as the e-cigarette dropped to the floor.

“Makes sense really. Paying a father figure for comfort to say you aren’t an abomination against the natural order. A pretty package who hasn’t been made entirely wrong.” The prosecutor’s voice dropped an octave. “But there is something wrong with you, isn’t there?”

Elias slumped, numb chilling his bones like long walks on the banks of Denmark in winter, alone, sinking further and further till there was no sound but his heart. Rushing water filling his ears. When he had walked out on the ice one night, hoping, and nearly drown. Wished he had.

Silence was the dead weight of a body being crushed by the millstone dragging it down.

Chaos was the collision of fight erupting just before the splash.

“Your Honor! I object!” Leather bound books slammed on a desk.

“Elias! Go!” Something clattered violently, marking the floor black. “Get up and leave! You don’t have to listen to this! Touch me again, Silas, and I will end you.”

“What is it you found more appealing about Doctor Lecter and Will Graham?” Jewel encrusted fingers tapped delight across the witness stand. “The socially unacceptable age difference to work out your daddy issues? Or that the Lecters’ collective sinfulness eclipsed your own? Far more wrong than you could ever be.”

Drawing a knee to his chest, Elias wrapped arms around it and ground a mouth against bone to stifle the pitiful chirps of sobs burning up his throat.

“The witness is not on trial!” Silas cried over his client’s shouts.

“If the prosecutor wishes for a crucifixion...” Frost chilled jagged teeth as Hannibal gripped Will by the wrist, bruising both their skin, as he tried to claw free. “…we shall provide him with one of intimate ceremony.”

“Quiet down! All of you!” Judge Napolatino yelled.

“After you lost sight of your faith, did you immediately engage a prostitute for sex? Or did you pretend it was a relationship and not a transaction of services rendered? Given or received.” Mister Rodriguez glided through the courtroom, straight backed, talking over everyone. “Did money exchange hands or did you provide counsel? Or was it an equal kind of education?”
“Please stop,” Elias sobbed, tears running down his wrists, staining his blouse now sheer and sticking to his chest. “Don’t talk about him that way!”

“In what way did you pay the Lecters in exchange for your life? Or were they just amused by the things you could provide them. The security of an alibi, a marriage certificate, and someone willing to lie for them.”

Voices surged from whispers to babbling noise from all sides, becoming deafening.

“Was your relationship an open one with the prostitute? Or with the Lecters for that matter. Did you pay for sex regularly? Monthly? Weekly? Hourly? Did you have favorites? Men and women?”

“Councilor, you will mind your tongue!” The bang of wood bounced off walls.

A scream pierced the air. “I’ll fucking kill you for this!”

“Order! Order!”

Elias saw the entire world vibrate in a prism. Threaded coils of connection tangling and knotting, falling across him like a fisherman’s net, cutting in to his skin and lungs. His vision fading in and out. Sights and sounds closing in. He began to rock, chair creaking, heart in his throat.

“Young man, sit down! Everyone take your seats!”

Maybe if he had been able to look up without fear of seeing the shadow falling over him he would have seen. Could have called out. Been able to stop it.

“Or…” The microphone crackled as a palm slid around it to muffle. Mister Rodriguez leaned in to the box. “…was there just one whore in particular you preferred to bend you over a table and—“ Scent of stale cigars touched his nose, his cheeks, pressed sickeningly hot against his ear. “—fuck you till your faith in the Almighty returned? Did you absolve Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter for what they were? Or is depravity more of a turn on?”

“Young man! You cannot be up here! I am ordering you to sit down!”

The room halted mid spin.

Everything fell silent.

Lashes lifted over lilac eyes. Caught the glint of a wedding band on a fist in the distance.

Blood sprayed scalding hot across the priest’s face.

Then the screaming began.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for being away for so long, friends.

Before our last post, we were preparing for a move. Moved, waited for internet. I was working too much and too drained to write. Mess of things happening in my family/stress from that. Recently there was an accident (someone left a razor blade out,
didn't see it, gashed my dominant hand pretty good) so I haven't been able to do very much. The stitches are beginning to dissolve, but in the mean time my spirits have been pretty low.

Hope these chapters are okay and all of you are doing really well. I do miss you.

I'm sorry if I don't update again right away. I'm just really depressed. If you want to leave a comment, or draw/write me a little something I'd appreciate it. xo
Chapter 36

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Peter had learned from a young age to listen. Not hear like most. Static and nothing more, but truly listen. Pluck the strings all around him and listen to the hymn each made. Every person unique. Each circumstance a different note.

Amidst the tumultuous sounds of time passing and the world turning, he found the drone of crowded conversations and screech of a braking underground trolley a comfort. Quiet in a sea of noise. Another faceless blur of color, lost among strangers, where everyone moved in unison towards unknown destinations and pretended they did not feel weary from jostling shoulders of those slumped beneath the notion of being truly alone.

He kept company with streetlights and strangers at twilight to avoid the inelegant sting of adulthood thrust upon him too quickly at home. A boy seen and not heard without a mother. A father lost to red ink and late night scotch. Both drowning in loss. Alone even in the presence of one another. Alone except for all he listened for.

When he was truly forgotten, except for the shadows that tormented in the night, he wondered if his father even noticed he was gone.

Then he learned to listen to the absence of sound.

Heard the disquieting roar of silence in a raspy exhale of his lungs dampening screams. Seconds the distinct nauseating tick of a wristwatch pressed to his ear. The creak of springs as bruised knuckles and nails dug in to a mattress. Minutes a metronome of his willful and defiant heart continuing to beat. Inhaled a sigh of bile when discarded, falling deeper and deeper inside the blood rushing in his ears, alert and pricking for the most distant creak of a floorboard. Half hoping Death had finally come to call upon him.

There were worse things than dying. And only one thing better than living.

He had heard the warmth of sunlight filtering through clouds and twitter of a sparrow’s wings grazing a garden of crocus. His own heart beating fast, unsteady with want, a twinge of hope. Felt answering hesitation of love beneath freckled skin smoothed by his fingertips.

He listened to an echo of the memory long after the boy it belonged to had parted.

He became an observer, removed and present, watchful of intent. It took years for him to understand how to hear the sounds of the living. Their anger, twigs of underbrush snapping as fire consumed them. Resonance of pain, broken shells and stones rattling like bones as an undertow crushed them on a reef. Grief and remorse, the rush of a storm seconds before pouring on to the pavement. He had yet to name content or happiness, had not known it well enough, to know to listen for it, or if he would recognize it if he ever heard it.

He knew now it sounded a lot like Elias softly breathing against his chest in the morning.

Peter stared at the floor and listened. His breathing, tense short bursts of anger and hurt clashing, louder than shouts filling the room. Each voice a distinct tone, parsed by pitch and tenor, sorted and filtered as he identified each one without sight. His surroundings prisms of light and muted colors in
motion. His jaw clenched as minutes passed. Teeth scraping one another. He listened to the chaff of long fingers sliding together, knuckles and bones cracking one by one.

“After you lost sight of your faith, did you immediately engage a prostitute for sex? Or did you pretend it was a relationship and not a transaction of services rendered? Given or received.”

He bit the tip of his tongue and copper filled his mouth. He had heard enough. Peter was not ashamed of his life, his choices forced upon him, of who he was, or how he was made to feel: unworthy, unloved, nothing. Less than nothing. A ghost inside himself. Elias was the only person to make him feel real, as if he mattered, alive. He was purity and goodness, sheltered from most hatred and bigotry.

You will not take that away from him.

Leather crinkled as he stood. Silk lining of his suit jacket hissed static as it slid down shrugging shoulders and quieted obediently as it was placed neatly on a bench.


Threads snapped tersely as buttons popped and cuffs rolled up elbows. He moved with vague awareness, both in and outside himself, drawn toward a crackling microphone, rabid spit dripping from snapping jowls of a wolf.

“Young man, sit down!” A gavel banged on wood. “Everyone take your seats!”

“Or…” A bass violin screeched a low note as he drew near. “…was there just one whore in particular you preferred to bend you over a table and fuck you till your faith in the Almighty returned?”

Lips peeled over dry teeth, releasing a low vibrating snarl. His wrist popped, fist drawing back. His wedding ring glinted in the reflection of steely grey irises. Dark eyes darted to bright white corners and widened.

The brief expansion of refracted light and tonal pitch snapped back. He heard a new sound: someone else’s screams.

Knuckles tore open as they connected with a mouth spitting beads of red bellowing surprise.

Rodriguez barreled into the witness stand and spit on the floor, fists lifting to defend himself. “Are you out of your fucking mind? Or are you just so lovesick you want to join these two in prison, pretty boy?”

His jaw cracked, teeth clenching hard, vision tunneling.

You want the belt again, pretty boy, or are you gonna open that mouth?

Such a pretty boy. I bet your screams are just as pretty, huh.

No visit from that pretty little god fearing boy of yours? Maybe we ought to go look for him, is that it? That’s what I thought. Wrap that broken arm and get back to work.

The rest of the man’s words spoken fell from a mute, moving mouth. Lost to an equally sickening sound. His watch. Tick, tick, tick.
And the shrill, helpless warbles of a wounded bird. “P-peter, wait, wait!”

“Yes, Peter.” The lawyer’s front teeth flashed. “Listen to your little harlot and do as your told.”

Peter’s lips rippled to a ghastly smile. His thumb cracked with a press of fingertips and he exhaled slowly through his teeth. Elias was good. Innocent. He never had been. Kind where he was cruel. It wasn’t in his nature to forgive.

He hauled the silver snakeskin lawyer forward by a shirt collar and threw a punch. Cartilage of a nose cracked on his left fist. Blood splattered the front of his dress shirt red. His next hit landed on a jaw. Pearl teeth tinted pink as gums bled then teeth fell loose, pinging wood. Rodriguez glanced a blow across his chest and a right hook grazed his brow. Peter snarled and rammed another fist forward. Breath heaved hot on his face, two punches landing one after the other against a stomach. The lawyer scratched red down the side of his face as he fell backwards with a gurgled choke. A flailing wrist cut his mouth splitting it open. His nails tore a scalp and gripped wax slicked hair. Peter dragged Rodriguez as he kicked and screamed obscenities, Italian leather shoes leaving black streaks on the marble. He wasn’t sure how many times he hit him. He just kept swinging. Bone breaking against bone over and over again. He yanked a bloody face down and rammed a knee against the soft underside of a jaw. The lawyer choked, blood trickling the seam of his lips. His mouth tightened. His fists ached for more. To sink his nails in, skin the monster, expose his underbelly, and tear out every vulnerable part until it begged for mercy.

Mortally wound him like he had done to Elias. Like men had done to him to leave their permanent mark. He deserved it. He raised his fist for one final blow.

“Don’t.” Someone whimpered, footfalls shuffling unsteadily down stairs. “Please don’t.”

He turned his head slightly, grip tightening to find the source. Elias stumbled on the last step of the witness stand and fell to his knees crying out. A trembling hand shot out to steady himself, pain coloring cheeks bright and leaking silver. Watering lilac eyes drifted across the room. Pupils blown black. Searching in a daze to find him. The priest paled, rocking forward on knees and wretched.

I’m not this man. Not anymore.

Peter let the lawyer drop, chest heaving as he exhaled brimstone, suffocated by the return of stunned silence roaring. Molecules humming fear.

I will not be that man.

Half the courtroom was on their feet. Faces washed white, aghast and paralyzed by the sight. No one spoke. No one moved. No one dared to breathe. Onlookers and reporters crowded near the back doors, milling uselessly like sheep wanting to run but unable to look away. Rodriguez’s co-counsel was crouched behind the table, mascara running, high heels discarded for a chance to bolt.

Blood smeared a bright blue pulsating vein in his forearm as he wiped it from mouth and teeth. Copper and bile burned his tongue. Peter couldn’t quite bring himself to stare directly at the man. At what he had done. He heard horror in hushed whispers stirring. He found blood lust glittering in his eyes reflected in a cracked watch face, the one from his youth, defiant and proud and furious. Minute hands stuck. It finally ceased to tick.

“Speak to him like that again…” Peter stooped, ratcheting Rodriguez by a torn tie, eyes the dull silver of a guillotine, voice slicing cold through the air. “And I promise you will lose much more than a few fucking teeth.”
He dropped him. A weak noise breathed as the lawyer crumpled to the floor.

The room smelled of sweat and stale vomit and not enough spilled blood. Would there ever be enough? Had there ever been? He was transported to back alleys of Paris, years of knowledge traded for torn uniforms and muddied textbooks. Fists swinging, thought to be outnumbered and cornered, only to leave bodies cowering of those who dared to slur faggot at him while passing in halls. He fought every single one of them. From one boarding school to the next. Until they stopped coming altogether.

Peter was not that boy any longer. Elias had not known him then. His sharp nails uncoiled from blood slicked palm. But he didn’t have to be.

He wheeled around and banged a fist on the table, leaning across it to stare Hannibal down, growling, “Take care of this or I will take care of you!”

The hiss of flame and ice answered darkly in unison. “Understood.”

Silas inched backwards then crouched beside the table, sensing haunting howls of a pack calling out to one another in the night, quietly circling. Hannibal and Will leaned forward in their chairs, expressions stony and blank. He cast a fleeting glance at their restraints. Sinew and blood vessels thinned as the older man stretched his left hand beneath the table, gauze bandages unraveling. In a palm was a bent paper clip.

It wouldn’t be long.

Stepping over the body sprawled on the floor, Peter walked quickly to where Elias was still kneeling. He could hear the shift of fear spike as he turned his back on the crowd. Unsettled rustling of fabric and whispers. People caged what they feared.

“Come.” He crouched down, forcing a hoarse grate to a firm hush. “Come to me, Elias.” He placed cold fingertips on the flushed nape of a neck, stroking knobs of a spine. The boy was shaking, hot to the touch, afraid. “We’re leaving.”

Elias started, scrambling backwards, small chest rattling, the panicked breathing of a trapped rabbit. He threw a hand up as if to wield off a strike, eyes screwed shut. “Don’t touch me!”

His stomach dropped, breath catching. Peter slid a palm over his mouth to smother a quiet exclamation of fucking saints. The boy’s pale skin was freckled in someone else’s blood. The lawyer’s blood. It dripped from tips of his light hair, smudged mauve by tear tracks. Chiffon of his blouse stuck wet and red on his ribcage, halo of retribution shifting on a cross. Palm prints swiped the front of his ivory jacket where he had tried to wipe them clean. His husband scooted farther away on elbows and heels pushing across the ground, shaking.

You aren’t afraid of him anymore… Peter closed his eyes, mouth flinching. You’re afraid of me.

“If he says. Go,” Hannibal added sharply, smoldering red gaze scanning the room. Rubies glinted across sharp cheeks to stare at Rodriguez stirring to consciousness, eyelids fluttering. “I dearly hope you are not too attached to your tongue, Mister Rodriguez, as William and I shall be relieving you of it shortly.”

Will sensed the danger too, tongue pricking the backs of clenched teeth. “Get out of here.” His voice hummed low, black, a promise. “Do us a favor and stay a dead man, Peter. While you still can. There’s nothing you can do for us now.”
Peter reached for the boy again, grimacing when he cowered.

“I will drag you out of here,” Peter growled, gripping Elias by a bicep. “Even if you hate me.”

A coughing fit rolled Thomas Rodriguez on his side, spitting up a bloodied molar before he started laughing. “Take him out of this courtroom and you will be obstructing justice.”

“Peter…” Dark warning hissed.

The older man looked up. He heard them. Crunching boots shuffling across the floor. Uniformed men slithered through doors on either side of the judge’s bench. The last of Judge Napolatino was the glimpse of black robes being ushered out the nearest red glow of an exit sign to safety.

It all seemed dull in comparison to Elias shaking with fright. His breath wheezing and ragged.

“I’m sure we’re all very interested in what you’re trying to hide.” Rodriguez goaded, shakily to his knees. “I wouldn’t mind seeing you lead out in cuffs.” Blood stained teeth gleamed, ashy lips twisting. “Or is that something you’d do willingly if paid by the hour?”

A cheek flinched. Footfalls banged across marble. Peter slammed his fist into a smirk, force blistering his knuckles, and reverberating a heavy ache up his shoulder. Blood and teeth splattered the ground. Rodriguez landed with a hollow thud face down. He spit on his body. Peter stared at blood dripping from his fingertips, rusting his wedding band red, and heard its quiet ping of consequences on the marbled floor. Not just for him. He heard Elias. And Will and Hannibal. Every drop rippling the puddle beneath. A turning tide.

“This isn’t what I wanted,” Will said softly, guilt turning irises green as they reflected blood on the hands of his family.

“Bullshit.” Peter snarled, cradling a limp hand to his chest, jerking his chin in the direction of Elias. “You call. He comes.”

Hannibal rose suddenly, handcuffs dropping to the table, shadows hollowing eyes, staring at something behind Peter. “Will.”

“Yeah.” Will cracked his neck, glint of blue flicking right. His handcuffs coiled at his feet. He stood. “I’m on it.”

Electricity crackled hot. Air tinged smoky. Peter saw the sound, a memory of white glowing on a scarred face, cornered in a pitch-black room, shaking with fear.

He heard Elias calling out. “Peter, watch out!”

He turned but it was too late. Saw the glowing red of a target wavering at the center of his torso.

Elias flung himself in harm’s path as a trigger was pulled. Two clawed probes struck a blood soaked chest. The slim body seized with the sudden jolt of a stun gun connecting, scream cut off as the boy began to seize, sweet eyes rolling back. Peter charged forward and caught Elias in his arms with a violent howl, dropping to a crouch. He tore the metal free, charge searing red across his palm. He curled around arms and legs flailing against the protective shield of his body, silver gaze slicing up as another trigger clicked.

Will tackled the guard screaming, nails tearing a terrified face shrieking for help, thumbs digging a frail carotid.
A heavy hand landed on his shoulder.

Peter looked up and found Hannibal standing over him, blood dripping from jagged teeth, a single word snarled, "Run."

*

Elias woke with a hoarse gasp and a firestorm raging through his chest. He left nail marks on his chest, clenched above his heart, radiating lines directed at the source of the pain. He timidly touched two heated marks. He grit his teeth to keep from crying out. They felt like bite marks, deep and searing.

His vision was black. Everything around him varying shades of dark. He tugged damp curls off his forehead, wrinkling his nose at the putrid scent of week old bananas. His teeth began to chatter. He was cold. His spine pressed something grooved and hard. Where was he? He followed fraying buttons down the length of his blouse. The fabric torn and soaked through with something. He pressed his palm over it, chaffing skin beneath to warm.

A door creaked open, rectangle of light hovering above a looming shadow filling the space.

Shrieking, Elias scrabbled backwards, damp hands slipping on the ground and he fell, cracking his head on the tile. He groaned and rolled to his side, curling up in a ball as he had learned to do, to make himself the smallest target. When he had needed to disappear, but couldn’t.

“Easy…” The light shifted, pixelated glow of a cell phone. Peter held up hands, a towel in one and a small glass bottle in the other, lowering slowly to kneel beside him. “Easy. It’s just me.”

The younger man touched a knot swelling on his head. Did Peter’s clothes seem dark in the light? Splotched by widening stains. He dragged his thumb over a wet palm. He lifted his hand to the light. Wet and black. An oil slick drowning unsuspecting wildlife.

“Oh god,” Elias moaned, gaze falling from his hand to his chest.

The light lifted shadows from his body. It wasn’t black. It was crimson. Soaking the chiffon of his blouse, stuck to a heaving ribcage, and his hands and skin.

“Oh Christ!” He clawed his blouse open, fingertips streaking marks across his torso and stomach. He frantically pawed at bones and muscles to find the wound. To stem the bleeding. He had to stop the bleeding. “Help me! Peter, help me.”

A glass bottle tapped the floor. The red label on it was peeled and flaking. He could make out the words: triple distilled. The phone’s screen dimmed beside it.

Cold palms slid around his hands, cupping them, grip hard, voice even harder. “Stop.”

Light of the phone radiated a split lip, bruising flaring a cheek and jaw, blonde hair smeared red. Peter stared at him, distant and glazing at fear and judgment registering in eyes looking up.

The priest froze. “You…” His throat clicked in the dark. Crescendo of a whisper turning to a shout. “You hurt him. You almost killed that attorney. You nearly beat him to death! This is his blood! You —”

“I protected you!” Peter snarled, tipping forward on his knees, slit of silver in the dark. “I did what
was necessary! What they did! How can you so readily accept their violence and not mine? I will not be made to apologize for actions I do not regret! He deserved far worse and I pray Will and Hannibal showed him no mercy.”

“Or is depravity more of a turn on?”

“I’m not like you. Like any of you.” Elias recoiled with a whimper, from a slithering voice and Peter, shrinking to a crouch. “It was wrong. What you did was wrong.”

He bit the words on his lip, but not fast enough. He heard the man’s voice in his head. His becoming all of the ones in his life who had told him he was wrong. Shame washed sickly hot. Gaze falling to stare blankly at the floor.

“Sparrow. What do you mean you aren’t like me?” Silver turned to intermittent glistens of starlight, voice grating raw, a whisper of hurt. “I have never laid a hand on you. I would never—“ Peter looked away and swallowed. A shaking hand smoothed up a bent knee, squeezing gently over a bandaid, a reminder of healing. “Let me help you. You need to get out of this. You need rest. I want to soothe your burns and put you to bed. Won’t you let me?”

He whimpered again as Peter slid a hand to his hip, fingers splaying beneath his bloodied blouse, touch timid. The older man crouched closer, careful to unfasten each button slowly. He tried to look away. To dampen the pace of his breathing as it quickened. The suit jacket pushed from curled shoulders and fell to the floor. Cheap soap filled his lungs. Thumbs drifted up the crescent of his ribcage as fabric parted. He turned his face against a broad shoulder, chin tipping up as a heated mouth found his pulse and slid down. He shuddered at the way his hands shook, seeking comfort as they slid from hair to a neck to the border of fine stitching and skin.

“But there is something wrong with you, isn’t there?”

Elias bolted for the door, kicking the cell phone and bottle across the floor.

A thick arm latched around his waist and hoisted him off the floor, shower door banging open. “You’ll thank me later.”

“Let go!” He shrieked, feet kicking out.

“Stop fighting me!” Peter growled angrily against the shaved hair on his scalp.

Water spit a drizzle of cold, pipes shuddering before unleashing a scalding mist of hot. It drenched him a second later, fury hissing out. He hung limply in a single arm, toes barely grazing tile as fingernails scoured shampoo through his hair. Large hands planted his out in front of him, flat and shaking on either side of the shower knob, bent at the waist as the blouse was stripped from his shoulders. Their clothing squelched angrily on the tile.

Thumbs hooked belt loops lightly, mouth pressed to the curve of his ear, apologetic. “I have to take these off. They must be disposed of. The boxers can stay.” Elias shifted uncomfortably, arms hugging his waist. A heavy sigh pricked his neck. “I’ll stay clothed if you like. Until we’re done.”

He nodded numbly. Peter stripped trousers off himself and then Elias in a single swoop. His head dropped. Curls pouring water in his eyes, running down his nose, blood circling the drain. He felt cold again. Chilled skin chaffed by their silken boxers stuck to long limbs brushing his legs, familiar and inviting. Tears pricked his eyes. He jabbed an elbow against a stomach.

“The fuck, Elias!” Peter barked. “I said stop!”
He didn’t know how to stop fighting. He had been fighting all his life. To black out grief. To survive violence. To fight against it. To be accepted. To find peace within. He had seen it so many times. Searched for it in the eyes of others. He had never seen it looking back at him in the mirror.

He wrenched out of Peter’s grasp and thumped a hand squarely in the center of his chest. “I told you to let me go!”

“Sparrow…” Peter swallowed and took a step forward, head bent, cold nose trailing from his shoulder to rest in the curve of his neck. “I want to help you.” His mouth moved to a chin, a cheek, and hovered above thinning lips. “Let me help you. Hold you. I love you.”

Peter stooped to kiss him.

Elias shoved him. “I don’t want your help any more! Haven’t you done enough!”

The older man straightened, arms falling limply to his side, eyes glossing dark, whispering. “You don’t mean that…”

He hit him again, harder than the first time. Then again. His glancing blows turned to pummeling fists, confused whimpers turning to shrill cries of pain. Peter stared at the ceiling, standing still, tears brimming corners of his eyes.

All he saw reflected was resignation, acceptance, giving way to guilt.

Elias pushed away and dropped to his knees, hugging his stomach, and sobbed. He saw a puddle of blood rippling against his skin and continuing to rise. He may have cost Hannibal and Will their lives. Cost Peter his freedom and safety. Nearly was the cause of a man’s death. The death of countless souls to carry in his heart.

All because of him.

“What’s wrong with me?” He wailed, banging a hand on a burning chest.

There was blood on his hands. His family’s blood. What had they done?

Peter sagged to the shower floor behind him, chest curled over a frail spine, palms cupping red tipped ears to muffle sobs of sorry, god, I’m so sorry, Elias, I’m sorry.

*

His hands were shaking.

They hadn’t stopped. A persistent palsy of adrenaline and fear. He couldn’t make them stop. Far worse now that he couldn’t feel them. Chilled by his abrupt lack of movement. Numb. The fresh burn on his palm a hazy sting of pain. It was the only thing he could feel. The pain.

Pain had no sound. Enduring in its silence. The hesitant flicker of a mouth or sweep of eyes unable to meet gazes.

Peter was crowded between the toilet and glass shower door of the motel room. His mouth dry. He had been sick twice in the last hour. His throat cracking from muffling hoarse sobs of regret and relief against a lint covered towel. Breath a stale acid spearmint of mouthwash and miniature vodka. The tiled floor was cold. His hair dripping wet, rivulets rolling down his half naked body. He
shivered. He slumped, red rimmed eyes tipped toward a dim grey crack of light beneath the closed door. Somewhere in the darkness his bloodied clothes lay in a ragged pile along with the priest’s. They would have to burn. He could hear his husband’s pitiful whimpering from the other room.

It was, and had always been, the most grievous noise he had ever heard. Breaking mirrors scattered by rainwater.

How long had it taken him to get Elias to safety? Hours. Days? It seemed like days. Too long to go unnoticed. Running in broad daylight with the boy half conscious in his arms, both of them bloodied and bruised. He was grateful. Grateful he knew how to run. To hide. How to disengage the static loop of pain radiating through his bruised body and keep moving. Grateful Elias wouldn’t likely remember the stench of dumpsters as he hid him from patrol cars sliding by. Or recall the heat of his mouth on his, pressed to a shadowy graffiti alley wall when a suspicious passersby came too close.

He would be grateful if they got out of this shit motel. Crossed county lines. Out of this fucking state.

Leave this god forsaken country once and fucking for all. Will you come with me Elias? If you do, will you ever speak to me again?

How long had he been sitting here?

I’m sorry. God, tell me what to do.

Safety wasn’t permanent. It was temporary. He knew that better than anyone. Not a place or a person. An ideal, blind faith, not a fact. They couldn’t stay here. He tried to drown out the voice whispering he might not be able to stay with Elias. He was not safe. Not with him.

Peter groped in the dark until he found his cell phone wedged behind a metal trashcan bolted to the floor. He got unsteadily to his feet, gripping an edge of the sink, dizzy from motion. Or the alcohol. Or the nausea and constant anxiety gnawing viciously at his stomach. He peeled out of wet boxers and kicked them away, knotting a towel on his waist.

He shuffled slowly to the bedroom, every movement labored and painful. Two ribs were bruised. Jaw swollen from what experience suggested was a cracked tooth. He tripped over a rug, squinting to locate a hint of light to guide him. It was squared off behind the paisley duvet he had thrown over the window to keep it dark. They needed to keep quiet and out of sight. No lights. No sound. If they needed to run, he wanted a head start. Even if it meant sending Elias away without him.

Both twin beds were empty. Bedding rumpled but not in the shape of a boy he had placed in them. Elias had cried himself nearly catatonic after an hour and a half. He got down on one knee and glanced beneath them. His husband wasn’t hiding there either. His stomach clenched, panic spiking. The suitcase. It was gone.

He was half way to the door when he heard a muffled cry behind him. He leaned his head against a forearm braced above the locks, willing a sting of tears to retreat. He listened for the sound again. Small and helpless and faint. He followed, tiptoeing gracelessly across the carpet. He stopped in front of a wicker slat closet barely the size of a small bookshelf. The cry sounded again. Louder. Coming from inside of it.

“Elias…” Peter breathed, fingertips pressed splintering wood.

There was no answer.

He squatted down and pushed. The closet door clacked open on its tracks. He punched a side button on his phone, lighting up the screen and held it up. Elias was curled on his side, spine flush with the
inner wall, knees to his chest. His eyes tracked beneath thin lids, whimpering, chased by a dream.

*Or am I chasing you? The man dripping in red. The one you don’t love.*

Damp skin and hair was rolled inside a thin sheet, toes peeking beneath a fraying hem. Tucked between the boy’s arms and knees, hugged tight, was his yellow suitcase.

Peter saw Elias lying there, hidden at the bottom of a closet, abandoned, and heard the cries of a child crying himself to sleep. Thinking he belonged nowhere. To no one.

The older man let the weight in his chest take him. He sagged to the ground. He dropped the phone and stretched out a hand, hovering inches above a pale flinching cheek. He wanted to crawl in with Elias and keep him safe. Safe from his past. Safe from the present. Safe.

*Safe from me.*

Tears streamed silently down his face. He stared at a poorly painted still life of a sailboat on the far wall.

*How the hell are we going to get out this?*

His phone buzzed white in the dark.

His first instinct was to pitch it. Crack the screen. Tear out the keys. Snap inner chips in half. Set it all ablaze with their clothes. It could only be one person.

Black letters blinked up at him, sender marked. **S: They want to see him. To say goodbye.**

**Fuck you. All of you.** Peter scratched his reply viciously across keys.

**S: They want to see him the day after tomorrow. 9 am sharp. He must come alone. The guard will allow them half an hour for a price. It may be their last chance. Their only chance.**

The phone case creaked as his grip tightened. **GO TO HELL.**

A ponderous check mark appeared for a long time.

**S: Mister Moreau.**

He waited for the impassioned plea. To come to his senses. To show compassion. To share what he loved with men who loved enough to kill, to protect them. And didn’t he owe them that? A goodbye. Forever indebted to their brutal kindness. Enslaving Elias and them to a memory. Was that all he could give them now?

Ellipses appeared then disappeared. Turned to a check mark and then reappeared as ellipses of a reply being written, then rewritten. It turned to a check mark once more. The final reply sterile and emotionless.

**S: I am the only one in possession of your current whereabouts.**

Peter felt blood drain from his face, fingertips and knuckles ghosting white.
S: It wasn’t a request.

His hands stopped shaking. Cold to the touch and numb, phone sliding from his grasp. Resignation was steadying. Choice stripped from him. Hostage once more.

He heard fragile breathing. His own. A different kind of pain thrumming through his chest and stinging his eyes. His gaze slid to Elias nestling beneath the sheet, vision dimming as his eyes closed, heart emptying to a slow beat.

*I should have known I would fall in love with the jailer and not the key.*

Chapter End Notes

Decks Dark x Radiohead

The grass grows over me
Your face in the glass, in the glass
It was just a laugh, just a laugh
It's whatever you say it is
In split infinities

Have you had enough of me?
Have you had enough of me
Sweet darling
An iron cast clock was mounted on a cement wall, marking the time. 9:10 am. The turn of the second hand a steady tick in silence.

“Are you…” Will grit his teeth, eyes flicking up then away, lip flinching from a repressed curl. “How are you?”

Fine cut nails clattered to a stop. “Fine.”

“Fine?” His nostrils flared, reply terse. “Great. Nice talk.”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” A clipped tone said.

A curse fogged white. The heat of it suffocating, choking screams. There was not enough air. He could barely breathe. Plastic cut bones of cheeks and scraped stubble beneath a clenched jaw, straps of a mask biting the back of a neck and rubbing it pink. This is what it would feel like to be hanged. Chains rattled furiously as Will twisted on the bench he was tethered to, cuffs on his wrists, looped at his waist and falling to ankles. His restraints gave enough slack for him to pace a few feet in the windowless room he was kept in. A pretense of freedom. Hangman’s noose looming in the distance.

*If I ever was free. If I ever could be again. Except in death.*

He winced as they chaffed raw skin, cigarette burns of a taser winding down his body. His head ached. Subdued only by a baton cracking over his skull. Hidden away from innocent witnesses and a courtroom running with blood. Their last stand had failed. Now they were trapped. Rabid dogs muzzled and on a leash. One growing shorter by the minute.

*But not for long.* Will looked to his left at Hannibal stooped beside him, grey and gaunt from the physical blows to his body, arms bound in a straitjacket. *They put wild animals down. But we had to give you a chance. To escape us at last.*

Handcuffs shook around a vein pulsing fist. “Then we’ll sit here in fucking silence.”

A knee pressed his. A reprimand.

Hannibal watched him from the corners of dark eyes. Consuming fire turned to forlorn smoke. He was creased by weary lines, orange cast across his face by the red uniforms they now wore labeling them a danger to others. Silver pepper fringe of hair tangled fair lashes still crusted in dried blood. The rest of his face remained expressionless, hidden, scraped and bruised. But not from Will. He had learned to see what lay beneath. Felt a frown of disapproval forming beneath a white mask.

His lip curled derisively in response. He wanted to tear off his husband’s mask and cover a bite mark on his mouth with his own teeth. Tear the fresh split open, taste what was left of Rodriguez’s tongue, and drink the man’s screams. He stared at the bright red knee indenting his thigh and sucked in a growl of fury and want. It was the first they had touched in days. He wanted to hit it away. Wanted to draw Hannibal in with nails buried in the back of his neck and waist, hold him down, struggle until the fight raging within him to run or maim drained.

“What would you like to discuss, Elias?” Hannibal asked softly, affection sparking as it slid to the
other side of the table. “Do you intend to return home?”

There was a soft snort. “What home. And don’t you mean if? If I can return home.”

Shaking hands adjusted a grey fleece hood drawn low over a face. A thin rose gold band glimmered. Will followed the streak of light it made like a falling star, heart sinking, before it disappeared to rake static from hair. He searched the shadows for light. There was only darkness.

“Would you like to see photos of the dogs?”

“No.” Will snapped.

The priest jumped, shoulders drawing forward as he slumped.

“Another time.” Hannibal’s brows drew low, frowning at Will. “Thank you though.”

Will bit his inner cheek until the pain spread to his mouth. Apology tingling on his lips remained stuck. He huffed frustration out his nose, gaze dropping as violet eyes rose to meet his.

What kind of apology could I possibly give you to cover this? All of this.

The hood pooled around shoulders as Elias sat forward on elbows, warily avoiding their gazes. He reached in the sweatshirt’s center pocket and drew out a sepia tone photograph, pushing it across the table. Its edges crinkled, a crease running diagonally at the bottom of a landscape. Will took it and pushed it towards Hannibal, refusing to look at it.

“How lovely.” The older man’s eyes swept over the photograph and smiled sadly at it, murmuring, “I, for one, would have liked to walk you down the aisle and given you away, little dove, as I promised. I am truly sorry we could not be in attendance.”

Will ducked his head, pretending to stare at the table. As if was as simple as all that. The apology. Or the excuse.

As if the most important day of your life was mistakenly forgotten.

“Say it again, Will!” A freckled nose scrunched.

“Elias.” Will groaned, taking hands in his and lifted them to a bewildered smile. “There isn’t anything on this earth that is going to keep Hannibal and I from your wedding. Are you sure you couldn’t do better though? Does it have to be him? Ow, ow! Okay! You’re so strong for such a tiny thing. Now show me what cake you want…”

He watched violet eyes stroke the glossy surface fondly. Roses climbed wrought iron lattice soldered together to create an aviary style gazebo and spilled over it in a waterfall of petals. The curving silhouette of Venus carved from stone stood at its center. His eyes followed a dusty gravel walkway to a marble staircase at the base of the gazebo. Rows of thorny stems and blossoms out of focus, blowing in a spring breeze. At the center were two figures, one light and the other dark. Elias was swept up in Peter’s arms, beaming, lily of the valley braided with pearls drooped elegantly in hair tumbling over scrunched eyes. Tiny ribbons draped the nape of his neck and fluttered from a bouquet peeking behind broad shoulders. Yards of chiffon billowed on his slender arms around a neck and clung to a narrow waistband of white trousers trimmed with satin. His upturned nose was pressed to a crook of a peaked one. Peter wore the expression of a man both besotted and terrified of finding all he dreamed holding close. His smile more subdued, crinkling long lashes swept low. There were tears in his eyes, pearl stained on cheeks. Long hair combed and wound tightly with a single silver pin. His suit was stark in the afternoon, a shadow of deep velvet piped by satin and a floral brocade
lapel. A gloved hand was resting on a freckled cheek, the other tucked gingerly beneath knees, grasp firm as if a single gust of wind might take Elias away. Cursive blotted the back of the photograph: *Roseraie de L'Hay*.

Will sighed in his mouth, dragging his gaze away. He listened to creased pages falling one after the other, looking over a shoulder as Elias thumbed through his scrapbook of torn magazine pages and sketches of his perfect day, smiling up at him. He had promised to be there.

“We could have another one…” A small voice suggested. “Renew our vows?”

He gripped the photograph and tossed it to Elias, trying to ignore the tremble of a dainty bottom lip.

“What a pleasant thought. Will, what do you think?”

He wasn’t sure if it was the surety smoothing Hannibal’s voice, glossing over promises they could not and would not be able to keep, or the pitiful dwindling hope he felt tighten his chest when Elias bumped fingers against his wrist to have his hand held, longing for contact. He wanted to give in. To let the dream sweep them away. He couldn’t stop hearing the boy sobbing on the witness stand, imagining countless hours he wept for his parents, for his new family, to return to him, knowing they never would. It tore open scabbed wounds deep in his heart. They would never have that life. There was no testimony to save them now. They had shown who they were, without pretense or masks, descending viciously, howling until the court room filled with screams.

*We’ll never be a family again.*

“I’m sure Peter would be thrilled by the idea,” Will spat, gaze glinting violently his husband’s direction. “If you don’t mind putting it off indefinitely until we’re dead in the ground. Maybe our spirits can ascend and attend the ceremony. Probably safer for all involved. Is that it? What you want me to say?” He jerked his hand away and slid to the other end of the bench, back to them both. “Stop filling his head with fantasies, Hannibal. We’ll be in the ground long before their anniversary.”

“William!” The older man growled. “Apologize at once.”

“I only meant…” A throat cracked.

“What?” Will howled, fist reverberating the table. “Why the fuck are you here talking to us like nothing happened? Like this is just normal? I told you not to come, Elias!” Cold blue grey eyes swung up and locked on the shrinking form washed out by grey fleece. “So what’s wrong with you, huh? You’re gonna be lucky if you and Peter make it a few hours without being arrested at a road block, let alone out of the country!” Will mirrored Elias as he stood, leaning across the table. “Do you have any idea the danger you’ve put yourself in! Put us in! I don’t want to die for nothing, not knowing where you are or if you’re even alive! You were supposed to stay out of this. If you had, maybe we would still stand a chance surviving this trial!”

Elias gaped, arms pin straight at his side, knuckles tipped white and shouted, “What’s wrong with me! What’s wrong? For starters, I love you!”

The force of his words lashed Will’s face, doubled him over like a fist to the stomach, gripping the table to keep it from toppling him completely.

“And apparently that’s wrong…” His shout faltered to a scraping whisper, tears pooling at the curve of his trembling chin and falling to hands braced on the table. “As it’s always been wrong. Don’t you dare…put this on me. Any of it. I didn’t ask for you to help me! You wanted my help and I came! Don’t ask me to carry the weight of your consequences as if they were my own. The loss of your
lives…” His voice warbled and thinned. “…is not nothing to me.”

He turned to go, eyes fixed on the locked door, without even a goodbye. To halls and doors beyond where Will and Hannibal could not follow. Not anymore.

Storming around the table in a clash of noise, Will reeled Elias roughly in by the hood of a sweatshirt and held him against his chest. Stared at chains cutting across his small body, cruel and twisting, and wondered if they had been there all along.

_Are you only as free as I imagined you to be?_

“I don’t want you to touch me!” The priest clawed hands and wrists red.

“I don’t much _care_ what you want since you callously disobeyed my instructions. I suspect now neither does Peter.” Will tightened his grasp until Elias strained to breathe. “Would you rather I stood by to see the only living family I have left on this earth torn apart and jailed beside me?”

An elbow jabbed his liver. “You’re not my father, Will! I don’t have to do as you say!”

“No, I’m not.” He gasped, wrenching an arm behind a back and pinning a squirming form to the table. “Or you would be far more disciplined.”

“Like you were?” Rosy quartz flashed back, gashing him open.

Hannibal stood, head quirking, leveling Will with a steely gaze and a command. “Let the boy go. You may exact your frustrations on me if you so desire. His only fault is his loyalty to us.”

He followed maroon eyes doused by startled blue staring at the priest’s wrist. Will saw his hands shaking, red blossoming beneath his grip and jerked back with a curse. He had only meant to restrain him. Not hurt him. He always hurt him. Elias stay belly down, whimpering when he heard the _shhhing_ of Will’s chains retreating.

“I’m sorry.” Fingers twisted his prison uniform stretched by tensed shoulder blades, keeping him rooted in place. “I’m sorry, Will. I didn’t mean to say that.” A wet face pressed to his spine, voice muffled. “Please.”

“Stop fucking apologizing to men who hurt you!” The younger man stared at the ceiling until his eyes ached, unable to cry. “I was trying to protect you, goddammit. Why do you have to be so stubborn! You never listen to me. To anyone.”

“I’m tired of being protected! Of being used as an excuse for your sins! And his!”

Blue eyes flashed back. “When have I _ever_ used you, Elias!”

“Wasn’t I just an alibi, Will?” Elias crowed, scattering tears with a drag of a wrist. “You put that man’s death at my feet, in my honor, and ask for my forgiveness in the next breath. His and so many others.”

“If and when he dies…” Will pivoted on his heel and descended in an unforgiving swoop. He gripped a jaw between forefinger and thumb, bent close until he could see the shadow of antlers in frightened eyes. “His death will belong only to him. If you didn’t want us to care for you, to fight for you, then you should have never followed us! You should have stayed in your church where you belonged!”

Tears rolled down a paling face. “I have never been enough to belong anywhere!”
“Rodriguez is a closeted, homophobic piece of shit, who doesn’t deserve to waste the world’s limited oxygen! You are fucking perfect! Hear me?” Will tipped his mouth against a dainty tattoo etched behind a shell ear, growling fiercely. “Perfect.” The priest mewled, head shaking. His grip slid from shoulders to wrists, thumbs pressed to a racing pulse. “Yes, you are. Radiant and lovely and good. Too good for the likes of us.” He turned Elias in his arms and crouched at his feet, holding clammy hands to the warmth of his mouth and pressing knuckles to the hollow of eye sockets, head bent in contrition. “You’re right. Elias, I didn’t want this for you. We chose this life. You didn’t. We should have told you. You deserve more…”

Hannibal afforded them privacy by contemplating scratches on the metal table, straight backed, red lipped grimace taut to remain mute.

Elias folded on the bench when his knees and strength gave out, palm tenderly cupping the back of Will’s head. He sagged gratefully at the boy’s feet. Cuffs biting calves as he struggled to balance against their pull.

“Do you…hate me?” Will pillowed a waist, whispering. “Us? Now that you know what, who we are.”

“Did I not become intimately acquainted with you in a firestorm of bullets and blood in my church upon our first meeting?” The priest asked, fingertips shaking on the base of a skull. “I had no reservations about who you were.”

Will lifted his head, eyes damp. “Yes, but we…”

“I forgive you.” Elias pushed him back against his stomach, nails dragging a rough scalp.

His mouth was muffled, lips numbed by the mask. “I don’t think it works like that.”

“Shouldn’t argue with a man of the cloth.”

“Former.”

A long sigh breathed out. “Maybe.”

“Maybe?”

“In theory.” Fingers hooked latches, loosening each one, before tossing the mask on the table. “Peter airs out my vestibules from time to time.”

“Oh god.” Will choked on fresh air and a laugh.

He inched closer to laughter, fallen autumn leaves rippling a glassy lake, crisp warmth returning their voices.

Elias pushed curls coiled on a damp forehead, smile fleeting and gentle. “That’s usually blurted out closer to orgasm, but I see you get the idea.”

Blue rolled behind eyelids. “Thank you for the visual.”

“Most welcome.” The priest retorted with quirked lips. “I imagine you have little to entertain you these days seeing as how you’re in prison. Just trying to help.”

Will slumped as Elias began to run fingers through his hair, sighing as they raked the column of his neck and rubbed numb tips of his ears chaffed by the mask’s straps. They smoothed his brows, sting
gliding on bruised cheeks, and thumbed at the corner of a bloodied lip. He tried to right himself, to pull away instead of chasing after each touch, leaning in, pressing, twisting, to soothe an ache for contact. A *shhh* answered the whine lodged in the back of his throat. He wound fingers around ankles beneath denim jeans, encircling small bones, and squeezed gently. He trembled as fingertips ringed the collar of his uniform and slid up tensed muscles of his shoulders. Thumbs dug in and he groaned. Pushing his ear to a small chest, he listened to the patter of a heart beating fast, palms settling on the back of his head to hold him.

“He’s ruined you…” Will slurred drowsily.

A chirp brushed the crown of his head. “In more ways than one. Taking my virginity, for example, in case that wasn’t clear.”

“I miss the days…” He shook his head with a labored sigh. His hands slid to a narrow waist. He held tighter until the priest’s breath hitched. He could feel the arc of a ribcage. Elias seemed smaller, more frail than he remembered. “…when you didn’t even mention the word sex out loud.”

“My vocabulary in that area has become quite vast. Would you like me to regale you with a few stories?”

Rocking back on his heels, Will squinted at a rippling smirk and twinkling eyes, frowning. “No, Elias, I don’t particularly care to be *regaled*. Or have you forgotten I barely get to see Hannibal, let alone fuck him? Or was that the point?”

“Here I thought you wanted to be amused,” The priest said.

Wriggling out of his grasp, Elias walked to Hannibal, arms sliding around his front and hooked a chin over a shoulder. The pale ghost within the older man stirred and rustled color back to his skin and cheeks. Maroon eyes tipped to the side, sliding up and warming as the boy pressed a kiss to his temple. He removed the older man’s mask and set it beside Will’s with a tap. He carded fingers through silvery strands until they smoothed in place, dragging the older man’s eyes closed with a sigh. Hooking legs sideways on the bench, Elias bent and fumbled with hooks and latches of the straight jacket, bottom lip rolled underneath a press of teeth, determined. He blew at waves of hair falling in his eyes with an exasperated curse, palms plopping against a torn denim knee, unable to free the jacket from the chains they were attached to.

“Sorry…” The priest mumbled, sad eyes stuck to arms strapped to a chest. He lay a palm against them, “I wish I could be of more use to you.”

The older man shuffled forward and pressed a kiss to a shaved scalp, lips moving gently. “You have been dearly missed.” He pulled the priest closer with a chin. Fair lashes drooped over a mist of tears as Elias lay against his chest and folded arms around him. “William and I rely upon your strength even during this enduring separation. The sight of you a tonic to soothe our ailing spirits. To keep us company in the days to come.” Hannibal shifted to whisper softly in an ear, “To let another define us is to give him power over our souls. Never give them the satisfaction of thinking they determine your worth, little one. We are who we are implicitly, without apology, and unforgiving in our radiance even if it sets fire to those who would cross our paths. If they cannot see your beauty then let them burn. They are far more committed to misunderstanding you.” Tiny fingers tightened on his collar as the older man kissed the center of forehead. “Pay Mister Rodriguez no mind. Will and I saw to it he has been given a proper education in holding his tongue. His acts of cruelty were met by a fair punishment.”

“You are not God.” Elias lifted his gaze, tears trickling cheeks. “You cannot decide what judgment another man deserves.”
“And you, little one…” Hannibal bent to peer at the priest at eye level. “…might consider not judging us for our actions. Do not bear the weight of their judgment as if you are deserving of it. You act as the patron saint of the masses to justify their right to abuse you by counting them worthy of doing so. You are not their lesser, Elias, or their equal. You are unique and exist far above their cruelty. Do not sacrifice another minute of your life for people who would drag you to this earth and bathe in your spilled blood to imagine they could ever be as pure as you are. They would trample you until the last breath of light within you died out. Do you understand what I’m saying to you?”

The priest nodded, knees tucked to his torso, pressing his face to the older man’s chest.

“Good. Now…” Hannibal smiled faintly, motioning for Will to join him with a turn of his chin. “Will and I are going to sit here with you quietly for our remaining time together.”

Shuffling clockwise around the table to unwind his chains, Will slid in behind Elias and pillowed his head on the curve of his spine. His knees bumped the older man’s. Their eyes met. Damp and dark, longing and sadness rimming their irises gold. His jaw trembled then clenched to keep steady, pulled by thick emotion lingering in the air. He could feel it shake his bones and ache deep in his chest. Palms sweating as his eyes began to burn. A sensation all too familiar. He had last felt it looking at Abigail washed grey by light on granite then white as snow as blood pooled around her. The younger man hooked his left ankle around a right one and they leaned forward to shelter Elias between them. A small hand reached back and slid though his chains, to hold his, gripping hard enough to bruise. He cleared a choke of grief from his throat and closed his eyes.

If this is the last time... Glimmering rivulets gathered in the folds of a fleece lined hood. …for us to be a family then I want to be able say goodbye.

A minute hand tocked ominously. An incessant reminder of moments too short lived.

“Will?” The tin of a bird sung, low and sorrowful.

Rivers rushing over a cliff to pummel rocks below answered, rough and brutal. “Yeah?”

“I don’t want to go,” Elias turned his head slightly, nose cold against a cheek, whispering. “Please don’t make me go.”

Twigs snapping a dwindling hearth warmed gentle slopes of ears. “We cannot keep you our songbird in gilded cages any longer, little one. There is much wonder to see and experience if you would only spread your wings. How are you to bless bluest skies if they cannot hear your song from the clouds high above them?”

“But I love you…” The priest twisted the front of Hannibal’s uniform. “…and I want you to come home. You won’t be there when I get back.” He sobbed against a neck. “Please don’t make me go. If I go I can’t come back. I’ll never see you again. Don’t let them take you from me! This all my fault.”

“We will always be with you, dove. In here.” The older man brushed a bruised cheek, buzzed hair grazing soft, words choking and coarse. “Death is not substantial. Nothing is truly lost. Even when Will and I have gone from this life, you will feel us in the warming light of dawn and shining down on you from the heavens painted by night.” With a nudge of a nose, Hannibal tipped Elias closer to Will, dim gaze sliding to the clock, quiet. “It’s nearly time to say our goodbyes.”

The priest coiled arms around his shoulders, breath quick as he began to shake. His thin fingers scoured the back of a scalp and clenched at clipped curls. Will grabbed the sweater’s front pocket, twisting till stitching began to pop, clenched jaw resting in the curve of a neck. His clothing held the
faintest scent of salty ocean breezes and musk of dog hair.

Home… Elias began to cry against him. You remind me of home.

Family had brought him suffering. He had given them nothing but pain. Abandoned by his mother. Torn from kind smiles of Beverly. Watching the light of his only child drain from her eyes. He was watching Hannibal waste away right in front him and soon he wouldn’t be able to see him at all. There lives, everything they were and had been, burning to the ground all around them.

Now, Elias, dear sweet Elias. We gave you hope, a chance at becoming whole, and took it from you.

He pushed hands beneath a sweater, cupping quivering ribs, pressing tighter to keep pitiful noises still within lungs beneath. To caress aching longing of memories of quieter times seeping free. It would haunt him until the end. Another ghost to visit him in the darkest hours.

“I’m sorry I took that from you. I wish I could give it back.”

Hooking a knee to a waist, Will pulled Elias across the bench and held him against his chest with it. He kissed a braided chain hanging on a collarbone, apology murmured. He wanted to fold arms around the boy and rock him quietly until he fell into a fitful sleep where he was safe and no one could hurt him. If this was the last time, he deserved to be held.

A calloused palm circled a pearl shoulder freckled by starlight. “He’s trembling.”

“That…” Hannibal lifted on an elbow, hair mussed and glowing white in a beam of moonlight. He reached across the boy curled on his side asleep and thumbed tenderly at Will’s sullen mouth. “…you must find a way to soothe him.”

“Elias…” Will tucked dove satin sheets over sloped shoulders and shifted closer to kiss long lashes resting on a cheek. Tears melted on his lips. “You’re safe with us. Safe.” His hand slid from a shoulder to a waist, fingers slipping in to the older man’s palm resting lightly on a hip. “We have you now. It’s just a dream. Please stop…”

“Please stop crying.” The younger man’s voice echoed from wintry nights. “There’s nothing to be afraid of.” He pressed his cheek to a throat working down sobs, eyes stinging. “Shh. Shh. I have you. Everything will be fine. You’ll be okay.”

You have to be. For our sake.

He stared helplessly at Hannibal’s back, turned from them both, chin tucked to hide a glimmer of tears.

“I made a place for us…”

“Don’t worry about us. Just take care of yourself. Tell Peter it was my fault, Elias, tell him it was me.” The younger man entreated hoarsely. He kissed a pearl earring, a cheek, a brow. He hoped each would leave a protective seal on his skin, keep him safe from harm, ferry him to safety. “I took advantage of you. Tell him that. Let him blame me for this.”

“That isn’t true…” The boy sniffed, shaking a head hard.
His heart stalled, clenching. “Does it matter?”

“It matters…” Elias straightened, tear tracks dried white at corners of a trembling mouth and placed a palm gently on a stricken face. “…to me. I won’t lie. It was a long time ago.”

Will gripped thin wrists and pressed them to hard lines of his lips. “Not long enough. Not for him. Please…”

A heavy steel door banged open, flooding the room with blinding light. It lasted for a minute before filling with two silhouettes. One far taller than the other. Will squinted through halos of green and red, blinking until they receded from his vision. Steely eyes pierced beneath the shroud of a hooded sweatshirt worn beneath a thick black leather jacket studded in silver rivets. Falling snow was melting on a white t-shirt. He carried a chill of coming winter on his cheeks. Peter was standing entirely too close to their young lawyer who was staring uncomfortably at the arm looped intimately at his waist.

“I’m sorry.” Silas grimaced, shifting his tweed jacket aside where Peter’s hand rested. A blade was pressed firmly in soft tissue where his ribs rounded. “He insisted it was t-t-taking too long.”

“Couldn’t you exercise a little fucking patience just this once?” Will flicked a bewildered glance at Peter, then Hannibal. “Do we pay him enough?”

The older man lifted his head and fixed a cold stare at the knife without answering.

“No.” Silas answered grimly, closing the door behind them. “You do not.”

*

Peter automatically bristled at the sight of dim shadows taking shape. He found Elias exactly where he always found the boy when frightened. Tear stained and holding on to another man. His grip tightened on steel engraved with roses, feeling heat of bony fingers instead of cold metal in his palm. His wrist stiffened. Breath hitched. He looked down to find his blade indenting flesh. He lifted it away. A neat cut in a cashmere sweater outlined a fine pinking line.

“I see my prodigal son has returned to me in fury, despite my wishes. Were my instructions laid out to you by proxy unclear?” The older man fixed him with a condescending gaze down the bridge of his nose. “Or do you take some satisfaction in willfully disobeying me?”

The lawyer wheezed as Peter reeled him by a collar, tip of his knife scraping up a throat.

“I might ask you not brandish a knife at my lawyer, Peter,” Hannibal admonished icily. “He is dear to me. If he were to come to harm, I might act rashly.”

“You gave me no choice.” The knife pointed threateningly at the older man then the lawyer standing ramrod straight. “Neither did you.”

The lawyer lifted glasses to perch on copper hair and pinched the bridge of his nose with a pained sigh. “Forgive me if I d-don’t see the appeal of being threatened in my place of business.” He motioned at Hannibal then Peter with a flourish of his hand. “By either of you. A polite request would have sufficed.”

Peter tipped a chin with the switchblade, lip curled. “You threatened my freedom. The man I love. I am repaying you in kind.”
“How did you even get in here?” Will demanded, chains twanging irritably as he scrubbed puffy eyes.

Peter ignored the voice and pushed Silas free, heavy steps of laced boots swinging towards the priest pivoting away from him on the bench. His blistered voice shook. “I asked you not to go. I asked you kindly to heed my concerns. I have been patient with you and still you refuse to listen. Why do you not understand I am trying to do what is best for you? For us.”

Elias hunched, chin resting on folded arms and didn’t answer. He shifted closer to Will who placed a hand on his back, rubbing small circles, eyes fixed warily on Peter. He paused as Hannibal twisted to face him, teeth sinking behind lips to warn him off, moving to keep the two men out of reach. He glanced at two masks discarded on the table and then at straining arms constricted to a chest. Both men were bound to the table in chains. He tried not visibly flinch at the bruises marking their faces, old aches of his body humming sympathetically.

He clipped the switchblade and stuffed it into a pocket with a roll of bills, zipper prongs scraping his wrist. He shoved a hood back to free his vision from its blurred outline. His hair strained smooth and tight in a bun fastened hastily at the nape of his neck. Peter came to stand behind Elias and placed hands loosely behind his back. He bent, weight of his presence hovering until the boy shivered. He ignored the watchful gazes of ice and fire upon him. His traced the delicate curve of a throat swallowing, sensation of it rigid on his tongue, fingers ticking as they imagined bearing creamy skin of a shoulder to swipe along it. His eyes flicked to a caress of fingertips enviously. He wanted Elias beneath him, begging to be held and comforted by him, not Will. For days he had shied from his touch. Not even wanting the presence of him in the same room.

*Why is it so much easier for you to find comfort in him?*

“How do you think about the consequences of your reckless behavior?” Breath snapped above hair tousled over a shaved scalp. “Or did you just decide risking my freedom was something you could accept if it meant seeing them? Perhaps you could trade my life for theirs if it was within your power. Would you prefer it?”

“I was careful.” A somber voice replied.

It was the first time he had heard his voice. It sounded like frost cracking the windshield of a car abandoned beneath an underpass. Breath chilled and body weak as he struggled to stay awake. To stay alive. City of New York lights twinkling across a river in the distance.

“You—“

Peter lunged. Elias whimpered and locked hands over the back of his neck. Will started with a snarl, blocking his path. Silas hovered uncertainly in the background beyond Hannibal who stood, unnerving calm washing over his features.

“You would have lead them straight to me!” Peter shouted, resisting the urge to grab Will by a shoulder and throw him out of the way. “They could have arrested you to get to me!”

Loud sniffs sounded against steel. “I d-d-didn’t think—“

“No you didn’t! You never have! We’re leaving, Elias! Get up!”

With a hiccup, the priest swayed unsteadily, teary eyes lowered, and moved to follow.

Cold blue eyes narrowed, fingers tightening on a waist to draw the boy in. “Take him from me.”
Peter smiled, reaching for the switchblade. “Gladly.”

Will pushed Elias out of the way and stepped around the bench, growling.

The last slot of a leather belt shinged free and clashed on the floor.

“Elias—” Hannibal’s voice rang out. He turned from the lawyer who had freed him of the straight jacket, shoulder rolling with a dry crack as he stretched and took a warning step forward. “Come here. You do not need to keep the company of reckless boys snapping at each other’s throats.” The priest darted to the older man and huddled, hands folding protectively around him. His eyes and tone were empty and rigid. “I suggest the two of you weigh the consequences of your actions before you indulge them. Silas, would you please tell Mister Moreau I would like a word with him in private.”

The two men locked in the promise of a fight stared the other down.

The lawyer called hesitantly. “Sir? Doctor Lecter I don’t understand.” He cleared his throat when no one answered. “Um…Mister Moreau, Doctor Lecter would like to speak to you.”

“Visiting hours are over.” Peter sneered at tensing chains keeping Will tethered. “We’re leaving. While we still can.”

“Doctor, I am not sure it’s wise for them to linger…” Soft fabric bunched around a rose gold watch. “The guards will be changing soon.”

“It will only take a moment.”

Silas flung open the door and beckoned a stocky guard in. He went for the ring of keys on his belt thinking their meeting had finished. He took one look at Hannibal freed from his restraints and pitched the ring in. It clashed at soft clothed feet.

He backed away, hands up. “I’m going for a smoke. These animals had better be how I left them when I get back, Jordan.”

“Thanks, Kurtis.” Silas sighed, passed him another fifty dollar bill, and slammed the door.

Retrieving keys, Hannibal unlocked the cuffs at his ankles and pitched chains with a disgusted growl as he stretched. He stalked towards Will, grabbed him by the scruff of his collar, and hauled him to the other side of the table. The younger man’s feet tangled and he ended up flat on his back, panting. Hannibal freed his ankles first, thumb traveling the outer length of his calves, his torso, and crossed to cuffs on his wrists. He leaned over, bent on a single hand beside a head.

He hooked an index finger around the center chain and tugged. “I am going to set you free. Are you going to be on your best behavior?”

Will sucked in his bottom lip, squeezing eyes closed, nodded once. Cuffs clicked open. Heat of a palm print faded from metal.

“Would you excuse us?” The older man looked sideways at their lawyer then down the sharp peak of a nose. “You too, William.”

Wrapping an arm timidly around the priest, Silas ushered him with quiet tuts of comfort to the exit.

“Why?” Sarcasm came out husky. “So Silas and I can disappear for about forty five minutes on a lunch run? Or do you think you need a whole hour for this private conversation? Maybe I should call Jack for a drop in visit.”
“I am asking it of you…” Eyes sparked fire. Hannibal gripped Will by the back of the neck and pressed a terse kiss to a snarl. “Do I need another reason?”

The younger man stiffened, eyes locked on a reddened mouth as it moved.

Will broke free and slammed a shoulder against Peter as he passed. “Should have stayed out of it, Moreau. The priest didn’t need your help. And I didn’t need the inevitable death sentence trying to protect your sorry ass.”

“Is it not true then, based upon the evidence, you had both a romantic and sexual relationship with the Lecter family? Long before you married your husband. Even during your marriage to Mister Moreau.”

He moved without thinking. Swiped claw marks on the nape of a neck Elias wept against. Ringed a throat purple with a choke as a uniform collar tightened then tore where the boy was often found half asleep. His knuckles grazed a sunken cheek, cherished by lips kissing in greeting and upon each goodbye. Scabs tore as they connected with hot breath rushing from a mouth. The same one that had spoken to him softly in the night beside a fire, bellowed at him in fury in the rain, and fit perfectly with rosy lips murmuring love for Peter.

“Petrus, no!” The priest wailed, held back by Silas. “Don’t hurt him!”

The younger man barreled in to the wall and crumpled to the floor with a groan of pain. He didn’t move. Stunned. Blood seeped from his mouth in a trail of spit, staining brown black on a thigh.

Hannibal moved first. Peter shut his eyes and waited for the punishment he deserved. The older man brushed passed and knelt by Will. He touched a sweat beaded forehead and cheeks, whisper harsh and demanding.

“It’s fine.” Will stirred with a croak, struggling to sit. He hit hands away trying to help him then shoved at the wall of the older man’s chest with a sharp glare. “Back off. I said I’m fucking fine!”

Hannibal’s shadow uncoiled from the floor and cast long over the two figures near the far wall, eyes glinting.

“Vous avez raté.” A crooked smile became a wince. Coughing, Will bent on his knees unsteadily and spit blood on the floor. He blinked, shaking away a dizzy spell. His eyes were melting snow of a river when he looked up, cleansing and forgiving. He lifted a hand, palm up, waiting. “Sommes-nous bons?”

(You missed. Are we good?)

“Yeah.” Peter reached out shakily, fingertips pressing a calloused palm, and tugged Will to his feet. He curled around his blistered hand and clutched it shakily to his chest, blue grey smoke receding from his lungs. He stumbled back and folded on the bench, tears burning his throat and eyes. “We’re good.”

“Glad…” Will cleared his throat, wiping blood on a sleeve, and staggered to the door. “…our reunion included a bi-annual fight. Wouldn’t be a celebration without it.”

Silas held open the door. Elias fluttered when Will neared, eyes round, wrapping him up in both arms and guided him out to a sterile hallway.

“Sit with me awhile, sparrow. The adults need to talk. Or whatever the hell it is they need to do.”
Hannibal eased a terse exhale through teeth, staring hard at Peter. “Escort the Moreaus to your office when we have finished here, Silas. The envelope I left in your care. They will need it. Do not deviate from my instructions.”

“Yes, Doctor Lecter,” The lawyer nodded solemnly and closed the door.

"Mister Moreau..." Shadows swathed red eyes cutting back. "I dearly hope for your sake you have a well formed apology and an eagerness to beg forgiveness."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for my inattentiveness, dearest friends.
“I am not going to apologize! I refuse. This is entire situation is your fault!” Peter shouted at a turned back. “The fuck do I have to be sorry for?”

Hannibal stood perfectly still facing the door. Head bent gracefully on a roping neck. Clasped fingers resting against the twitch of red lips glistening by the pass of a sharp tongue. Any stranger looking at him might think he was lost in thought or prayer. He wasn’t thinking, either about the morality of what he was considering, or how a fictitious deity might judge him for it. He was watching shadows rustling beyond the crack of light, hearing the ebb and flow his own blood running molten, and calculating how quickly he had to move to snap Peter’s neck before he screamed.

You cannot kill him. His conscious sounded a lot like Will’s voice. He’s family.

His shadow self sounded like the tiny crunch of his sister’s bones in teeth or the murmured plea of Abigail soft on his wrist. Never stopped you before.

“How could you let this happen! I expect it from him. Not you. You had to know they would humiliate the sparrow.” A ragged voice droned on in the background, heavy and sinking with guilt. “Elias hasn’t spoken in three days! Three days, Hannibal! He blames himself. He won’t say anything. Won’t even cry. Just lays in bed and stares at the wall. Pretends like I don’t exist. He’ll barely let me touch him. Every time he tries to eat, he’s sick. I don’t know what to do.” Weak coughs covered a swallowed sob, hushing to a vulnerable whisper. “What do I do? How could you put us through this? Him? God, why did it have to be him. Hasn’t he been through enough?”

Haven’t we all.

His eyes pierced the dark, seeing burnt shadow of where Will had been lying, bloodied and defenseless. His breathing shallow as he moaned pain. The most plaintive sound. Screams of stop, stop, I’m not resisting beaten out of him on a marbled floor as Hannibal lay beside him, bleeding and face down, only able to watch.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t protect you in this life.”

He would end this pretense of Hell and set Will free if it was the last thing he did.

“Why can’t you just let him go? Hannibal?”

The older man sucked in a deep breath, inclining his head to stare out corners of his eyes at Peter who had his head in hands. “I could ask the same of you.” He placed one hand after the other behind his back, clasping each wrist, to keep them shackled from wrapping a throat. “I did not ask for Elias to be present at this trial. I trust he is capable of making his own decisions even if you do not seem to agree with them, Peter.” He peered down his nose. “If we are insistent in our search to place blame, I might remind you it was neither I or Will who drew first blood. Though perhaps if you had been patient, we might have been spared this ordeal. You always were a short sighted boy. I am at the mercy of Fate’s tide as much, if not more, than you. What would you have me do?”

How many more lives must Will and I take between us to ensure you do not suffer the same Fate?

Peter snorted disgust. “Given your alarming history, I shouldn’t have to answer that.”
“Then neither will I.” He answered tersely with a friendly flash of teeth. “Though while we are on the subject…” Hannibal moved swiftly and banged Peter’s head against the table, palm spread on the nape of his neck and snapped the switchblade from a pocket, and brandished it against a throat. “The last person who attacked Will ended up strung up choking by his own entrails as his colleague bled out beside him, beating heart in hand.” His fingers tangled a knot of hair, growling warning. “If you ever touch my husband again, Mister Moreau, you will lose one of your own. Family or not. Do we have an understanding?”

“If you wanted a taste…” Steeled eyes of a man intimate with fear slid up, blush lips taunting “…could’ve asked.” Peter slid his hand around the one holding a blade, pushing it in enough to draw a beaded line of red, unfraid. Teeth pricked a wrist and slid around a thumb dripping with his own blood. “Or is Will only inclined to share…”

Hannibal’s grip tightened in hair as a graze turned to a searing bite, soothed by a passing tongue. “…if it is not his husband at stake?”

His hands shook as he swipe the blade clean on his uniform, latched it, and returned it to a pocket. His palm throbbed to the remembered pressure of Will’s body, bound and lying on his back, teeth sinking in a bottom lip to bite back a groan before freed.

Hannibal retreated to his seat on the other side of the table, forcing his breathing to steady. “You would be far too bitter for my palate, Peter.” He offered a thin smile. “You are not usually prone to such…” He rubbed the pain in his palm, trying to subside a sting of pleasure. “…brazen manipulation. What is it you were hoping to achieve?”

“I was hoping to remind you of everything you can’t have.” Peter rolled up from the table, eyes piercing and vengeful, taunting. “To have him so near you and be unable to touch him. The scent of his skin lingering in the air. Taunting you with all the images of pleasure you might give him. To show how sorrowful you are. Seeking forgiveness with your tongue. In your mouth. Bent on knees.”

The older man raked nails down his thigh and gripped his knee till flesh began to bruise, focusing on the distraction pain provided. The boy wanted a fight. To be punished for his actions. He would not give him the satisfaction.

“But…I wouldn’t know anything about what that’s like, would I? Wanting someone with such desperation only to be turned away. To be kept just out of reach.”

“It’s a wonder Elias took a liking to your particular brand of flavor at all.” Hannibal’s jaw popped, tensing.

“What about Will?” The young man wrenched the leather jacket in place, lip curled. “Did Elias take a liking to his flavor? Or yours.”

“For a man who leads his life with willingness and openness in all things, you impose a severely strict set of rules on those around you. Only useful if they are bent in your favor. Does your husband find this flair of jealousy becoming or a nuisance?” The older man’s fingers twitched, balancing scales of life and death on his cheeks with a tip of his head. “Perhaps I mistook your intelligence for reckless impulse of someone incapable of thinking for himself.”

Scraped knuckles knotted as Peter bit his tongue and looked away, anger flaming cheeks. He tore off the jacket and flung it to the table, zippers and studs clashing loud. White cotton stretched as a chest heaved with labored breathing, shouts simmering on pinched lips, violence flexing biceps.
“You will look at me when I address you,” Hannibal commanded coldly. “You’re manners seem to be lacking without proper guidance. Far more so than before you came to be under my care.”

Peter jutted his chin at an angle, defiant, looking at him beyond the glow of a cursory cigarette. Severe in both beauty and self righteous indignity. Intricate black ink covered his arms and blossomed pale underneath a veil of white on his torso, complex and hard like the gleam of pupils. All the cages he had been kept in formed the grey of his irises, desolate and unforgiving. He saw himself alongside him. Understood the soul within pacing for freedom and longing to trap anything wild and beautiful to keep them company.

*They will not stay…* He heard Will crying out as he buried a blade in his stomach. *Even if you wound them.*

“You are—to the best of my knowledge—a young man, not a rabid dog. Do try to converse rather than snarl at the boy if you know what’s good for you. I will not abuse his trust by sharing a past that is not mine to tell. If you want answers, I suggest you ask your husband.”

“I am asking you!” Peter banged a hand on the table. “I trusted you! And Will! If you were fucking my husband, the least you could have done is asked for my blessing! Or left me the hell out of it. Left me alone! If he was with you…if he didn’t want me…” Palms scraped a weary face to hide eyes, anger singing to smoke. “You didn’t have to lie to me. Any of you. Don’t you think I would have stood aside if I knew Elias belonged to you? I only want his happiness. Even if it isn’t with me.”

“I am beginning to think you believe this web of lies spinning in your head. Do you find self fulfilling prophesy a comfort to indulge in? Or is it more of a crutch?” The older man reached out and turned a face darkening scarlet as Peter shook with the mental effort to stay silent, fighting tears welling in his eyes. “How easily you are swayed by the influence of others. Poor Mister Moreau, too wounded, too lost in his own self pity, to fight for the boy he loves. Far too absorbed in imagined loss to see the very real threat of it looming in the distance. Tell me, do you no longer wish to be married to him? As transient in your blessed union as in your youth? You need not self-destruct to be rid of the priest, merely divorce him. I’m sure Silas could draw up the papers this afternoon. He might still find happiness if he is rid of you.”

“You know damn well I would fucking die for Elias,” The young man growled, jerking away. “I didn’t wait years for us to be together only to have him leave me!”

A dry laugh escaped. “Yes. You may still have the opportunity with your little display. Flattering to have you follow in our footsteps. I am sure traffic cone orange will suit you perfectly in the jail cell next to ours. We can have joint visits from the priest where we can watch his life waste away alongside ours. The flesh dropping from his bones an ounce at a time as he loses the will to carry on. Is that the future you imagined for him when you took action?”

“Are you saying I should have stood aside and let that fuck get inside his head?” Lips twisted to a sneer. “Hurt him? Humiliate and degrade him. Is that what you would have done?”

*No, louveteau…*I would have torn out his throat and spread his pelt out before the mantle. I would have finished what I started.

*(No, little wolf…)*

“You lack patience, discipline, and the foresight to comprehend where your reckless actions will lead you!” Hannibal gripped a square jaw harder as Peter began to shake. “It is not a matter of if Elias will leave you, it is a matter of when. Our little bird is in your care and he will surely wither and decay if you do not become what it is he needs you to be.”
“And what’s that?” Peter tore through the leather jacket, pillaging one pocket to the next. The knife spun on the table. “A mountain?” A roll of bills joined it with a slap. “A fucking river?” Then a neon yellow lighter appeared. “What?” Finally he produced a single stale menthol cigarette from a breast pocket. “What proverbial analogy am I to become so as not to be lacking? As I seem to be as helpless as a child, no more able to better myself than I have ever been. Reduced to a self pitying common whore with a temper, is that it?” A wheel sparked a flame, lifted unsteadily to a bud, red hot, sarcasm searing. “Come on. I’m waiting for your wisdom, *le vieux.*”

*(Old man.)*

Hannibal counted precious seconds of his life passing, touching his tongue to each of his back molars. If he had son, young man or not, he would have throttled him for such impertinence. He blinked, mouth pursed, for a moment seeing Abigail sitting beside Peter, mouth full of fire and cooling water in her eyes. She dug up dead bodies threatening to expose them and questioned him at every turn, about everything, tested the very limits of his patience and compassion.

*It is a wonder I did not see it sooner.* Maroon eyes glanced across a fierce set jaw, dewy skin, and glint of challenge in eyes. *You are just alike. I see her in you.*

Hannibal’s growl was razor sharp. “*A man.*”

Cheeks hollowed a deep inhale of smoke. Muscle in a jaw flinching each time a slur of curses was held in. Peter exhaled harshly out nostrils. Hardened eyes looked out from a plume of choked screams. It was an impressive display of indifference. The boy stayed silent.


Ash gathered on the table with a flick of a thumb, nub blackening knuckles. “Rodriguez deserves to burn.”

The older man stared at the soot. He waited expectantly for it to be brushed away or for Peter to turn to discard the evidence politely on the floor. He did neither.

“He might yet.” Hannibal snatched the cigarette out of a mouth, ground it out, and tossed it over his shoulder. “Filthy habit. Lesson one: educate yourself on how to quit and then do so.”

“For the love of saints, if you have any mercy—“ A head thudded woefully on the table.

“All out at the moment.”

“You shouldn’t have given him those documents.”

“Who else was I to entrust them to?”

“*Any* fucking one else, Hannibal!”

“Do you wish to elaborate on who in our vast social circle might have been a better option?”

“I’ve nothing to say.”

“A splendid arrangement as I only require you to exercise your God given ability to listen, Mister Moreau. That is… if you think you can manage. Now sit.”
The steel table was cold on his forehead as Peter rolled against it, miserable, hands shaking from nerves. His smoke sputtering lonely on the floor of the room he was being kept in. All he had wanted was a little comfort. He was growing more irritable by the second. It was the least to ask for if he was going to survive a week long lecture from on high. He was never more reminded of his headmaster than when Hannibal opened his mouth.

*Pious, pretentious old man.*

All he wanted was a cigarette. And some straight goddamn answers.

“Are you going to continue to treat Will and I, and by proxy the priest, with such thinly veiled hostility?” A palm wiped ash from the table with a disgusted frown. “Or do you have some inkling as to when your sanity and good nature might return? To feint concern for us or the sparrow?”

*I guess I’ll be getting neither.* He lifted his head to stare glassy eyed at the older man.

“I see.” Hannibal pursed thin lips and sat forward. “A pity.”

He stared at the roll of bills. There were at least two hundreds in the stack. He could buy a half dozen cigarettes and at least two bottles of top shelf liquor to drown in. If he was drunk, it would be easier to grovel at the priest’s feet and beg for him to touch him. Tell him the truth.

“As abhorrent as it is to me be the collector of debts…”

*Yeah, I’m sure you hate being on the other end of it. I hear murderers have a very strict moral code and all.*

“Tell me, Mister Moreau—“

*For fuck sake, am I ever too old to be the lectured pupil?*

“—do you no longer remember you are indebted to us? Will and I gave you safe passage and a home to call your own. To be reunited with the love you had lost.”

*You’re implying I could ever forget my debts. When I had made a promise to be indebted to no man again.*

“I remember,” A surly response shot back. “And maybe if I would have known what he was I would have taken my chances with the police.”

“You could have turned Will in.” The older man spread his hands, laying out the scenario before him in pieces. “Allowed him to be captured. Make no mistake. I would have found you. Hunted you down and reunited you with the priest. I would have created a last supper in your honor of biblical proportions. Elias would not have made a suitable main course. Based on your past endurance withstanding torture, you would have lasted far longer.”

The switchblade glinted with a swing of the light overhead.

*It would look good protruding from your throat.*

“You’re a goddamn monster…” He sat back, arms crossed, reply halting.

Whatever kindred warmth he felt for the old man was evaporating by the second.
“You’re mistaken. You are indebted to the gods of old testament. I am a man of vengeance, merciless and without compassion to strangers, reigning hell upon those who would cross me. Some of the more compelling news articles soon to be published should be evidence of that.”

The older man sat beside him, placing an arm around his shoulders as he tried to twist away. “Get your hands off me!”

Hannibal scruffed him by the nape of his neck, forcing his cooperation and silence. He shook as fingertips traced the furrow of his brow and hesitantly touched the beginnings of a scar on his throat. His touch was far too warm for the chill in a voice pressed to his ear. “Do not mistake my kindness for vulnerability, Peter. I will do what I must to protect my own.”

The collar of a uniform pulled open to the center of a chest. Gauze was taped to a livid bite mark, flesh ragged and torn, green and purple. There was a shallower mark ringing his bottom lip. He remembered the blood dripping from teeth and instantly knew it was Rodriguez. The imprint of his teeth. What had they done to him? Part of him hoped for the worst.

I hope he suffered.

“Will is my blood and I will do what is necessary to see him to safety. He is the only sacred protection you have from unleashing the man I was on life as we know it. He is the same one who would kill and die for both you and the priest. You are protected because Will asks it of me, and I in turn, am at his sole mercy.” Palms cradled his face as Hannibal softened, eyes and voice becoming molten gold, affection sparks of white. “I am trying with some difficulty to remember that you are my own.”

He sucked in a weak breath. Why? What good have I ever brought this family?

Grey eyes flicked down, conflicted. “Do you care about us at all? Or do you pretend to please him?”

“What was it I penned to you in our last letter?”

“What?” Peter blew a stray curl from his eyes. He needed a smoke. “Expect me to recite it from memory? This isn’t Sunday school.”

He remembered. He had read it over and over again. Confused and angry. Hurt. Trying to understand. To find some reason he could give to his husband stricken with grief. Anything to make him stop crying.

“Protect and cherish your family, Peter, they are all we have.”’ A honeyed voice echoed. “The answer does not elude you, even if you choose to ignore it. You and Elias are family. My family. And Will’s. We must do everything within our power to protect them. To put their best interests above our own well being even if they fight us. Surely our differences cannot divide us if we share a desire to see our loved ones protected and safe from harm. Do you ever look in the moonlight and see the blood of all we have shed to ensure they live on? Even if it is without us, Peter?”

I spent most of my life looking in at what I could not have. What I destroyed.

He looked at the closed door. He wanted Elias. To forget this. All of it. Tucked in his arms under a blanket by a fire, protective spell of books scattered around them, sleeping the coldest months away.

“Do you understand what is being asked of you? What you must do?”

Elias wasn’t the only one Hannibal had entrusted their lives with. He had left the future of the sparrow and Will to him. Sworn to secrecy. A scripted set of documents hidden within the false
bottom of the safe in their house. New passports. Different names. A plan. The envelope was sealed. Location unknown. To everyone except Hannibal.

“If something ever happens to me, Peter…” A hand hawks his, tight, shaken by something lingering in a deep voice. “I need you to take them and go.”

Peter cupped the larger hand in both his, voice strained. “I don’t understand. Why can’t we stay here?”

“This home is made up of many things. A cement foundation. Carved support beams. Panels of glass.” Brandy swirled in a glass as Hannibal stared at the sea. “Mostly it is made up of an endless echo. Memories. Don’t ask them to live with ghosts. Tell me you will show them kindness and take them from here. Promise me?”

“Yeah. I promise.”

“How do you plan to uphold that end of your philosophy exactly?” Peter demanded. He took the hands stroking his face and placed them shakily on the table. He couldn’t take it anymore. His scars ached with a need to be soothed, traced, held, cherishing words whispered against them. “You’re not exactly free to do whatever the hell you want anymore. Neither is Will. If you haven’t noticed, you are both chained, guarded, and locked down in a prison. The odds of either of you walking out of here without being riddled by bullets…”

“Odds suggest I would be foolish enough to leave anything to chance.” Struggling to stand, Hannibal limped across the room and grew quiet as he paced. “They want a sacrifice and they will have it one way or another. They may not howl for the blood of the lamb if the lion gives himself willingly to the gash of their knives at its throat.”

Peter stared after the figure pacing, mouth hanging open. “You cannot possibly be suggesting…” It suddenly hurt to breathe. He gripped an arm as the older man passed, voice rough, “It’s suicide, Hannibal. A sacrifice at best.” He watched fingers flinch acceptance. “Don’t…don’t give up. Will was right.” He swiped at a tear threatening to spill and let go. “I should have never come. Stayed out of it. I ruined your chances. If you didn’t have to protect us… from my foolishness maybe…”

I’m sorry pinched between graying lips.

A pause hung heavy on the air.

Hannibal touched the crown of his head haloed by light and pressed forgiveness to it with the rough pads of fingertips, reply hushed. “If I didn’t have you, a family to call my own, I would have nothing left to live for. Nothing to give my life for and call it an act of love.” Knuckles smoothed tears from sullen eyes lifting up to find a wavering smile. “This is the last kindness I might be able to bestow upon you. Offer to William.” His voice became rough, raw. ”I love him with my deepest heart's affection and cannot bear to see his suffering. I only wish to know he has somewhere safe to turn if I set him free. Would you forsake me as your biblical namesake once did? Deny me?”

I owe Will my life. I owe you my loyalty. I owe Elias my love.

Peter shook his head. “You know I can’t. You’re the only family I’ve known. Will won’t be happy.” He buried knuckles on tired eyes, head aching, heart heavy. “Fuck, neither of them will. Don’t I have enough to worry about? Who do you think he’s going to take it out on? You don’t even know if whatever you're planning will work.”

“It is not ideal. However, it is preferred given all the scenarios laid out before us. I would choose
physical separation, before I would watch him put to death.” The older man hummed, eyelids hooded by shadow. “With any luck, it will be a fleeting sentiment for them both.”

“Fleeting? Will is going to resent me for the rest of his natural life if he gets out of here.” Peter motioned wildly at the door, anxiety growing to a tick bouncing his knee. “And knowing him, he’ll out live me just to piss me off. Is that really what you want? For him to hate you?”

Hannibal walked to the door, hands behind his back, and looked through it as if it were a curtain of glass, voice dipping to a hush of barren tree limbs tapping against cabin windows. “I have found over the years if Will is capable of resentment then he is also capable of forgiveness.”

“A man can only forgive so much…” Peter replied softly.

“Then I hope he has enough mercy within himself to be at peace with you and Elias.”

“And you? What about you? After all his mercy is spent.”

“A man can only forgive so much.” The older man smiled, no light or warmth in his eyes, emptied by mourning.

“Is that all?”

“You will do what was asked of you?”

“I gave you my word, didn’t I?” A jaw set fiercely to keep from trembling. “Their mine. I’ll take care of them now. Consider my debt forgotten.”

Crossing the distance between them, Hannibal stooped and cupped his face tenderly, searching the cages for Peter within them and smiled when he discovered each one empty. He placed a kiss to the center of a forehead, chaste and feather light. “What a fine young man you are becoming.”

Peter whined low in his throat, heart aching for the warmth Hannibal had always brought him, the only true father figure he had ever known and loved him for all he was. All he wasn’t. He tried to reach out, to clasp him close, and tell him how sorry he was for everything he had ever done. For everything he might still do. For all he might never be.

_We need you. He choked on the words. We want you home with us. You and Will. How am I supposed to do this without you?_

“You think betrayal makes a man?”

Hands fell from his face and returned emptiness.

“I am under the auspices…” The older man withdrew, becoming smoke then shadow, fading. “…betrayal occasionally is key to survival. In the same way love can bring us closer to death. And sometimes we must be pushed to be reborn. Even if we do not survive the fall.”
What happened to our hated prosecutor? What is Hannibal planning? Will Elias and Peter make it to safety?

........This and more after a brief flashback sequence.

Throw your speculation or questions my way. D :

If I'm To Die x Keaton Henson

And if I’m to die before we spend a soft day
Know my final thoughts will be of regret
If I'm to drown in the deep sea that parts us
I once lived and loved, don’t forget
Will sagged with the weight of chains returned to his body. Silas stepped away and began to pace the length of the hall. He tipped his forehead on a cement support beam to the left and closed his eyes with a sigh. Black block letters stamped in all capitals on the wall read: *No touching.*

Elias leaned on the wall opposite and shifted from one foot to the other, damp palms shoved in his sweatshirt. The tips of their shoes touched. Will was yellow gray from fluorescent lights buzzing. Ghost of a man he had once been. Deep shadows clung to skin drawn taut across his cheeks and mouth, straining to soften burn marks and purpling flesh.

His heart crept up his throat, making it hard for him to breathe. *How much longer can you withstand this treatment?*

The priest touched matching marks on his chest then reached out to touch the one Peter had left.

Fingertips gingerly traced the livid bruise, whisper aching. “…I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Will winced. “It’s his right. It’s a wonder it didn’t happen sooner.”

“He knows better. Knows right from wrong.” Elias insisted, frowning.

Blue eyes creaked open, half smile forming a laugh. “No, he doesn’t. Peter barely knows what’s good for him, let alone possesses a sense of morality. All the shades in his world are grey, based on gut reactions and blind instinct. He relies on you as that compass. Right now it’s spinning and he hasn’t the slightest idea which direction to turn. Don’t blame him.”

The priest repeated his apology, voice cracking. “Then forgive me.”

*I’m supposed to be there for you. All of you. Your compass. Your night sky.*

“You’re praying to the wrong idol. Keep your apologies to yourself, sparrow.” The younger man huffed, tipping forward to lay his forehead against a stomach. “I don’t want or need them. It was his last chance to right the imbalance between us. I’d say we’re even.”

“What if the lawyer presses charges?” He tunneled fingers in dark hair, chin resting on a head. His voice thinned, becoming smaller and smaller. “What if they arrest Peter? What if they come after us, Will?”

*You aren’t there to look after us anymore.*

A smile curved against his stomach then vanished. “He’d have to be able to speak to do that. Not likely for some time.” Will’s voice grated, fingers twisting the front of denim jeans. “And Peter is isn’t going to be caught. Because he is going to run. And you are going to go with him. Listen to every word he says. You’re going home. You’re going to be safe. And you *are* going to forget about us. You’re going to live.”

Bile churned his stomach. What had happened to the man in the courtroom? What was going to happen to Will and Hannibal? Tears welled.
“And when they put you to death?” The priest asked roughly. “Am I to spare even a single thought for you then? Or am I not even allowed to grieve?”

Will made a harsh sound in the back of his throat, cheek flinching. Tipping a face, Elias searched cloudy blue eyes for a glimmer of remorse seeking absolution. There was none. The eyes looking up were not kind. Not the ones that turned silver, softening at the sight of him. They were hardened, blank, justified. Unforgiving.

“Judge, jury, executioner? Or do you fancy yourself a god like Hannibal? You can tell me to leave and never see you again, but you don’t ever get to tell me not to love you! To forget you. I won’t pretend this doesn’t affect me. Not for you or Peter!”

Elias turned to pull away.

A hand gripped his wrist and tugged. “Hey.”

He glanced back. Will was staring at the floor, arms held out, waiting for Elias to find his way back to the version of him he once knew.

“Won’t you get in trouble?” The priest asked quietly, glancing to the left and the right of barred doors, empty on either side.

“Sparrow.” Brows rose high on a head, bewildered. “I’m in prison. I am, as you so poignantly put it, likely going to be executed. And I would appreciate it if just this once you would not make me voice what it is I need.”

Elias considered the complex tangle of chains looped around Will’s body. The weariness causing his voice to tremble. He ducked under an arm and wriggled his way until he finally managed to find a small space to rest. He pressed his spine against the pillar, legs tucked to his chest, chin on his knees. Blue eyes swept over his cramped position, narrowing. “You wanna try that again?”

Before he had a chance to answer, Will grabbed the front of his sweatshirt and pulled. The priest toppled with a squeak, knees knocking together as hands shot out to catch himself. When the hallway stopped spinning Elias was teetering sideways in a lap, legs and arms dangling over limbs shifting to adjust him. He was forcibly jostled on a stomach. He huffed out a quiet for heaven sake.

Will smirked. He glowered.

“I am not a rag doll to be thrown about for your amusement!”

“Well. How should I know that?” The younger man’s smile grew, bending over his body. “Some of us didn’t have the privilege of owning one growing up. But I’d have to say you are the prettiest little trinket in my collection.”

The priest blushed to his toes. “You’re insufferable!”

He latched on to the front of a uniform, hauling himself to a dignified angle. A feat considering he was tangled to the younger man’s chest. Leaning against the pillar, Will stifled laughter as Elias kicked and squirmed, settling on his side and curling in a ball. He lay his head on a shoulder. He huffed out a quiet for heaven sake. Will smirked. He glovered.

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Will placed lips on a temple, quietly breathing in his scent, expelling the memories they stirred with an exhale. “They shouldn’t have said those things to you. About you. Or Peter.”

Elias listened to fire expanding lungs in a crackle, palm pushing a chest to set it free, to quell his fury
and bring peace.

“I’m sorry, I should have acted sooner. He’ll pay.”

Wrists were turning red, fingertips blotching purple beneath the strain of the handcuffs.

“I could have forgiven him…” The priest reached down and gripped chains, reeling in slack. Will put arms delicately around his waist. He looked up. “Can’t you?”

Will looked away, disdain quirking his mouth for a second. Splayed fingers curled in the spaces between his ribs, flexing, quick to change the subject. “Have you been eating properly? You need to. Don’t want Hannibal to give you hell for not taking care of yourself, do you? You know how he feels about proper nutrition and balanced meals.”

He inhaled a deep sigh. *Peter isn’t the only one to see the world in grey.*

“That one should…” The priest deflated, shivering as Will brushed hands up and down his arms. “…be selective in which ingredients of people to include…evidently.”

“Christ. Just what I need.” Laughter vibrated bones and shook shoulders. “We never prepared those kinds of meals for you. In case you were concerned.”

He nosed a throat, becoming rigid. “I wasn’t.”

“What is it?” Will asked.

“The last few months have been difficult. To cope with. To understand and adjust.” Elias answered quietly.

“Because of us?”

“Because of your absence.”

The younger man found a small hand and squeezed it till a whimper answered. *Don’t let this get to you. Between you. We’re not worth it. If anyone deserves a little happiness in this world, it’s you.*

And what about you?

“We miss you.” The priest reached for the hand bound in gauze, tracing its edging, wondering what new vows Hannibal and Will had bound to one another in ceremony. “It’s not the same.”

Loss quivered a cheek. “Sparrow. Nothing ever is.”

*I don’t want to lose you.* His gaze drifted to a sky he could not see. *Why would you take them from me? Have I not lost enough in your name?*

“Will, can I...?” His voice faltered a sob, gaze stuck on a chest, as if he could see the heart glowing beneath it.

He wanted to cup it to his mouth and breathe life in to it always. To keep Will with him.

“Yeah.” The younger man shifted until Elias could lie comfortably between his legs, arms and chains folding around him. He wiped angrily at tears. “They might be awhile. You need rest. Sleep if you can.”
“You need to eat…” A soft admonishment touched the night air.

The plate pushed across the counter, untouched. “I don’t seem to have an appetite.”

Elias teetered on a stool and stared blearily at glistening garnet grapes, slices of brioche, and rosemary roasted crackers neatly arranged in a semi circle on fine china. His stomach ached. His desire to eat and portion sizes had dwindled over the last week. What was before him—pickings a mere fledgling might consume greedily—now seemed like too much. He curled fingers round the delicate stem of a wine glass and avoided grieving eyes in the reflection. He downed sweet Riesling in a single swallow and reached for the bottle. Its last contents dribbled out. There was no need to stand on a pretense of self control when it too had thinned. The priest held on even as he finished the last of the wine with a swirl of his glass, sighing, hoping more might miraculously appear to drown him. Will had discovered him half a bottle deep two hours prior and mercifully let him keep, and finish it, without question.

You would think I could forget an anniversary as easily as he has forgotten me. Elias clasped the cross hanging around his neck, agony of its presence folding him to rest flat on marble, vision dimming. It is no more a wanted reminder to me as I am to him. A smaller voice whispered. If he ever wanted me at all.

He had been in France for a little over three months. Spending half his time living with Will and Hannibal and the other half staring somberly at the grey churning sea outside a motel window in town. The color of eyes he missed. Sobered by loss. Retreating when their company, their kindness, became too much for him to bear without it hurting. Without wondering when they would ask for him to leave. Like the others. They always did.

“You said that at breakfast.” Will pried the empty bottle from tense fingers and set it beside the kitchen sink, frowning. “And dinner yesterday and the day before that.” He rounded the island cautiously and took the glass, palm settling over twitching fingers to comfort. “You gonna talk to me? Or just make me worry.”

The younger man’s touch was painful. Confusing. How softly it moved from his hand to his wrist and cupped a freckled shoulder bared as a fog cable knit sweater slipped. His toes curled around the stool’s edge. He studied wide hands holding near, steadying him as he swayed from the drink. They were kind. Blue veins pulsing warmth and roping beautifully on golden sun kissed skin, a deep sunset on his wintry palette, pressure light and careful. Will was always so careful with him.

As if he might break. If he hadn’t already.

Glazed violet eyes lifted. “Why do you worry about me?”

A crooked nose wrinkled, smile twitching to a muted line of concern, quiet. “Because you are worth worrying about, sparrow.”

His heart swelled and fractured a bit more on poorly healed edges. Shying away, Elias tried to rise and retreat to the room they had given him. He would have gone to the motel, but the roads had been snowed in for days. If he was lucky, he might make it upstairs before a scraped throat turned to tears. He didn’t cry in front of others. Not even when he was a child. He might save himself from burrowing against a neck and begging to be held. He wasn’t a weak boy anymore seeking affection in the arms and eyes of those surrounding him.

I thought I found it in him.
“Elias, come back. Talk to me…” Will shook him by a shoulder.

Elias blinked away mist and found the younger man bent at eye level, brows knitted, echo of his voice lingering on the air. “What?”

“I said you are worthy of my concern. Isn’t that reason enough?” Will asked, pushing at a mess of curls tumbling over down cast eyes. “I care about you. I thought that was obvious.”

“Is it?” His voice cracked.

“If it’s not, I am a shit excuse for a friend.” A frustrated breath sounded.

“What…” Elias placed a timid hand over the one at his shoulder, stroking calloused fingers affectionately, barely able to find the strength to whisper. “…am I to you?”

With a sigh, Will crouched to put himself in line of sight and gazed up, brows drawn low over crystal blue shining, voice gentle. “You are a light in the darkness, Elias, and you are dimming like a star beginning to give out to the end of time.” He took a fist curled against a thigh and placed his mouth on knuckles with a wavering smile. “Hold on. Stay with me. Us. Forever our own personal constellation to guide us through storms.”

Elias stared at the pink mouth pressed thin long after Will had stopped speaking. He was looking at him again with brutal compassion, violent understanding, wounding acceptance. Tears welled in his eyes, spilling over, unable to turn away. Shamed to cry openly in front of his friend. He missed Peter. Had not known how much until the moment he saw him. Had not known how much he would hurt for having known it when the man had left. An ache inside his chest refusing to heal.

Will was beautiful. His kindness draped elegantly across the planes of his face and shone from his eyes. Goodness. Dim light was clinging to dark curls like dew on a spring morning. His fingertips traced the edge of a hard mouth. It was smooth. He touched a faint scar on his cheek, not raised and horrid like Peter’s, but lanced deep, puckered at its edges. Another story mapped on skin. There was a different kind of pain, longing, a chance to belong, shaking his hand as it slid down a swallowing throat.

The priest tottered on the stool and fell forward. Will caught him, strong arms encircling his waist as he drew them both upright, pressing Elias against his body with hushed scolding about his carelessness. He pushed palms up a plaid chest, lingering above a heart, looping a hand around the nape of a neck, before drawing the man in by a fistful of cotton. Blue eyes widened, surprise opening a mouth. He lifted rose lips, trembling cool breath, before Elias kissed Will, once, softly. To know him. He sighed as their mouths slid together, scouring fingers along a scalp to hold tightly to silken curls, knees sinking as a warm hand moved to cradle him by shoulders. He tasted like waters of the Odense river rushing over him as he had plunged to its icy depths, safe and endless and promising eternal peace.

His embrace was like water. Drowning and comforting. Cleansing. Glassy stillness washing over and through him. For a moment, Elias felt the quiet of moonlight caressing an inky black lake.

Arms shook as space pushed between their bodies.

“You’re so dear to me, Elias. More than you know.” Will tucked waves behind a shell ear, smile painfully tender, chaffed red from where Elias had kissed him. “I know I’m not him. But that doesn’t mean you aren’t wanted or needed. We need you. I…need you.”

Elias slumped near the kitchen counter, knees buckling, vision swimming, guilt and fright shaking.
his tongue, too weak to run. “Are you angry with me? For not asking permission?”

He always made me ask. Shied away when he could no longer stand it. Left when he could no longer be with me.

Calloused palms slid around his jaw, thumbs tipping a chin. Blue eyes intently searched his, mirroring the brutal loss pooling tears against his palms. Will’s brow twitched, breath catching on pain, muted by the intensity of sensation as if the emotion was his own. He shook his head once.

“He may not be—“ The unmistakable latch of a knife clicked open. “—but I most certainly am. You are touching what belongs to me.”

The priest shoved free of Will with a yelp and scrambled to the other side of the kitchen, boxed in by an island and a shadow looming at the only exit. “It was a m-m-mistake.”

Violence burned red as a slate blue jacket yielded on a kitchen counter. “One you are not likely to make again. You can be certain of that.”

Hannibal materialized in shades of black beyond an unlit hallway, chilled bottle of Bordeaux in one hand and a switchblade protruding from a dug out cork in the other. He freed the cork with sinking teeth before spitting it out on the island. The bottle thudded on marble, wine sloshing over the side and pooling beneath a glass covered in lip prints. The knife swung in a fist flexing and pressing against a rigid thigh. Burning red eyes fixed on the panicked rise and fall of a chest huddled between the steel refrigerator and the counter, trapped.

“Baby…” Will’s whisper trembled as he slid against Hannibal’s front to block his view, dragging a white crisp collar down to place his mouth over muscles bowed tight in a neck. His hand shook, brushing the length of an arm to hold the hand wrapped around a blade. To stay his rage. “Forget about this.” Smoldering eyes tipped low to watch teeth scrape, sucking a bruise on a racing pulse, moaning low when it quickened. “Let’s go upstairs.” Hannibal gripped Will by hair, jerking his face up, cold, assessing. “It’s nothing.”

His voice—the calm of water Elias had come to rely upon to soothe him, to cradle his fragile trust on its steady currents and carry him to safety, that promised he was worthy, worth something, anything, to him, to them—cut through the air and gashed open his heart.

Blistering pain raced up a throat and spilled from eyes. “I-I-I’m not nothing, Will! I love you!”

“Wait! It’s not—“ Will pushed the wall of a chest, eyes wild.

Hannibal shoved him out of the way and advanced, face full of demons forming sharp shadows.

Will groaned as he cracked his brow on a cabinet, doubling over the sink.

The priest cowered, darting to the right, ducking and headed for the front door. His vision doubled. His movements too sluggish, uncoordinated, feet catching on one another. His heart was heavy, dragging him down, sinking as his knees buckled. He reached for the handle. Fingers curled around it. The half opened door slammed in his face. He yelped.

Vicious fingers gripped his hair and hauled him back. Elias cried louder as Hannibal dragged him towards the kitchen. He lashed out, hitting at wrists and hands, gripping forearms to keep from falling to his knees. He was thrown forward. He banged against the oak table, bruise pooling on his stomach, breath knocked from him.

He clambered backwards then fell on a dovetail chair. “H-h-h-ann—“
The older man was on him a moment later.

“Shall I relieve you of your tongue to savor the story of dishonesty you have spun for me?”
Hannibal asked, exposing his throat with a yank on roots of hair, tip of a blade tracing a delicate
rosebud mouth.

He heard screams of dying men from his church ringing.

Elias sputtered, sobbing as the blade pricked his cheek. “P-p-please don’t hurt me! I’m sorry, I’m so
sorry!” He grabbed the older man’s other hand and pressed the palm of it to his mouth, weeping
against it. “Hannibal, I’m begging you! I’ll leave. I’ll leave and I’ll never come back. Just don’t hurt
me. I was foolish! I’m sorry!”

Red eyes glowed. “I do not suffer fools in my house. Nor will I be made one.”

“Let go,” Will growled hoarsely, weaving unsteadily from the kitchen, bloodied gash oozing from
fingers pressed to his brow. “I said get the fuck away from him!” The younger man snapped
Hannibal back by a collar, tearing it along the seam, side stepping as a knife swiped. He held tight,
staring down a teeth glinting snarl. “Elias is drunk. He didn’t know what he was doing!”

“And you?” Hannibal gripped a paling face and kissed Will hard on the mouth, shoving away a
second after. “Not a drop of wine on your tongue. What is your excuse? What did you do to give him
permission? Or prevent it for that matter?”

Palms spread wide in the air, shoulders shrugging. “Well, I guess I don’t fucking have one, do I? I
am not the one constantly holding me responsible for other people’s attraction and actions.”

The knife swung and pointed at a chair rustling. “You will remain until I have determined your
Fate! As will you.”

Falling on the dining room chair, Elias sunk against it, pleading silently at Will who stood beyond,
blood dripping in his eye and watching the rage descending upon them calmly.

“Stop yelling at him.”

“I will raise my voice in my own house if that is what I wish!”

“You’re not the master of my Fate, Hannibal. Or had you forgotten?” Will stepped in the blade’s
path, pushing the tip to his stomach, hands slung loosely in jean pockets. “You don’t want him. You
want me. You’ve always wanted me. You wanna fight, let’s go.”

The older man’s gaze fell from a challenging glint to the boy hiding, shielded by the man he loved,
his unruly, beautiful David rising up to face Goliath.

Hurt racked a smooth howl till it pitched to a wounded snarl. “Is he what you want? Would you like
me to step outside as our friend does for us while you kiss the sadness away from between his
thighs?”

“That’s not it.” Will hissed between clenched teeth.

Hannibal shoved the young man away as he tried to hold him, buttons popping as a shirt ripped
open, smoke curling on lips. “Is it not? I am having difficulty imagining any other excuse you might
give me.”

Blue sliced down, watching palm prints fade from a sweat sheen chest. “Don’t push me. You were
never the one with the imagination as I recall.”

The two men began to circle one another, talons out, hawks swooping in to defend their territory.

“I do not need imagination to find clarity. Am I the one pushing boundaries?” Snagged teeth glimmered a thin smile. “Or have we discarded those in favor of more appealing carnal desires and the freedom to pursue them? Shall I share with you all the images my imagination conjures for me at this moment?”

“Not really in the mood for your fairy tales, Hannibal, so no.” Plaid sleeves cuffed above elbows, instructions tossed over a shoulder. “Maybe you should go, Elias. I can deal with him on my own.”

“What is it about him you find such a need to rise up and protect?” The older man asked frigidly, stopping in his tracks. “Or am I to be dealt with, Will? A thing merely in your path to be discarded. Standing in the way of what you want. Of what you might be free to have if only I did not exist in your life.” He yanked the boy to his feet, hissing for him to quiet when he whimpered, grip bruising. “You want him? Consider him a gift.”

Elias was forced to his knees, fingernails biting the nape of his neck, bowing, and blubbered a quiet, “Please.”

“I will even divest him of clothes—“

His sweater was torn over his head and hurled to the floor.

“—fold them neatly upon the bed we share, and tie a pretty ribbon around his cock to ensure you know where to suck when you drop to your knees.”

Doubling over, Elias cried against his knees, hand caught in the hem of a woolen plaid trouser, one arm slung around a shivering torso, vulnerable, weak, expendable, nothing.


“I’ll go, I’ll go, please just let me leave.”

The older man shook him off.

Stalking forward, Hannibal stopped at Will’s side, head turned enough to drip venom harshly in an ear, clenching the knife as knuckles became white. “There’s lubricant in the nightstand next to our bed and condoms should you choose to use them. That is if you can withstand the overwhelming temptation to have him skin to skin.”

“You are a self righteous prick,” A hollowed reply chilled the room. “If I wanted to fuck someone, Hannibal, you know better than anyone I don’t need your blessing. Or were you hoping I didn’t notice the way your cheek flinched every time I walked in to your cell with Molly’s spit smeared lipstick drying on my dick? Knowing how much you would hate even just the scent of her perfume.”

Shadows clouded a glint of red eyes before dispersing. Hannibal’s face blanked, empty.

They went deathly quiet. Floorboards creaked. Tree branches scratched windowpanes.

Elias did the only thing he knew how to when scared: run.

Gripping wooden cabriole legs, Elias knocked the chair over as he scrambled to safety, small cry cut off.
Hannibal responded how he was accustomed when threatened by loss and betrayal: lunged, knife out.

Will reacted how he might have if he had only known to save Abigail: to protect.

*

Will dove for the priest and knocked him to the ground. The knick of a blade slashed a line across his chest, barely missing a tear soaked neck. The priest’s breath left in a gasp, hand clutched to the cross on his chest, fan overhead blurring and becoming two.

The younger man twisted and caught Hannibal around the middle, tackling him to the Persian rug with a curse and a groan as knee jerked against his ribs. The dig sent him sprawling on his back, hands lashing out, pinned as the older man heaved on top of him in pursuit. His fist connected with something. Cruel fingers squeezed his neck. He kicked with a choke. A wood carved stand knocked over. Elegantly engraved sterling silverware crashed free from a velvet lined drawer and tumbled across the floor. Something heavier clattered and spun on wood. The younger man strained, arm aching, and reached for it.

“I warned you…” Will growled, jamming the muzzle of a gun on a temple.

Hannibal froze. He folded, melting to the floor. His arms dropped limply to his side, pinned by piercing blue eyes. His crimson lips trembled once. “Hiding a weapon among the treasured belongings of my dead sister to end my life seems far too cruel. Even for you.” Deadened ash of a fire drifted to watch Elias cling to the leg of a table, hiding beneath it, tears rolling down his face behind a palm. “Do you intend to kill me in hopes to spare him, Will? Just as you betrayed me moments before with an impassioned plea to save her. Hoping I would take your life in her stead. Are you keen on seeing another you cherish bleeding out beneath our dining room table to join our daughter?”

The priest whimpered, clamping hands over his ears to drown out their voices.

“How dare you bring her into this!” Will snarled. He threw the knife across the room and traded the gun to fist a dress shirt, hauling Hannibal up by the fraying collar. He raised a fist. “The fuck is wrong with you! Huh? He is our friend, remember? Our only goddamn friend. The only one you have allowed me to have and live! And you-you-you threaten to take him away from me! Just because he means something to me. Why must you take away everything and everyone I have ever cared about?”

“Kill me and be done with it…” Hannibal jerked Will forward, palm spread blood red on his chest, roughing a tongue over a bloodied gash, eyes hardening to stone. “Or remove yourself from my sight. Take the boy with you. Be rid of him or keep him. But leave this house. I will not say it again. There will not be a second time.”

The older man rolled out from underneath and stormed the stairs, knife firmly in hand.

Will darted after and cornered him on the landing, paintings rattling as he pinned him roughly to the wall, blade pressed at his hip. It pricked the beginnings of a healed scar. “Stop walking away from me, goddammit! This isn’t something you can run from! Is that what you want? For me to get out of your life before you have to end me? Or I end you if you take someone else dear to me. Is that it?”

Flattening his cheek to the wall, the older man stared blankly in the distance, taste of the end on his
lips, blood in the air, and a blade between them once more.

“What was I when I met you?” Will demanded. “What was I?”

“A mistake.” Hannibal’s thin red lips rippled violently, hoping to wound.

The younger man banged him against the wall, nails digging shoulders, hissing out a steadying breath and bent his head to a chest, praying for patience. “Dying, Hannibal, I was dying. My life was filled with death. Behind my eyes. In my classroom. It permeated everything I was. I had nothing else. My life was a string of crime scenes, the occasional mindless fuck, and getting drunk long enough to forget it all. I just wanted it to end. Did I tell you I tried to kill myself? A week or so after we met. After Elise Nichols.”

Fingers at his waist twitched, clutching a ribcage. The older man stopped breathing, stricken gaze falling to a head crowned by curling thorns.

“I picked up my father’s colt and held it to my head.” Bitter laughter racked a chest. “I figured it had to be better. Better than living. When not a single person sees you. They look right through you. You exist in pockets of time, neither real or imagined, just breathing. Do you have any idea what it’s like to live with that kind of loneliness? Pain. A single touch from someone, anyone, burns your insides with want. And you want and want and want. But it’s not enough. So you pull the trigger and hope the afterlife will be kinder.”

The knife dropped to the floor with a muted strangle of pain. Hannibal gripped Will, arm at his shoulder and waist, crushed to his chest, nails blunt on his flesh until they both shook.

Harsh whispers burned a throat. “I…saw you. Loved you. All of you.”

“And…” Will brushed a kiss down a trembling jaw, thumbing away a hot tear. “…it hurts worse than any physical wound you ever gave me.”

The older man slid palms around an upturned face, fingertips unsteady as they traced each inch of skin, swiping at drying blood then kissing it till the stinging subsided. “God, William, why did you keep this from me? I could have helped you. I would have been more careful.”

“In dismantling the man you vowed not to see as fine china?”

Maroon eyes cast down with a tremble of light.

“You did help me. You tore apart apart my life. Forced me to adapt.” A fragile smile flickered. “You called. Demanding I give you my home address or come for dinner at yours. Gave me the tools I needed to understand.”

Loss blossomed maroon. “And if I hadn’t? You would have taken everything from me.”

“You did. I didn’t. That’s all that matters. Now I’m yours. And all that entails.”

“And all that entails?” Hannibal echoed hoarsely.

“Yeah.” The younger man braced the wall, hands on either side of shoulders, and bowed his head. “I can accept a lot, Hannibal. Have accepted a lot. The murder. The betrayal. Loss. Who you are. Who I am. Who we are, and with, each other. But I cannot do this again. I can’t. I won’t. We won’t survive it. Don’t…” Tears filled blue eyes as they lifted. “Don’t take this from me. Don’t take him from me. When he needs us so much. Don’t you think she would have wanted this for us? To have a family.”
Remorse turned Hannibal’s eyes the color of rubies catching fire, mist of answering tears gathering.

The front door groaned open. Will sighed. He held an unsteady hand, leaning out over the banister and spotted a graying streak stumble out to a wintry night. He glanced back at the older man, studying visible guilt forming a pensive frown.

“Elias is running from this house because I told him he meant nothing. To me. To us. Another man telling him his existence is meaningless. All he has heard since he was a kid.” Will said. “We were cruel. When all he has shown us is kindness, gentle and timid. Understanding and patient even when we test him. Frighten him. You made a promise for us to be his shelter. To give him a home. Does that mean nothing to you? To know he’s safe here with us. Never alone. For someone to tell him he’s loved. I don’t want to lose him if he isn’t strong enough to fight this. Ready to give up. Don’t abandon him, angel, not when he needs someone the most. Someone to fight for him. Like you fought for me…” He cradled a damp cheek, pleading softly. “You said you would protect us in this life. Will you protect us?”

*  

Sloshing through deep drifting snow, Hannibal watched the sudden flare of rage that had burned up his chest disintegrate to harmless grey wisps of regret. Beneath his leathery gloves he knew blood was dried beneath his fingernails. Another drop of all he had vowed to call his own, to cherish, to protect, to love, shed needlessly. A heart, one able to feel, was not a thing he had hoped to carry. An essential organ beating in his chest of muscle and sinew, nothing more. Without the consequence of wavering or withstanding hurt. Will and Abigail had woken it completely. Given it a new purpose. Instilled it with frail pain and humanity. It physically hurt to keep the burning heat of it inside his chest, lungs aching, begging for the soft touches and murmurs from the man he loved to soothe it, to show all was forgiven. To be reminded it was safe, cared for, in his hands.

Could I ever truly be forgiven? After all we have lost. Even now I cannot give you what I promised should time reverse without threatening to take it once more.

He turned up the collar against his neck, shivering. His limbs, trousers caked white, were heavy by the time he picked through the woods and spotted a speck of Elias winding unsteadily on the main road back to town. He could hear pitiful sobs lift on a howling wind. The boy was a pale thing in the moonlight. Snow glittering on a bare torso chaffed pale pink. Sweater heedlessly abandoned by their table where Will and he had left him. Not a thought in his head except to run. From them. From those who had promised a safe haven.

“Pretty little fool,” Hannibal grunted under his breath.

He picked up the pace, silent in his pursuit. Fingers stiff from cold fumbled to open buttons on a heavy wool coat. His boots crunched gravel muffled by snow as he stalked across pavement. He could feel trails of chilled breath from chattering teeth waft on his nose. His eyes moved over a braided chain covered in frost, stuck to slender freckled shoulders hunched forward, fighting the wind, the world, himself.

“Do you lack common sense? Or do you have some desire to freeze to death?” The older man bellowed, a minute’s step behind.

Elias whirled and dropped to his knees, ice caught in fair lashes and silvery on a chin. The only
The boy lifted pale eyes to the phone, shivering from head to toe.

“Come home. Where you belong.”

The line clicked dead.

Elias cowered, crying out, when Hannibal stooped. He drew back for a moment, sighing heavily. His eyes flicked over bruising on a thin arm and shoulder, gritting hatred for the actions, loss of control, causing them between teeth. Will was his equal in strength and fight. The boy had been helpless, defenseless, and he had brought harm to him. In the place he had promised his protection. The older man placed hands cautiously underneath arms and lifted Elias from the snow. His jeans were soaked through from ankles to knees, seeping up shivering thighs. His mouth the shade of his eyes crystallized by iced tears. Is this what he had looked like as a child? Crouched over the bloodied, motionless bodies of his parents, unable to answer his cries to wake up, to help. Had anyone reached for him them? Or since?

The boy wrenched away and tumbled unsteadily down a ditch, blind in his haste to get away. Casting a furious scowl at the sky, Hannibal swooped in on the figure lying stunned in a drift and yanked him upright by a chilled arm. Glassy eyes blinked. Knees buckled. Elias swooned.

Hannibal caught him, growling impatience, spike of fear turning his voice unkind. “I will not tolerate another moment of chasing you in this god forsaken storm! You are coming home as Will asked!”

A weak mewl brought a fresh quiver of tears to eyes. He forced tenderness back in to his touch. He picked the boy up. He cradled his fledgling in one arm and folded layers of a coat around a shivering form, buttoning it over hair frozen at the roots. He turned towards a beaten path leading them home and trudged on.

Cold seeped through his dress shirt from the body he was holding. The priest had the bones of a sparrow. Light and hollow. He felt like Mischa’s lifeless body swinging in his arms. He clutched tighter to a ribcage to make sure Elias was still breathing. He felt a faint breath shudder lungs. A gust of lashing wind sent him sideways, ducking against it, moving towards a yellow orange glow shining through trees.

“You may not believe me but you are the only kin William and I are likely to have in this life. Innocent and unmarred by petty perception. You’re judgment is not clouded by knowledge of our past. It is a rare thing to be seen as we are and accepted.” Hannibal murmured above outlines of a
head, holding closer when Elias sniffled. “You are a constant goodness, a friendship neither of us have been blessed with knowing. Not even with one another. And perhaps we do not know how to act differently. Conducting ourselves as though we will lose it at any moment. When have lost so much already. An explanation, not an excuse.”

“You scared me. Hurt me,” A tiny voice interrupted.

The older man winced. “I behaved abhorrently, dove, and you need not forgive me. You have spent many years frightened and alone, and I should be the last to return those sentiments to you. You deserve kindness. I…” His voice faltered on a plume of grey breath, closing tired eyes. “I am not a kind man. Only he seems to be able to conjure gentleness within me. A frailty. I was woefully unprepared for the weakness that comes with love. My good sense seems to leave me where Will is concerned, unaccustomed to sharing his person, or tender affections, with another. I fear it has wounded him far more than I will ever know. I vowed not to make the same mistakes, but find myself a creature of habit when threatened with the idea of losing him. But I will learn to master this ugliness if it means his happiness. And yours. He is right. I made you both a promise. If you could find it in your heart to stay with us, love us as we are…” He shivered as an icy hand settled above his heart warming at the sight of Will, protector of their human frailty, standing guard in the light of their doorway. “…then you will always have a place in our home. At our sides.”

The boy twisted, cold nose then mouth kissing a collar, whisper muffled. “But I do love you. You’re my dearest companions. You and Will. I never want to hurt you. I’m sorry I hurt you. Please forgive me. Don’t send me away.”

Hannibal turned down the coat enough to find a patch of skin on a worried brow and melted snow with a kiss. “There’s nothing to forgive.”

*

An unseen palm moved worriedly over a wool draped shoulder. “How is he?”

“Courting the chill of death.” A strained chest rumbled. “Can you carry him upstairs? I will fetch the tea.”


The priest startled when palms wrapped his snow covered ankles and tore off leathery boots.

“Go. I’ll take care of it. Don’t give me that look. Now go.”

Footsteps clomped wearily up stairs, around a corner, and came to a stop.

Steady hands placed Elias on something soft, dipping with the weight of his form. He huddled underneath the coat. He was safer there. Unseen. Hoping to be forgotten. His side ached from the bruising on his torso. He listened to sounds of Hannibal moving about, sighing, shuffling, cursing mildly beneath his breath. Something ticked. An orange glow ringed the carpet, easing cold from tips of toes then ankles. He shivered, eyes drooping, breath and body chilled. He was tired. Whatever he was on was comfortable. If he closed his eyes…

“Hey!”

The priest startled awake.
Both Hannibal and Will were on either side of him, terror darkening corners of their mouths, shining in their eyes. He blinked rivulets of melted snow away. A towel was discarded on the floor. A kettle of upturned tea leaking on the rug. Two china teacups had rolled to a stop on their sides. A fire roared in the hearth. He looked to the right. Glass paneling formed the walls overlooking woods and the ocean beyond. His breath stuck. He was in their bedroom.

“Fucking Christ, that was close,” Will muttered, palm falling from a cheek.

He touched the cold spot. It stung. His chest and ribcage hurt. He looked down. Red palm prints receded white on his skin.

The older man stood, silk pajamas knotted at his hips, expression grim. “We will have to undress him should we hope to avoid another incident. His clothes are ruined.” He held up a balled sweater. “Save this.”

Elias tried to protest, tongue heavy, mute as he trembled. He forced himself to look away from graying hair on a lean chest, blushing.


Will and Hannibal braced on the bed, each unfastening buttons, pulling a zipper, and hooking a waistband of soaked jeans. He struggled, numb and sluggish. He grabbed the younger man’s wrist, wheezing panic, shaking his head.

“You’re safe here. We aren’t going to hurt you,” Will reminded, pushing his hand away.

He mewled as denim peeled from his thighs, bunched at his knees, and were tugged free over curled toes. Hannibal reached for his sweater’s hem and stretched it to knees, averting his gaze. Will did the same and stripped him of boxers. Even chilled, he felt a flush of embarrassment kindling underneath snow washed skin. He squirmed as the men lifted his thighs and hips, dragging another pair on to replace them. They were black jersey, far too big, simple. They had to be Will’s.

Skirting their bed, Hannibal lifted sheets, waiting. Will straightened and balanced on one leg to kick off his jeans, one hand gripping the mantle for balance. Stitched burgundy plaid of a shirt brushed strong thighs. Another pained sound stuck in the priest’s throat, rising quickly to a choking shriek when the younger man scooped him up and carried him to where his husband stood. They placed him on the center of the mattress and crawled in on either side of him. A heavy silk comforter settled over them.

Elias shrunk till only the tips of his ears peeked beneath the blankets, hiding. He tucked knees to his chest, arms hugged around them, and shivered from holding his icy body, frightened by aching need, shying from forgotten comfort. It had been years since he had shared another’s bed, held safe in arms of someone who had once loved him. He hadn’t let anyone hold him since.

Will nestled closer. His square jaw rested on dripping hair, snow beginning to melt. Buttons lining his shirt pricked the length of the priest’s spine. A cloth bandage taped to the cut on his chest was rough. Smooth fabric grazed his hip as a leg bent and settled over both of his. Arms wrapped around the front of his torso, tugging gently until Elias was flush against a body radiating faint heat. He began to shake.

Hannibal followed suit, edging cautiously forward, palms out to show he meant no harm. He slipped
a hand beneath Will to cradle his head and with the other timidly pushed curled legs. The priest tensed. The younger man reached down to touch Hannibal’s hand, both palms moving in tandem to chaff from the high arches of his feet to the peak of his hip, trying to warm and relax him. His eyelids drooped, limbs becoming pliant and straightening. Soft praise murmured over the comforter pressed to his ear as Hannibal molded to the boy’s front, left arm stretching across to hold both Elias and Will in his embrace.

“We care about you, Elias. We aren’t going anywhere and neither are you,” Will said quietly, hugging tighter, watching the way Hannibal closed his eyes, content, as he ran a thumb over his crimson mouth in lieu of a kiss. “You’re so very precious to us. To this family. Tell him, Hannibal.”

The priest muffled cries with knuckles when tears began to spill, numbness receding from his body as warmth of skin and voices pressed in. He had never felt more terrified. Or more safe.

Tugging sheets from a tiny fist, the older bent forward in the shadowy protection they provided and smoothed waves from damp lost eyes looking out. “You are very much beloved by us both. Your place alongside us.” His mouth followed the path of a silvery tear, dampening a cheek, a fragile wrist bone, melting on a smooth chest. “Our steady guiding star in the night sky and the first fleeting rays of light at morning to be cherished. Do you not wish to be held by those who love you?”

“We love you,” The younger man said, kissing the nape of a neck, a shoulder, a frosted cross hanging loosely on a freckled shoulder blade. “Let us be your home. Do you think you could stay with us? For good.”

Elias peeked cautiously from under blankets, gaze flicking from softened eyes looking at one another, whispering, “What if you fight? What if I become a burden? Tiresome.”

“We will not fight,” The older man resolved.

“We might fight. We are far from perfect.” Will corrected with a stern glance. “But we never go to bed angry. At least not very often. And you should learn to ignore it or counsel our foolishness. Know you are never the cause of it. We won’t put you in the middle. Not anymore. This is your home and you will have a say here as much as we do.”

Tulip lips trembled. “Can I…Can I think about it?”

No one had ever asked him to stay before. The last one who had abandoned him.

The younger man drooped hope against a coiled shoulder. “Yeah. Of course.”

Hannibal bristled at the sadness in his husband’s voice, wanting to soothe him, give him the family, the kindred spirit, he had taken brutally in a rage.

He drew Elias closer, chin balanced on crooked fingers, mouth stern. “Do not take too long. I am an old man compared to Will and do not share his vast patience. I will accept nothing but a promise to consider our offer with great consideration. It should not be decided in haste. It would grieve me deeply to have such a promise broken if it is not what you truly wish for. Do you understand?”

The priest nodded.

“No.” The older man shook his head. “A promise.” He tapped the corner of his mouth with an index finger. “A vow to us both. You pressed your heart’s devotion to Will’s lips. I expect nothing less in return.”

Will drew up on his elbow, brows wriggling as a perplexed smile formed. The priest’s heart tottered
on a quivering thump, flashing a frightened gaze behind him at ocean blue. Will nodded. He was nudged gently forward. He swallowed, balance unsteady as he moved closer on his knees. He placed two fingers hesitantly on a peaked cheekbone, traced a jaw, searching a dark gaze filled only with dim firelight before lashes drifted, eyes closing. He pressed lips to harsh corners to find them soft, velvety like rosehips, lifting to seal a chaste promise of protection.

The older man offered a tender smile as Elias shyly retreated, one arm curving his torso. Hannibal leaned across pointing at Will’s mouth. The priest pressed back against hard lines of a chest as the younger man pursued, fingers tunneling hair, holding him in place. A weak prayer breathed out. Will kissed a flinching cheek, pressed warm on the cupid bow of his lip, and brushed unconditional acceptance on a chin.

Their hands gave a light push. Elias fell to pillows as Will and Hannibal entwined tenderly above, hands on skin, mouths a sunrise and sunset melting together. They sank to the bed as if a great churn of ocean water pulled them under, steady current forming on either side of him, unhurried and constant.

Both men turned, gazes tender. “How do you feel?” They asked as one.

“L-l-l-loved,” A songbird warbled up.

They both shared a tender look and leaned down. “So you are, little one.”

Elias lay stricken as they kissed each side of his mouth in unison, promises shared and kept, heart beating fast, and knew he would love them all his days.

They curled in and around one another, cocooned by limbs and blankets, falling fast asleep, made whole in the arms of each other.

* 

9 months later…

A calloused palm circled a pearl shoulder freckled by starlight. “He’s trembling.”

“Then…” Hannibal lifted on an elbow, hair mussed and glowing white in a beam of moonlight. He reached over the boy curled on his side asleep and thumbed tenderly at Will’s sullen mouth. “…you must find a way to soothe him.”

“Elias…” Will tucked dove satin sheets round sloped shoulders and shifted closer to kiss long lashes resting on a cheek. Tears melted on his lips. “You’re safe with us. Safe.” His hand slid from a shoulder to a waist, fingers slipping to the older man’s palm resting lightly on a hip. “We have you now. It’s just a dream. Please stop crying.”

“He has stolen from his bed to sleep in ours four times this week. Though his overall demeanor has brightened… I am beginning to become concerned. His nightmares seem to worsen as the days grow colder.” The older man mused.

“I think he’s lonely. Even here.” Will crawled carefully over Elias, overcome with a sense of helplessness, as if he too was still drowning, and pressed hard against the safety of Hannibal’s chest. “What do you think haunts him?”

The older man shifted, drawing his husband and the sleeping boy closer, pained by the comfort he
could not adequately provide them. “What all men fear. Being forgotten.”

“Hannibal?”

“Mm.”

Blue eyes flashed up. “I want to track down the man who left him.”

A slow blink answered. “To vindicate the boy’s honor? Or return to him gilded memories in the flesh?”

Will shook his head and shrugged, uncertain, mouth thin, compassion gold flecks in his eyes.

“You may not like what you find.”

“We all deserve closure. And a second chance.”

Hooking a hand around a neck, Hannibal stared at the dusk rose mouth that had both breathed life in to him and torn out the last of his hope safe behind glass. He thumbed good intention etched in soft flesh parting to reveal pearl teeth of both pleasure and reckoning.

“Kiss me, William…” He brushed curls from sorrowful eyes and cupped a cheek, dampened by cool Baltimore rain of a memory. “Press redemption and forgiveness to my lips. Remind me all you have given me. Of all you could take away. What we have found and might lose in one another. Speak to me of loss.”

“There’s nothing left to say…” A gentle smile formed and Will shook his head, reply as soft as the kiss preceding it. “…but I love you.”

* * *

Present day. 9:48 am.

“He’s a sparrow, not a jailbird, Will. I won’t let you keep him if that’s your idea.” A blurring accent heavy and coppery huffed against an ear.

Will swam through hazy depths of sleep, grieved to be tugged to the surface of a warmer memory, the sensation of Hannibal’s lips still pressed to him. There was a more tangible feel of a body tucked quietly in his arms, lost as he was, molded together as one in dream. He forced eyes open.

Peter stood over him, leather jacket slung over a shoulder, eyes bloodshot as if he had been crying. His thumb was caressing the bruise forming beneath an eye, remorse dimming grey. Hannibal stood a few feet behind, tethered by chains, a flicker of something—mourning or faint hope, gaze dark and searching, taking in every inch of Will as if it was the last time—then vanished.

“They’d hardly notice.” The younger man croaked, blinking at blind layers of sleep. “He’s travel sized and smuggle friendly.”

Peter extended a hand, cupping a shoulder and elbow, helping Will sit up, stiff from sleep. “I’d rather not test the theory regardless.”

Elias moaned softly, stirring, fine lashes fluttering over dewy lilac.
“We must go.” Silas urged, checking his watch.

Will maneuvered the heavy-eyed boy safely to his husband’s arms, finding himself unsteady as he rose, grateful when Hannibal came near to offer support.

He choked down anxiety clawing at his throat and bent, mouth pressed hard to the priest’s forehead, whisper fierce, eternal. “Love you.” He leaned to the side, face tipping up to meet a wary silver gaze, and kissed a cheek. “And you to a lesser degree, Petrus.”

“Don’t fucking call me that, killer.” Peter growled. They looked at one another, comfortable in their pretense of a quarrel, affectionate in their discord, a moment longer. Peter threw both arms around him, vice like grip lifting him several inches off the floor, trembling. He held on until Will could no longer breath, sensing turmoil rattling their bones. He was slowly, carefully, let down, mouth rough as it kissed his temple. “The feeling is, and will always be, mutual.”

“I’d expect no less. But I may never call you anything else.” Will smirked as they separated. He jutted a chin in the priest’s direction who was fighting back tears, eyes stuck to the floor. “Take care of him. Don’t fuck it up.”

As was their custom, Peter rolled his eyes and gave him a middle finger.

The older man stepped forward, tugging gingerly on a sleeve. Elias rushed to him, gripping his waist with a hiccupped sob. He heard a distinct murmur of counsel, hushed against an ear, catching the last of it, a quiet ‘We love you.’ An even more pitiful sniffl of ‘I love you too’ replied. Hannibal reached for Peter, cradling his cheek, the gaze they shared long and meaningful.


He felt the small fingers of Elias cling to the frayed stitches of his uniform sleeve tighten.

A pale hand touched his shoulder, wedding ring glistening, squeezing. “À la prochaine, Will. Hannibal.”

He couldn’t watch them leave. It wasn’t a memory he wanted imprinted on his mind.


Heard the tiny hiccupped wait, for just one more moment, the scratch of nails against fabric, as Elias was pulled away.

Warmth of their touch receded, crushing cold of the Atlantic returned, unraveling the steeled wire of his frame keeping him upright in the face of what he was certain was their final goodbye.

Three pairs of hurried footsteps echoed the hall in a wake of muffled crying. Locks buzzed. Metal doors shhinked open. Locks buzzed furiously shut. Who they were trapped inside with their memories. Who they had been, free to live on without them, and never to be again.

Hannibal caught Will before he could sink to the floor, his strength draining with every footstep that took their family, the life they had known and cherished, the seconds they had left together—in this moment, on this earth—farther from them. The younger man sagged against the bench he was lowered to and sobbed, cradled to Hannibal’s chest, staring at the derisory comfort of their hands embracing, bound by metal, chained to one another.

As they had always been.
Dear Friends, I am sorry I am a terrible friend. <3 I really don't mean to keep you waiting, honest. This current work pace just really drains me creatively. Please know I read all your comments and cherish them. I adore you all so very much. Love, Your Dear Author

***

I know a few of you have asked about the nature of Will and Hannibal's relationship with Elias. (Of course, I have my own beliefs on the matter. Clearly so does Peter, but we'll get to that.) Honestly, I would love to discuss this with you and hear your thoughts. See a different perspective. And then share how I see them.

I know we're all anxious to get back to our regularly scheduled Murder Husbands. And find out exactly how hospitalized Rodriguez currently is. Hopefully you won't mind another brief interlude while we resolve Peter and Elias' situation. (We know I can't leave things without proper conclusion. And I could use a break from the courtroom. I also need time to mentally prepare myself for what Hannibal has planned.)
“They have issued a warrant for your arrest.” Hannibal noted gravely.

Peter looked from orange blue flame of a lighter dancing beneath a wave of his palm. “How in the name of saints could you possibly know that?”

“Silas sent word early this morning.”

The flame extinguished with a hiss. “And no one… considered it might be beneficial to tell me this? Before I walked in to a prison?”

The older man offered a knowing smile. “You always did struggle to heed guidance.”

Hannibal pushed Peter down when he tried to bolt from the table, gaze fixed on the locked door, heart pounding. Long fingers slid soothingly from one leathery shoulder to the next, matching the honeyed tone swimming through the room with instruction.

“You publicly humiliated a man of great influence in his arena. And what a splendid spectacle it was.” Pride and admiration creased deep lines of sharp cheeks before fading. “It may yet cost you your freedom. Men’s pride is their greatest weakness. When wounded...” Hannibal's eyes gleamed, haunting and remorse, then faded to black. "...they seek blood. Not any blood will do to satisfy their lust for retribution, but any drawn is considered a triumph. Even if that blood is not your own.”

“Elias...” Peter breathed.

The older man nodded. “We need to discuss your ability to adapt. Your instincts gathered over the years are telling you to run. Do not run. You will be caught, Mister Moreau. The common rabbit squeals in terror racing through the underbrush to escape the jowls of the fox in pursuit of its meal.” Hannibal cupped his chin and lifted till murky grey eyes met a glint of fire. “You are not common. You are clever. And clever prey disguise their true form and scent in the pelt of a hollowed out beast, not at the frantic trot of terror, but a steady pace of certainty, knowing freedom is within sight. You have worn the guises of many men, Peter, and you will do so once more.”

Zippers shivered metallic as Peter trembled. The gravity of the situation bowed his neck and shoulders. He caught the expression of terror looking up at him from scratches of the steel table. A man he hadn’t seen in years. One who had everything to lose. The one who fled to keep his everything safe.

“Now.” A heavy hand landed on his shoulder and gripped to instill strength, words pressed low to his ear. “It is time for you to listen. Are you listening?”

Garbled agreement strained loose from a tight throat.

“Good. You will need to start with your appearance...”
The private bathroom in the young lawyer’s office was a neat square of cramped space and minimalist decoration. Potted English ivy frothed the ledge of a half oval window on the far wall. In a wired trashcan, a manila envelope with inked cursive, folded and crumpled, read, ‘Silas and Associates, C/O Jordan Silas.’ A passport was perched on a rose gold handle of a sink. On the other side of a closed door, inkjet paper ground on and mottled hushed conversation spoken in to the crackle of a corded phone’s receiver.

Braced on the edge of a porcelain sink, Peter struggled to lift eyes to the oval mirror edged in bronze, afraid to see his own reflection. Hated what was looking back. He watched his fingers flex white then grip to fight tremors. Wispy locks of white gold stirred in the basin. A pensive sigh lifted one on the air. It floated along the length of a taut black cord to rest near an electric razor buzzing angrily across white tile where it had been dropped. He picked the thing up and tossed it into the sink with a disgusted sneer.

*What kind of a man cannot stomach simple instructions?*

*You…* A photo whispered up at him.

Emblems glimmered iridescent as light passed over the passport. A muted photo of a youth with a crooked nose—broken the winter of ’03 by a brutish older classman— and hard eyes watched with disdain. Clipped blonde hair was pulled tight across shaved sides of a head. An embroidered golden leaf of a boarding school academy was clipped off by a corner.

Peter figured his seventeen year old self would have congratulated him on barely aging over the years. Then would have kicked his ass for what he had vowed never to become. Vulnerable. Where Hannibal had scrounged up the photo was a mystery. It was the only real thing about the passport, name and records of his identity all falsified. Stamps from countries he had never been lined the pages. Someone else’s name wearing his face. A better version of himself perhaps. Another passport, some version of Elias, was tucked in his back pocket. He forced his gaze up.

*Did you always know we would have to run? Or were you just looking out for us, Hannibal?*

Inky black pupils blown wide rimmed hardened grey moonstones. Dusting hair covered fair brows twisted low on a forehead. His lips thinned to withering roses curling on the eve of winter frost. Peter timidly pushed silken tresses back, every bit as beautiful as his mother’s had been, and gripped them to the crown of his head. He touched a buzzed prickling stripe starting above his right ear and stopping abruptly at the center. Starkly conservative and proudly red blooded masculine. All the qualities his father wished he had. Everything he was not. Had never once been.

“You will wear your hair in a style befitting a young man or you will be thrown from this house! Penniless with no prospects! On the streets. Is that what you want? To bring shame to this family’s good name.”

Peter jerked the roots of his hair till it stung as his father once had.

If only the old man knew I’d ended up on them one way or another. Ridded from the shame of an unwanted blemish on his family crest.

Tears gathered in corners of his eyes. He picked up the razor and pushed it across his scalp. Who he was began to fall away in a haze of pale yellow. Years of patient, cultivated beauty uncoiling from a high forehead to be trampled by feet. He felt the ghost of his mother twining his hair in delicate braids as he sat in her lap. The boy she, and only she, had cherished, faded. Inch by inch of self acceptance and love he had clawed out of himself turning to dust on the floor. He saw the ugliness of his body’s scars gather in the hollows of his eyes and harsh cheekbones, steely gaze piercing, no
longer softened and lovely without its veil of light. He bent over the sink and began to silently weep.

The door knob rattled. A tense inhale then a pause. The bathroom door clicked shut.

Sun warmed hands of springtime wrapped his, drawing the razor carefully from his grasp. A palm pushed his waist lightly. Peter’s heels hit the back of something, knees folding, and sat heavily on a porcelain stool. He couldn’t bear to see Elias look at him. He stared mute and tearful at the floor. Could the boy still love him like this? For what he really was?

A shaky exhale touched his scalp. “Oh Peter…”

Fingertips lightly darted across the discovery of a long white scar curving the back of a neck and side of a head. Sensation of it numbed and paper thin. He didn’t have the heart to tell him it was mismatched from the ones on his body. This singular one belonged to a silver tipped cane from his father’s office.

Where it all began…

Elias carded cut hair loose from a shaved scalp, touch deepening, comforting waves sending a shiver through Peter. The older man wrapped hands around thighs and pressed his face to a jersey covered stomach to breathe in lavender. He exhaled relief when the boy let him remain. His presence soothed him. Brought peace. It always had. The only home he had known.

“Hold still…” Elias murmured, palm steadying the base of his skull.

The electric razor hummed to life again, moving with care and precision. Chaffed the nape of his neck till it evened. Trimmed sides before patches smoothed. The boy chirped dismay at the mangled mess of what was left on the top of his head. He tousled it all directions as if it might return to its natural state.

“Is it…?” Peter tightened his grip on a waist, hating weak vanity scraping his tone, burning eyes screwed shut. “Is it salvageable?”

*Do you still think I’m beautiful, little sparrow? Or is it clear to you now? The fractured damage of a man without his disguise.*

Elias stayed quiet. He held his breath and glanced up. The boy’s lips pursed, brow furrowed, puzzled expression graying to hopelessness. He pushed tufted hair to the side once more, squinted, then shook his head. The older man’s mouth flinched. He knew all too well it would take years to undo the damage. Resigned, Peter twisted what was left of his hair in a fist and pulled. Elias watched with a stricken moue of pity. The razor hovered above his hairline, hesitating.

“Sparrow…” Peter dropped his gaze. He spoke the words out loud, not for Elias, hoping he might believe his own pitiful comfort. “It’s not forever. Finish it.”

The last weight of a soul freed with a buzz. He dropped curls and scrubbed a shaved scalp. It felt nothing like the caress of the boy’s hair beneath his fingertips, blades of cut grass in summer. It chaffed like sand paper. Severe and unwelcome. The room seemed colder. Peter picked up the leather jacket from the floor and freed it from cut hair with a snap. He dabbed the back of his neck with a white hand towel, watching Elias turn from him, careful to avert his own reflection. His husband trimmed sides and back of his own head with quick, practiced motions. He knotted waves of hair and reached for the razor.

“No!” Peter lunged and gripped the wrist holding the razor. He softened his voice and touch, lips bent to a shaking shoulder. He touched coppery brown waves tumbling over a sweet face delicately.
“No,” He repeated. “Don’t. It’s not necessary. They’re looking for me.”

“You shouldn’t be the only one to suffer,” Elias reminded quietly, dim eyes fixed on a sink filled with the only thing Peter coveted besides him.

He took the electric razor. It whirred off. He set it on the window ledge, far from their reach. He might have changed many things in their world, in their past, but he would keep Elias as he was, unchanged, for as long as he could.

Peter turned Elias in his arms, crowded in the small space, and tipped his face up by knuckles and smoothed a thumb beneath a sad eye. “Then don’t suffer. I’ll bear it all for you.”

The boy’s skin turned snow white in a beam of light, mouth a soft petal pink. “It’s a choice. We choose to bear our suffering. I won’t give it power if my choices are given and taken freely. And I won’t let you bear mine.”

Elias pulled the switchblade from a leather pocket. He fixed the older man with a stare of firestone opals gleaming. Silver flashed. Tumbling veil of hair sliced free falling. A moment later Elias stood before Peter in washed out vestibules of a church, on a grey day, in a grey mist soaking dirt and cobblestone streets. When he had first seen him from the stoop of a whorehouse praying the cigarette he was choking on might kill him. Where the only thing in color had been Elias. His beautiful eyes of amethyst, short clipped hair copper dust of a desert whirlwind, and flawless skin snow dotted by rain drizzled freckles.

They pressed knee to knee, chest to chest, scent of skin rising. Peter was drawn by the vision, eyes fixed on a frown. The boy put a hand on a chest to keep him from coming closer, turning his chin to the door, eyeing his only means of escape. A bemused smile toyed at his lips. Eternally the coquettish saint of purity keeping him at bay. His little priest. His from the moment he had laid eyes on him.

“Not a day has passed. If the world is in search of eternal youth and beauty, they need look no further than you…” The older man said, stroking a blushing cheek fondly.

Peter knew Elias could feel the wild thump of a heart through thin cotton and hot slide of leather through his fingertips. Thumbs dragged up seams of jeans. He didn’t want the boy too shy to speak more than a whisper, unable to look him in eye, from their youth. He wanted the one who left claw marks on his back and cried out his name in the middle of the night. Not this one, from the present, who touched gently then pushed away, to leave him alone, angry at him for reasons he wouldn’t voice. He followed the line of a throat arcing on a hard swallow as he braced on the sink once more, boxing the priest in.

I don’t want to lose you. Not any part of you. They all belong to me.

None of it seemed to matter in that moment. Not the danger. Or their window of chance to escape dwindling. Only the crushing weight of grief filling the curved space between their bodies and a need to know they were not alone.

Cool lips pressed a fluttering pulse. Listening to denim shift as thin legs rose on tiptoes to lean away, resisting. The older man flattened a palm on the bow of a neck, mouth dipping to the other side, and bit softly to feel a pulse of want jump. Elias gasped a plaintive ‘stop,’ palm delving beneath the hem of his sweater to grasp a heated ribcage. Peter cupped a slim thigh and lifted, to trap him in a moment, against him, knowing well when they parted he would set him free. As he always had.

He balanced the boy on the sink's edge, hand sliding to part legs and stand between them. He
gripped a chin and claimed a mouth to smother protest bubbling up. He swiped his tongue over unyielding lips for entrance. He wanted to taste him. Know goodness breathed against him. He snaked fingers further inside clothed heat and stroked a sensitive bud. Elias arced with a moan, nails digging supple leather, soles of sneakers dragging up thighs. A sweet mouth eased open. Peter groaned relief. He drew out a shy tongue with the slick of his own, tapping its pointed tip teasingly at first then sucking gently.

Puffing breath turned ragged. The boy reached to wind hands in long hair, rough buzz chaffing his palms instead, sliding to find a new hold. Nails raked a tensed abdomen then latched on belt loops. Bracing one foot on the window ledge, Elias pushed up and rocked their hips together with an insistent pull at a waist. He was pulsing hot beneath the rigid seam of a zipper. A shaky growl whistled through teeth. The friction of being needed, wanted, burned through his clothing. He had never been a man of gilded words or comfort, but he could provide this. Heat and need. Seek absolution from a pretty mouth panting in his ear.

Peter jammed a palm beneath a thigh, kneading a shapely backside through pockets and rolled a thickening length back. Days of separation burned their skin. They came together in a clash of leather and soft jersey. Elias gripped silver studded lapels and began to rut, gasping when teeth returned to his neck and an assault of fingers began to tear at jeans. He fixated on the way the boy’s head lolled back, throat bared, tongue leaving a moan pink and wet. He struggled to lose a jean button. Hot lips slid around the curve of his ear, tugging its lobe, breathless ‘hurry’ jolting his dick. Peter knew that barely there voice meant Elias was close.

He swore, dragging Elias from the sink, and flipped him stomach down. Peter popped the button, mutterings of thank fucking Christ lost on Elias, and jerked a zipper down. He rolled a waistband of jeans and boxers to tongue freckles on the curve of a cheek. He tasted hot, like the palm prints fogging and streaking the front of a mirror. The boy reached back to haul at the front of his trousers to open them. He gripped a fist resting on the sink, resting his ear over a spine to listen to lungs shudder. He groaned, fingers sliding in his husband’s small mouth to wet them. A palm cupped and squeezed, vision whiting out. His hips jerked forward. He shuddered as Elias guided his hand down a flat stomach, crested a folded waistband to what lay beneath.

He was grinding against an ass, barely fingernails deep in boxers, when the bathroom door opened.

“Like father, like son?” Bemusement called.

Leaning in the doorway, arms crossed over a beige London Fog raincoat and an emerald green scarf was Silas, taking in the scene with a quick calculated sweep and a lifted brow of disapproval. His gaze lingered a second too long on a face flaming scarlet, Elias still bent over the sink. Peter bristled. He lumbered forward to shield his husband, curtly shoving a rumpled t-shirt beneath a waistband and hauled a zipper uncomfortably up.

“Get fucked.” Peter’s snarl came out flat and winded, struggling to catch his breath.

The lawyer blinked slowly, chin tipping to a curious angle and smiled. “There’s an officer in the lobby asking questions. My s-s-secretary is doing her best to evade him.”

Soft squeaking panic accompanied a rustle of clothing being put back in place.

Reaching in a pocket, Peter thumbed the knife hidden inside its folds and glanced at frosted glass of a closed office door in the other room. Two shadows moved beyond it. The man wasn’t lying. He would have to move quickly. He had no qualms taking the lawyer hostage if the situation arose. He sized up the bathroom window. It was too small. Even for Elias to fit through. They would have to find another way out.
“How evasive?” The older man’s unspoken threat rose a fraction, taking another step forward.

“Keep your voice down.” Hazel eyes hardened. Silas tipped a pointed nose at the man above, unafraid. “Lying, Mister Moreau, she is hardly going to t-tell him you dragged me off at knife point if I told her not t-to. From what I am to understand patience is not your strong suit.”

Peter sneered at the lawyer.

Elias folded arms around a tensed bicep, sheepishly biting his bottom lip, whispering, “What do they want?”

The lawyer pushed glasses up his nose with an index finger, pinching lips and scrunching his nose, as if what he was about to say tasted bitter. “Information on your whereabouts. And I s-suspect some questions as to whether or not you were staying at the Motel Oasis before or after a controlled b-b-blaze destroyed any evidence of you having done so.” There was a heavy pause and a slow blink. “If you had stayed there. Allegedly.”

Temperature of the room dropped several degrees, words hanging in the air. His stomach soured at the thought of his wish coming true, to see their past up in smoke, freeing them of it.

*What perfect fucking timing.*

Elias began to shake. Long fingers curled to a tight fist. Frigid grey scanned up the lawyer.

“My…my…books.” Heavy tears rolled from wide violet eyes. “Our clothes.” A throat choked a sob down. “My…”

Peter lunged and dragged the lawyer by a fistful of fabric, teeth bared. “*His life was in that suitcase.*”

“You’re welcome.” Silas hissed. “Your *entire existence* including the very real p-passports leading to your home, the Lecter’s home, in France was there as well. Or did you want t-to risk returning to a house swarming with police? Face extradition?” Wing tip shoes swayed, tapping unsteadily on tile, grimacing. “There was no time! It was a necessity I took no pleasure in dispatching. On a brighter note, the debt a former arson owed me is now cleared. And you might have the satisfaction of knowing I am now t-t-tangled up in obstructing justice, impeding a police investigation, and several felonies.”

“I don’t give a—“

A loud sniff filled the room. Both men quieted. Peter turned. Elias was hiding behind a jersey sleeve, hairline pinking as tears stained ribbed cuff. His heart wrenched, throat tightening, straining to form some noise of comfort. To offer a world of promises, to return all he had lost, ones he could not keep.

“What? *Replace the yellow aged books of your family’s home. With empty margins once penned by your mother’s delicate hand. All you had left of them in smoke. Give you back the family torn from you? Then and now.*”

His husband ducked, sinking, white knuckled grip stuck to the window’s ledge, color and innocence draining from his face.

“Tell me what I can do.”
Elias stayed mute, eyes glazed, lost. He wanted to melt grief creasing his mouth. Hold near until shaking subsided. He smoothed tangled hair from ears turning red from repressed sobs. Leaning their foreheads together, Peter brushed a sorrowful kiss on a temple and stood, knees creaking. There wasn’t time. Nothing he could give him. Except to see him to safety. It might be all he could provide in the end.

Silas toed a black satchel forward and held out a red velvet purse string, pained eyes flicking to Elias then down. “A few things for your journey. And I need you to hold on to this.”

The purse fell in his palm. Peter’s first instinct was to hurl it back at the man and shove him towards the office with a swing of fists not far behind. He jerked open the soft strings and peered inside. A ring of light glimmered. He tipped it and held in a vehement exhale. It was Hannibal’s wedding band.

As if he had not charged me with enough responsibility.

He jammed it inside a jean pocket. He imagined it would taste metallic as the blood he was sure would flow when he returned it to Will, forcibly made a widow without consent, by conspirators who thought they knew his conscious far better than he. He knelt beside the satchel and tore through it. A navy blue pea coat, several angora sweaters, and a few toiletries lined the bottom. He glanced at Silas, annoyance flinching a jaw.

“Look again,” A grave voice admonished.

With an irritable huff, Peter dug around the contents. Paper crinkled. He picked up two pieces of folded white and looked them over. They were plane tickets with his and the priest’s new identities printed on them. For two separate flights. He shot a glare at Silas. He wouldn’t tell Elias, not yet. He traced the satchel until fingers touched jagged plastic. He peeled up a corner. Etched green 100 appeared. He lifted the false panel and hushed a gasp. Stacks of American currency lined the bottom.

“In the name of Saint Anthony…” The older man rocked back on his heels, stunned.

He tugged a crisp stone colored card free and read the inscription:

They are yours to take of now. You know what must be done. ~ H. L.

A shrill woman’s voice pierced the air, growing louder as a shadow moved in front of the office door to enter. “I’m sorry, Officer, but Mister Silas is on a very important phone call with a client. You will simply have to come back at a later time.”

“Your phones. Remove the chips. Leave them here.” Silas paled, whisper fierce and insistent. “We will need to go out my office window. Quietly and quickly.”

* * *

“They will be looking for you. Both of you. We define our lives by what we choose to wear. Our monetary gains, social status, and to whom we have bound our lives to, in silver and gold. You must relinquish those symbols, separate, if you hope to deceive your hunters long enough to have a minuet chance of escape.”
Nostrils flared on a harsh exhale. “I’m not taking his ring.”

“Would you rather they take his life? Take him prisoner in your stead?” Hannibal lifted Peter’s face, fear and anger dilating his pupils, smoothing a furrowed brow. His heart ached. The fear of losing Will, searching for him for months, was a wound burned permanently in his mind. “Trap a weaker mate and even the most steeled predator heeds the frantic screams of all they are bound to protect.”

“I’m not fucking leaving him on his own! You know how he gets when he is frightened. Who’s going to calm him down if none of us are there, huh?” A plastic lighter cracked open on a far wall upon impact.

The older man sighed wearily. “If you wish to save him, you must become strangers. Strangers harbor no sentimental attachment to be wielded as a weapon. Do you wish to save him?”

* * *

Amber glow highway streetlamps flitted across leather seats in endless procession. Glittering snow blew striped lines and streaking red taillights. Throaty purr of a silver Jaguar roared. Hazel green eyes flicked anxiously from mirror to mirror, watching closely for the reflection of police in pursuit. Gloved hands shed across a wheel spinning to the right. Reflective white lettering announcing an exit for Baltimore-Washington International loomed in the distance.

Elias rocked anxiously in the backseat, strangled by the thump of his heart in his throat. He picked a brassy button on a pea coat, unraveling it stitch by stitch. He was unraveling on the inside. Sagging as every tendon and muscle within him weakened and snapped. He slouched lower, sweat pricking his palms and forehead. He wheezed in an attempt to catch his breath. His nostrils burned. His eyes stung. His mind fogged, spinning with too many questions and thoughts.

This is what it was like to drown…

He began to tear a bloody scab of a thumb’s cuticle, whining softly when a fresh split formed. He was still numb, from leaving Hannibal and Will behind, with their parting words howling in his mind. He knew the truth of it. There wouldn’t be a next time. They were never coming home.

Not alive. His lips rolled together until they lost feeling. We’re not blood. They won’t let us take their bodies. To bring them home. They will deny them peace even in death.

He couldn’t stop thinking about the motel fire. Swore he scented pungent smoke as flames ravaged the room black. Heard the mournful crinkle of pages curling on his mother’s beloved books as they burned. The only photo he had of both his parents charred grey in the folds of a hymn’s pages. He had only been allowed to take what he could fit in his suitcase before they had carted him off to the orphanage. Now it was gone. All of it. Everything he had. Grief welled his eyes.

Just like them. Mother. Father. Peter. Will and Hannibal.

Why did his life constantly seem to go up in flames? What had he done so unforgivable in his life, or past life, to deserve this?

Frigid palms folded over his and drew them against a weary sigh. “Give me your hands.”

Faint silver shifted in the shadows. The broad outline of Peter moved forward. Elias stifled a startled cry, not yet used to the rough cut stone of his gaze, piercing and strange without luminous curls. He
was different. Everything about him seemed changed, both inside and out. Darker. Weathered and harsh. Rosy light tracked the glass cut bones of his face. A white scar on the side of a head glowed. Scalp a fine blonde dust of snow in morning light. Stern lips turned blood red in a flicker of taillights. Damp earthy cigarettes wafted from leather. A wolf wearing the pelt of a recent kill.

Elias was too frightened to speak as a hand drew the cross over his head. The older man bent and placed something on twisted chain of the necklace. He solemnly studied a left hand, thumb and middle finger cradling a wedding band. A cheek shuddered then flinched. Peter twisted the ring off, placing it on the chain next to a darker onyx band. It burned a flash of white against his skin where it had been.

Panicked breathing picked up. What are you doing?

Roughed palms slid tenderly over shaking hands, voice echoing sorrow. “I’m sorry for this.”

Peter tried to remove the dainty ring he had given to Elias. Take back all of the promises and gently spoken future imbued in its curving form. The priest lashed out. He struck a solid chest and crawled away. A door handle bruised his hip. He clutched his left hand above his heart, whine growing louder and louder. It was the last thing he had. His final, and only other earthly possession he cherished. Grey eyes became slits of light. The older man pinned him to the seat, apology gritted and low, small hands and knees jabbing to break free.

Flesh tore as the ring was twisted off coiled knuckles, sobbing. “No, no!”

I’m going to lose them. All of them.

“Give it back! Give it back!”

The necklace fell in a zippered pocket of the leather satchel, cold as the wintry night. “I will return it to you when and if it is safe for me to do so.”

His skin flushed warm then pink. His blood pressure spiked. He began to gasp for breath, chills shaking his entire body, clawing at his throat to tear out the heart strangling him.

“Fuck.” The older man clenched teeth, expression becoming stone. Peter dragged Elias to the floor, wedging them between the driver’s seat and passenger door, praying the tiny space would soothe his panic. “Stop it. Stop.” He wrapped a shaking torso, embrace tightening. Gasps turned to chokes, legs and arms enfolding. A command pressed to an ear, low, trembling. “You’re alright, little one, you’re okay. Breathe. You can breathe. Feel my touch.” A palm pulled from a throat to a chest, stroking a calming rhythm. “It’s just a fit. It will pass. Safe. You’re safe.” He kissed the crown of a head, a tear stained cheek, held clawed knuckles twisting fabric. “I know you’re frightened. I know you have lost so much. I have taken too much from you already. But I am asking you to stay strong a little longer. Just a little longer, my dove. Breathe, for saint’s sake, breathe.”

“We’re nearly there.” Silas announced from the driver’s seat.

“Keep driving. Circle the airport. Do something!” The older man rasped. “He is having a panic attack. I can’t leave him like this.”

A blinker of a turn signal tick, tick, ticked. The car steered towards baggage claim.

“Shhh, shh, love…” Peter cradled Elias to his chest and began to rock him, continuing to stroke his chest, increasing pressure as breathing began to match pace. “When we get home I will buy you a thousand books. I will let you lie in bed till well in the afternoon and soak for as long as you like in the evening. I’ll give you anything. Anything you want. Do this for me. For them.” A harsh mouth
roughed a hairline. “Please. I need you to calm down.”

The sign for arrivals and departures slid into view from the tinted window overhead.

“Listen.” Arms locked Elias to a chest till his breathing strained, vision going in and out of focus. The vibration of Peter’s voice sinking shook and rattled the heart in his ribs. His tone curling smoke tempering a flare of fear. “Can you do that? Listen?”

The priest shook his head, twisting to press his nose and cheeks to a sternum.

“We are going to draw suspicion,” A nervous voice warned.

Anger burned a throat. “Shut the fuck up and drive, Silas!”

Elias jumped. Thighs clamped his narrow waist. He whined, unable to breathe, soothed by the pressure forcing him to still. He needle ribs until the grip slackened. He burrowed further inside a leather jacket, sucking in a lungful of jasmine perfume loosing the tightness in his throat. He closed his eyes, lulled by heat, relaxing slightly. Peter folded edges of the jacket over his head to envelope him in warm dark, chest shuddering once, before his chin dropped to a shoulder.

“Mon oiseau, there’s no time.” Strength of a voice cracked like ice breaking apart on a river. Slender fingers trembled on the curve of a head then tensed. “You’re going to get out of the car. You won’t turn around. You won’t kiss me goodbye. If you see me, don’t look at me. I’m nothing to you. A stranger. If you are stopped at customs or detained for any reason, you call Silas. Say nothing to anyone. He’ll find a way to keep you safe and get you home.” The priest banged a shoulder, curse sighing above. “Y-yes. You’re going to do as I say.”

Peter drew him out from beneath the jacket, thumbs tracing a clenched jaw, turmoil waving a high forehead. Blinding light poured in white silver. The priest squinted, nose wrinkling. Digging out a clipped set of bills and credit cards, the older man held it up before dropping it in a breast pocket of the pea coat.

“If you need anything you use this. Not the—look at me.” The older man growled. He gripped a chin and forced Elias to look, stare hardening, edges of a mouth tightening. “Not the cards. Or the accounts. This and only this.” He pressed a palm over the cash for emphasis. A passport and folded sheet of paper was shoved in hands, rocking him against the back seat. “You will land at Charles du Gaulle at nine forty two p.m. You will go straight to long term parking. Fifth floor, spot D20. You won’t look for me. You will not stop for any reason. If the car is there you will wait in it. My flight—”

Elias bolted. He flung the passport. It smacked his husband’s face. He scurried across the back seat and pressed to the far window, seized by panic once more, gaze darting to the scene unfolding around them. He listened to the tightening squeak of gloved hands gripping a steering wheel. They were idling outside a corridor with endless windows and automatic doors shuttering. An announcement echoed scratchily from a speaker overhead. Throngs of passengers flowed down the sidewalk and over gleaming waxed floors of the airport to a section marked, Departures: Concourse A and B. Police officers milled in front of a security check point roped off by yards of black.

Shrill terror pierced the silence. “What do you mean your flight? Peter, what do you mean! What do you—”

Nostrils flared. Peter shot forward and clamped his palm over a mouth. The priest’s head banged the window. Pain blotted red against the back of his eyelids. Fingers smothering a surprised cry. Guilt dilated pupils, uncertainty and fear turning irises to moonlight, extinguishing with a hard blink.
Swallowing hard, the older man pressed his mouth to the back of knuckles, as if kissing Elias with a barrier of skin and bone would somehow dull the pain of separation. Of not knowing.

*Is this the last time?* He pressed back against the palm on his mouth, pleading.

“My flight arrives at eleven twelve. Wait an hour after this then go home…” The older man forced himself to look away, tone becoming gravel. “Hail a cab if you need to. Not a minute before. Not a minute after. You aren’t going to wait for me.” Peter shook Elias lightly when he whimpered, drawing the hood around his ears. “Sparrow, you aren’t going to wait. If Daniel doesn’t come to collect you in a week’s time then go to the safe and retrieve the black envelope. Follow the instructions. Withdraw all the money from our account. Hannibal has arranged everything.” Fine brows twitched. Peter withdrew his palm and skirted the edge of red outlining a bottom lip softly, sighing. “You are to listen to him if you will not bear me any mind.”

“Please you have to hurry.” Silas urged again, hazel eyes flicking from the rear view mirror.

Elias knocked the older man’s hand away and shoved the wall of his chest. Hurt flashed. He shoved again. Peter jammed hands in the pockets of his jacket and remained kneeling. Another shove turned to a small fist.

“No, no! I won’t! I’m not going. You said, you promised—”

“I know what I promised! Did you think I wanted this? Any of this!”

“You’re a liar! You’re a liar and I wish we had never met!”

A full mouth quivered to a snarl. “Eli—“

The passenger door flung open. Elias tumbled backwards. Peter grabbed him by the front of the sweatshirt, suspended, heart in his throat, clawing leathery arms.

*Don’t let go. Don’t let go.*

The older man reeled him in, a brush of lips to his brow, then pushed.

“—get out of the fucking car!”

Every goddamn thing since Peter had lost sight of Elias had taken too long. He told himself he would wait ten minutes before going in. A necessary precaution. He hated every fucking second. Fear had gripped him the moment a passenger door slammed in his face and propelled him from the vehicle a second later with a dying apology on his lips, terrified his husband’s last memory of him would be a fight, believing he did not love him. Not enough to keep them together. Not enough to keep his word.

A liar… The older man scraped nails over a tensed neck. *Is that how you truly see me?*

*Isn’t that what you are?* Shadows answered. Pathetic.

He loomed, gripping steel railing of a staircase overhanging a cordoned off area of airport security. The cheery glitter of waxed floors was obscene. Chattering excitement from below grated. The older man scanned the crowd. He would know Elias anywhere. Always had. He kept a trained gaze on a
small figure shuffling through the queue. Fear had turned his scent fevered sweet and skin pink. He could nearly hear the shiver of the boy’s bones as clearly as he could see the flush of emotion on a bowed neck. He was frightened.

*Go to him*… His arms braced on the rail began to shake.

Elias stopped in front of a security agent, eyes down. The man held up a light to the passport, scanning it in a thorough sweep. Peter tensed, heart beginning to pound. If he was a man of faith he would have prayed. The boy bristled and lifted his head suddenly. Gaze darting to the left. Then right. Violet eyes, teary and puffed red, flashed up to find the man who had separated them by force standing guard above. Their eyes met.

“I wish I would have never met you!”

His steely façade crumbled, visible hurt clouding his expression for a fraction of a second. It was all Elias needed to read him, mirror of pain welling fresh tears, delicate lips trembling. Peter dropped his head and pushed out of sight. He carried the weight of his husband’s words in the part of his chest hollowing and growing wide as the physical distance between them grew.

Initial resolve drained fingertips numb. The older man let his movements become automatic and carry him to the other end of the airport. He blundered through security, sluggish, blunting his accent to soft responses and kept his gaze low. Demure and non-threatening. A weary traveler beyond the scope of suspicion. Winter storm beyond glass settled in his bones. Without kindness of the boy pressed warm against him he felt brittle, worn, and far too old. Too weary to fight it all, uncertain if he wanted to if the time came. He was tired of running, from the world, out running loneliness pressing his flesh every time Elias pushed away. Truth resonated in his words.

*You would have had a far easier life without me.*

He passed through a beeping metal detector. A uniformed officer, bulky with a shaved head, held up a hand for him to stop. Peter blinked away fog, muttering an apology. He stripped off the leather jacket and tossed it on the belt. The man beckoned him forward again. Another beep knotted his stomach.

“Sir, you need to remove your belt and shoes.”

He tried to rearrange a pressing scowl to a pleasant smile of apathetic understanding. Why it was necessary to strip down in a public setting was beyond him. He yanked off boots. Gripped tight to a burn of a leather belt passing through his palms. He passed through again. *Beeeep, beep, beep.*

*Fucking saints in hell.*

“Stand here.” The man said, pointing to yellow footprints printed on a rubber mat.

Hands chaffed up his chest and down the length of his back, moving to his waist. The older man stared blankly at an advertisement of agate and sea foam green depicting a pleasant tropical destination. He hated the unfamiliar press. Hated being touched by strangers. His knee jerked. He forced himself to stay still, not shake the man off. Fingertips pushed down his legs. Peter bit his tongue. He concentrated on keeping fingers straight, uncurled, non-threatening. He had to look calm. Palms dragged between thighs and moved up. He inhaled sharply and held his breath, vision tunneling, flash of memory vivid, blunt nails forcing his legs open, holding him down.

“Okay, you’re good.”

“T-thank…” He moved, voice far away. “…you.”
Mapped scars wrapped in white cotton and covered by ink burned. His surroundings tilted then spun. The older man grappled the edge of conveyor belt, sinking as he became hot, pin pricks of color scattered by a droop of lashes and buckling knees.

“Oh my!” Fuchsia tipped nails skipped across his waist, plum silk of a blouse a cooling relief on the side of his face. “Are you okay, dear?”

Peter forced a harsh exhale out through his nose to keep from blacking out. He focused on a shimmering aura singed peach by dewy foundation and rosy cheeks. Blonde curls cascaded from pearl combs framing the side of an angelic face. Eyes a cloudless blue sky wide with concern. A beauty mark dotted above wine stained lips of a kind smile. Diamonds on a tennis bracelet twinkled, palm smoothing his cheek. He touched a perfumed wrist resting at his hammering pulse gingerly, mouth dry and tongue heavy. He inhaled distant memory—powdery note of bergamot and irises, *Guerlain Shalimar*—nude suede stilettos abandoned by a leather suitcase, record skipping as stocking feet swayed, balancing a smiling little boy on them one last time.

*Mother…*

Had he ever truly felt whole since? His vision filtered in a clearer image of a black boucle skirt, gold loops of a belt jangling. He was placed on a bench and the room began to settle.

“There you are…” The woman smiled, hands falling. “Are you well?”

He missed the pressure instantly. Longed for what, and who, he had seen. Wanted it to be real. Her features dimmed underneath harsh lights. Gentle smile pleasantly creased. Older than she had been moments ago. Hair a little less golden. Eyes more storm grey than blue.

“Yes…” Peter croaked, ducking his head to hide from gawking security and fellow travelers alike. So much for maintaining a low profile. He touched the satchel and boots at his socked feet. Someone must have brought it over. “I’m…” He took the belt rolled in the ankle of his left shoe out and threaded it on. He tightened laces of boots next. “I’m sorry for startling you.”

*And drawing unnecessary attention to myself.*

“No at all. I always appreciate a little excitement on any journey.” An airy laugh lifted. She draped the leather jacket over his shoulders with an endearing pat. “Would you like me to bring you some water? Something to eat?”

“No.” He lifted his gaze a fraction, weak smile forming. He squeezed her hand once before pushing it away. “Thank you. I’ll be fine.”

“Well, if you’re certain…” The woman stood, looping a Chanel bag on her elbow, glancing at a clock in the distance.

“I am—“ His smile faltered, catching a gleam of copper hovering in the background. “—thank you again.”

Elias stood stock still next to a leafy green potted tree on the other side of security, pale and wringing his navy coat. He was wearing Peter’s pain, moment of weakness, helpless to the pull of it clearly on his face. How much had he seen? The older man bit the side of his cheek, automatically on his feet and moving. He swore vehemently in his head in quick succession even as he dimly wished the woman safe travels. He blinked. The boy charged down a concourse, back to him, coat hugged to his chest.

Snatching up the satchel, Peter hesitated a minute longer, teeth on edge. It was stupid. Irrational.
Dangerous. And he didn’t seem to have a conscious choice in the matter. He went after his husband. He jammed arms in sleeves, metal belt clashing. He wound through travelers pressed shoulder to shoulder, blocking his route, horde moving together. He navigated rolling bags and yellow flashing carts shuttling people to their intended gates. He wasn’t sure how much time they had to get to theirs. He had to find Elias first. Before his panic set in. If it did, he would barely be able to move let alone make it to his flight. He bounded down an escalator, catching sight of the boy ducking in a men’s restroom. He jostled someone trying to pass.

“Watch it, old man!” A thick American accent snapped.

Peter spat back, half turning on the escalator to stare the prick down. “Go fuck yourself.”

It was just a kid. Twenty at best. Adjusted a rose printed brim of a snap back emblazoned with the phrase, **Blessed**, on its front.

A gunmetal nose ring flashed above a sneer. “Problem, asshole?”

Hours of tension, days of unending stress and uncertainty, turned to a fist. The last thing he needed was another incident with local security. They would not invite him in for a chat and release him. There was no stranger to befriend and escort him safely this time. The Americans were looking for him. Wanted to bring him in and keep him in the States for good. Away from his homeland. From his husband who needed him. He stared at the nose ring, blood beginning to simmer. No matter how satisfying it would be to tear the thing out in a gush of red, it was a satisfaction he would have to forgo.

Hefting the bag on his shoulder, the older man snapped his attention to the stairs and took them two at a time. He hauled on the zipper and tore out the necklace from the satchel’s pocket. He dodged another golf cart on the move. He circled twice to make sure he wasn’t been followed. The voice of caution in his head was wailing about how fucking stupid he was being. How they shouldn’t be seen together. He had spent years of ignoring it. Why start listening now? He ducked in the entrance of a restroom, nearly collided with a pilot, and jerked to a stop.

He found Elias bent over at a far end of the sink, paper towel wadded against eyes and nose to suppress cries. Slumped shoulders shook, grey as the stalls around him.

Yeah. He hated every fucking thing about this. Fuck Silas. Fuck Will and Hannibal. Fuck that piece of shit attorney. And fuck himself for a pitiful excuse for self control and putting them in to this mess to begin with.

*Fuck it.*

His nose twitched a snarl. Peter pitched the satchel forward. It banged the metal trashcan. Elias started. Tears whiting cheeks. Nose and ears crimson. Pupils dilated. The older man stalked forward and crushed the remaining distance between them, fingers snagging the neckline of a sweatshirt. He flattened the boy to the wall, jerking hands above his head by slender wrists, surprised yelp hot on his chin. He covered a mouth with his own, kiss rough and fierce, scrape of teeth reddening a bottom lip swollen. He wrestled a hand inside a jean pocket and pressed a crucifix and wedding bands to a thigh. It would keep the priest safe if he could not. Ankles bumped calves. He muffled small confused moans, tongue plunging in. He jammed his husband’s palm against his chest and held it there. If Elias was going to be plagued to feel every single one of his emotions, wrapped in one another as they were inside sheets, then he would feel this: a heart beating violent and wild and vengeful in its promise to cease unless the boy stayed by his side. Stayed safe. Stayed free.

He shoved them apart, growl hoarse, gripping Elias by a chin. “Stop following me! It isn’t safe. Did
you listen to a word I said? Or are you trying to get us both caught?

The boy blinked, dazed and swaying. Response stuck on a vibration low in a throat, delicate and snowy, tendons straining as he forced a chin up. He wanted to feel them hum between his teeth.

“No one…” Peter sucked a selfish claim crimson on a neck, grip tight. “…is ever going to take me from you. I won’t let them. Would I lie to you about that?”

A torso arced. Trembling hands balled his shoulders.

“Réponds-moi.”

“No,” Elias whined softly.

The older man drew back, gaze dark, kissed him hard once, then twice. “Then do as I fucking say. Promise you’ll be waiting.”

Elias whimpered, damp palms slipping from a chest, red chaffed lips thinning. He lay a hand over the rings in his pocket, caress feather light. The boy stooped to pick up the coat he had dropped. He lingered, watchful of Peter in the mirror’s reflection. The older man held his wrist, then a thumb, very tips of fingers. He didn’t want to let him go. He dropped the hand he was holding. Without another sound or glance, Elias walked out.

Please. Be safe.

Peter tipped his head and stared at bright lights, fighting a choke of tears. He grabbed the satchel and swung the opposite direction his husband had gone. He climbed the escalator, scowling. The broad set of his shoulders snapped to attention and a hardened glare met the whir of a security camera in challenge.

Just try and take him from me.

Chapter End Notes

I think it's safe to say I will be apologizing to you until the completion of our journey with this work.
(I’ve been wildly depressed since our last update and feeling inconsequential in many aspects of my life.)

If I remember correctly, we all agreed we would stray from the courtroom for a bit until the brief interlude of Elias and Peter resolved.

I read all your messages and appreciate each and every one of them so much. I will set aside time this week to answer them properly. xoxo

ps: I greatly lament the loss of Peter's hair!
Peter was fond of calculations and using them as a way of knowing when it was an appropriate time to put up selective barriers to shut others out. Prided himself on the ability to do so even in the throes of reckless youth. He considered his own two hands an appropriate, if not convenient, tool in measuring out daily life. Five fingers for a level of tolerance he was willing to accept. The other five when either he, or others, had crossed territory of discomfort and needed to be dealt with swiftly. He counted his own actions and reactions as dutifully as he did the people falling in and out of his orbit. He reeled them into his bed when it appealed and disregarded them when the novelty wore thin. Sometimes they left on their own. Other times they needed a push. It kept his life orderly. His emotions detached. And his heart, affection starved as it was, safe.

Today was an eight. Transience of connection, fleeting and inconstant, weighing heavily on his mind.

He had, after many bickering self monologues, acknowledged the guise of chaos. Saw it looking out from fan curved lashes and twinkle of precious amethyst, shyly inviting intimacy he knew could not, and would not, exist. His recently revived heart seemed vehemently opposed to the obstacle. Ache of its longing a stubborn torment of disorderly attachment.

He did not appreciate disorder. He enjoyed planned impulse. The web of chaotic far too complex. It was a trap, lulled by a false sense of security, only to be torn away at the whim of another. None of it had appealed to him. Until now.

Chaos had a name, wore a sweet face, and was sitting across from him at a wiry table on a Sunday afternoon eating ice cream. And for all the self restraint his past self had, Peter could not summon a single ounce of it to look away from its mouth. And it was such a lovely one. Plush pink cupid bow and curving bottom lip made to sing hymns and brush prayer against undeserving beads on a rosary. (He had discovered a new found jealousy of every inanimate object that had the pleasure of touching that mouth.) Pure and holy and entirely off limits. It did not seem to make him any more capable of not staring or thinking about it.

A drizzle of raspberry syrup trickled to the corner of a lip.

His day ticked to a ten.

He groaned inwardly. He had lost count of how many times he had fantasized about kissing little Elias Svendsen’s mouth. There was no calculation after ten—he had never needed it— but whatever it might have been called (though he expected insanity was appropriate) pooled sudden heat of want in his belly and left him dizzy. A craving, to be known, to remain, waking slowly from deep slumber.

“Do you want some?” The priest’s voice filtered light through overcast clouds.

His response came out a strained growl. “Yes.”

Pushing up from the table. Peter leaned across and guided the ice cream cone out of his intended path with a nudge of a wrist. He settled a cool palm, large against a freckled cheek warmed by the sun, thumb pressing an angled jaw. Elias lifted his face. Innocent curiosity filled wide set eyes darkened to stone from the shadow he was casting. Backlit by the sun, skin turned luminous beneath
an auburn blaze of haloed hair. A trusting smile beamed. His heart creaked a beat of appreciation for the boy’s beauty, intensity of his gaze softening. A tempting blush began to blossom. Sensitive to touch and attention. Affected as deeply as his own dust covered heart. The older man saw how easy it would be, to capture his mouth in a languid kiss, drink in the summertime heat and cooling sweetness of dessert.

God, he wanted it. God was his problem. Or his current rival. Never in his life had Peter been more jealous of a fictitious story than he was of the one Elias worshiped.

All these years and the first person I’ve felt genuine attraction for has sworn me off as a friend and taken vows of celibacy. The irony.

The older man lowered his gaze to a chin then a starched Roman collar. Fair brows rose with a sigh he kept in. He drew his thumb over smudged syrup and brought it to his mouth. He folded on his chair, eyes closed, and cherished sugar melted by what he wished was against his lips. On his tongue. When they opened again, he wished they hadn’t.

Elias bit his lower lip, embarrassment pinking, fingertips placed where Peter had touched. “…Oh. Thank you.”

For not kissing you. For not explaining my gratitude runs far deeper than a man who feels indebted to the person who saved his life. Yeah. You’re welcome.

He grunted dismissal with a wave of his hand. He dropped it against his thigh and felt for the crinkle of a cigarette carton. It was the one thing he could orally fixate on without the unwanted side effects of his dick getting the wrong idea. It tended to be a little less subtle than the wants of his heart. There was a bitter irony discovering that despite everything his hardwired biology still worked. At least where Elias was concerned.

Elias beamed gently at him, attention wandering to a group of girls linked arm in arm, easy laughter following after. The older man used the distraction as he often did to observe the boy. How could he not want to rest his face in the curve of a slender neck bowed in prayer? Or bring delicate fingers threaded by a rosary to his mouth? Kiss blushing knees and ankles beneath heavy robes he sometimes saw peeking from blankets of a cot on the apartment floor. A napkin dabbed lips. Peter forced his gaze to a drifting cloud until he saw sunspots. He had not yet decided if he should feel guilty for his attraction or if it would be more suitable for the boy to chastise him on sinfulness to further his seminary training.

Had I known religion could be this tempting, perhaps I would have attended church.

Peter tucked a menthol in his mouth and mumbled around an orange glow. “Have you ever been kissed, Elias?”

He choked on a burning inhale realizing the voice he heard was no longer inside his head. Fucking saints… had he said that out loud?

“Not properly.” The priest chirped.

Oh Christ, he had.

“Unless you count friends.” The boy squinted at drizzling peach cream oozing down fingertips, confused thoughtfulness wrinkling a nose. “I don’t think that I do. So no.”

Peter forced a twitching jaw to stay wired shut instead of demanding who it was locking lips with a fledgling member of the church under the guise of friendship.
If they are kissing you on the mouth, they are not your friends.

He ashed his cigarette and reached for the ice cream cone. Their fingers brushed. Peter forced his clenched jaw to relax, palm cradling the priest’s knuckles, molding the faint warmth of them. He was mildly irritated he had not considered using the excuse himself. Not that he thought it was an option. What self imposing fool had the audacity to take something so pure thoughtlessly? He caught a drizzle with a lap of his tongue and glared internally at his imagination conjuring Elias kissing a faceless stranger. Then cursed the interest his tongue took tracking a melting curve where the boy’s had been.

Elias tipped his head to the side, eyes drawn to the flick of a tongue before dropping, question lilting. He let Peter continue to hold his hand as if what was natural, simple, innocent. “Some friends kiss, don’t they?”

The older man’s brows shot up. He accidentally exhaled a curse then sputtered on a bit of cream. He tossed the cone back to Elias and snatched a napkin. He covered his mouth, beginning to cough, and banged a hand on his chest. His skin prickled. He scooted his chair to a shaded section of a canopy and blinked. He was obviously having some kind of heat stroke and hallucinating.

“Excuse me?” Peter mumbled after a full three minutes of silence.

“Don’t friends normally kiss in your country? Isn’t that customary?”

His brain stalled. His tongue mercifully knotted. His gaze slipped to the mouth forming the question again, soft and inquisitive. He was grateful his reply was trapped in wracking lungs.

Are you offering?

“Well. Do they?” Lines furrowed a frown.

Peter may have been non-believer, but he was not without morals. Some morals. (Not that he hadn’t lured a few bi-curious beauties to his bed to revel in the way they tasted. Not that he hadn’t enjoyed every fleeting second of it.) His little priest was not like most. He was made of good, if not frighteningly naïve, intention and a voraciously curious mind. Being sheltered allowed him to see the best in others.

What you see in me is a mystery…

Elias trusted him. Implicitly. And in his mind, for no reason, other than the boy saw something worthwhile in him. Worthy. And he didn’t want to lose it. Or him. Not when he had grown used to being seen as though he truly existed. A ghost taking form in the shape of a man.

“Customarily upon greeting or parting…” Peter said flatly, taking a long drag of his cigarette to refocus.

“Only then?”

His thoughts turned to Samuel. They had certainly been friendly and kissed often. From the age of thirteen.

“If anyone but you were asking, I would feel compelled to lie.”

Elias straightened, pupils dilating, reply chilled. “Would you lie to me?”

A thumb caressed a dwindling glow, ash drifting. “Would I lie to you about lying to you? Or would I
lie to you in general?”

“Peter.” The wire chair scraped. The boy stood, defensive, face beginning to deepen crimson.

Hell. He knew better than to toy with him. Well natured teasing or otherwise. It upset him. He lived in a world of black and white far too often to understand the nuances of sarcasm or mundane human interaction. Peter tossed the nub of a filter and ground it out furiously with a heel. How many times had the priest told him ‘honesty in all things?’ Demanded he be open and straightforward. The only thing Elias feared more than being abandoned was finding out the person he thought he knew was someone else. A masked intruder. A trickster. What fucking monster had abused his trust so completely to make him this way?

Peter reached out and steered the boy to him by an elbow, touch ginger, knowing anything more than a soften spoken truth would cause him to run. His hand lingered on a waist, bunching thick black linen to trace the indent of a hip, before falling away. “No, sparrow…” He glanced up, remorse flinching a cheek at the fear he saw crystallizing irises. “I would never lie to you. The truth is I find your mouth very pretty and I imagine if the opportunity were to arise it would feel quite soft against mine.”

“You shouldn’t…” A bottom lip trembled. Elias clenched fists, arms straight at his side as he stared down a cobblestone road. His entire body shuddered. “…say things like that to me.”

The older man swallowed, suddenly hoarse. “You’re right. I shouldn’t.”

“Then why did you say it?” Elias demanded.

He dropped his hands and eyes. He couldn’t stand feeling the boy trembling, heart aching, knowing he was not allowed to hold him. Not even a hand. “Because you’re reaction to the suggestion, and mere compliment, is more than inappropriately compelling for me to bring it up. And you asked me to be honest.”

Sounds of the dusty town faded. Chirping birds lulling. Call of vendors muffled by a light breeze. All he could hear was yearning of his pathetic goddamn heart and strain of Elias fighting to dispel the chaotic trauma of emotion Peter evidently stirred within him. His eyes caressed the thrum of a blue pulsing vein in a wrist and imagined how warm it might feel cradled forgivingly against his cheek.

Fair brows twitched. “Are you…asking me as a friend? To kiss me.”

“Elias…” Peter deflated, drooping forward to balance elbows on knees and stared blearily at their shadows passionately entwining.

He could strive to be honest. But not about this. Not with Elias.

No one deserved the noose of his heart’s brittle adoration around their neck.

Someone called out to the priest. A girl about his age. Red hair caught the light as she waved, sunflower in one hand and basket of baked sweets in the other.

The older man’s confession blistered jealousy on his tongue.

I think I’m falling in love with you.
Elias focused on the clink of wedding rings shuffled back and forth on a chain. He shivered, chilled from tips of fingers to toes. He dared not turn keys abandoned in the ignition for more than a few seconds to read the time. Barely enough to chase away the perpetual numb clinging to his face. The gas gauge was at a quarter tank as it was. He had checked five minutes ago. 2:30 am. He had heard nothing. From Peter. Or anyone else. Was he coming? Had the worst happened? What if—

He placed the necklace over his head and buried precious trinkets inside his jacket to keep them safe. He forced his thoughts to churn. To refocus. Not on the howl of blustery wind whipping snow across the windshield of the Pontiac. White of it filling the car with looming dark. To think of something else. Not the chatter of his teeth. Or rustle of his coat as he curled tighter in a passenger seat with nothing to do except wait. He turned his bright red nose against the lining of a collar, bitterness seeping through cold. He seemed to wait wherever the man was concerned. At the beck and call of the Fates and influence of others.

He thought of blue skied summers in Denmark, of the first one he had spent with Peter, warming slightly. Their relationship had developed much like the season. A molasses of sunlight days, slow motion turning to an overbearing heat of confusion and fiery words. Their never quite friendship abruptly exchanged for first frosts and mutual distance. The sunsets had become burnt orange and snow burying rusted leaves lining the streets before Peter had confessed his feelings were more than platonic love.

*  

“Where were you?” Peter demanded, perched in the sill of an open window, a tray of whittled cigarettes spilling over beside bare feet.

Elias hitched his shoulder, stiff from trudging through sleet, aching from the premonition of a different chill permeating his clothes. The room was filled with smoke and brooding. He had quickly learned to read the signs of Peter’s mood over the months.

Today was a bad day.

Guilt weathered the priest’s soft lips to a frown. The turn of Autumn—and ever watchful eyes of Deacon Jensen, growing suspicious of his excuses—had prevented him from coming sooner. He had not been able to call or get word to him. Peter rarely ventured out on his own, not without him, too wary of a city and people he did not know. More terrified of being recognized by those who might know him.

“I…” Elias gnawed a corner of his lip and set down a brown bag filled with snow dusted fresh produce on the floor. His heart fluttered anxiously. The apartment once cast by golden comfort and laughter had grown dark by an aura of fogged blue. “Lilianne—“

Red burned in the dark, exhaled white through nostrils. “Get out.”

“You’re tired. You need rest…”

The priest ignored steely eyes tracking after as he moved towards the kitchen. He unlatched a window a crack and wrinkled his nose at several snowflakes determined to invite themselves in. A bulb sputtered. The refrigerator was nearly bare. By its state, it looked as if Peter hadn’t bothered to fill it for weeks. He shuffled a half carton of spoiling milk and eggs aside to slide the brown bag in. He sensed more than heard the older man lean over him and braced a hand against the door to keep steady, shivering. He radiated heat, not steady like a hearth, but woods caught ablaze and
burning all in its path to ash. Elias swallowed hard and gripped the fridge, fighting the urge to press against Peter.

Smoke curled his ear, arm resting along his outstretched. “Are you deaf and blind? I told you to leave. Go and never come back. Don’t tell me what I need. I never asked for your help.”

Elias closed eyes, shifting to rest his brow in an elbow, weary. “I cannot leave if you block my path.” He thought of the hour and a half, more if the storm continued, to return to the parish. The trains had stopped running. It would have to be on foot. “More so, if you refuse to care for yourself than I am responsible to see you are cared for.”

“I suppose your care is as thorough with me as it is with all your parishioners?” The older man growled darkly, smudging a thumb over a cheekbone. “Tuck them in bed and occasionally crawl in after when you are too tired to return to church. You’ll find no warmth here, priest. Not tonight.”

“You—” The priest ducked under the arm and threw a cold glance back. “—do not get to decide what kind of care I provide. You are not responsible for my person. I am free to spend my time with whomever I wish.”

“While I am to remain here! Out of sight! To be kept and seen at your convenience.” The older man shouted, dirtied dishes sweeping from the counter and clattering in the sink.

"You are not the only one I am charged with looking after! Lilianne needs help with her grandmother and—“ Elias shook snow from his scarf and wound it tightly, headed straight for the door, anger thawing his limbs and setting them with purpose.

“—and she is infatuated with you!” Peter snapped, storming after.

“She is a friend!”

“She is in love with you!”

“That’s not true! I would know if she—“

Strong hands gripped his shoulders. The older man spun him around. Elias landed against the front door. Breath knocked out of him. He cried out in a gasp when it returned. The older man towered, hand planted on a struggling chest to keep him pinned. He automatically turned his cheek and shut his eyes when Peter lifted his hand, steeling himself for a blow. He flattened, shoulders molded a frame, grimacing. He would not cower.

“Saints…” A throat clicked on a swallowed curse. “Do you truly think I would hurt you? Knowing where I come from. You see the goodness in all around you, sparrow. In the hearts of man you see them as they are and not as they wish they were. Why…why then can you not see this?”

The hand on his chest lifted, trembling on the wooden cross hanging around his neck. A thumb drifted a quivering lip, fingertips scattering light freckles from jaw to cheek. Peter cupped the side of his face and lay a forehead against his, breath shaky. Elias winced at the tenderness shuddering his bones worse than any hand had ever struck him. He bit his bottom lip to keep from whimpering. To ask for more.

“Would you…” Hoarse need shook cool against the tip of his nose. “…know if someone loved you? If it was right in front of you… would you be able to see it? Know what to look for. Feel the thrum of it in the way they touched you. Saw their gaze soften, seeing only you in color in a grey crowded street. Heard a wilting sigh of content against your spine at day break.” Charred fingertips skirted copper dust of a hairline. Smoothed a wrinkled brow and moved to wipe pearled tears from long
lashes. “You are my world, Eli, all my sins and goodness resting at your feet. As I kneel at yours...” Bones cracked before rickety floorboards creaked. Peter dropped to his knees and gripped hands, pressing chaste kisses to each jutting wrist bone. “…telling you I am sorry. I am sorry for what I am and all I have done. I am sorry...because I know I am not what you want. Even if you could. Will you forgive me my feelings? Even if my love is unnatural and sinful, could you—“

Amethyst eyes fluttered open. The priest touched crooked knuckles to the older man’s mouth, hushing him instantly. His reprimand to be quiet, not to say such things, blistering his throat. Why should he have to forgive him? Forgive himself? For this thing unfurling inside him, seeking heat and touch, drawn to a timber tenor that shook every time Elias looked at Peter, burned and turned to smoke when they drew close. Was it so wrong...to need forgiveness? Seek penance?

Trembling began with a weak exhale from aching lungs. Silver star light threaded curls falling around a neck bowed painfully low. Brow knitted and waiting for cleansing touch to dispel remorse with the mark of holy water. He lifted a chin and searched millstone grey spilling from churning tides filling the weary soul looking up. Drowning. He drew the older man up by an elbow, pained to see him on his knees when he belonged closer to the gentle embrace of heaven. To him. They twined together as easily as boughs of wilting trees nestled close to keep wind from stealing sun burned leaves. He felt safest here, inside sure arms, a strong heartbeat lulled to reserved wonder against him. He reluctantly turned when a mouth moved to kiss him.

The priest leaned into comforting pressure of a palm, lips brushing lifelines instead of promise dust rose hovering close, whispering, “Please. I’m tired now. I need time. Time to think. Can we sleep?”

Corners of a mouth twitched sadly, gaze lowered. “I will give you all you need.”

“Will you hold me?” Elias asked softly, fingertip finding the solemn v of an upper lip, moving where he was not meant to kiss.

Agony twisted shadows on Peter’s face, becoming vacant, fragile soul sinking beneath wide depths of irises with a hard blink. He shook his head, harshly exhaling. “No.”

The room darkened, moon dipping behind a flurry of clouds. Resounding chafe of snow whispering goodbyes.

Peter caught Elias by a hand, grip crushing action and intent. “What do you want?”

“I don’t know what I want.”

“Yes, you do.” The older man released him and turned. “You just don’t want it to be me.”

Eyes stinging, the priest shuffled to his small cot pushed in a corner of the bedroom and fought a surge of tears threatening. Peter was his friend. His only friend. His dearest companion. He struggled to free the scarf from his throat, choking slightly before wrenching it off. He pitched it to the floor. Another wave of tightness crested his chest. Why couldn’t he breathe? The only one to love him. Love? He couldn’t breathe. God, is that what this was? It hurt. His heart hurt. War worn from teachings and scripture dimming his longing. He tore at buttons on a scratchy wool jacket. His wooden cross jangled and caught him in the eye. He ripped it off, fraying cord snapping, and hurled it with a sharp cry. It was swallowed by darkness lurking underneath an aluminum twin bed.

“I did not say...” Peter came from behind and held hard at first, embrace softening when Elias crumbled. The priest twisted and hid his face against a chest. The older man patiently lured shaking arms from a damp jacket, pressing a soft kiss to the knob of a spine to soothe. He cradled two small hands in a larger palm and held them above the priest’s hammering heart. “I would not lie beside
you and watch over you in sleep. I did not say I would leave.” He tugged off rain boots worn thin in the soles, catching the priest around a waist when he swayed, chaffing thin legs through robes. “But I can’t hold you. Not now. Now that you know I feel for you. Do you understand?”

The priest half turned his face to the shield of a shoulder, lips trembling. His feet shuffled intent to continue turning, face the man holding him, and find out if the promises he made had cooled or still remained warm. He didn’t understand why Peter’s touch had changed. It was different. Tender and heated by a need Elias did not understand, wasn’t allowed to consider, or know. Why did it have to change? Why couldn’t they be as they were? Fingers flexing at his waist sent a blush bleeding down his face. Surge of want to be touched skin to skin shivered through him, guilt and shame a tremor chasing after it. He tipped his nose to a forearm, biting the inside of his cheek until it split.

He wasn’t to want. He wasn’t supposed to want this.

Scooping him up, the older man placed Elias on the feather mattress and stooped to pick up the abandoned crucifix. He returned it to an upturned palm without looking and sagged against an end of the bed. The priest clenched his cross till the imprint turned red in his palm. Branded by its teachings. Choked by the weight round his neck of all deemed proper and right and good. Elias studied the bow of a forgiving spine, strong arms limply containing a growing pain inside a heaving chest, and reached out. He wanted to dispel haunting clouding grey eyes. He wanted to touch him. Differently. Like Peter now touched him. Lift the hair from his nape and press his mouth to the underside of a jaw. He moved with hesitant certainty of knowing. Knowing he wanted to kiss him. His fingers trailed a damp cheek, followed the slope of a tightly knitted charcoal neckline and slipped beneath to touch rigid beginnings of a scar on a shoulder. Peter flinched and shifted to a far edge of the bed, drawing folds of a sweater close to his neck and chest as if chilled.

“May I…” The priest’s tiny voice faltered, feathers crinkling as he crawled closer. He did not want to think of never being held again. “May I hold you?”

Fair lashes flicked up to reveal a glimmer of rainwater tears. “Only if you think it will pain me less to remember your embrace when you are no longer here.”

“I’m not leaving.”

“Not yet.”

"I'm here."

"You're not mine to keep, sparrow. You belong to Him."

* 

Eyelids creased by sleep struggled to open. Ears pricking to register sound. Heavy footsteps twanged eerily up a steep incline of the garage. Spike of hopeful anticipation uncoiled stiff limbs. The car door creaked. Elias pushed it open to peer cautiously out. Blustering wind stung the side of his face. Someone in a hunter green parka with the hood pulled low marched by, turning the corner and disappearing out of sight.

The furious screech of a driver side door opening whirled him around.

Glint of teeth and rusted razor blades peered from the dark. “I thought I told you—“ A roar began to shake cement walls.
Elias sputtered on the leap of a heart in his throat. He tore across the center console, wail seeping. He banged his left knee on the gearshift. Caught his elbow on the steering wheel. Tore a bit of leather on the seat as his shoe twisted, launching himself forward and out of the car. He collided against chaffing zipper teeth and musk of leather warped tight across a torso. A duffle bag dropped to cement. Boots skidding fresh lines in the snow. Window pane and metal rattling as the force sent Peter sprawling against a parked Mercedes. Low vibrating moans of pain becoming harsh gasps. Legs buckled and the priest sank, sobs—of anger, terror, relief—echoing like gunshots off the parking garage.

Chilled fingertips traced cropped hair, curve of a head and hands clenched a snow soaked thigh. His boiling blood turned white on winter air.

Peter stared at Elias clinging to him, wet cries of a blue hued mouth leaving rings against denim, grip bruising as if to moor them there. “Oh thank God, thank God.”

The older man stooped and hooked hands beneath arms to dislodge him. Sobs turning to frightened shrieks. The priest clawed a leg, coiling tighter, melting snow seeping through clothing and freezing to his chest like tears on his cheek.

“All right, Eli…” Wintry lips tinged violet touched the crown of his head. “All right.”

With a labored sigh, Peter struggled to shuffle forward and hurled the duffle bag to the front seat of the Pontiac. He hobbled to the left gripping the car’s frame and fell on the driver’s seat sideways. He managed to drag his right leg in, arching against the chair to ease a fresh bruise pooling beneath his shoulder blade clipped by a side mirror. He was shaking from exhaustion. He wanted nothing more than sleep. Home. He wanted to go home. Bolt them on the other side of the front door and ensure neither of them left it, or one another, ever again. He closed his eyes a moment and pulled off a snarl with a frigid palm. He commanded harsh features to melt like snow flaking off the lapels of his jacket. He groaned, bent over the middle console, muscles straining from ankle to shoulder from the weight of the boy clutching his leg. The passenger door fell shut. He gripped the steering wheel and leaned out, shoving a forearm beneath knees dirtied by the ground and crusted sludge on a black painted frame. His wrist scraped pavement. He grunted, hauling Elias in his lap, and slammed the door as soon as tips of both their shoes cleared its space.

The engine stammered to a start before releasing a valiant growl. Shivering, Elias tore at clasps and zippers, burrowing deep to find safety inside leather and skin. The older man wrapped an arm tight around the small body for a moment then reached for the gear shift. A small whine drew across the brand below his collarbone. Peter dipped his mouth to a chilled neck in quiet thanks, beginnings of a prayer dying, and drove them home.

* 

Crouched in the dark of a frigid living room, Peter smoothed eyelashes matted to bruised circles and watched Elias sleep on the overstuffed couch he had laid him on. He had dragged an old quilt from the hall closet and draped it carefully over him. He traced a brow furrowed by some unpleasant dream or memory. He kissed salt from dried tear tracks on cheeks, gazing at a frown cracked and taut from thirst. It reminded him of putting the boy to sleep in their first run down apartment, passing many a night looking at every delicate feature, eyes tracing where his fingers and mouth wanted to touch. Overwhelming loneliness, of standing out in the cold, settled over him. He knew where to find home. All he had to do was trace a path of pale wind chaffed skin. Brief flickering of a worn smile appeared as Elias stirred. He dropped his hands to knees. He remained where he was, as he had learned to be for years, watching warm safety pouring from windows with feet planted firmly on
the other side of locked doors.

Watery lilac flicked expectantly around the room, questions hoarse. “Where are the dogs? And Penelope?”

It was fitting really. For the first words Elias to say to him in days be ones asking after any comfort that wasn’t him.

“Daniel left a note. He has them. Heat went out,” The older man explained dimly, hoisting himself up by an arm of the chair.

Sad eyes fell. The boy nodded. A full body shiver sent him curling in couch cushions.

Peter shucked off his leather jacket and held it out, sigh clipped. “Take this.”

Elias stared quietly. Leather crinkled audibly, their fingers making the briefest contact then separated. The older man hunched against cold and made his way to the front door before he could look back to see if there was any hope written in eyes asking him to stay. He went out pretending a howl of wind was the priest sweetly calling his name. A gust nearly toppled him in a snowdrift gathering round the little cottage. Grunting a curse, he picked across the front lawn to the garage where a pile of chopped logs were stacked. Snow filled his boots. He rifled through the second layer then the third till he was elbows deep in scratches and frozen white. The wood was varying degrees of damp and crumbling moss since turned brown.

He braced a drain pipe, casting a glance over his shoulder at the cottage completely dark and wondered if the light Elias once had for him had too gone out. He shuttered eyelids over rising tears. He wanted a cigarette. He wanted to be held more. He stayed until thin layers of his t-shirt were covered in ice and his hands went numb. Black tattoos on his biceps becoming harsh red, welling reminder of isolation in New York City’s winters. Another place, another time, another moment, he couldn’t return to or reverse. He stared at dirtied gauze loose on his palm, covering the burn from the taser. He tore it off and left it in the snow. Its healed remains would leave a white scar. What kind of crescents would be left on his husband’s body? His eyes misted. An even more hideous reminder of his failings. He gathered several logs, drawn to the impossible hope of kindling a spark. He paused at the front door to stamp boots, socks and feet soaked. Lace curtains shifted near the living room window, spectral aura of lives passed, receding.

Peter leaned in the doorway shivering and listened to the drip of clothes on hardwood floors. His leather jacket was folded on an edge of the couch. Elias stood reserved by the window, hands clasped loosely behind his back, washed grey by a moon wrestling storm clouds. He touched wedding bands hanging at his neck, glassy gaze mournful. He had changed to soft jersey bottoms and an oversized teal crewneck sweater stained by oil paint from a brush swiping lines clean on a sleeve. Elias was a creature of habit. Sooner to wrap himself in Peter’s clothes than ask to be folded in his arms when they had a disagreement. And it was a disagreement. Deeper than that. A discord in the harmony enveloping their home. Readily seen by straight backed posture and crossed arms as if an invisible thread vibrated through the boy and held him up. Glint of it mirroring Peter’s pain when his husband glanced back, fighting a tide of emotions, both his and not his.

The older man marched passed, desperate to tear off whatever battered emotions had shown to keep Elias safe from it, from him. He crouched next to a wood stove, setting the logs at its base in hopes of drying them out. He swung open an iron door and idly picked through burnt remains of its insides, mumbling, “Wood is too damp to burn.”

He saw a disappointed sigh fog the window in reply. Lips a pale blue. Another shiver.
Reaching for the duffle discarded, Peter dumped out the contents. Stacks of money, receipts, and crumpled airline ticket stubs littered the floor. He could feel Elias watching, questions and conversations they needed to have smudging shadows of the room. He picked up a lighter and three neatly bound bits of money. He tossed the bills in the mouth of the wood burner. The tip of a flame ate through handwritten vows of Hannibal’s letter before catching fire and joined the bills.

Fire crackled unsteadily, embers growing to a heated glow. Peter stripped off his wet t-shirt, crossed the floor, and pulled Elias against his front. The boy watched lips graze his cheek and shoulder through a reflection of falling snow. He kissed a wrist, a forearm. Blood vessels thick and blue despite the cold. He lay his ear against a spine to listen to a heart, embrace loose around a chest and waist. He could have him like this. Lift him. Push up a sweater and press a pliant body to the glass. Gentle. Never speaking. Just breath.

Some possession, some writhing demon, placed a covetous hand between the boy’s legs and loosed his tongue against the shell of an ear. “Did the three of you ever…?”

“I don’t want to talk about this.” Elias wrenched away and flung himself on the couch, facing its suede cushions.

“I do.” Peter bristled, shedding clothes as he followed and crawled underneath the quilt, forcefulness of his tone and body foreign, accusatory and searching for a fight. All the gentleness he had promised frozen. “Did you have sex with them?”

“No.” Elias said emphatically.

“Did you want to?” Peter rolled on an elbow, gaze fixed on hues of a fleeting sunset melting snow from a pale profile. “Elias… did you want to?”

The boy shifted a wrist across his nose, knees drawn to his chest, reply muffled and a minute too late. “I didn’t know what I wanted.”

“You said the same thing about me. So you did?” He replied with a soft snort.

“No.”

Inching closer, the older man curved an arm across the body curling tighter and brought his mouth to a throat, eyes closed. Breathed in. Faint turpentine not quite as strong his husband’s natural scent, warmed icing on a cake, becoming fevered. “Your mouth is sweet when you lie. Did you want Will?”

“Please, I don’t want to talk about Will anymore.” The boy tried to squirm free, huffing frustration when a palm smothered further protest.

Peter snaked a hand between thighs, nails scratching a bare stomach tensing. “Yeah, you do.”

He tried not to question why a hairline began to flush. Or what caused the priest to slightly shift knees apart as he often did when arousal began to stir. His body temperature rising each second. Telling himself not to ask if it was their closeness, the mention of Will, or vivid imagery of three bodies in motion he had dared to breathe life to. He wanted to want Elias as he always had—effortlessly, maddening, pained by the passion—when how the two of them ended up in bed, from his own devices or a few choice photographs on his cell phone, their private game, hadn’t mattered. His jealousy a fleeting colorful impulse of an overactive imagination and run of the mill paranoia.

Now continents and time zones away in an empty room of an abandoned cottage the uncertainty ‘will we ever be truly alone or mended’ chaffed wind stung skin raw.
“You’re freezing.” A petulant pout pulled behind fingertips.

A cold nose nuzzled a neck, blood and temperament beginning to thaw. “Then warm me…”

Peter began lazily kissing a blushing nape, deepening its shade till it seeped beneath the quilt. The older man drew a pearl studded earlobe between his lips, tonguing lightly at the prick of its post. A hot sigh rushed his palm. He covered his husband’s mouth gently, picturing the rasp of it on his skin, holding in every gasp. Stretching and molding each shuddered exhale of a slender torso. He sucked and lapped a pulse before catching its jump between teeth. Shoulder blades arched. An insistent palm pressed a stomach, digging soft flesh hoping it might uncoil the boy trying to remain guarded, fight what came most naturally to them, drawn to the discovery of the other. Peter groaned when the rest of Elias—every delicate curve and peaked angle—followed. His breath caught, swell of cheeks and thighs cradling the weight of pooling desire. He rocked lightly forward. Moans vibrated his palm. He tucked the priest closer and reached for a knee, drawing the leg it belonged to up and rested it on his. He pushed his hand over a rising rib cage, lingered at the dip of a waist and hip, and stretched long fingers below a navel. Blunt nails traced draped fabric outlining a swollen shaft tortuously slow, sensing its enticing quiver and warmth, promise of closeness.

“Oh sparrow. My dearest little bird, I’ve missed you…” Peter nipped the underside of a jaw, voice becoming rough as his mind, his mouth, his tongue was filled with only the boy shaking apart. He fumbled the ribbon on a thick jersey waistband, sweet scent filling lungs and grazed a velvety head beaded wet. “I want you.”

Elias startled from reverie of sensation and scrambled taking the quilt with him, violet eyes flashing, whisper startled, fractured. He clutched it round his body like talisman to ward off spirits. “No.”

“Why?” The older man rolled on his back and pinched a curse, head dropping and stared blankly at flames on the ceiling. His hands, heart, all of him, welled emptiness, rejection. “I want to comfort you. Be near you. Why can’t I have that?”

Tears warbled a reply. “You want to manipulate me. Again. I can’t say no to you.”

His mouth flinched, reaching for defenses he had shed beneath their seeking bodies moments ago. Finding them thinner and thinner as the years drew on. He cracked a neck, pop hollow, gaze falling to the side. Elias was a tight ball again, sheen of sweat pale and opalescent, reaching for curls to tug over his face no longer there. Peter too grieved the loss. A shield to keep from seeing visible pain turning irises opal. Dotted navy and white quilting slid the protective garb from shoulders leaving freckles deserving seals of a kiss defenseless. The boy shivered and wiped fresh tears.

Peter’s tone flattened, whisper detached. “You just did. Is it so wrong to want to give us a little pleasure after what we’ve been through? Or is that too to be added to my growing list of faults?”

“It’s not just pleasure for me, it never has been, and you know it!” A shout had Elias on his feet, face red, arms pin straight. “You want the connection it brings. Because you know it makes me vulnerable. It is the one time I am completely receptive to feeling all of you, helpless to experience every thought and emotion that is not my own.”

The older man tipped his cheek, frustration edging tears to his vision. Hating that he needed. Hated choking it down. Hated himself for how true the priest’s words were.

“Sex is the one way you know how to force my understanding and forgiveness, Peter. I am not ready to see this from any viewpoint than my own. I am not ready to forgive you!”

He waited. Soles of feet storming off. Braced for the slam of a bedroom door. Jumped even after it
stopped rumbling rafters of the little cottage. He slid to his knees, rested puffy eyes against harsh peaks of knuckles, then dragged the quilt soundlessly down the hall.

Peter paused in front of the first bedroom door. Paint peeled from a corner. He heard the boy crying into a pillow. He would be hoarse by morning, fight lying sallow underneath dim eyes and heavy limbs. He reached for the crystal doorknob. Crying quieted. Elias felt him there. He cast a mournful glance to the room at the far end of the cottage, half heartedly willing his legs to take him there. The hall stretched out before him. Corridor growing impossibly long. Taking him too far from the one he loved. Lying down in front of the door, Peter rested his knees and forehead against a hushing breeze carrying the scent of vanilla candles.

He wrapped the blanket around him, up over his nose and eyes, deep beneath its canopy of stitching and murmured, “I don’t want forgiveness, Elias. I just want you to hold me.”

Chapter End Notes

You Wanted to Look for Help, I Wanted to Sit And Wait to Be Rescued x Flatsound

If this could stop
I don’t think I’d want it to
I built my life around watching everything you do
It still feels like you can hear me when I talk to you
You just don't respond
Chapter 42

Chapter Summary

I'm still committed to this work and to you, dear readers.

Welcome back. (To angst, soft boys mourning, and an abysmal lack of communication.)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In a shaft of golden light pouring from a kitchen window, a willowy figure stood, arms crossed. “You shouldn’t be drinking.”

Peter hunched at the table, smoothing a hand across his scalp, tattoos shining like war paint winding down his arms and toned torso. His cheeks protruded shadow. Lips pale quartz. A statue. Stoic. Formidable. Able to weather any storm unscathed, unharmed, unaffected. Ember laughter rasped then died out. “He speaks.”

Silence returned.

Gunmetal eyes flicked, solemn, lingering on a glass tumbler. Peter poured another and swallowed ruefully. “Have you simply come to chastise me?”

Elias inhaled a slow breath and exhaled, emptying out a pent up scream, conversations they needed to have and simply weren’t.

“Am I always to come second to your God’s insistence on dismissing my existence, priest, or are you hoping to pray your demon away?”

The guileless question flared a frightening rage to life in his chest. Strand of patience and understanding snapping. Cupboards and drawers slammed open and shut one by one, kitchen a cacophony of screams and selfish demands for apology, mourning the loss of family and something fundamental between them. Copper mixing bowls toppled clashing to the counter. An open package of hidden cigarettes fell to the floor. Elias slammed them on the table. Peter’s knuckled turned white round the glass, scarred shoulder flinching, corded tendons standing stark in his neck, an automatic response to violence.

Apology formed on the priest’s lips, guilt drooping the corners, turning to ash. He knew better. He was better than this.

Peter poured another scotch, decanter shaking and tossed it back, wincing. He palmed the package tenderly, glance wistful, and pushed it back, rasping, “I’m trying to quit.”

“Now?” The priest began laughing, shrill, becoming near hysterical. The absurdity of it. Peter without a smoke was like him without a cross, neither of any true help, an afterthought, an accessory, a crutch. “Now! You’re trying to quit now? Are you simply trading one vice for another then?”

Startled silver eyes hardened. “Sure you aren’t the one in need of a fix?”
Elias clawed the package open. A black Bic lighter fell out. A menthol cigarette burned before it was thrust forward.

“No,” The older man repeated coldly, gaze lingering on the indent lips made in the filter, longing for a different addiction.

Churlish defiance blew smoke in his face. “Why not.”

The tumbler banged the table. Scotch seeped a golden ring beneath glass. Kitchen chair grinding, Peter snatched the cigarette, breaking it in half. It sputtered. Crushed by a palm. Pitched to the sink. The older man walked Elias back in to the counter, eyes glossed obsidian, visible hunger shining. Hands roughed arms shakily, encircled wrists, and held them against the bite of formica. “Because what I need is you!”

Elias turned his cheek and glared at smoke trailing from the sink, quiet.

Rigid nostrils flared. Fingertips loosening, an aching caress, before slipping from wrists. Knuckles blanching as Peter braced on the counter, arms on either side of Elias, request strangled and directed at the floor. “Please hold me. I need—”

He isn’t able to give voice to the rest. Doesn’t need to. Elias knows what he needs. To feel wanted, by the only one who ever wanted him, the way he is now, and stayed. A simple act of comfort. It would be easy. A hand on his. Fingers splayed at his waist. Skin to skin. Fleeting contact like cool beads of a rosary pressed to lips to pretend the forgiveness of God was imbued within. Strong knees begin to shake.

He can’t. He won’t.

Elias bit the inside of his cheek. “No. I said no and I mean it.”

There was a sharp in take of breath. Shoulders lurched. Grinding lungs loosened pitiful low moans. Peter sagged to his knees, balling the front of heather blue cashmere sweater, and pillowed his face on the boy’s stomach, whispering, “Don’t forgive me. I’m not asking. Not after all I have done. You want me to beg? I’ll beg.”

The softened sweater stretched, becoming warm then damp, sticking to his stomach as the older man wept. Elias fought rising tears and forced himself to stare blankly, aching heart desperate to comfort. Peter was fragile in his hands, wounds lanced deep, weak and easily brought to his knees. Coming apart. When Peter was hurt—truly, irrevocably lost to the pain like the first time he fractured and choked out ‘You are the reason I can’t breathe’—he whispered. Terrified. To hear himself. To be heard.

“I accept you’re right to be angry with me. To blame me. I hate myself, for all I let happen, to you, to us. Can’t you accept I need you all the same?”

“To them?” The priest asked, sudden chill draining tears from his eyes, filling his mouth and spilling out. “What you did to them.”

The older man slumped, grip loosening, tears sliding from neck to chest. “If you would have listened —”

His hands shot out before he had time to think, sending Peter sprawling with a wild shove. He wouldn’t, couldn’t, hear the rest. Entertain for a second the implication. Heard it, deafening, the rumble seconds before a building collapsed.
“If you would have listened...none of this would have happened.”

When Elias was frightened—overwhelmed by static of his empathy crackling and forcing him to see, to feel, experiencing every outcome of a moment all at once. Panic clawing lungs and skin. Needing to be crushed inside a reassuring embrace, but too far gone to voice it—he lashed out.

“If I didn’t take risks I would have never met you! I did what I needed to, what was right! Which is far more than I can say for you. What you did was impulsive and selfish and I don’t want to hear your excuses! That it was to protect me!” The priest howled, teetering unsteadily. “I am not anyone’s burden! If that’s how you see me, maybe you should leave.”

Peter caught Elias by a wrist, pitiful gaze locked to the floor, tears trickling a sharp chin. “Please.”

His wrist burned. Simple touch searing need, Peter vulnerable, trembling, bone deep, to be touched, reassured he was wanted, needed in return.

The priest flung him off, raced down the hall and slammed a bedroom door. He didn’t want to be needed. Didn’t want to need. What had those feelings ever given him except pain and confusion and an endless longing for more? He ground palms against his temples. Didn’t want anything except for this noise in his head to quiet. Tightness in his chest to release. Room churning. He wanted to be alone.

Except he didn’t.

* Floorboards creaked. The room dark once more. Though a thicket of trees the last remnants of a sun bled on the horizon. Heat rattled steadily through a grate on the floor. Elias stirred. He rolled over, chaffing crusted tears. A hesitant shadow shifted underneath the door. Slid quietly through an opening, lingered on the threshold, and seeped underneath cashmere blankets. He closed eyes, focused on the pretense of being asleep.

Breath amber warm lingered on a shoulder and pressed loneliness to a neck, inhaling his scent. “I’ve tired of this forced separation. I cannot always put your needs above my own. I need this. You. Near.” Peter eased carefully to the mattress, clasped hands safely to his chest to keep them to his self and curled on his side. “I haven’t slept in three days, sparrow. I can’t without you.” Chilled toes touched his ankles then retreated. “Let me stay a little while then ask me to leave. I’ll go.”

Soft breathing touched his shoulder. Mist lingered at the slope of his neck. He shifted, cold feet twisting a roll of blankets, frown deepening. Peter inched to provide more space. The priest released the stranglehold he had on a down pillow. He glanced back. Half lidded forlorn eyes dropped. A bare torso shivered. The older man tensed, shoulders jutting, fingers curling, a wolf cowering in the dark.

Elias reached for Peter. The older man flinched, warily jerking, glistening gaze stuck on a small hand settling on the ones held to his chest. He tried again. Slower. Index finger touching a shoulder, tracing the length of a muscled arm, then cupped loose fists gently, coaxing, guilt riddled frown forming a breathed apology. He pried locked fingers apart one by one. Peter began trembling as he wriggled inside his arms and rolled them to their side. They sighed, shape of their bodies molding. A forearm tentatively draped his stomach, fingertips lightly kneading indentations of ribs. He drew a thumb along a straining tendon to a wrist and squeezed fingers calloused by the drag of an axe. The older man smelled of burning firewood, lover and provider a note of aged autumn. Peter burrowed, gratitude rumbling, arm wrapped tight to his front. Traced a path of lazy circles from stomach, to hip, to spine.
“C’mere then if you’re tired,” Elias murmured drowsily, eyes heavy, lulled by the heat of their bodies entwined.

The older man nuzzled a shoulder blade. Kissed the curve of an ear. Elias settled on his back, eyes closing, fading underneath fingers drawing down the neck of his sweater. Lips tentatively mouthed love and thanks above a heart. Peter lay his full weight on top of the boy, knees then thighs tracing legs, stomach and chest following, shoulders and a chin buried in the crook of a throat. Weak content sighed, pressure and weight grounding clamoring emotions waking. Chilled palms dove beneath a sweater and flexed to a rhythm of lungs expanding, embrace tightening.

Elias fell asleep snuffling content. He woke what seemed a lifetime later, dazed, to find a pitch black room and a cold, empty bed.

Why couldn’t he have asked Peter to stay?

*

The older man left. Thought he still could. Like he used to. Spare them both the torment of a goodbye. Walked blindly with half hearted purpose of freezing to death. Heavy snow painting clothes white. Fists shaking. Stumbled twenty minutes. Tripped over a rotting log and landed on knees. Ice cold spreading from palms to wrists, knees to thighs, stunned. Then he began to weep. Bloodied, harsh noises sending black tipped wings to the sky. Tree branches rustling as startled birds returned when it quieted. Fingers burrowed through snow, found dirt, nails sinking in earth, as if the pulse of all living things slumbering would ease sobs wrenching from a mouth, trail of spit melting ice.

A single crow swooped from above and tapped effortlessly across a mossy log. What was it like to move through the world without leaving the cruelty of a mark? It cocked its head judgmentally to the side, ruffled feathers, and shrieked at him to leave before destroying its home too.

He returned to the cottage chilled. Elias was not in their room when he crept in for a hot shower. Or when he pulled on layer after layer of clothing in the dark. He moved quietly down the hall to the bedroom at the end, peered through the crack, found the silhouette of the boy bent on knees in the dark, fingers pressed to lips, praying.

He stood beneath a dull yellow buzzing porch light and lit a cigarette to soothe a blistered throat. A pitiful consolation prize. His first in nearly a week. Lasting three blissful minutes. Ending abruptly when the priest appeared, took it—and the cashmere scarf round his neck—and placed the filter in his own mouth.

Inhale deep, exhale the only warmth left. “These kill you know.”

“Yeah.” Grey eyes flicked to the left. The priest was bundled in a winter parka, woolen socks, and leather boots zipping up calves. He swallowed where are you going and peered up at a half moon. “That was the general idea.”

The screen door tapped shouted arguments and begged forgiveness in their silence. Elias moved to step off the porch. The older man caught him by an elbow and tugged lightly. Adjusted the zipper of the boy’s jacket and lowered a knit wool cap lower to cover small ears. He squeezed mitten hands and kissed a brow—a quiet agreement they had made never to part again without a sign of affection. His husband stiffened, arms stiff, recoiling. Not returning the kiss, smoke curling from nostrils. He exchanged ‘please stay’ for a forced exhale of vapor and let go.
The boy disappeared beyond a black tree line from the safety of their porch. A cherry glow. Then nothing. His chest grew tight, lungs wanting to call out. Wait. Bones rattling, run, pursue, protect. He licked a dry patch the filter left on his bottom lip. Hoped it was far more gentle to Elias. That they might yet share tenderness where both their lips had touched. He went inside, frozen, and clinging to that hope. Thoughts turning to God. Bitterly amused by the cruelty of being abandoned by his grace, unconditional love, since birth over the course of a lifetime.

What good was prayer if not a goddamn person was listening?

*

Dawn began to break gold across the sky. Tires crunched heavy snow and rolled to a stop near an abandoned fountain swallowed by withered ivy and ice. An engine died. A driver side door swung open and banged shut. Peter leaned on the hood, expression grim, staring down a looming mausoleum. He chewed the filter of an unlit cigarette, searching mirrored windows for apparitions. Neither he nor Elias had returned to the Lecter home since seeing reports of their capture. Not after he locked doors and hid the key, too weary to track dogs and boy to find them asleep in the master closet, clinging to faint scented clothes.

Grey huddled on a stoop, eyes downcast, head tipped wearily on stone siding. Clouds of breath the only sign of life. The priest had been gone four hours. Had walked three miles through knee deep snow and braved dropping temperatures to curl up against a shrine. The scarf wound over his head and face like hooded vestments of his church. Sleeve of a parka rolled and used as a pillow. His nose, poinsettia red was running. His ears and cheeks even more vivid. He vibrated cold, knees tucked to a chest, arms tight around them. Eyes rimmed puffy.

Saints, when was the last time I saw you smile?

The older man placed cigarette and car keys in a jean pocket. “Figures I would find you here,” Peter noted gruffly, purposefully stamping down the drive in an effort to be loud, make his presence known.

Elias started, dazed, caught between dream and reality. He registered the voice. Outline of the figure addressing him. Violet eyes dimmed. The entirety of the boy’s soul wilted underneath a glare of blinding snow.

Am I why you left? Or were you looking for them?

“Shouldn’t be out here.” Peter stepped over Elias, hands jammed in pockets to hide his hands. They vibrated betrayal, desperate to cradle the boy to his chest and care for him. He reached for a glass lamp with an empty bulb socket above one of the windows and opened a latch. “We are going to talk, Elias, whether you want to or not. Not now. When you’re ready.” He brushed a metal ring. He pulled keys out and returned to the front door, measuring each step, maintaining distance between them. “Come inside.”

Cold breath plumed defiance. “No.”

Peter sighed, chilled breath frosting the key in the lock. He cracked his neck and side stepped the boy, sinking in snow. He crouched, palms up, searching blood shot eyes staring at something in the distance. He removed a glove and lowered the scarf, announcing intent, the way Elias used to. “I’m going to touch you, okay?” He gingerly cupped a frigid cheek. He ground teeth, alarm spiking, before forcing his expression to remain neutral. “You’ll make yourself ill. I am asking you to please come in. Let me bring you a cup of tea and light a fire.” His murmur, gentle, pleading, was shrugged off. Elias stiffened watching the horizon. “He isn’t coming, little one. There’s no need to freeze to
death waiting.”

Bluish lips twisted cruel, slap of a closed palm on a face echoing. “Fuck you!”

Peter lost his balance, hit the ground cursing, pain radiating, side of his face throbbing. His right ankle twisted. Stunned, the older man lay breathless—thinking of being down on his knees weeks prior begging Elias not to leave—and watched snowflakes drift with the vague sensation of not existing. His chest deflated. What was the point?

“You fucking asshole.” Soft nostrils flared anger, diamond nose ring winking. Samuel pushed a shaking hand through hair, ducking beneath a sweeping beam of light to hide smarting tears. “You don’t care about anyone, but yourself, Moreau!”


“Fuck you!”

“Sam. Samuel, wait, I—“

Exactly three men had loved him his entire life. He wasn’t worthy of a single one.

I'm the problem.

He struggled to stand, pushing at a burgeoning headache. “Yeah, you’re right. You're always right. Fuck me. My mistake.”

He pulled the boy’s crucifix from a coat pocket. Watched its glimmering fall. Limped around Elias. Unlocked the door. Stamped snow furiously off boots. Left the priest on the stoop to decide.

I’ll only hurt you. Isn’t that what I do?

If he would have looked back, he would have seen tears filling upturned palms, horrified lilac fixed on them as if they were foreign, belonged to someone else.

He tried not to look at anything. Not the photographs or paintings or furniture. The shadows here breathed. Everything as the Lecters had left it. His stomach clenched. His eyes lifted slightly to stairs, half expecting to see Hannibal looming, arms crossed, rebuke staining lips crimson. Could a place echo the presence of memory? Peter ducked a shaft of dust shining from a skylight, feet drawing him down the hall. It was only when he reached the study he realized what he was looking for.

Will.

Shadows exhaled.

“Peter?” Will crouches cautiously, fingers scratching a Persian rug for balance, and touches stiff fingers interlocked on the nape of neck.

Peter lets out a harsh breath, pressing to a corner of bookcases, shrinking, head tucked between knees. “Don’t.”

Will folds a leg and tucks it beneath the other, shoulders touching, wincing when the man begins to violently tremble. His voice, lulling calm, hushed and soft like fingertips brushing a thick golden
coat, skirts firelight on the blue of their bare toes. “It’s all right, Peter, you’re safe.” He places an arm round broad shoulders, increasing pressure of the caress by degrees. Mapping raised scars by their thickness and depth by touch alone. Feels the exact moment, lungs sympathetically wrenching and stalling inside his own chest, before Peter begins weeping ragged agony. “You’re safe,” He repeats softly. “A nightmare. They aren’t here.” His eyes close, well of pain catching, scars shivering. “They can’t hurt you anymore. It’s over. You’re whole now. Safe.”

“I don’t feel whole. They took so much. Piece by piece. I don’t think I’ll ever get it back.” Peter wails, curling tighter, raking blonde curls and wrenching them taut on his scalp. “W-w-what if I’m the nightmare? What if it n-never s-s-stops? I thought he was one of them when I woke. I hurt him. I hurt him, Will, held him down, god, he didn’t even cry out, trusted me to come back. What if I didn’t? What if I—”

“Shh…”

Will smooths clenched fingers, prying till they loosen, holds a chilled hand in his. Motion near French doors draws his attention. Elias stands in its frame, hair tousled, large t-shirt slung to knees, pale, pained, empathy brimming tears. The older man shakes his head and juts a chin to signal for him to go back to bed. Hannibal eases from shadow, dark gaze flicking once to where Will sits, registering the turn of events in a calculated sweep. His eyes fall to palm prints blooming beneath frayed stitching. His mouth tightens, expression melting, nothing replacing it. Elias jumps when Hannibal places a guiding palm on his waist. The boy looks up, shakes his head, a request to stay. The older man regards him a moment and leads him away.

He will ice the wound. Cradle a tear soaked face. Quiet the priest. Put him to bed in their room and send him to the cottage for a week. Both Peter and Elias consider this a punishment, to be separated, each staying with their respective counsel; Will keeping Elias company, Peter under Hannibal’s watchful eye and intense psychiatric care. This is their shared routine now, whenever the episodes surface, knowing peace will return to their home, until the next one, praying for them to be less frequent, steadily committed for the day they stop.

“I know nightmares,” Will murmurs when they are alone, drawing Peter from the wall to embrace him, lips touching the crown of a head. “You are not a nightmare, Peter. You are hunted by them. It never stops. But they will become quieter…in time. Fight. Don’t let them take your life. Elias needs you. Do it for him.”

Folding on the chaise, a pitiful gaze cast over the empty room covered by dust and veils of plastic. He lingered on the fireplace. Glass aged and cloudy, gold tinged rust. Logs ashy and rotting from neglect. The hearth, in his mind, the center of the home. Where families gathered and stories were told. Knitting their lives around one another basking in a glow of love.

There was no glow. Or light. Only empty, stifling grey, abandoned and forgotten.

Just structures falling to inevitable disrepair.

He whispered to them, tears flowing, dripping over fists. “Please help me. I don’t know what else to do. I don’t know how to be what he needs.”

Neither shadow or apparitions answered.

*
Elias tiptoed downstairs at dusk, cashmere quilt dragging. He leaned out on the banister and caught a glimpse of Peter at the dining room table. Steam rose from a chipped ivory mug in a left hand. Something scratched parchment paper sluggishly. The last stair creaked loudly. A quill pen tipped slightly, pause tense, before sketching again.

“Can we…” Elias drew in his bottom lip, chewing, dampening an anxious tremor. He tried again. “Can we talk?”

Haunted eyes tipped his direction and fell.

Elias came to stand at Peter’s right. He slid free of the thick quilt and laid it over broad shoulders cool to the touch. The older man flinched, going perfectly still. His hands drop and he regards the sketch of ivy climbing walls of an alley, shops lining a street, Eiffel Tower a smudge in the distance. He shouldn't have hit him. Why did he hit him?

*Are you craving a home you once knew? Or a future separate from mine?*

“We used to talk more.”

"Open conversation requires mutual trust, sense of safety. We have neither at the moment." Blotting ink spread on paper. The image is ruined. "Besides I’m not sure it will change anything to talk about it now."

“You aren’t trapped anymore. Stop locking me out.” The priest’s fingers curled beneath a sharp jaw, willing Peter to look at him.

“Are we not trapped with these versions of ourselves?” The older man returned evenly, gaze lowered, ducking away. A tongue dragged chapped lips, sketchbook snapping shut with the finality of an end.

Numb fingertips ghosted a bruised cheek, whisper trembling. “There is no version of me that ever struck you.”

“Please.” The older man gripped the hand on his face, mouth thinning, paling. He squeezed, another push emphasizing pain. “I can’t bare your touch right now.” Hitching the blanket over his body, Peter half turned in the chair, to remain just out of reach and winced a smile. “I have had much worse than a few glancing blows and loss of balance, priest, as you well know.” His eyes are sunken and red. He has been crying. “If that is cruelty, you are going to have to try harder.”

Elias furrowed a brow, pain ravaging his chest. He can’t stop looking at the blossoming grey and purple beneath Peter’s right eye. His hands trembled and clench. “That isn’t as comforting as you intend it to be. Don’t justify my actions. I had no right to do what I did. Not any of it. The last several months I have stripped you of your voice without realizing I was doing so. Given you no say in what was happening and forced us apart because I no longer wanted to hear the hurt in your tone when we disagreed. I made all the choices for you, for us. Chose to call Will. Chose to leave this house. To blame you when—”

“Please.” Hanging his head, Peter steepled fingers over a nose, eyelids closing to hide welling tears. Elias looked away. Did the mere sound of his voice wound Peter, ache and throb, landing as painfully as the hand that struck him? As he had struck him.

*How could I?* Elias sinks teeth into his tongue, throat closing.
“Please,” Peter said once more. “Don’t. I feel like all we’ve been doing is apologizing since they left. Finding blame. As if it would somehow make it right. Bring them back. Make my inadequacies any less lacking in the glare of their absence.”

The priest kissed tops of fingers gently. They still held heat of the teacup and tasted bitter of ink. Grazed a kiss on a forehead, sighing when Peter leaned away once more, heaving a quiet plea, “I’m begging you not to touch me.”

He stared at their bare toes curled on the wood floor. “It wasn’t your fault. It was me. I was wrong.”

“Am I not at fault? For you. For them. For us.”

“Peter, I don’t want to fight,” Elias sighed, praying for strength, and waited for the heaviness in the older man’s lungs to disperse and become words.

“I am beginning to realize the source of our problems may lie within me. Has since the beginning. I stole something that did not belong to me. Not because you asked me to, but because you never said I couldn’t.” Silver eyes peered cautiously between slotted fingers. “I was never uncertain about who I was. Even before I was taken. No right or wrong. I just was. Open and honest and fuck what anyone else thought. Reveling worn well an often. Youthful disguise and distraction to hide the boy soaked in alcohol to numb and have it fucked out of him when the pain was too much. I’ve enjoyed the company of men for as long as I can remember. Never once felt a need to apologize for it. Then I met you. You were young. Innocent. To think you don’t accept yourself for who you are, makes me wonder if you ever accepted me.”

“What does that have to do with—“

“Everything!”

Soft scolding trembled. “Petrus Alain Moreau—“

The older man covered a mouth gently, frowning. “Eli Alouette Svendsen, you opened this starving thing inside me and gave it a voice. You taught me to speak all my truths. It’s not my fault if you no longer want to hear. If I was silent, it was because I chose to be.”

“That’s not fair.” Muffled breath cooled his palm, violet eyes tipping to the floor. “I didn’t have the same freedoms you did. Why does it matter now?”

“It matters to me. Did you before we met? Know yourself. Without influence telling you what to believe. How to think. What was the right way to act. Who to love. Was I another voice in your head telling you what you should want? Did you know women before or after me? Understand you could choose?”

“I never wanted—“

“How would you know? I blinded you to the possibility because I wanted you. In my life. In my bed. My actions are unforgivable.”

“I chose you, arrogant prick! You speak of choice and freedom and belonging, then tell me I have none!” Elias shouted.

“You aren’t really free though, are you?” Peter gripped Elias to his front when he tried to flee and lifted him clear off the floor, breath huffing. “You are constantly running, ashamed, holding your God tighter than you know how to hold me.”
“I am ashamed!” Elias wailed, strength waning, swinging toes barely touching. He knotted fingers on the front of thighs, tears blurring. “I am ashamed of living a life where I was made to feel wrong because I was different. Ashamed of letting their words shape me. Knowing they will always have some hold on me. I am ashamed…” His head fell, conscience heavy, croaking his confession to their carpet burned shadows. “…of myself. Not you! The fragile little boy you cannot rely on because he hates that part of himself. So when someone confronts him and says everything thing he is, everyone he loves, is wrong, he gives in because he was never taught differently. I couldn’t stand up for you in court because I cannot stand up for myself. When you needed me most, I failed you. I failed all of you!”

The beginning of a reply muted, breathing shaky on the nape of a neck. Cool wood touched toes. Clenched fingers eased from a shoulder. Drifted from hips. Peter let go and took an unsteady step back. Elias slumped to the floor. He shifted on knees, fingers spread on hardwood. A stumble and a thump. Gravity forced the older man to join him.

“I make you feel unforgivable? Unaccepted? Unloved?” The priest stared at rings of immortalized trees, pressed and cut, trampled in both life and death. “Have I always made you feel like that? Did I truly hurt you so deeply in our youth because I did not yet know who I was? I've always known I loved you. How could you believe otherwise?”

You didn't stay long enough to accept me. My heart. For me to learn to accept myself.

“I.” Peter stretched an arm across a knee and shook his head. “I have doubted everything I have ever done or said in my entire life, but I have never doubted that. I also know you came here to find them and when they did not appear, when I couldn’t return them to you, you were angry. You have held me accountable for their loss every day since. Except now I am guilty of the crime. And I wonder if you will ever truly forgive me or if I will simply act as a reminder, resenting one another for a family we came to rely on that is no longer here.”

Violet eyes flicked to a cabriole leg of the table. Nail marks scratched deep in the paint’s finish. Where he had clung, cowering, as the good of his new life toppled to the carpet at gunpoint.

“The fuck is wrong with you! Huh? He is our friend, remember? Our only goddamn friend. The only one you have allowed me to have and let live!”

“They’re gone. What does it matter?” A flat whisper dispelled the vision, both good and bad, pluming dust.

His darkness, the one clinging to him, stayed. “They would never leave you. Not of their own accord. They aren’t me.”

“You are not you!” Patience unraveled, tongue lashing. “Not who you think you are. You are not the you from yesterday. Or the week or month or year before that. Yet you bear the burden of all the souls of those men who lived before you. Haven’t you grown tired of dragging their shadowed selves behind you? Let them go or give them to me to show kindness.”

Thumbs lightly traced tendons straining a neck, firm pressure digging an ache where the skull hollowed. “Do you know why I continue to haul the dead of those men, priest? To keep all the versions of yourself you refuse to let go company.”

“Not knowing my own soul is not the same as not knowing yours. I wouldn’t change you, not any part of who you are.”

Wounded smiles flickered. “Are those your feelings or mine?”
Elias shook his head weakly, shrugging.

“Was it as difficult with them? Or easier? To be yourself. I’m not…” The older man touched a hip tentatively, gaze downcast. He cleared his throat. “I’m not asking to hurt you. I’m trying to understand.”

“Not at first.”

“How long?”

“Before you returned.” Teeth gnawed a lower lip red, pausing, then. “What they said wasn’t true. You can’t think that.”

Peter cast a sideways glance of disbelief. His nose twitched. He looked towards the kitchen, every curve of the boy’s body etched lines in his palms, vivid and searing. “I can’t stop seeing it. How you look when we? I see you with him. Hear his name on your lips. How am I to live up to that?”

“It was never physical.”

“I’m beginning to think you may not understand the difference between physical and sexual. An observation, not a condemnation. Neglect on my part for not making it clear.” The older man tipped a thought across the bridge of a sharp nose. “You told me once you didn’t count friends as proper kisses. Did Will kiss you, Elias?”

“Yes.”

His ears were ringing. Copper bells in ivy choked towers. Familiar. The boy’s former home. His church. Or maybe it was his heart breaking. Strange for it be accompanied by anything holy.

Someone’s heart, not his. His was not broken, couldn’t have, even if it wanted to. It had never healed properly. Never had a chance to. Vulnerable thing cracked over and over, calloused by scar tissue till misshapen and hard. Not unfeeling, simply malformed. Petal wrapped to hide protective thorns. Given only to the priest who he thought had accepted both unconditionally, held tight, smile sweet even as blood pooled palms and stained delicate skin red. His priest. Whose heart, abused as his own, remained beautiful, was breaking along pearlescent cracks on its surface and pouring from wide eyes. Wet oils dripping down a blank canvas. Made destitute by a single question.

Becoming aware of his surroundings once more, Peter realized he was sitting alone in the dining room, half certain the entirety of their conversation had been in his mind. He heard feet banging up stairs and followed blindly.

Elias retreated to where he felt safest. When Peter was not the safe place he could go. Standing in the Lecter’s closet, arms hugging his body. Clothing thread bare without the protection of his quilt. Eyes closed. Cheeks stained white by salted tears. Praying to a memorial of cherished belongings.

The priest braced on the wall, head bowed, voice cracking. “I don’t think I can bear it if you hate me.”

Peter stretched out his palm, fingertips ghosting a small hand, listened to shallow breaths quicken then stop, and drew back. The graceful bend of the boy’s spine stretched, vulnerable ridges of pearls, lain bare underneath his t-shirt. Something in his heart stirred. Faint reminder of softness. Then became searing. Tightness suffocating. Its thorny armor turning inward, piercing, unforgiving. Safe from others. Never safe from himself.
"I…I don’t hate you.” The older man shuffled, pulled forcefully by a weak chirp, palms damp on the front of his jeans. “Fucking saints, how many years did you spend your life denying what came naturally? I would never ask that of you. I only want you to be as you are. Honestly, forgive me if I’m not surprised. For god sake, I kissed Will—out of spite, which is entirely different than why I imagine you did—but I’m not blaming you. I’m not asking you to justify or explain. Would you rather I lie? Pretend not to be conflicted knowing you found, and still find, comfort in someone else. When it has gone on so long unspoken between us?”

Toes curled. “You cannot hold me to a different standard and ask me to adhere to it only when it suits you! Why were you allowed the company of men and women in my absence, but I wasn’t allowed to sleep in the bed of two men I love?”

“That is entirely besides the point. I am not saying—“ A strangled growl echoed loud in the small space.

“What are you saying! What are you fucking saying, Peter, because I don't understand!”

“I selfishly wanted you to remain faithful!”

“I never strayed. You did!”

“I never loved the people I fucked! I only ever loved you! It was the one thing left in my life I could control! Nothing made sense after you. I couldn’t come home, I couldn’t see you, couldn’t tell you I was alive and beg you to wait for someone who never deserved you even if I could. It was never a possibility. Just this fantasy in my head that kept me from ending it all and pretending my life had any meaning without you.”

Swinging light blackened the confession, back and forth between the two figures displaced below, empty fluorescent sound.

“I didn’t expect to find peace! It isn’t fair to put me on a pedestal and expect me to be the one you wanted, that lived in your head. They happened. He cared for me. I care for him. I won’t apologize.” A wavering shadow bent, farther and farther, melding memories and clothes, embraced by the dark they cast on the floor. “I can’t change it.”

“But I could have!” Hangers screeched along a metal bar as Peter shoved aside autumn toned suits and dropped to his knees. He braced an arm above a shoe rack, oiled leather filling lungs, and placed two fingers below a blossomed burn mark on Elias’ chest, touch and tone fleeting. “I could have changed. I could have chosen. I could have protected you, all of you. Instead, I risked their lives. Your life, Elias, because you chose for me! Made me an outsider in our relationship, while asking me to live a life of complete transparency. You left us vulnerable to the attacks of a man banking an entire prosecution on using our emotions against us because you needed to be dishonest about who they were to you. God, don’t you, don’t you see that?”

Frost melting mossy bows of trees lifted from a hand twisting a t-shirt, to a knee, followed the length of flexing muscle to eyes hooded dark, grieved, mirrors reflecting until Elias was forced to look down. “I thought I would lose you again. You would leave.”

“That was my choice to make. You can’t keep making them for me out of fear. I’m still here, aren’t I? Saints, won’t you look at me?”

“I’m not sure I’ll ever be any less terrified than I am today.” Glistening tears rolled down the priest’s cheeks. “Why would you want someone who spent most of his life trying to vanish? To become
someone they would want to see. That God would love.”

“When…” Unforgiving lull of gravity pulled. Peter gave way, sinking to the floor, flat on his back and searched for words, each thread connecting their lives, tying them together. “…are you going to realize I’ll choose you? I fucking see you. Love you for who you are above all else. Saints, I love you, Elias. I love you. Why is that so hard to accept?”

Elias delicately touched a pearl earring, the mark on his chest, whisper threading. “I didn’t mean to love them, Peter, just like I didn’t mean to love you.”

Peter closed stinging eyes, listened to the echo of their lives.

“I like touching you.”

“You shouldn’t.”

“I shouldn’t like touching you? Another man. Or I shouldn’t touch you?”

Grain of dead forests smooth underneath his fingertips.

“You’re out of breath, priest. Have you been running? Why exactly. Is that fucking kid bothering you again? I swear to Christ—“

“Kiss me.”

“What?”

“Please. I can’t stop thinking about it. I know I shouldn’t. But I—“ The front door reverberated, linen fabric chaffing freckled knees. “What…” A throat clicked nervously, flush seeping from chin to throat. “What are you doing?”

“Giving you what you want. But I want something in return.” Hot breath warmed upturned lips. “Not in my house…” Long fingers hooked a Roman collar and slid it free, discarded at their feet. “Here…you belong to me.”

Swing of the light, red dots retreating on a canvas of black.

“Saints, I love you…”

“You what? Did you just say you love me?”

“Why do you sound so surprised?”

“Well. It’s just…you never said it…explicitly.”

“I fucking love you. I want to spend my entire goddamn life with you. Explicit enough?”
Cedar chips filled his lungs, once wafting from his own clothes on the priest’s frame.

“S-s-stop it! Just stop! I can’t want this! I can’t want you! Have immoral thoughts about you. This is wrong! I sinned. Don’t you understand? I’m a man of God. We can’t, we can’t do this. I can’t see you anymore!”

“I…I understand.” Shaking fingertips traced the grain of a door. “Please, please let me in.”

Heard distant shallow breathing, tranquility of gold skied dawns inside languid kisses.

“I’m scared. I can’t. I’m sorry.”

“You…being with you…I want nothing else. If we only ever hold one another like this, wake and fall asleep with just our mouths and hands touching… je te n’aime rai aucun moins et je serai heureux. Let me live beside you, Eli, any way I can, knowing I will always belong to you, and you to me.”

(I will love you no less and I will be happy.)

The older man flashed a weak self deprecating smile. He was many things, a learned pessimist in most, scoffing at the idea of soul mates. Of finding that one vibration of molecules when the universe formed, torn apart, seeking reconnection. The sappy bullshit of greeting cards. Then Elias. Beautiful, luminous boy, secretly dismantled him with tender words and kindness, until it was too late, and he was stricken with grief, in love. His heart belonged to Elias before he had even known him. Since the dawn of time.

“I would share your affections, before I would live without you. You saw what it did to me. How long do you think I would last? I survived years of-.” The older man gestured helplessly at the swinging light fixture, gaze tracking its light and dark. “Not being with you again? Or near you? No. That, that was far worse. That will kill me. Quicker than the chain smoking and drink. You look at me and see a person, Eli, a human being deserving. Of what, I have no fucking idea. Knowing who I am and where I come from.” His hand began to tremor and he placed it over aching eyes, trying to drag flickering nightmares from behind them. “That you accept any part of me…ever could…is nothing short of a miracle. I know I don’t deserve you, but please don’t ask me to live apart, let me stay near even if you find someone else.”

“You are deserving.” Elias hesitantly peeled off the wall and curled over his husband’s body, bridge of his nose flattened to a chest, muffled. “He shouldn’t have said those things about you. I asked him to stop. I did! I let him humiliate you and I’m sorry. I’m sorry I wasn’t as strong as you. I’m sorry I lied. I’m sorry I love them. I’m sorry. I’m sorry I’m—“

I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.

A hard jolt by the shoulders stopped the voices. His and the ones in the priest’s head. Peter shook the boy once more for good measure, dark glower piercing the back of eyelids. He ticked a tongue across his canine. He wanted these voices gone. For good. His version of exorcism was fucking
Elias unconscious or at least till he couldn’t remember his own name and guilt ridden faith.

Currently not an option. Fine. The hard way then.

Sliding hands along a spine, Peter dragged Elias in his lap, caged. He wanted to be soft, cradling, protective. But his past was not soft. It was harsh and brutal and unforgiving. He would not be kind. Not to them. Inner demons hardly deserved kindness.

This time they were going to fucking listen.

Or I’ll take you from him and make you mine. You’ll learn what it means to suffer.

He pressed razor teeth to an ear, growling low, “No one will make you feel wrong. Some genetic fucking mistake. Fuck them.Fuck every fucking one of them. And stop apologizing.” The older man gripped a soft jaw when his husband tried to burrow, forcing him to stare deep in his eyes, unblinking. Elias shrank, holding tight to wrists, repressed tears rippling. “The only thing wrong with you is your willingness to accept damage dealt and let it resonate so deeply in the mouths of others. They mean nothing. Are nothing. The hollow shrieks of souls oppressed and wounded, scorching those they cannot understand in hopes to have a single spark to smother in their hateful darkness. You were embers of a fire dying when I met you. You were just a boy. Stripped of your flame and fight. Clinging to one final hope, to see the best in man…while denying the parts of yourself that made you good. Not wrong.” Peter balanced tears on fingertips, gentling, seeing haunting recede from violet eyes. “Just different. My love, my world, my light. You are beautiful the way you are. I always hoped to love you enough for both of us. Give back what they robbed of you. To find peace.”

Like penned letters catching flame, curling in on itself as inked poetry burned, Elias did too. Covering shame searing his soul. Knees and elbows jerking, becoming wretched sobs. “If they thought I was wrong, too much a sinner to be loved, then why did He make me this way? Loving what I shouldn’t. Why did He let them hurt me?”

Because he’s a sick, merciless fuck who cares more about theatrics than those who put their protection and faith in Him.

He wished he could hold the child wailing, scared and searching for acceptance. To know Elias then. Mentor. Protector. Guide.

I would have kept you safe. Peter sank nails in his own forearm, eyes stinging. I should have fucking stayed when I had the chance!

“These.” The older man inhaled a sob, sharp and quick, flattened it, let it fill his lungs and burn. Not penned poetry, but cruelty. Vapor and charred dust, just like those who had spoken it. He placed a thin arm in his palm and drew up a sleeve. He followed lifelines up a blue vein to thick scars etching delicate flesh. He turned his wrist, exposing the same type of scarring, lanced deeper in an upper bicep, and lay them next to each other. “These look the same because they are the same. Or did you not think I wouldn’t recognize the eyes of a boy who had righteousness beaten in to him?” Elias whimpered. Peter dabbed wet eyes with a corner of his t-shirt, blinking rapidly, wounded bird huddling close. “Haven’t you ever wondered why I hate religion? It absolves those wielding abuse as discipline. It is not righteousness or just or good. It is infliction of pain for the sense of rightness it brings the abuser. They crushed your sense of self before it began to bloom and told you your own thoughts were vile weakness.” He tucked the boy between knees, sighing as thin fingers balled his chest, sensing rage simmering beneath. “I love you so much, Eli. I can give you what has been denied your whole life. A choice. To choose who you are. Who you love.”
They had no right to take that from you.

Gentle eyes. Kind soul. Breaking. Not broken. Not yet. He would fill the boy’s heart with wildflowers, cradled softly in the earth, before he would let it be riddled by poisonous thorns. Elias would not look out at a world enamored by its own reflection, seduced by only what it saw looking back, to be defined by its standards.

You deserve so much more. Peter blinked. Salt filled his mouth, chasing a prism tear, eyes closed. More than I need to hold the sunlight of you against my body and be reminded of cherry blossomed kisses. To selfishly possess the eve of summer casting holy light on darkest hauntings of my mind, whispering they too are loved.

He drew a thumb along a shell ear, a pearl tipped lobe, gentle jaw. Smile dwindling when Elias glanced up, brow knitting, quaver in his voice appearing in hands cradling a face. “I am not the man I was. You saw to that. Made me better. A person who became worthy of your love.” He cupped the nape of a neck and gathered the priest to his chest, running fingers through hair, tone a rough ache. “You have a choice. A divine right to choose, sparrow, and I want you to know you are free to find yourself. Free of their words and their teachings and His approval. You decide what it is right.”

Saw the boy diminish, wiry frame deflate as the years began to rewind, giving way to violet wide set eyes looking out from a dewy child’s face, absorbing the entirety of the world, adrift in its current, utterly trusting in where it took him.

“Don’t be scared. Your friend, if not your lover.” Peter rested his mouth on the priest’s brow, tasting salt of his skin one last time. “You’ll make someone…” His demons stirred restlessly, sensing the subtle push, return to the dark, affection starved. Chaste kiss lifting hurriedly to seal what was best for Elias, not for himself, deep within. “…as happy as you made me.”

Decay began to rust Peter’s bleary vision. Elias slipped through his fingers. Fractured plaster of lips peeled free. Crumbling foundation shook, seeking hands grasping and tearing apart. Cracking support beam moaning, pleading as the older man struggled to stand, husband clinging to his neck. Rafters shuddering, bodies colliding from one wall to the next, dust falling as clothes tore from hangers. Corner walls snapping when knees gave way, palms up to catch shattered glass, windows breaking one by one. Rainwater spilling in and flooding eyes. A final mournful cry, rumble of pain answering as the entire structure collapsed.

Peter watches Elias half asleep, feathers molted, tucked safely in the curve of his body. He pries a tiny fist from beneath a chin. The priest nestles closer, humming bliss. Blooming roses caught a faint ring of light. His heart clenched. His ring. His priest. His…

“What is it?” The priest asks softly.

Heavy eyelids flutter. Serene mouth resting on fine furls, fingertips a sacred confession brushing skin. “You are the only true home I have ever known.”

Chapter End Notes

You likely won't believe me (yes, you will, you're so sweet, the lot of you) that I have been picking through this on and off since this entirely unintentional hiatus. You'll say, "You don't need to apologize, we understand." (I'm still very sorry. I can't express how much. I had a lot of things to fight in my head, toxic events and people that needed to be
handled, and think I'm in a better place now.)

Thank you for staying with me. I read every single comment you wrote me. It helped, honest. I'm going to reply to them all. I cherish them, especially the ones checking in on me. Thank you.

In To Dust x Mazzy Star

Still falling
Breathless and on again
Inside today
Beside me today
Around, broken in two
Till your eyes shed
Into dust
Like two strangers
Turning into dust
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

At the base of the stairs, Elias stood disheveled and wild eyed and gaunt, Peter’s precious belongings a quivering arsenal gathered to his chest. One marbled vase, black sable oil brushes snapped in half, an unfinished canvas from their wedding day swathed sepia, torn where the portraiture of smiles once were. Cashmere the color of lamb’s wool—his mind flashed. Something Will wore ragged in winter months splitting logs. Beard a thick shadowed smile.—baring a shoulder and pale chest, limp sleeves a foot too long, hiding tiny fists.

Tears streamed blotchy cheeks, turning irises amethyst, reflecting the older man. “I gave up everything for you. Turned my back on my family, my home, all I stood for…and I…” Elias bit a trembling mouth, cheeks flaming scarlet. “I have loved you since I was sixteen, Peter, before I knew what I was feeling. Now you want to leave? Ask me to find someone else? Why? To destroy everything we have before I can have the chance to? Why are you always leaving me! What have I done!”

“I don’t want to leave.” The older man returned thickly, touching a damp cheek, fingertips, calloused thumb, falling. “I am trying to set you free. Return the years of your youth, your heart, I hadn’t realized I took when I left. I would rather go before the entirety of our lives together is tainted by my presence.”

Broken brushes sprayed the stairwell. “I don’t want them back!”

Peter tripped up stairs, palms out, and backed away. “Sparrow, you deserve better. A chance to discover the world, yourself, find another. Someone like Will.”

“Stop telling me what I want! What I need! How to feel!” The vase dropped, bouncing and cracked at its center near the front door.

“Eli—” Peter began to plead.

Torn canvas bounced the rail, skidding along stairs. “No! Shut up!”

The priest stalked after, visibly shaking. Peter felt his way through a frame to the master bedroom. Something pelted his chest. Pinged furniture. Settled on a Persian rug. Their wedding rings. The older man bumped a high backed chair, covering raised welts on his chest, side stepping.

“You can’t tell me to accept myself, say I have a divine right to choose, then take that choice by rejecting me! I—“ The priest grabbed the kimono’s front and wrenched his husband forward. “—know what I want—” Peter steeled for another slap, gasping when teeth snag his bottom lip, kiss savage and earnest. “—what I’ve always wanted! You. You infuriating, hellish man! If I wanted someone else, to love, or discover, or fuck, I would have done it already! Do you really think you’re the only one to proposition a priest? Or that I wouldn’t have given myself to Will and Hannibal if it’s what I truly wanted?”

They teetered left. Their feet tangled. Windowpanes rattled, broad shoulders smearing. Shuddered again as they spun.

Elias flattened beneath Peter’s body, breathing hard, glaring. “I chose not to pursue earthly pleasures after you, not because there wasn’t opportunity, but because my Fate is not pre-fucking-ordained.”
They tumbled. Dresser groaning, nightstand shuddering.

“Assez!” Purple bruises pooled his thigh. Peter tore Elias off, stumbling backwards when the boy grabbed his arm and pursued. “Fous-moi la paix!”

(Enough! Leave me alone!)

They panted screams, turning their mouths crimson, gazes drawn to glistening crescents.

“You’re a goddamn hypocrite.” The priest arched for a kiss, breath scalding.

Peter spun them and jammed the heel of a hand against a chest, blood heating, pinning Elias to the window. “Yeah?” He swallowed thickly, fingers twitching against a collarbone, wanting to drift, find where else the priest burned to the touch. “What else is new.”

“Besides giving me permission to initiate congenial visits with my best friend, or take a lover—which I might remind you I don’t need—you mean.” Elias sneered.

The older man smirked darkly. “So why are you—“ Here stuttered out. Elias raked nails down a chest, yanking the kimono open as he went, fresh stained red fading white. Pearly teeth latched on a nipple, scraping, sucking, lightly biting flesh. The older man gripped curls and tried to pull him off. The boy suckled flesh raw and hard, drawing out a harsh exhale he meant to keep in his head.

“Saints, I want to fuck you.” He lost his grip, arousal piercing and painful, winding fingers in hair. Clawed fingers hooked, leveraging to drag a tongue from navel to sternum. Elias moaned when Peter lifted and pressed him to the window, running fingers greedily along bare legs. He pushed the boy’s lavish attentions to the other nipple. Tongue teasing, wet, stranded between gentle ache and stinging fury. “I don’t want pity, priest. And I’m not interested in a goodbye fuck.”

“I never pitied you.” Violet eyes narrowed to slits. Peter exhaled loudly when Elias cupped his cock and gave it a punishing squeeze. “Not once. I am angry with you for a lot of reasons and either you let me come to terms with how I feel or you can run again, spare yourself, and then, then I will resent you and I will learn to hate you. So help me God, I will never give you another thought, Peter, I will forget you as if you never existed.”

The older man gritted teeth, his throat and chest stinging from nails digging in, sinking, buried in his heart. “You’re hurting me.”

“You cannot continue to be on the verge of abandoning me and expect me to treat you with kindness.”

“Abandoning implies choice and circumstance, Eli.”

“And I don’t want to hear it. You’re not a damn charity case or some martyr so stop acting like one.” The priest caught the lobe of his ear between teeth, letting it snap. “I think you lack the basic self control not to get between my legs. Or let me go.”

Bitterness pulled a loathing smile wide. “Fine. Consider me reduced. I am who I’ve always been. The unrepentant sinner. The queer fuck up. The whore who loves a Madonna.”

“Don’t call yourself that!” Icy rage turned lips blue.

“Or what. Going to pray for forgiveness on my behalf? Or ask me to. I am to be resented either way, is that it? I throw myself at your feet and beg you to put your arms around me and I am unworthy. I try to sacrifice my heart, to return yours, to give you a chance at a better life and I am a coward. Can
I do anything, anything right, Elias! Or are you still sorry you ever met me!”

The moon disappeared behind a cloud. Then Elias was on his feet wrenching Peter by a silk belt. His foot caught the rug. Palms sent him careening forward. Twisted and fell on a winged back chair. He watched blurred water on the ceiling, momentarily stunned by the force, the momentum. Found amethyst eyes carving a path from a bare sternum, over briar roses shivering on a throat, to a slack mouth.

“I am not sorry!” The priest shouted, watching dispassionately from above, scowl darkening. “I don’t need forgiveness. I don’t need sacrifice. I don’t need to hear what you think I need! Not for this.” A hand reached under robes, touch softer, kinder than the anger shaking his voice. “Not for you.” Elias climbed his lap, fingertips sliding to an inner thigh, breathing hot on Peter’s mouth. “If this is wrong? If what we have…” The older man shifted legs apart, gasping. “…is a sin? Then I would rather burn for eternity…” Elias slid to elbows, bent at the waist, and looked up from damp silk covering a bobbing cock. “…then spend one more second pretending it isn’t hell without you.” Peter buried nails in an armrest, bent at the waist, and looked up from damp silk covering a bobbing cock. “…then spend one more second pretending it isn’t hell without you.”

Pushing knees apart, Elias wriggled to the floor and made room for himself, lashes sweeping demurely. “I’m going to pray. ’” Slender fingers encircled tensing calves. Peter writhed, cursing, thorough attention pooling heavy in his groin. Isn’t this what he deserved? The boy’s wrath? “With my mouth on your cock.”

Wet heat engulfed him, flat of a tongue sliding from tip to root to balls. The older man bucked, crushing silken hair, forcing shaking hands to gentle, trembling around a jaw stretched wide to take him deep. Elias set a furious pace, nails biting, looking straight in Peter’s eyes, mix of anger and desire gleaming black pupils, bringing him to the cusp of release. The older man groaned low, frustration and relief, when Elias eased off and began again, focused on drawing out softer sighs, tongue patiently tracking and swirling. He stroked the boy’s hair, thrusting slow, relaxed by gentle suckling. Murmuring the priest’s name over and over, fingertips tracing his thighs that had begun to shake. Slurred sonnets shook doubt, are you sure? God, are you sure this is what you want? Me? Saints Elias, tell me you’re sure. Elias lifted on knees, abruptly changing pace and angle again to shut him up. Humming pleasantly when Peter flailed, twisting a sweater instead of hair, reduced to swearing in English then French, then a relatively straightforward fuck me when swallowed whole. Ragged breath flared nostrils, gagging slightly, before gliding to the tip.

Elias rolled lips like he blended lipstick, jolt of pleasure lifting hips off cushions, shaking off the hand at the base of his neck urging him down. “Saints, get on with it.”
A coy smile appeared. “Thought you weren’t interested in a goodbye fuck?”

The older man paled, pain, question hollow. “Is this goodbye? Or prayer?”

Biting then wetting a lower lip, slow, deliberate, the priest fluttered eyelashes. “Oh, of course. My mistake. I ought to clarify.” Elias ringed a cockhead, kissing and mouthing loosely, flicks of a teasing tongue playful. The older man dropped his head back. Suckling began to vibrate, low and attentive. A single kiss to his shaft, then. “Dear lord in heaven, may you bless the forgotten and hopeless.”

Peter’s eyes creaked, shook his head, the phrase, are you seriously fucking praying right now, poised. Then ripped from his throat, fucking hell, when the rough flat edge of a tongue dragged up his shaft.

“May we live as you lead us.” The tip speared a slit mercilessly wet till it curved taut on his stomach and leaked steadily. The priest’s tongue slid farther, damp heat trailing balls then smeared a kiss. Peter bucked, faintly aware broken moaned begging belonged to him. Elias draped a strong leg over his shoulder, kissing the bend of a thigh tenderly, and rolled the length of him inside of his cheek. “Serve as you inspire us.”

“Close.” The older man groaned loud. Elias made eye contact, lips stretched, sliding his husband’s cock along the roof of his mouth then out, shook his head, not granting permission, not yet. “Give…” Peter cupped a skull as the priest went down on him again, shaking, teeth grinding to keep from coming down a throat taking him deep. Watched pouting lips glisten and move as they exhaled, teetering on the edge before they slipped off. “Give as you teach us to give.” His robe slid open. The boy pushed in his lap, knees sinking cushions, spellbound, sweater hitching on freckled thighs, higher and higher, kisses winding up his chest to throat. “And may you teach us to be merciful…” Elias enveloped Peter, gently cradled his face to a slim chest, and whispered in his ear. “…as you have shown us mercy.” Bare wet cock touching the older man’s, taking them both in hand and tugging, glide hot and tight. “With the glory of your name.” Peter came, hard and blinding, pressing a sob of pleasure and welling tears to vocal cords, the boy’s name stumbling and holy. “Amen.”

They sprawled on the edge of the chair. Peter tried to catch his breath, waiting for the room to stop spinning. He touched a pulse to feel a heart wildly beating, matching his own. His muscles pooled, anxiety and fear melting every time the boy’s lips touched his skin. He ran fingers through silken hair, a nose nuzzling his stomach, and tipped his in the air, exhaling like he would the blissful smoke of a cigarette. If he had ever claimed to have a true addiction, it was the priest.

“Am I—Christ.” His voice sounded faraway. Limbs numb, slumping, oozing spineless to the base of the chair. “Going to hell for that?”

Elias chuckled. Toes tickled his calves. “Are you Christian or Catholic?”

For several seconds, he struggled to think. Was he? Was he Catholic? That didn’t seem likely. They scared him. Christian? They believed in heaven and hell, didn’t they? Was what they just did a sin or was Elias taking communion? Wait. Was he religious?

Delicate arms and chest shook, suppressing laughter, when he managed to eventually slur. “Atheist disguised as agnostic.”

A teasing snort warmed his neck. “Then I think you’re safe.”

“Am I? Because you’re going to have to explain why the sight of a fucking church gives me a hard
on now and might very well need to jerk me off when we give blessed thanks at dinner.” Fingertips tapped a curving spine, kneaded a backside, and rubbed a pulsing bulge of desire, cupping lightly at first then delivering a tight squeeze.

Elias blushed, kissing a navel, chair creaking as he shuffled awkwardly back. “I don’t think our guests, or any proper clergyman, would approve.”

Peter caught a chin, leveled a searching gaze, rasping softly. “Do you?”

The priest froze, thumb stuck to a mouth he was wiping clean, flushed skin deepening scarlet. He lowered lashes.

Too soon.

Sighing an apology, the older man kissed Elias in smooth, fluid motions. Inhaling lingering fear. Exhaling calm.

“Do you forgive me?”

They parted, breathless, touching each other’s face, adoration warmed golden.

Elias kissed his lower lip twice to hush, gentle gaze shining. “I think we’re passed penance, don’t you? Or do you need another reminder?”

“If that’s your method of conversion, you can pray over me whenever you want. Though is it my imagination or have you become much more... *insistent* than you used to be?”

Another pleased chuckle tickled his ear. “You are a stubborn, vexing man. You weren’t listening. You forced my hand. Complaining?”

“Not at all. Pleasantly bewildered and grateful. Learn that...” Peter forced eyes open, smile wry. They should talk about this. About all of it. Not now. He wants to touch him, hold and kiss him, make love till they are both too sore to move. Blurred vision created two of Elias, blurring, sweating, sucking him clean. Began getting hard again, soon, too soon, winced and snapped eyes shut. “…in seminary?”

“No.”

Teasing laughter touched his hip, his knee. Peter didn’t realize his chest was aching, straining to hear the sound, until he rubbed hands up the priest’s waist playfully, tickling to hear it again. Saints, his smile, his smile, was everything. If there was a god, he had created the perfect image designing Elias. Small hands batted him away, laughter sparking, robes snapped closed and fixed with a delicate bow. The floorboards creaked. Elias stood, arms over head, stomach flat and ribcage arcing, stretching. His slim cock swollen, pink, and bobbing beautifully, untouched. Drawn to it, the older man framed hips and sat forward to taste him, earn his penance.

“I learned *that* from Will.”

Teeth audibly snapped. Seething. Elias watched irises blacken, expression blank, spark of curiosity balanced on a nose. Tracking glinting teeth, a snarl, upholstery torn. Watched Peter fight and wrestle demons rising to the surface, their eyes raking naked skin, howling claim.

The boy smiled. Sweet, delicate, blossom of a thing. Then laughed once more, airy and bright, wind chimes on a spring day.
“For a sinful man, you certainly have difficulty recognizing a liar. In this case teasing. ‘Neglect on my part for not explaining the difference’,” Elias mocked, using the same serious gruff timber, smile growing. His fingertips drifted over a scowl and pecked a kiss to a forehead. “Too soon?” He asked sweetly.

Peter hauled the boy forward, tongue scratching from knee to hip, and sucked bruise after bruise. Various shades of displeasure covering a left thigh. Winding up a right. His nose twitched, silver returning to dangerously slit eyes. “What do you think?”

“So you wouldn’t share my affections then? You’re an awful liar.”

“I said he could have a piece of your heart, not your body. That is where I draw the line.”

“My little wolf. Coveting is a sin, but for you, I think I’ll allow it.” The older man’s brow twitched confusion, softening to the endearment. Elias was looking at him, right at him, and loving all he saw. The priest cradled a clenched jaw, nose scrunching amusement, and kissed brimming rage tenderly. “Sorry. Truth then?” Elias asked, sheepishly tucking a non existent curl behind his ear, simple gesture reducing the wolf in Peter to a mewling pup, nuzzling and drawing a nose along the same wrist.

Afternoon sunlight dimmed to rainclouds. The priest fidgeted long sleeves, alarmingly self-conscious, suddenly shivering and stepping back. Peter tried to search eyes darting the room, dove flitting from surface to surface, restless and frightened. He straightened, brows drawing low, and coaxed his boy closer, careful to guide him.

He took Elias by the hand, brushed tensed fingers open, kissed the center of a palm softly and lay it over his heart thudding fear. “What is it? What have I done?”

A shaky exhale rose to a whisper. “The only faith, I need, truly, is yours.” Glimmering violet darted to solemn grey. “In me. Us. Promise to love me no less at our worst and even then…tell me…I am loved.” Elias cradled his throat, shaking tone growing stronger, louder, on the verge of tears. “If I can’t sometimes, will you still tell me I am enough? Like you did yesterday. Like you always have even if I didn’t listen. Speak louder than the doubts in my head and help me lay them to rest. God, please, love me, Peter, love me and tell me I belong. Keep me safe. Even from myself.”


(Look at me.)

Cable knit chaffed lips. Elias held damp sleeves over his mouth, breathing in fallen forest, far more willing to be lost to its wilderness than face weathered mountains looming at his back. Small. A speck looking up. Scared to anger the god living inside them.

Reprimand, a single word, smoothed slate. “Priest.”

He was small compared to their power, but he possessed his own kind of strength. He could make the earth quake. Bury his fingers in its pulse, groaning rockslide baring new surfaces for him to
discover. Vanquish. Cherish. Bring his mouth to snowcapped peaks, whisper soft, and lie in the safety of its valleys.

Elias faced Peter, eyes brimming, discovering pain carved deep, disappointment and loss clouding skies.

“Vous n’êtes pas assez...” The older man murmured, shaking his head.

Lungs emptied a pitiful moan, struck down, knees giving way.

The earth folded around him. Lowered him through wintry vapor, blue skies, and lay him in a field of slumbering wildflowers. Soft foliage encircling wrists and ankles, threading to become emerald radiance. Braided daisies crowned his head. Lilac petals covering eyelids, promising even in sleep, he might always find the mountains watching over him.

“Vous êtes chaque chose putain à moi.” The breeze became breath sliding on his lips. Foliage a caress on his skin. Daisy crown fingers twining his hair tenderly. His eyes drifted open, saw grey clouds of promised, cleansing rain, and began to cry when Peter came in focus, tears in his eyes. “Vous êtes plus. Et vous ... vous êtes aimé.” Smile pruned, vulnerable blooms unfurling and whispered softly, repeating once more, “You are not enough. You are more. You are every fucking thing to me. And you, you are loved.”

He clung to the man who hung his soul like stars in the sky and carried them to safety when they fell. I love all of you. Admiring each scarred crater they created. I always have and always will. The older man kissed him through it all, whispering, you are enough, you are enough, enough. Looked at his blotched face and red nose, smile glowing, knuckles following tears, and still said, beautiful, you’re so beautiful. They came together, softer, limbs pliant, kneading, touching, pulling at clothes, entangled on carpet wilderness. And you belong to me.

Peter grasped the hollow frame of his body over clothing, squeezing till a gasp offered a throat and dragged kisses up, over a jaw, and mouthed softly in an ear. “Fais l’amour...” He slipped the boy’s hands inside robes, passed velvety arousal, and cupped it to the place Elias was forbidden to touch. “…pour moi.”

(Make love to me.)

The priest stiffened, hand jerking back, and blinked confusion. “You don’t like it. Besides.” He wriggled, rose, lithe and graceful, tiptoed away and sank to the bed. He averted his gaze, hooking two fingers beneath a thread bare hem and began to lift, exposing creamy flesh. A curved thigh. The hard peak of a hip. “I like what you do to me. I want it.”

“Please.” He crossed the bedroom, knees touching as he settled. Peter reached for Elias, drawing near. Cupped palms trailed from ears to a slender throat to tilt a chin. Lilac petal met a silver stream flowing, slow in its caress and hesitantly shimmering. He whispered softly, lips smoothing curls on a forehead. “You’ve no idea how difficult it is for me to want this. To ask. You say I take from you. Let me give you this.”

“You owe me nothing,” Elias returned quietly.

“I owe you my life.” The older man lowered a hesitant gaze, hard swallow tight, rasp straining. He drew open the kimono, silk falling demurely from an inked shoulder. He shivered. “I want this with you. Do you want me too?”

“But I’m—“A nervous pause flourished. “It’s not necessary. I’m not asking for that.”
Inexperienced.

“I’m asking.”

Elias picked a loose nail, heart thudding anxiety. His fear was a fluttering thing, tiny wren flitting from rib to rib, soft expressions; lip biting, clammy palms, trembling. His husband shifted uncomfortably—hard eyes flicking to a far window, hands threading over the other in his lap to become loose fists, tendons starkly taut in a neck, defensive.

“Youthful disguise and distraction to hide the boy soaked in alcohol to numb and have it fucked out of him when the pain was too much.”

How had he not seen it before? This disguise tailored to perfection since youth. Vulnerability masquerading as defense. Even strength. Elias watched it unfold, clarity a dim light beginning to glow. Lace veiled shadows lifted from harsh edges. Eyes not hard, but safely gauging Elias from the reflection, and hands not fists but clasped to hide tremors, teeth set perfectly to swallow unsteady breathing.

The priest uttered a small noise of distress, images aligning.

A mouth thinned white. “Forget I said anything. I’m tired.”

Peter drew silk tightly over his offering, single fist gripping a corner of the mattress for support, shaken. It creaked as the priest slipped from the bed. Skin marbled slate, limbs and features hardening a statue. Cashmere rumpled as it stretched on elbows, freckled wings on shoulders, pulled a hiss of static over a head and shed to give way to pale fawn skin.

* 

Toes crept passed a circle of light on the rug. Something tapped the nightstand. A cool nose leaned in, reply soft. “I want to take care of you. Is it what you want?” Gold fanned lashes rose hesitantly, tears welling moonlight. Elias searched a brittle gaze, bending gracefully at the waist to cup the side of the older man’s face, willing, entirely naked. He nodded, gaze darting. “If I hurt you?”

Don’t. Please don’t.

Peter forced teeth apart, jaw quivering. “You won’t.” He breathed uncertainty. “Not like that. I need you to be sure.” Encircling smaller hands, Peter dragged them over his shaved scalp and pressed them to the hard line of his jaw. The adam’s apple in his throat. His toned chest. “Be sure this is what you want.” Held them above a thundering heart and steeled himself for the boy to deny him, their love, his own nature. “I am what you want.”

A honeyed smile spread. Elias peered steadily, dart of a tongue dewy on a bottom lip, trembling want, need for closeness. He moved the older man’s hand to a pulsing weight between his legs and reached for the robe’s belt. Elias traced a peaked cheek, smoothed dry lips, fingertips resting underneath tired eyes. He kissed one corner of an eye, then the next. Lips sealed to the center of his brow, murmuring, love you.

Silver light hung elegantly like stringed pearls on a slender waist, a jutting hip. Curving thighs and carpet burned knees straddled him. He admired a waifish form beneath half shuttered lashes. His boy was soft, the way rain pattered silvery on a lake, from rosewater lips to tiny curled toes. He was frail, indentation of smudged bone on stretched canvas skin, feathers of a wren rustling. Powerful, his touch a storm stealing the sky and drowning faithless men in an unforgiving sea. Eyes falling petals
to caress, capable of crushing beneath their weight.

“Are you sure this is what you want?”

Peter cleared a hesitant plea for mercy from his throat and glanced up. Soft affection looked back rendering him helpless.

_I would do anything for you. Anything you asked._

A small knowing smile answered. The priest cradled a fist crushing the kimono closed, lightly at first then gave a tender squeeze.

He exhaled harshly through nostrils. “I don’t know if I can.”

“Then we won’t.” Elias answered, rose lips blooming on a cheek. “Simple as that.”

Simple. The older man struggled not to laugh. Outburst dampening to a distressed bark. It had never been simple. Even before. Ulterior motives and dominance and possession and lust.

“Simple?”

“Whatever you want. Whatever you need. Simple.”

“I want this.” Peter clenched silk armor threatening to unravel tighter.

His heart raced. His palms sweat. He had never trembled. Not even his first time. When was the last time he had given himself, willingly, to another? When it had been for pleasure. When it had been his choice.

“What if I can’t?”

“It’s okay.”

Tears chaffed his voice raw, excuses and justifications and fear jumbling. “Eli—“

_I can’t._

The priest trailed kisses, murmured love open mouthed on a neck, scented perfume. “I understand.”

_I understand_ echoed again and again and again. He remembered Elias cradling him as he sobbed in the night, pushed him away again and again when his body betrayed them and he couldn’t stomach being touched, frustration turning to anger and despair and resentment for what once came so naturally. Reflecting on his cowardice in Hannibal’s study, endless hours to think when they were separated, bitterly determined to become well again, normal, as normal as he could be. The priest would patiently wait, always there, never far enough where Peter couldn’t find him. Greeted with those words, mouth closing over his to smother shame riddled apologies, affection tender and enveloping as it had always been. As Elias had always been.

Unchanged.

Endlessly understanding.


_I don’t deserve you._
His hand fell, weight pressing fear to his thigh. “Touch me. I want to try.”

The robe pooled in elbows. Lungs hitched panic. Peter covered inked lily of the valley on the right side of his chest, scarring beneath raised and ugly. He reached to lay hair across the most brutal markings, wincing when he remembered, unable to hide.

“They aren’t yours to keep, remember? These…” Elias kissed rigid fingers, the spaces between, and pried his hand free to kiss the underside of a wrist. “These are mine. To touch.” Lips trailed scars, sealed his brand. “To kiss. To love.” He framed the older man’s face, portrait of fearful longing meeting drowsy lilac devotion. He kissed a bruised cheek, hum mournful, sting receding. “Everything you are, ever were, or ever will be… belongs to me. You’re mine, Peter, and you are the most extraordinary man I have ever met.”

Navy silk flowed, rippling cool tide beneath heating bodies. They lowered gingerly to the bed and slotted lips together, reverent I love you drawn inside lungs. Humming as a curious tongue licked passed a seam of lips, deepening the kiss. The older man loosely traced knees, dimples of milky swelling globes, thumbed delicate ribs. He nipped a forearm for attention. Elias lifted bent fingers inquisitively, moaning when a tongue curled, sinking inside damp heat.

Peter widened legs and guided the priest to a thatch of curls, bucking when blunt nails scratched boldly further. Coiling arousal grew hot, cockhead twitching. “Like this?”

He grunted appreciatively. Elias worked slowly, gaze rapt, brows furrowed in concentration. He thrust lazily, timing each stroke, eyes closed, liquid pleasure heating blood, content to be touched. He melted. His hips snapped a second later when the boy slid the length of him teasingly between damp cheeks.

“Saints.” He tugged clipped hair and brought the priest on top of him, smearing a kiss from throat to mouth, swallowing a moan when he didn’t let go, pulling harder. “Let me see you. Touch you.” They tumbled growling when open thighs slid closed on his shaft, friction drawing out a needy groan. “Please let me inside you. It’s been too long.”

The priest pecked a slick cockhead. “Uh uh. You promised. Said you wanted to try.”

He groaned regret, wishing he had enough foresight to ask Elias to grant him the pleasure of his body first.

“I still promise.” It wasn’t entirely a lie. He wriggled a tongue between thighs, kissing and licking creamy skin when they fell open, intent on finding an eager opening. Elias diverted his mouth, determined. “Please?” Peter sucked a lower lip red, licking a tongue pushing at his, pleading between breaths. “Just the tip.”

“I’ve heard that before.” Elias chuckled and broke their kiss a moment to wet fingers and slipped them between their bodies. “And no. I want what you’ve offered.”

Peter growled. “I was willing to compromise.”

The priest smiled, eyes rolling, speaking between tempting kisses. “Your compromises always end up with me on my back, compromising positions, not compromise.”

“Name one time.”

Fair brows shot up. “I can name several. The ‘I just want to talk’ confessional incident for starters.”

“Mmm.” The priest rocked a slick shaft along the silken thigh resting between his legs. “If you
wouldn’t have been dressed so provocatively."

Elias flipped Peter on his back, fingers walking playfully down the cock he straddled. “In my full length wool robes?”

The older man closed his eyes, a jaunty rhythm tapped his sac, heard ragged breathing in the dark. “You weren’t speaking to me. And I wasn’t entirely thrilled about your desire to renew vows to God and sacrifice your love for me.”

“You just want my body.”

“I always want you. I have never denied that. I just preferred you singing his praises while I had the pleasure of fucking your blessed soul senseless.” Peter groaned laughter and kissed a collarbone when Elias gripped his shaft ruefully.

A cool palm rested on his inner thigh and timidly slid higher, pausing. “Are you sure?”

“No.” The older man swallowed thickly. Elias watched closely, reading his expression, waiting, thumb brushing a taut tendon. He froze, heat receding to chill. Internal anger sparked red. He dragged the boy’s hand lower, defiant, biting his cheek open when fingers dipped and found the ring of muscle there. “This is devotion. I meant it. I’m offering this to you, willingly.”

The older man squeezed eyes shut without meaning to. Dark shapes lived behind his eyelids. Saw them move. Not take shape. Only sensation.

Breathe. Not now.

Quiet ohs fluttered his stomach. He reached for the boy and sought the distraction of a delicate mouth. To focus on what moaning pitch he could draw out of Elias when he sucked his tongue.

He should ask him to stop.

Palmed his cock beginning to soften, nails twisting the quilt, grimacing, trying to conjure images of past pleasure before it all changed.

You used to like this. Breathe.

“Is this good?”

It is. It isn’t. He can’t focus.

“Yeah.” Peter curved fingers and pushed them against his opening, alarm jerking knees, frigid instruction a barely audible gasp. “Harder. Push.”


He should say he can’t. Elias will stop. He will understand.

He gradually became aware of the night. Hands of gnarled tree branches tapped menacingly on glass. They’re reaching out for him. Dark enveloped despite ocean drifting across the ceiling. Unable to see the comforting glimmer of loving eyes.

Please, not now.

The palm leveraging support on his chest, normally silken began to hurt. Becoming heavier and heavier. Pressure nearly unbearable.
They should stop.

Then bruising. Phantom nails digging his hips. Holding him down. Crushing his trachea. Choking out his oxygen. He started to scream.

“Wait.” The older man croaked. He grabbed sloping shoulders and shoved, bringing a knee protectively between their bodies. Elias tumbled to the mattress, yelping. “Will you t-t-turn on the lights?”

The boy lifted shakily on elbows then rocked to a crouch. He panted slightly, lips swollen, alarmed. Blushing skin paled a shade. Elias clamped a hand over his mouth, stifling a scream or bile, eyes widening. His husband’s terror mirrored. The priest pushed damp bangs from his forehead and nodded wordlessly. When his hand fell, Peter could see a tearful apology rippling lovely lips and winced. Shadows embraced them as the priest slipped away.

The older man hastily wrapped his naked body with sheets, burn of tears searing. He wiped furiously at them.

Why the fuck am I still like this?

He drew a knee up, tucked one leg beneath it, and wrapped both arms around himself. Shame pricked the nape of his neck. He dropped his face to forearms. Bitterly choked down pathetic.

For god fucking sake, I’m—

“—trying,” Peter insists vehemently. As if that was the cause. As if he was lacking. As if he wanted to stay like this forever, this thing that couldn’t be trusted to stay in control. As if it was his fault. It was his fault. “We’re talking to one another, meditating, every week, just like you said. I’m here, aren’t I? I’m fucking trying.”

Rolling of a fountain pen paused on paper. Hannibal looks up, expression passive, nodding once. “You are.”

“Then why! I’m doing everything you asked. Do you have any idea how humiliating it is to abandon your lover mid orgasm because you’re being consumed by a flash back of choking on some fuck’s cock? And you spend the next week telling him it isn’t his fault when you can’t get it up.”

There’s a muffled, derisive snort. “You voice that question like neither of us can relate.”

“This doesn’t concern you!”

“You asked me to be here.”

“I should be better already! You promised it would help!”

“It doesn’t work like that.” Fingertips graze stubble of a beard, rest on a frown. Will peers over the rim of thick glasses, gestured to his husband. “Ask Hannibal. It took time. A lot of goddamn time. It still happens. You have to learn to sense it, recognize the signs, before it’s too late. Find ways to cope and methods to move past it. I know it’s painful, Peter, I’m sorry. You know Elias understands.”

“We don’t have time.” An unlit cigarette snaps in half. “He shouldn’t have to fucking understand. He didn’t sign up for this.”

“Have you ever considered that the importance, on time, of the loss you both experienced when
apart, drives you to commit to circumstances you unconsciously know will trigger the attacks?”

Ssshed. Delicate fingers protectively shielded a spitting flame of a match. Wax ran sideways down a votive candle and dripped to the floor. Pupils pinpricks as light caught, burning brighter, unleashing a scent of patchouli and sandalwood. Presence of its former owners trailed smoke and lingered near windows, carried perhaps, across the sea to fill their dreams with visions of home.

Elias climbed the quilt, crouching behind Peter and kissed the side of his neck, murmur far quieter than light flickering golden. He touched him once, lightly, apologetically, on the crown of his head. “Perhaps we should get some sleep?”

“I want to, it’s just.” What could he say about the thing that lived inside him, standing between them, never allowing Elias in? Peter exhaled guilt through his nose, caught his own reflection—lip curled, tears stinging, feral. He hated that unloved, unwelcome thing watching. Disgusted, he tore his gaze free. “You can—“ He coughed to cover a threatening sob. “—hold my hand.”

Don’t let go. Even if I ask.

The boy sat a safe distance, near enough, radiating languid heat. A hand covered a fist crushing an ankle that had begun to bruise. Elias brushed gingerly, waiting. It loosened by degrees. He slid their fingers together, kissed them. “We don’t have to,” A hushed voice repeated. “Not now. Not ever. You’re not any less to me, Peter, as a man or a lover. You are simply you. Not damaged or made ugly by what was done to you. Though I would never hurt you, this isn’t something I need. I know you. Know you’re devotion.” The older man lay a palm across the back of his neck, blunt nails digging in, as if he could pull pale hatched scars from his body as easily as removing a shirt and discard them, who they had made him, forever. “I am in love with who you are as a person, not what you think I want you to be. Now…” Lips pecked a shoulder blade crisply. Let go of his hand. Sweet cadence understanding cloying. “Would you like to hold me? For me to stay? Or do you need space?”

They mutter good night on opposite sides of the bed, shivering, restlessly watching moonlight track the room.

*

Beneath bluish twilight, rustling sheets and plaintive moans fill the bedroom. Peter is propped on his knees with Elias writhing beneath, one hand pumping his cock, working the tense muscle between his legs open knuckle by knuckle. Sweet flesh stretched his grimace, head dropping to take the priest deeper in his throat, focused on what he can control, the boy’s pleasure.

He rolled Elias on top, grunting, “Now. I want you now.”

Before I change my mind.

His mouth latched on to the boy’s before he can protest, stroking to keep him wanting, wanting him, wanting this. Desperation to match his own.

He remembered consenting. ‘Yes’ resounding. Insistent. Demanding.

I don’t want to lose you.

He said the words.
The room is dark again. He tries to stay connected, gripping Elias by the hair, it’s him, it’s him, it’s him.

He sobbed, pleasure, pain, stranded between rooms and time.

_He loves you. You want this._

He unconsciously has been mapping an escape route since the start, marking doors and windows, and how he will break free, then and now.

_Please not now. Let me get through this._

God, why the fuck can’t he enjoy this? Some part of his mind flickers, struggling to surface, to show him how eager Elias is to make him feel good, to give him what he wants.

_You asked for this._

Then it hurts, his body a live wire screeching pain, real, imagined, there isn’t a difference. It isn’t Elias anymore. He reacts.

“Peter!” This cry is different, piercing, scared.

Black tunneling his vision faded, follows frightened violet eyes to palms wrapped unforgiving on wrists, pinning Elias to the mattress. He let go, stomach lurching. There are bruises. His stomach heaved. “I didn’t mean—” He bolts.


“I got lost.” Peter’s lips twisted, agony and grief, trembling violently.

“I know. I know. You're here. With me. It's okay.”

“Hurt me. I know how to process the pain. This. I can’t do this. You’re too gentle with me.” He placed small hands on his throat, forces them to squeeze, voice and smile straining. “Hold me down and fuck me.”

The priest’s knees dig shoulders, trying to pry hands free from Peter’s neck, heart wrenching and terrified, not of him, of what he’s asking. “We don’t have to do this! You don’t need to prove anything to me, please.”

Fists thumped the mattress, lungs ashen sobs. The older man rolled on his side. “This is what I need!” Humiliation dampening eyes. “Use me.” Frustration burned his throat. Hates the delicate pain, his pain, radiating in the priest’s eyes. “Prove to me I can still do this!”

Elias drew the quilt gingerly over his husband's naked body, eyes downcast and lay down beside him. “I don’t need proof. Neither do you. Not like this.”

In the minutes that follow, the earth quivered then shook, timid caress on its spine, lain bare and stripped of protection, a crackle of lighting distant. “Please don’t touch me. It hurts. No, no—”

“Shhh…” Lilacs twined protectively at the base of curving mountains, breeze soft, embrace gentle. “You’re okay. We’re okay. I’m here. Breathe. Remember? We have to breathe? Oh Peter, please, you're going to hyperventilate.”
Muffled thunder sobbed. “I was never this weak.”

“All I see is a strong man weary worn from tormenting demons in need of rest.”

Rainwater fell from the sky, pelted a smooth petal chest, gripping its soft stem. “God, please, please don’t leave me. I can change.”

Chapter End Notes

Devil's Backbone x The Civil Wars

Give me the burden, give me the blame
I’ll shoulder the load, and I’ll swallow the shame
Give me the burden, give me the blame
How many, how many Hail Marys is it gonna take?
Don’t care if he’s guilty, don’t care if he’s not
He’s good and he’s bad and he’s all that I’ve got
Oh Lord, Oh Lord, I’m begging you please
Don’t take that sinner from me
Chapter 44

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Elias finds them in the kitchen. Will leaning on the island counter, curls falling in his eyes, watching Hannibal cook. This is the first time in a week he has seen them in the same room. They had kept their quarreling quiet, passive aggressive jabs in passing or dark stares across the dining room table, or taken it elsewhere to spare Elias the experience. Last night their voices had reached crescendo, pitched intensity, then fell silent. The aura surrounding them remained tense. An electricity. No longer lethal. Changed somehow. Static sparking gold on sheets in the night.

He quietly takes his place on a stool, pours an orange juice, watches the two men in its reflection. They seem restless. Hyper aware of the other’s presence. Every shift of their body. Ears pricking at every inhale and exhale as if waiting for the other to speak. Drowning in unspoken conversation.

He is about to voice concern when Hannibal tosses garlic in a skillet, blue orange glow of flame igniting thick red marks on scarred wrists, winding up a forearm, ending abruptly where white cotton sleeves are cuffed at the elbow.

“You’re hurt,” Elias says, standing abruptly to tend to the wounds, nurture. His chosen role to mend their souls and bodies.

The older man sits the skillet down swiftly and moves to cover the markings, smile tense and thin. “This is nothing.”

Will reaches across the island, stilling hands, and shakes his head, warning. “I want to see them.”

Hannibal looks at his reddened wrists, thick lines cross hatching golden arms, skin puckered from aged white scarring, and returns to cooking in fluid and precise moments, saying nothing.

“Safety is important to me,” Will notes, motioning at the marks with a tip of a coffee cup and directs the last bit at steam turning his cheeks ruddy. “Especially when our irrational base instinct to hurt when threatened is impulsive and short sighted.” His fingers slip open four buttons on the front of his shirt, draws the material aside. There is livid bite mark on the slope of where his shoulder becomes throat. Elias reaches for it, gasp an airy accusation, fingertips unsteady. Will lays his hand across it to stop him, a single caress, affectionate, before secreting the wound beneath blue green flannel. It is his to keep. Belongs to him. “The resurrection of who we were before this has no place here. With who we are now. Who we have become. Sometimes they need a reminder not all pain is intended to wound and not all of our compassion is soft, without teeth.”

The priest’s eyes slide from rope burns on thick golden wrist, lifting just below dark lashes outlining blue eyes. “He hurts you?” Will tips a thought with his chin, carefully reading the twitch of a freckled nose, lips slackening, knowing Elias is reading him in kind. Elias breathes out quietly. “Has hurt you before?”

Rhythmic sound of silver hitting the chopping block slows then stops. Breath held. All three waiting an answer.

Cerulean sparks off haunted crimson. “Only when I allow it.” Will answers measured and slow, eyes locked on Hannibal, fingertips curving his belly, caress fond, intimate. “Surrender requires implicit trust, shared balance of give and take. And Doctor Lecter likes it when I’m marked. And
occasionally I require him bound.”

The older man clears his throat hoarsely and returns to dicing sprigs of green onion, remaining silent. Elias can’t help but notice the way his eyes darken, soft amber ringed edges, firelight, drawn to fingertips Will drags across his stomach, mouth thinning. Wonders what it is burning his lungs that he isn’t saying out loud.

This is as open as they will ever be with him. Like the wound Will has blanketed underneath his shirt. A glimpse. The priest thinks of his church, the screams, howls of wolves, protecting their own, their mate.

“And.” Elias shifts on his stool, noting crimson staining peaked cheeks, an uncharacteristic blush. “He likes when you mark him? Restrain him?”

He is not here to judge. He plays the role of confessional, listening, reflecting.

“He appreciates surrender when it suits me. When I ask for it.” Will flashes teeth over the rim of his cup, going to stand behind Hannibal, single fingertip tracing a spine, the older man’s posture straightening, the higher it rises. He crumbles, dropping the skillet. The younger man whispers something softly in his ear and kisses the nape of his neck. “Go on.”

“I take calculated measures to…” Hannibal’s voice comes out thickened, accent rough, entire body seeking affection in Will’s arms, starved for the gentle way he molds him in pursuit, as if they are touching for the first time in years. “…ensure above all else you feel safe. Whatever you ask of me I provide. Trust in your guidance. Free or bound. I surrender, willingly at your mercy. However you will have me. If you will have me?”

“I’ll have you as you are,” Will murmured softly in his ear.

Crimson eyes darken, tears drip through fair lashes. “All of me?”

“All of you.”

Their hands slide in tandem, seeking, tracing their reciprocated wounds, tender in their violence.

The conversation from two autumn’s prior swims through the library, tonal rises and falls of Hannibal and Will, echoes. Elias is seated cross legged in a dusty pink silk robe, small lilies clustered on its lapels, delicate stitching a mark of Peter’s work. Three suitcases lay open, surrounded by the Lecter’s possessions whispering memories and time past. Leather bound books. Charcoal sketches. Stacks of folded clothing flank him, both fine and thread bare. Allowing his hand to be guided by the pull of energy they emanate. His fingertips skirt each object reverently, caressing, eyes closed and breathing softly. They speak to him. Closure and appreciation humming.

Grey dawn of morning turned smudged fingerprints mottling his wrists to pale sapphires. He touched them. Rubbing each ache. This was not the first time Peter had gotten lost, sepia tone flashbacks of memories surfacing, bleeding down the back of his eyelids until the present ceased to exist. He couldn’t remember the last time his husband had an attack. Events of previous months appeared on his skin like a grocery check list. He frowned. They had been under too much strain for too long. Mourning. Neglecting their needs. If he listened, not to the words but vibrations in the air around them, he would have heard it sooner. Fear.

His gaze strayed to a mahogany desk covered in thick plastic, shapes and colors shifting, forming long plaid limbs striding confidently across the carpet, thick leather book in an outstretched hand. “It
sounds like you are describing post traumatic stress disorder, a common plague for victims. Even Will still has episodes. With the appropriate treatment, learned coping methods and gradual exposure, I believe Peter would benefit greatly. Your husband likely subconsciously relates all sexual acts to violence, what his body once learned for pleasure was replaced by pain, humiliation, degradation. There is safety in bringing you pleasure, control, quiet. When the act requires two, his wiring seems to cross, and he is sent back to dark torment. We must find a way to rewire his subconscious to keep him present, provide his mind and body a new education if you will.”

“Don’t say victim.” Elias hears the memory of his reply echo, cutting in, terse. “He doesn’t like it.”

“What does he prefer?”

Printed words on stark white pages float in the air, blurring. “Survivor.”

“My apologies. Give me a few days to research and we will find someone suitable.”

“No.” Elias latches on Hannibal’s hand, ridges of sinew and bone solid, steady, curving to cup his own. He can feel the shadow of him, there, in the light. “It has to be you. He trusts you.”

“He trusts you, dove, no one else. If you advise it, I think he will heed your wishes to seek my counsel.”

Hannibal was not here. Elias released a shaky breath, a promise, to himself, to Peter. They had been at peace for some time. Before. Before everything. They could be again.

He brought bruising to his mouth, tasted the sting. He does not fear Peter. Has not met a version of him he cannot love. Fell for the haughty sneer of a man who needed no one. Embraced the softer pieces, without question or comment, when they clung to him at night. Caught glimpses of the looming shadow that rose, soul emptying from grey eyes, recognizing its form, a demon holding him down, lost to its cruelty. It was not Peter. Even it needed love.

Overwhelming shame and grief fill the room, thick and hot like humidity on the eve of a rainstorm. Timid knocks tapped the door. Elias opened his eyes, light silver then white then fading, filtering, shadows arranging. He beckoned for Peter to enter. The older man shook his head, muscles straining, neck bowed, adam’s apple bobbing, trying to speak. Fists shifted miserably in tight pockets, denim cutting hipbones, cotton t-shirt stretching. Two sizes too small. One of Will’s. Peter sucked in a lungful of air and holds it, eyes shining, pleading. He looks younger. Flesh a sickly grey green, taut, clinging to shivering bones. The priest heard him become sick twice that morning. Reflection of a boy he once was, breaking beneath an oppressive conscience and tar riddled lungs breathing in affection from fleeting mouths.

He returned to packing, averting his gaze, patiently waiting for Peter to say whatever it is he came to say. Patience. He heard the rumble of Hannibal warm his mind. He is not unlike a feral creature, terrified to approach, wanting your affection all the same. Wait for him to come to you.

Rainwater eyes are transfixed on the path his thumb is trailing along the crisp collar of a crème colored suit jacket, pained, hungry, as if Elias is exploring Peter’s naked skin.

He is frail beneath the façade of steel and venom he presents us. The older man visibly shivered when the priest cradled the fabric, breathed in its scent, and lay it carefully in the black leather suitcase to his right. And he is proud. The cruelty bestowed upon him a second skin worn in defiance. Armor of righteous anger. You must accept all parts of him equally as they are revealed.

“I’m—“ Peter paled another shade, screws his eyes shut. He put a hand on his stomach as if he might
be ill again. “I’m. *Fuck.*“

Elias paused, framed set of fishing lures in hand, waits a moment for Peter to continue and returned to packing when he does not. A hysterical yelp, almost a laugh, pierces. The older man scrubbed palms over eyes, up the side of his shaved scalp, and locked fingers behind his neck, trying to hold himself together. He waited. Peter’s eyes remain on the floor, biting his lip, an attempt to hide how close he is to bursting in to tears.

The priest sighed audibly, straightening, and shows mercy, command hushed. “Come to me, Peter.”

Stumbling blindly, Peter toppled stacks of books, leaving a sea of ruined clothing in his wake, pitiful gratitude seeping between clenched teeth. He fell to his knees and buried his face in the priest’s lap, palms flat on the Persian rug, too afraid to touch him. Afraid of what he would do. What he had done.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” He choked out. His fingernails rake lines in the rug. “Forgive me. Please say you forgive me.”

Elias touched lips to the nape of Peter’s neck, draping across his back, cheek resting in the hollow of shoulder blades. The words are unnecessary. There is nothing worthy of penance. Nothing he wouldn’t forgive. Peter needs to hear them. “Forgiven.”

The older man burrowed for protection, becoming breath and nothing more. His weeping evened out after several minutes, throat scraped raw when he spoke again. “I shouldn’t have pushed you. It’s my fault. My fault. I thought I was better. I thought we could, I could. God, Elias, I’m not lying. I want you so much I feel like I’m suffocating. I just want to be normal again.”

No matter how tight Elias holds Peter he can’t seem to stop the trembling.

“I know. And I’m not the one you were pushing,” The priest said. “You were pushing yourself. Testing your limits. And we both know you like to prove how unbreakable you are by breaking yourself, before anyone else can.”

“I wanted—“ Peter bit his mouth red, gaze shattered. “I want to give you this, sparrow. Crave change. You should be able to touch me without fear of…”

“What?”

“Without me falling apart. Without hurting. Being hurt.”

“Then fall. Let it hurt for a moment.” Elias murmured, crooking fingers beneath a clenched jaw, lifting Peter’s face. “You don’t have to hide from me. I love you. Let me collect your shards.” He pulled the t-shirt over the older man’s head, unhurried, thumbs drawing up ribs. “Cherish each bit of colored glass.” His mouth found the thickest scar on a lean chest and sucked its puckered surface till black ink seemed swollen, red at the edges. Nosed the side of a throat bared for his exploration, licked the lobe of an ear, and pressed close to whisper, “Arrange them to create a display in your honor, my patron saint. My fallen.”

Elias offered his wrists, frantic remorse sealing bruises. “I don’t want you to live the rest of your life trying to piece together a broken man.”

“Then let me help you. And for Christ sake, listen when I offer counsel. You do not always know what’s best.” The priest’s growls are lost on Peter, sternum deep inside silk, licking a clear path down his ribcage, slurring a desire to taste him, be with him, love him. “I told you to listen.” The older man snapped to attention, panting, blinking hard to keep focused on bright eyes and not a
tempting scowl. “Good. Remove your clothes, please, and kneel when you’ve finished.”

Peter stripped without hesitation, bends to his knees, lean muscle and tendons shivering anticipation. Moans when Elias offers a light kiss, whispered thanks, before shedding the silk robe to join him. He watched the older man flex fingers on ankles, reminding himself to submit, motionless and wait. Reassurance warmed his brow, you’re safe, safe with me. Lilac eyes washed unhurried, fingertips following where a marveling gaze lingered. Left dotted flesh in its wake, expanding chest freezing, stomach clenching. I think you get finer with age, Mister Moreau, more lovely every time I see you. Only to you.

Peter buried his face in the curve of a neck, face heating at the soft praise, weak sound escaping. Shh, I won’t hurt you. The priest freed a shaking hand and smoothed it from the small of his waist to rest on a left thigh. His breath hitched. He held tighter, leaving pink indentations, fingerprints of shared belonging. God, you’re so strong. Elias followed scars from elbow to bicep, squeezing and pressing, threading loosely round a neck for balance. My masterpiece. Divine protection pressed the knob of his spine, followed to the base, then traced from left to right.

The boy crouched, nuzzling a chest, quivering. “Do you want to put your legs around my waist?”

It isn’t a question. A statement. A position they were both familiar with. To inspire openness and trust. Communication without distraction. A safe space. Elias hid a small smile. He was positive Hannibal had not intended them to be naked during their sessions of meditation.

Peter complied a little too quickly, breath rushing out when Elias did the same, heat of their groins meeting in the space between. They both gasp. The priest cupped his husband’s face, leaning their foreheads together. “Now may I have your hand?” The older man stared warily at the boy’s palms, one empty and the other hiding something in his right. “Please. I want you to have this. Ah, no, the other one.”

His offered hand, rugged and large, rested in a smaller one. The boy traced kisses from calloused tips to wrist. He slid his husband’s wedding band up a gnarled ring finger, pretending not to hear his breath catch. His left hand stretched out, curved fingers pressed to pale lips, waiting. Peter kissed them, the boy’s wedding band, and returns it to its rightful place, brushing it with a thumb till it began to shine.

“See? Whole again. Better?”

His husband linked their hands together, shook his head, gaze averted. The priest offered a tender smile, ghosting hard divots and cracking skin, sighing when Peter pursued, lifting and pushing in to each touch. Sliding lips and tongue reach the air. They skimmed each other’s backs, wedding rings cool on their skin. Reveling in their differences, silken smooth and slate ridges. Molding then arcing to discover new comfort. Aching need to be near the other, curving warm up their bellies.

“I want you to do something.”

“Anything, sparrow.”

Silk flowed free of belt loops and dangled demurely in upturned hands. “Bind my wrists.”

Peter drew back, eyes darkening and scowled, disgust glinting a single incisor. “I will not.”

He tried to wrench the belt away. Elias held on, tongue clucking, tasting the vein furiously bulging in the man’s neck. “You said anything.” An audible hiss answered. He snaked the ball of his foot over
a leg and began massaging a thickening length. “Give me my anything.”

“I rescind the offer.” Punishing teeth bit his clavicle.

Elias tipped his chin to a freckled shoulder and glanced through thick lashes, hoping to inspire softness and placed wrists loosely behind his back. “I want you to be able to put me where you want me, soothed by the knowledge I can only have what you allow.”

The older man flipped him belly down, harsh breath scalding. “I can, and have, bent you over every surface of this entire house and fucked you until you begged, priest. I assure you that isn’t an issue. Are you trying to anger me?”

“This is different.” Carpet roughed his cheek and arms. Elias gripped fingers tearing the silk from his wrists and glanced over his shoulder. “I haven’t. And couldn’t if I wanted to. I am trying to give you what you so desperately crave.”

“And what do I crave.”

“To have me inside you,” He answered softly. “To maintain control while I shift your pieces and find room for myself among them. I want you to feel safe, unafraid. I’m not surrendering my freedom, I’m offering you yours.”

Silver eyes flashed, derision, loathing, denial. He pushed Elias free. “I am not afraid of you!”

“Not of me, no. Just all those before me. You are afraid of them. Terrified by how alive they become when I touch you. Look at me—“ Elias twisted and gripped Peter’s face, slid his nose alongside a peaked one, blinked eyelashes together. “I meant what I said. What we have is perfect, beautiful, and we don’t have to change it. This is your choice. Let me heal you if I can.”

Repressed tears blackened a reply. “And if you can’t? When we haven’t been able to all the times before?”

“I will love you all the same. Every version of you that loves every version of me, in this life and the next, will grow old together and we will be content.”

They looked at opposite ends of the study. Each waiting. Garbled cursing or consent cleared a throat. Peter jostled Elias to his knees and drew wrists to a lean stomach, braiding silk around them without another word. The priest kissed his cheek, once, gently. His husband stared at faint shadows of their bodies entwined on the carpet, pang of anguish radiating. The priest rocked back on his haunches, thanks quiet when the older man automatically steadied him, helping them settle, knees open and inviting.

The older man pursued, stern gaze halting him. “Slow. I want us to go slow. Listen.”

Peter huffed and tried again, motions jerky and stilted, fighting trembling hands by the time they are skin to skin, positioned like they were before.

“Breathe,” Elias murmured, faint breath touching Peter’s lips. He inhaled once and exhaled deeply. He repeated it. The older man relinquished to match their breathing, eyes dipping closed each time they emptied their lungs, exchange practiced. “That’s good.” The older man gathered the priest to his chest, long fingers enfolding freckled wings. Elias splayed fingers on a smooth chest, head cradled. They inhale again in unison, wrapped in skin, warm and cool, exhale. “Again.” They pause. “Do you want me to try and touch you?”

“Not yet.”
“What do you want?”

Glassy grey peered over a wrist, moved to the priest, bound hands folded on thighs, unabashedly beautiful in his nakedness. Slopes and planes pearlescent. Radiant.

“I want to know if you think I still need space.” Peter encircled Elias before consciously aware, hooking a hand beneath a knee and cradling the back of a head, pressing him to the carpet. Their souls seeping, melding, sighing for one another. “Is this enough space for me, priest? Is this what I need?”

Peter straddled him, palm sliding to the small of his waist. The boy arced, lean stomach tense, lips parting, murmuring, “No.”

Slender calves cradled a larger body. They jolt when their hips connect. Tarnished copper waves spiked as the older man ran his fingers through hair creating points of a molten halo. “Now?” He asked huskily. The boy shakes his head. “What do I want?”

“I think you want to kiss me.” Elias said.

The older man shifted on an elbow and kissed him softly. Each touch feathered wings. He trailed fingertips from an arch of a foot, to calf, to knee, and pressed bunching muscles of thighs, smooth and silken. He trapped a rosy quivering cock beneath his abdomen, languid pressure making Elias gasp, nails digging the crest of his hips and stomach.

He ducked and suckled a nipple, grazing teeth a moan of his name piercing the air, before soaking it with a tongue, murmuring around it. “Now what do I want?”

“To touch me.” A breathless reply.

Toes nudged the silk robe into view. A miniature vial of lubricant, floral print dotting the glass, rolled from the pocket. The older man snorted. Drizzled honey gold filled a navel, seeped over inner thighs and pooled, dripping upwards as hips lifted. Elias whined. “Could you just touch me already?”

Peter streaked fingerprints to a groin, outlining a blushing cock with a pinky, and bent to mouth his reply lightly around a slick head. “Happy?”

“Hardly.”

He quirked a grin. “Not hard or not happy? Because you appear to be both.”

They topple a neat stack of books, rolling, Elias caught by powerful arms and thighs, both laughing when an antique encyclopedia hits Peter on the head. He groaned and flopped back, one palm over his eye, smile frail. The priest would give anything to see it bloom, like it used to. The other grey eye cracked open, considering the boy languidly stretched on his chest, humming a jumbled tune.

Peter grazed a kiss to his forehead. He caressed a shoulder, followed its curve, smoothed pink silk beyond and fiddled with its stitched edging, remark soft. “You’re vulnerable like this. But you still have so much power over me.”

The priest blinked slow, lashes shimmering, equally tender. “So are you.”

“What do you want?”

“To kiss you. May I kiss you?”
“You can kiss me.” Elias leaned, struggling to balance, head tipping to the side when Peter lifted his chin away. “You can kiss me between my thighs.” A soft gasp escaped. “Softly. Slowly. Like you do when I return home from work in the evening.”

Tiny kisses wandered from scalp to nape, down and down, scars and black ink straining for a glance of tender devotion. Silken trail of hair a parting gift. The boy wriggled back, carpet turning knees red, and began at the tips of Peter’s toes, kissed the arc of his foot, traced a jutting ankle bone, lips wandering up one leg then back down the other, body a whisper of fingerprints.

Elias curled on knees, draping an ankle over the arc of his back, chaffing the chill from it tenderly with his cheek. Thigh muscles quivered, smooth jaw nuzzling, coaxing legs open. Peter hummed drowsily, relaxing. The boy’s tongue looped cursive letters of the alphabet at the base of his shaft.

He purposefully applied an open mouthed hum for permission on his perineum. “Is this okay?”

He can feel the vibration from balls to tip, groaning. “Yes.”

Tentative flicks of a tongue touch skin. “And this?”

“More.”

“Like this?”

Peter sighed low, deep breath filling lungs, praising the way Elias followed the swath of dark skin up, over and over, licking the crevice open until it’s dripping wet. “God, yes.”

The rough underside of a tongue swiped the ring of muscle, once, twice. “This?”

A surge of sudden arousal sent fluid stripping his chest. His legs go rigid. He released a low breath, knees clamping narrow shoulders. The priest waited for him to relax, sharp gaze attentive, body taut, prepared to stop on command. He nods for him to try again. Elias caressed roping thighs soothingly and delves forward, eager to repeat the mistake, breathy keen of wonder pursuing. Cool bridge of a nose inhaled his scent, tongue wriggling, lazily rimming.

“More, god, more,” A guttural, splintering moan shakes loose.

Falling to his belly, Elias sucked harder, louder, hungrily smearing spit and little gasps of appreciation. Timid tonguing became pointed, spearing, winking muscle fluttering and clenching, shy exploration now ravenous. The priest can feel his own moans, as if he is the one on his back being devoured, flow through Peter, heels of feet roughing up and down his spine. Tiny mmms of pleasure hum louder the deeper his tongue sinks, intoxicated by the taste, plunging, startled by the blistering heat.

You taste divine. He wanted to say. You taste like heaven.

Peter rolled hips to adjust the angle, swearing in three different languages, wriggling tongue sinking deeper, ache becoming hotter, wetter, throbbing. He can’t remember it being this good. Wants to palm his reddened cock or tell Elias to relieve it with the cool spit of his mouth, but he knows one lick, one caress, and it will be over too soon. He couldn’t bear to be parted from needy suckling, Elias feasting between his thighs, moaning and whimpering, their sweat soaking the carpet, rock hard, panting.

Enthusiastic sucking drowned out the older man’s desperate slurs in French, too fast and too jumbled to make any sense. Elias stretched a smile over the opening, blissfully pillowed, certain he never needed to come up for air. He wouldn’t mind suffocating between his husband’s thighs if only he
could make him sound like this. Every moan different, long, short, sharp, and rough, telling him exactly when to lick slowly or suckle to make the legs wrapped around him shake. His fingers curl on the carpet, scratch awkwardly up his thighs, rubbing a leaking head between thumb and forefinger, moaning.

“Oh god, oh fuck, priest, you have to…” Searing pleasure traced inner thighs, flows up tightening balls, and Peter lifted Elias before he can fall.

“Nnn.” Dejected breath cools spit drying against his opening, tongue lapping affectionately, again and again, sighed longing to be inside, becoming a petulant whine. “Just a little longer?” His grip tightened, orgasm cresting by the simple sound of Elias wanting to taste him. Groaning when the boy laves the tight muscle, spearing lightly. “I like listening to you. You’ve never sounded like that. Is it good?”

Palms over his face, Peter tried catching his breath and burst out laughing. “Fucking Christ, you have no doubts believing some dead guy hung on a cross to dissolve our sins, but question whether or not I enjoyed your thorough, and surprisingly skilled, tongue fucking?”

A petulant pout rippled on a thigh. “A simple thank you or job well done would suffice.”

The older man eventually found the strength to sit up right, legs and arms quaking, sweat beading his broad chest, expanding and contracting shaky laughter. “You suck cock like you were born to it. This, this was something else entirely and I don’t believe ‘job well done’ adequately covers it.” His grin broadened, leaning close, as if to whisper a secret. “I think I may have seen God.”

Elias delivered a sharp pinch to his ankle, scold muffled. “Heathen.”

“You have to stop,” Peter lamented. Heat pooled painfully in his groin, tongue lavishing attention. His fingers twitched, half considering how long he could last if he were to give Elias what he wanted, let him drink his fill, shivering on the cusp of orgasm for hours on end, exhausted and desperate and begging for his hand or mouth. “You’ll make me come.”

“Don’t you want—” Elias glanced up innocently, biting his bottom lip.

Peter choked on his next inhale. Slack jawed, mouth watering, heart pounding. Finds the priest’s plush lips crimson chaffed and entirely swollen. White fluid and spit gleaming on a soft chin. His body pearled sweat, roses blossoming in spring. Another stab of pleasure jerked his cock. Fixated on a hand between slender legs, pink glistening cockhead bobbing.

“—me to worship you?”

Moans grazed a freckled shoulder, damp lips finding a pearl tipped ear, stuttering, “I want you in me.” Oil slicked palms slid up a groin, caressed a willowy cock, leaving Elias breathless. “Come here.”

Leaning across a sweat soaked chest, a tender mouth pressed to Peter’s. “Are you sure? I could finish us both like this.”

“No.” The older man shook his head, flare of madness dimming to steel grey and made a soft pleading noise. Elias lifted bound arms. Silk unfurled, petals on summer withered English roses, falling to leave only implicit, terrifying trust. “I want to know you. Give you this. Make me yours.”

Every press of their bodies signaled gentle intent and affection. Their resonating emotions molding, become one, wrestle across faces, glistening gazes, warming fingertips. Elias knelt, knees aching, soft gaze gathering every shadow and bend of light on Peter’s body, cherishing the moment
stretching between them. He never wanted to forget a single detail.

“You are my altar.” The older man’s eyes misted. Answering tears rushed a strong voice like tidal waves. Elias cradled knees, draping the hollow weight of his body forward, gaze steadily on Peter. “This…”

They touched the other’s chest. Took a deep breath. Let it out. Another. Thoughts scattering. Exchange of souls. Elias took his quivering length in hand, shaking too much to guide it. He felt a surge of anxiety, both desperate to make this perfect, then startling calm. Slide of a palm gentling his hesitation, settling in the small of his back, before the older man drew hips forward, let me help. The first breach left them both gasping, mutual ache to be connected a dropped match on their skin.

Elias slumped, legs liquid, overwhelmed by engulfing heat, catching a thread of emotion not his own, fear and desire, forcing himself to exhale. He dropped his head, bridge of his nose digging a hipbone. “God, I love you. You feel—” A low moan tickled a stomach. “Is this okay?”

A nod jarred muscles, reply tense. “Yes.” Another beat. “Good?”

“Transcendent. I. I don’t think I can move;” Slurred awe becomes laughter.

“Stay for a moment.” Peter kissed the crown of the priest’s head, fingertips carding silken hair, twitching at hips to guide. “Like this.” His breath sticks, thick and vicious. Elias stilled mid thrust sensing his discomfort, balanced on elbows, tears in his eyes, love and worship mingling. “Won’t break.”

The priest embraced him, lips sealed to the armor above a hammering heart. “I won’t let you. Show me what you need.”

Starlight trickled silver, lifting hesitantly, fall a whisper. “You. Elias. I need you.”

They become sensation. Languid lips sliding, connected by murmurs of content, love, admiration. Tongues live circuits wired to hearts. They traced bodies, discovering, exploration of a new fit, soft hills and angled valleys, shifting plates beneath the surface. They cling, breathing through the stretch, molten silver trained on shimmering amethyst. Stay here. Please stay here. Peter flattened a palm to the boy’s chest, inhaled and exhaled deep, felt the contraction of lungs and mimicked the action, oxygen evaporating with another roll of hips. I see you. I’m here. The older man coaxed an erratic rhythm, damp palm on a dewy cheek, their lips nearly touching. Starry skies scattered, broken growl of pleasure returning Elias to the present, next thrust long and deep, drifting on empathy.

Peter threw his head back, mouth open, noiseless and closed his eyes. His fingertips smoothed the spaces of sacred ones, bringing them to his lips. His eyes fluttered, glassy calm remaining, soul quiet. Indescribable peace washed over Elias. For the first time in his life, free. An emptied vessel welling once more by heated touch, accepted and known. Their naked bodies melding, breath quickening as they found rhythm, solace in the other.

“You are my altar.” The priest pillowed Peter’s head and found his voice once more, strong, resolute, golden. “This is where I worship.” They become one, moans rising, one heart, one body. “This is our hymn.” Elias held tighter to cradle every piece of the man he loved falling apart, whisper on their trembling lips. “This is how we pray.”

The front door to the Lecter house ground shut. Lock sliding in place. Keys returned to a glass lamp. Shoes crunched snow. They move quiet, lighter somehow, imprints gentle on damp earth. A black duffle plopped to the ground, a brown leather suitcase joining it.

“Are you ready?”

Elias managed a tight smile from where he was sitting on the edge of the fountain, wary sideways glance straying from his melancholy reflection frozen in water. He touched Hannibal's wedding band looped over the crucifix hanging on his neck. “No.”

“It’s a bit of stone and glass.” The older man nodded, gaze sweeping over the house, chest tight.

“Just things.”

“They’re our things.”

“I know.” Peter reeled Elias in and wrapped both arms round a slender middle, squeezing tight. They melted together, snow touched by the spring sun, every hollow and crest slotting perfectly, breathing unconsciously in sync, halves of a whole resonating. “Things can be replaced. You cannot. You are irreplaceable.”

This is what peace feels like...

The older man rested a chin on the top of a head. Dogs were jumping excitedly around a man wearing a heavy black parka waiting for them at the end of the dock. He lifted a hand briefly in greeting. Penelope was a set of glowering blue eyes inside her kennel, perched at the center of eight large suitcases, guardian of what the priest cherished most. Half from their cottage. The rest filled from some corner of the Lecter house. Paintings and photographs, lures from Will’s desk, handful of Hannibal’s favorite books and sketches. One had been dedicated to half of the man’s immaculate plaid wardrobe. Peter talked Elias in to something more practical like selecting four of his favorite suits. The rest he left to the priest, patiently watching each object weighed and appraised, carefully placed in their rightful spot. Wondering with what care, and where, he might be laid to rest when his time came. Fear becoming a dull ache when Elias had caught sight, drawn to the floor at the center of everything cherished, where they made love at dawn for a second time.

“It’s our home,” The priest mourned, sniffing. “Our family. Our life.”

Lips tenderly caressed a pearl tipped ear. “I am your family. We will make a new home. You and I. Like I promised…”

Cheery yellow glimmered a postcard of bright red and green sticking out of Peter’s left back jean pocket. It read, ‘Welcome to Havana, Cuba. A set of brass house keys was taped to the other side.

“What if they come back?” An even quieter voice asked. The boy shivered, sensing the ghost of their presence on the wind. “And we’re not here. What if they can’t find us?”

Listless laughter warmed a hairline. “The stars in the sky don’t shine any less bright because you ask them to. You underestimate yourself, sparrow. The kind of devotion you bring out in the people around you. The faith you inspire. Trust me…” Peter cradled the priest’s face, dragging his lips from one blushing cheek to the next, blinking slowly. “There is no where on earth we wouldn’t be able to find you. I, for one, will always know where. I just need to look for the brightest star.”

Peter lifted Elias when they kissed, palm burrowed under layers of a coat, breathing ragged by the time afternoon sun broke through clouds and enveloped them in gold.
Hand in hand, suitcase swinging on either side of them, Elias and Peter walked to a white yacht floating on grey churning sea. Yipping dogs and a familiar weathered face greeted them, disappearing to stow furry family and luggage beneath deck. Wind whipped waves frothy white. The engine let out a throaty rumbled goodbye. Peter joined Elias at the stern, stood silently behind him, gazes fixed on the shrinking shoreline. Ebbing tide becoming flowing hair. Sand bare flesh hugging rocky limbs, nestled against rust green foliage folding around the house of stone. Trembling as the ocean spread, grey to white to blue, smudged along a cloudy sky.

Turned from a wink of glass like a north star hanging in the forest and clutched one another, swaying unsteadily. Breathed in the last of decaying winter Autumn clinging to their clothes. Drank winter’s chill from their mouths. Exhaled uncertainty and unknown, salt of the sea and tears. Hushed whisper of their past saying like it should have been the first time, like it always could have been, how we will make it now lost to thunderous waves, glittering drops across the bow. Brushed slates of their souls clean with searching fingertips, unearthing possibility, new beginnings. Found, all the pieces they needed to build a home, jagged grey of the shoreline and clouded lavender of dawning sky, shining in their eyes.

Chapter End Notes

Counting Paths x Mathew and the Atlas

Soon your touch will disappear
It's something that I recognize
Something that I should have come to fear

Trace the lines upon your face
They tell a tale you can't erase
No one's ever looked at you that way

Well if I could apologize
Put the light back in your eyes
No one's ever looked at me that way

Well, that was painful. Hannibal and Will need to break out of prison just to take care of these blundering fools. I feel rusty, hopefully it wasn't too rusty for you dear ones to read.

Speaking of our Murder Husbands. Don't hate me, guys. The next chapter will be?
Difficult to read?

"If everything that can happen happens, then you can never really do the wrong thing?"
Ricocheting back and forth in time here, between past and present, till we can find firm footing in the here and now.

The windowless van is humid, choking, graying blue mist blanketing the Bayou. A single overhead light sputters with every dip and turn, burning rubber streaking the cement it hurtles down. Another turn. Crunching gravel then a whisper of dusty earth. Nearly there.

White knuckles flex on the grip of a semi automatic rifle gleaming between knees of an armed escort. The lower part of his face is concealed by a black jersey mask not thick enough to cover soft wheezing nervousness. Thick sweat beads his brow. His brown eyes flick between two prisoners, bound in straitjackets and heavy industrial chains, masks strapped to their faces. He swallows, thick and heavy, glances at his watch. How much longer? He was authorized to use force. They so much as blink, you shoot to kill, son, Agent Crawford had said, smug grin wide and all teeth. He just wants to make it out of this van alive. The one with graying hair shifts minutely. His hand trails to the stun rod on his belt. He’s never shot anyone before.

The two prisoners have been staring at one another in strangled silence for forty five minutes. Neither has looked away. Violence radiating from their ever so still bodies, interrupted only by occasional swaying of the van. They’re having a conversation.

There’s a sharp swerve, wheel well scraping a pothole and jarring the axel. The light flickers off for a second.

Vehement crimson glows, smoke seeping in the dark. “You have denied me a dignified end, where my death might yet have had meaning. I will never forgive you.”

It clicks back on, filling the interior, a gold yellow haze.

“Lucky for us,” Hostile blue glitters across the aisle, condensation barely veiling a smirk. “We don’t have to endure each other’s existence much longer.”


*

Black Valentino heels clicked on the courtroom’s marble floor, pausing before pivoting and turning to face the witness stand. “How do you know the accused, Hannibal Lecter?”

Pale hands shudder and clench. How was she supposed to answer that question? Lain in poisonous pools and let it swallow her up. Let the visage of black consume her body. Waking repeatedly in the bed of a cold blooded serial killer. An index finger chipped bright red paint, vivid color of gushing blood, scraping streaks from nail to nail. Immaculate manicure ruined by ten minutes of questioning.
Alana shifted her right leg over her left, tugging at the hem of a black hounds tooth pencil skirt.

She hasn’t been able to tear her eyes from the aisle between prosecution and defense where pooling stains remained, waves of the red sea shifting beneath, where Rodriguez had lay flailing and gurgling for help when Hannibal alleviated him of what he deemed most offensive, part of his tongue. He had decided the act alone wasn’t enough to punctuate loathing, refusing to honor the man by eating it, and spit it back out where it lay glistening on his chest.

She had not heard if the medical team had been able to reattach it. Only that the lawyer was in intensive care. She hadn’t heard any news at all.

Her eyes slipped to the phone hanging in a two button suit jacket pocket, face up, black and sedentary. No news yet of the boy and his companion. She ground indignation between her teeth. They wanted to make a fool of her. Of Jack.

They were doing an excellent job. True friends of the Lecter’s after all.

She wished she hadn’t listened to reason. Or rather hadn’t listened to Jack’s wounded pride and need to prove to the entire world his rightness in the world. How sane he had been all along. If only someone, before Alana, had listened and not written him off as crazy, washed up on the rocky shores of service, where he insisted the bodies of dead men had once been and weren’t.

Alana folded hands delicately across a knee to keep from scratching them through her hair, wound so tight her scalp was stinging. She missed her fucking family. She offered a nod towards the jury, sheep huddled anxiously together in their box for protection, wide eyed and grey, instead of scowling. “He was a professional colleague of mine for many years. Later he was my charge, a ward of the State, when committed to the BSHCI.”

“Can you tell the court what the acronym stands for please?”

She resisted scoffing. Not much remained of ‘the court.’ Cleared out except for essential personnel only. Safety, they said, when what they meant was ‘saving from’ further humiliation and scandal. Jack Crawford leaned on a far wall near the exit, dark hollows where his eye sockets were. Freddie Lounds had crowed about freedom of the press loud and long enough that she had been the only journalist (if she could be called that) permitted to return, pen tucked in wiry hair, and sitting front and center behind the defense, of course. A jittery court staffer operated a video camera on a tripod in the center aisle, recording and broadcasting the live feed back to wherever the judge had deemed sound enough to hold Will and Hannibal on the premises. There were now two armed guards carrying assault rifles posted at every single exit and entrance of the courthouse, black gleaming shadows clinging to the walls. One stood directly to the left and behind the judge who sat rigid in his tower, statuesque and tight lipped.

“Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.”

Clicking heels drew to a stop. The attorney, Francesca Eastwood, adjusted her cropped black suit jacket, blue eyes casting anxiously about the room, as if Will and Hannibal might materialize from thin air. Satisfied, she swiveled and flourished diamond ring encrusted fingers. “Continue.”

Alana nearly rolled her eyes. If only she knew Hannibal rarely let a meal escape him, present or not, if he had every intention of preparing it. “He narrowly escaped death row on an insanity plea, when charged of countless acts of premeditated murder and cannibalism. He is most well known by his media coined moniker, the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“Mister Silas would have us believe he is better known as devoted husband. His life committed to the
This time Alana couldn’t help it. She laughed. A bubbling thing wrenching from her stomach, stale and dry on her lips. “The only thing Hannibal Lecter was ever committed to was his innate impulses to murder, consume, and display his victims. He couldn’t even be bothered to commit to paying his debt to society at the hospital this same court deemed him worthy of being kept in for the rest of his natural life.”

Something buzzed softly. Alana immediately looked down at her phone. Still blank.

Leather creaked. The defense attorney, Silas, pulled a cell phone from a breast pocket and glanced at the phone. It buzzed five more times consecutively, furiously, then stopped. His brow furrowed. Adjusted glasses on the bridge of his nose and placed it anxiously on top of a yellow legal pad. He jotted something down.

Jack took a step forward, fists slung over the last row of benches, gaze expectant and dark. She shook her head. His expression darkened. He stormed quietly out, likely to find a space private enough to shout at whatever departmental staff still served him in the bureau for their incompetence. How difficult was it to track two foreign boys fleeing from a government building covered in blood, their public violence publicly broadcast on Tattle Crime? They needed them. An insurance policy to wield over Will and Hannibal. To accept their imprisonment and death with open arms, or see their precious little family thrown alongside them.

“The defense claims these two men are in love.”

Miss Eastwood crossed to an easel placed several feet to the right of the jury covered in a white cloth. She whisked the fabric off with the gaudy flourish of a magician’s assistant. Several of the jurors physically turned from the spectacle in their chairs, almost all averting their eyes. A twenty five by thirty poster board was separated in four symmetric panels, highly saturated photographs, panoramic and gritty close ups; faded silver of a scar on a stomach, gnarled boughs of tree limbs branching down a back, white teeth imprints on a thigh. The attorney stacked three of these side by side. In bold Times font read, ‘Evidence A: Will Lecter.’

“The prosecution would like to submit these photographs in to evidence, showing physical markings and scars found on Will Lecter’s body, when he was taken into custody. Acts of brutality brought against Will by his husband, Hannibal, over the course of his kidnapping and subsequent imprisonment.”

“Objection!” Silas’ phone resonated the same exclamation across the table.

As you should, Alana thought. Fresh red blisters ringed Will’s wrists from manacles. Burn marks at his throat from a makeshift noose. Protruding ribs remnants of starvation. She should have let him die there. It was kinder.

“In your professional opinion, does this look like the actions of a man who loves his partner?”

Alana cleared her throat. She wished Brian had kept his nerve long enough to finish the shots. He presented victim evidence like diagrams of anatomical textbooks, clean cut details devoid of emotion. Jimmy showed them for who they were, human, graphic cropped portraiture. She tried to avoid the ones of Will’s face looking directly in the camera then becoming farther away, fading, an apparition caught at the edge of polaroids. Pallor of his skin graying more in each shot. Tears in his eyes by the last. Enduring humiliation.

“While I can’t speak to whether or not these scars were directly or indirectly inflicted on Will by
Hannibal’s hand.” Yes, I can, she wanted to shout. She couldn’t. Either way that’s what she was saying. The jury would draw the same conclusion. “Hannibal was very physical in his relationship with Will. They have always been destructive. He made countless steps to isolate Will, including drugging him with electro-light therapy to induce time loss, and allowing Encephalitis to aid his form of manipulation and coercion while it ravaged his brain. None of us realized how far his obsession went until Will was lying on a kitchen floor bleeding out after Hannibal buried a knife in his stomach and slit the throat of Abigail Hobbs. His violence extends from his relationship with his victims to the one he perceives to have with Will. It is unhealthy at best. Abusive, bordering on violent at worst. It always has been since the beginning.”

“Why do you say ‘perceives?’” Francesca asked, smile fleeting in its triumph.

“Hannibal Lecter is a sociopath by definition. There are countless scientific documents and studies presenting evidence to show sociopaths are incapable of human emotion. While Hannibal may find Will fascinating on an intellectual level, and may have labeled that intrigue as a kind of adoration, he does not love Will or anyone for that matter. It is not possible for his kind.” She spat, motioning to a photograph of a slivered scar on Will’s forehead. “The only emotion that drove him to pursue Will was his revolting hunger and pathology. To consume a worthy adversary. Which he attempted to do with a bone saw on Will’s skull to feast on his brain in front of eye witness, Agent Jack Crawford, in Italy when he was fugitive from the U.S. government the first time.”

The first time. God, that had to chime melodiously in the ears of the jurors.

The cell phone vibrating across the defense table dropped to the marble floor. Where it stayed.

Miss Eastwood breezed past, nose in the air. “Thank you, Doctor Bloom.”

Silas considered his folded hands for a moment, ivy colored lambskin gloves bringing out hues of flecked green in his suit. He rose deftly and looked imperiously passed the rim of wiry glasses. “You were, for lack of a better term, romantically involved with the accused, both Will and Hannibal at different times, before their separate imprisonment. Even sexually engaged with Doctor Lecter, the man you claim revolts you. Is that correct?”

Her crimson painted mouth scowled. “Yes.”

“Did you love former FBI agent, Will Graham?”

“I had a professional curiosity,” She replied flatly.

“Did you have romantic feelings for Doctor Lecter?” The young man smoothed a rebellious strand of coppery hair from his brow, landing his next blow without missing a beat. “Or was that too professional curiosity? A chance to study the inner workings of an alleged cannibalistic serial killer.”

Her hand twitched on her thigh, anger flaring. “I had no prior knowledge of—“

Silas cut her off, gaze darkening as he approached. “Even after your suspicions grew, regularly attending a firing range with an unregistered gun, you continued your relationship with Doctor Lecter. Maybe you too found the sexual encounters more exciting with an element of danger, as you accused my witness, Father Svendsen. It could be said that you have a biased opinion against my clients, humiliated by the rejection of both, to find them in the arms of each other. And your presence here today is only to influence the jury to right a wrong you could not.”

“Badgering the witness!”
“Withdrawn.”

“Did Doctor Lecter find you intriguing, Mrs. Bloom?”

“You’d have to ask him.”

“You said he finds Will intriguing. Why?”

“Doctor Lecter likes pretty things. And he likes to be amused.”

“What of those were you to him exactly?”


“Counselor, if you do not put your phone away this instant I will be forced to hold you in contempt,” The judge growled, leaning out across the bench, wagging a scolding finger.

Silas bowed elegantly the judge’s direction, swept up the phone from its place on the floor, and flicked through contents of incoming messages. “I do apologize, but since you deemed my clients an immediate threat to the court, we have had to f-f-find a different strategy of communication and counsel.” He cast a look over his shoulder at the video camera behind him with a nod of deference. “Could the court read back the witness’s last statement please?”

The court recorder hunched over her typewriter, gold chain on her glasses catching silvery blonde hair and rose pink of her cardigan, scanning the document quickly, and repeated in a monotone. “Doctor Lecter likes pretty things. And he likes to be amused.”

“Thank you.” Silas casually prowled his dominion, green eyes narrow slits, lithe tiger smiling at its prey, clipped speech now smooth and dripping threat. “Doctor Lecter would like me to clarify, in case you harbor any lingering doubts, that Will is only one of those things and you, Mrs. Bloom, in the end, were neither.” The boy glanced at his phone, smile vanishing. “Except a way to bring up defenestration at dinner parties in your honor, which he hopes to personally host for you soon.”

The last remark left her shaking. She needed to hear Margot’s voice. Saw Hannibal’s reptilian smile peering out from the video camera’s lens.

-Your wife. Your child. They belong to me.-

Nearly an hour later, Alana made her way blindly out of the courtroom, practically gasping for air by the time she rounded the corner and collapsed on a bench. Limbs trembling fury and indignation. How dare that child they called an attorney speak to her that way. Petulantly shredding her character piece by piece. He hadn’t even tried very hard. She had done most of the work for him. Reacting. Retorts spilling from her mouth before she could control them, shape them to favor herself, her testimony. He made her look like a woman scorned. Using the law to assuage her contempt. Grip white knuckled, clenching a gold tipped cane. Where the hell was Jack. She fumed silently, frigid eyes locked on the floor, blood rushing in her ears.

She should have never let Will and Hannibal leave the facility. She should have killed them both. Like Jack wanted. Like they both wanted.

Distinct tapping and sluggish drags of leather soles reached the empty corridor. A honeyed Southern
drawl lilited, coiling, up her legs, straightening her slumped body, and lifting her head to stare at a bouquet of pristine white lilies and plum tulips. Flowers offered to widows at funerals. “It’s a wonder there’s anything left of you to drain, Miss Bloom. I must say I am surprised to see you, alive that is, though I suspect you would say the same of me. But my self preservation remains intact, never the one to present myself so brazenly to Doctor Lecter’s appetites. Though I can see now neither of us was his type.”

There were worst ways to die. Yellowed eyes crinkled amusement. Or not die. Suffer. She could easily make them suffer.

“Hello, Frederick.” Cold blue eyes rose.

Scarred lips peeled back a smile. “Why good afternoon, Doctor Bloom.”

*

Rough polyester straps chafe. His clavicle still throbs, dull ache fresh hell in the morning and a gaping memory of old wounds at night. Will is convinced Hannibal’s teeth, jagged bits of bone remain, skin healing over them, to bury within another torment, a promise.

He closes his eyes to block out creaking wheels of the dolly he is restrained to, once more carted around like a prize pig under Doctor Chilton’s watchful eye, sole benefactor of the three ring circus Alana left him. He’s not allowed to use his own two legs except on the leash they tether him to in a bricked off location somewhere outside the mess hall. His remaining freedom is confined to a cell, half the size of the one he was kept in at the hospital.

Straitjackets, masks, and being strapped to things. This is what he has to look forward to once a day. He suspects Chilton heard about him getting a taste of Cordell and wishes to prevent yet another incident. God knows the way that man ran his mouth, between him and Hannibal, if opportunity rose there would be. He imagines there isn’t much left to his face. Not much more to lose anyway. Persistent bastard. Not that he could confirm this suspicion, hidden, shielded by the whir of thousands of security cameras. Their very own great and powerful Oz. The doctor is the faceless conductor of their lives now. Hour by hour. Second by second. They are his. For his amusement. To do with as he sees fit. Alana owed him that much.

The dolly jerks to a halt. Rough hands manipulate his body to straighten. This slight contact causing him to shiver. Christ, he misses being touched. Will stills a twitching muscle in his cheek, an almost snarl of contempt. He has been waiting, once more, to be strung up and gutted. The day has finally come. Today he is allowed to see Hannibal. It’s been two weeks.

Pristine white waxed tiles shimmer in the reflection of shatter proof wall to ceiling glass. Side by side cells cordoned off by an eight inch thick glass barrier between them. Air holes the size of golf balls rivet the center. A single table and chair is bolted to the floor. A small sink and toilet screwed to cement blocks in the far left corner. There is a steel cot soldered in place. Nothing more. Will can’t take his eyes off the cot, another mirrors it, just on the other side of the glass. Each purposefully built where the cells are joined by its crystal clear curtain. The illusion of sleeping next to the man he loved. The man lying flat on his back, hands folded across his chest, eyes closed and seemingly blissful, lost to throes of sleep. Where Will is soon to join him. Separated by glass.

Of fucking course.

This is not Chilton’s design. Will scowls, arms tight across his chest where they are bound, gaze
flicking to a camera panning the hall. This is Alana’s doing. Her last act of retribution. To ensure they suffer, until the end. Chilton wants nothing more than the renown and spotlight that comes with their incarceration. To keep his two prized possessions in their respective bell jars to show off to inquisitive minds of the medical profession and charge a nickel to anyone else seeking the thrill of a sideshow. Bile rises, acrid, burning the back of Will’s throat. He wants to see what they’ll do. He and Hannibal. Curious to know which will come out alive. Victorious. The makings of his very next book. Maybe a collaboration with Freddie Lounds. Series of novelty t-shirts and clues to crude crossword puzzles in psychiatric journals.

What was the nickname the Lecters were given before their incarceration and timely execution? Fourteen letters across.

Printed ink, glaring white and black numbered squares bled through his vision, teeth bared behind his mask.

Need a hint?

They could all go straight to fucking hell.

*  

“Could you please s-state your full name and occupation for the record?”

Static crackled through the microphone on every gruff consonant. “Jack Crawford. Head of the Behavioral Science Unit of the FBI.”

“How do you know the d-d-defendants?”


“Friends?” Silas echoed, leaning on the witness stand, stutter evaporating beneath impassioned speech, sensing weakness, a fondness, tremble of a man grieving. “Present or past tense? Platonic or otherwise? Or were you and Doctor Bloom both romantically inclined towards my clients?”

Jack blinked instead of scoffing. “It was a long time ago. And no. Strictly platonic. Professional.”

“I hate to pry. But would you mind telling us what happened to your face, Agent Crawford?”

The agent scowled, automatically touching dissolving stitches in his cheek, searing memory of tearing skin and unified howls for blood deafening, still fresh in his mind. “Yeah actually, I do. I got sloppy. That’s all I’m going to say.”

He refused to take the painkillers. Wanted to be alert. Clear headed. Will and Hannibal had bested him twice. Not a third time. Not this time. He was no one’s fool. They were going to hang.

“One might suggest you were sloppy long before this. Seeing as how you let Hannibal Lecter slip through your fingers not once, but two times.” The attorney noted dryly. “Is it not true after the disappearance of my clients you were forcibly relieved from your duties at the FBI after an internal psychological review? Where it was common knowledge among your subordinates that you had become obsessed with two things: excessive alcohol and the hunt for my clients.”

His wounded pride bubbled, eye twitching. Jack was going to drag this kid outside and knock out his teeth.
“That hunt,” Jack scoured up an indulgent smile, not reaching his eyes. “As you call it, bore fruit. Returning two murders to face justice. Upheld by the law I put my undivided faith in.”

“A sentiment I imagine anyone who justifies persecution with the sealed approval of God would echo.”

“I did my job.” He barely managed to omit the word fucking, swallowing a growl.

“But it wasn’t your job, at the time, Agent Crawford. You had been dismissed from the FBI. Pursuing the Lecters, proving to the world you would not be made a fool of, became your only purpose in life, a glorified hobby. Justified by your self righteous indignation and a slip of paper deeming you a free lance contractor for hire.”

He huffed a snort. Alana was right. The kid was good at needling, an unwieldy boxer flailing around the ring, hoping to land a punch. “I did what was right. What was necessary.”

“Is that what you told yourself when hired mercenaries delivered Will and Hannibal to you and Doctor Bloom to uphold your own version of the law you hold so dear?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. They were extradited from Italy and processed at headquarters. Matter of public record.”

Not exactly a lie. Not that he wasn’t willing, and had, lied through his teeth to get Will and Hannibal into custody. Not that his superiors would have objected had he told them the truth. That Alana had hired him, and an entire team of mercenaries as he now knew, to track them down when he hadn’t shown any promising leads. The wanted posters, escape of the most notorious serial killer in the country, was a black mark on the Bureau’s record. They were happy to have the fugitives dropped in their lap. No questions asked. Implied, yes. But never asked, not directly. The sooner the Lecters were out of the public eye, the sooner they could be forgotten, the sooner they could all pretend to sleep better at night. The sooner he could retire with dignity and glory firmly intact. He only had to wait a year. One year and the Lecters would be forcibly removed from the face of the planet.

At last, at last. Can I get an amen.

“When you processed the defendants, you and your team of forensics—Apologies. The Bureau’s team. I hear they aren’t trusting you to run any solo, unsupervised operations just yet.—gathered a decent amount of pictures, did you not?”

Jack’s cool expression faltered. His upper body drew taut, ready to lash out, to fight. He was gonna make it his goddamn mission to get this whelp disbarred.


The minimum. If he could open his mouth and stick to the facts he would be the only credible witness they had, the factual analysis of evidence and testimony of Price and Zeller not excluded. Alana’s was inflammatory at best.

“Did you take any of your victim?”

The gavel banged sharply. “Counselor!”

“Sorry, sorry. Slip of the tongue.” Silas offered a weak smile at the judge, then Jack, without even trying to look or sound like he meant it. The kid wore blackened eyes like a second set of glasses, like he hadn’t slept in weeks. Probably hadn’t. Neither had Jack. Not properly for years. “Did you
obtain any photographic evidence of Will Lecter’s person?”

“Yeah.”

“Of what nature were these photographs?”

“Mister Grah—Mister Will Lecter’s body.” He hated that name on his tongue, bile and coppery blood.


“Is it not true these initial photographs were obtained illegally? Without consent or representation. At a black ops facility on the East coast where you held my clients for several months.”

Jack carefully schooled his expression neutral, leveling an unblinking gaze at the attorney. He knew a fishing expedition when he saw one. If the kid had found anything, he would have been run out of the courtroom and FBI by now.

“Your Honor, if you would compel the witness to answer.”

“Mister Crawford.” Judge Napolatino sounded as weary as the rest of them.

“All our evidence presented here was collected by special agents, Zeller and Price, under the explicit direction and sanction of the FBI.”

“Are you suggesting some evidence has been suppressed because it would directly implicate you and Doctor Alana Bloom in coercion of a false confession and unlawful imprisonment? Photographs that show my client, Will Lecter, emaciated, beaten bloody, bruising at his throat from where he tried to hang himself in his cell where you left him to starve. Or were you hoping you might cover up those as well as you covered up the fractured bones of Hannibal Lecter received by an overzealous bounty hunter before officially being remitted to FBI custody under the pretense of extradition?”

“This is hearsay!” Miss Eastwood thwacked a legal pad on the table for emphasis.

Silas pitched his glasses, gesturing wildly, voice rising shrill then grating shouts. “This is flagrant disregard of the law we are bound to uphold! How can we claim to offer due process when my client’s were illegally arrested, without warrant or sanction by any U.S. official, and extradited by mercenaries under the complicit direction of Alana Bloom and Jack Crawford?”

“Objection!” The prosecutor was out of her chair now, hands on hips, ever the definition of pageantry.

Judge Napolatino beckoned Mister Silas forward, cupping the microphone with a paper thin, weathered hand, cloudy aged eyes watering. “Do you have any real proof of this, Mister Silas? Beside the word of your clients.”

“You gave this court your word to personally look in to the incident.” The kid’s voice trembled.

This wasn’t just a case to him. He cared about what happened to the Lecter’s.

Too personal. Too involved. Too invested. Willing to risk whatever it took. He knew the feeling well.

-You know what looking at this does to me.-

-I know what happens if you don’t look.-
“And I did.”

Jack inclined his head to the right, staring at the glow of an exit sign, pretending not to listen to the hushed conversation between the young attorney and seasoned judge. Familiarity. Almost fondness. Maybe if they didn’t have the Lecters on the ropes, trial entirely in their favor, he would have filed a complaint and received a mistrial based on the judge’s personal bias.

“There is no evidence to support your client’s claim. No record. No paper trail. No corroborating witnesses or evidence. I am sorry, Jordan, but your clients must stand accountable for the crimes they are accused and for the lives of the men they murdered openly in my court.” Louder, to the court, the judge announced flatly. “I must ask this outburst be stricken from the record.”

His phone buzzed. Silas withered and stood, hands in his pockets, lost and looking openly in the camera. “Doctor Lecter, I don’t understand,” He exclaimed fervently.

The screen blinked white, a reply. He returned to his empty table and sat heavily. He looked at the chairs on either side of them. Bereft of their protection, their guidance, their demands. His phone bleated plaintively, just once more, a consolation. He stared at it a moment, cheeks flushing, drooping forward to swipe a listless reply. Resigned. Hannibal had told him to retreat.

“Counselor?” The judge called.

Without looking up, Silas whispered, “Nothing further.”

Jack nearly let his guard drop, splitting grin itching behind his lips to break free.

“Tell me, Agent Crawford, what does this look like to you?” Miss Eastwood strode back to the easel she had set up, palms motioning at the photographs with the bravado of Vanna White.

He didn’t bother to look up. Didn’t need to. He had seen the photographs enough. Horrific pixels blown wide beneath the seeping rim of a shot glass night after night.

Her voice had been soft, palms on his aching temples silken. “Why are you torturing yourself like this? You can’t change it.”

‘Exactly. I can’t. I could have. I didn’t. I did this.’

‘Hannibal Lecter did this. Not you, Jack, you couldn’t have known.’

But on some level hadn’t he always known? That Will wore the scars of the work he forced him to do, for the greater good, on his soul. At least now he could see what it had done to him. There in the photographs. What he had done to him. Maimed and abused and used by everyone who knew him. Had he wept, calling out their names, his and Alana’s, when Lecter was maiming and possessing his body, begging for help? Or had he grit his teeth and cursed them for dangling him as bait?


Or more likely he prayed. For death. Knowing Lecter would never let him have peace.

“How much force do you imagine it would take for a bite mark to scar over with such rigidity after
The bite mark troubled him, more than the rest—he had seen enough battered victims to stomach the evidence of violence left on them—its placement near the juncture of thigh and groin. Intimate parts of his former colleague covered by a sterile white cloth. Why there? Lecter had always been more direct when trying to consume Will, quick simple, saw to the skull and done. It wasn’t right. The angle. The depth. Pressure sinking in and up. Deeper and deeper, pulled close as if someone (Will, but it wasn’t Will, he couldn’t give the photographs his name or face) had been holding on to the back of Lecter’s head to keep him there, allowing him to feast, that’s what Price had said, and then some rancid bit about sexual foreplay he had tuned out entirely.

-Because he was my friend. And because I wanted to run away with him.-

He shook the grey winter memory, longing of blue eyes, from his mind.

“Quite a bit.” Jack answered vacantly.

“‘Quite a bit?’ Can you elaborate?”

“To cause that much trauma to the flesh? The force would have to be significant. Enough to break skin, tear the underlying muscle, draw blood.”

“Do you think a man of Hannibal Lecter’s pathology would take no issue with drawing blood and maiming his partner?”

“No. He never took issue with exerting his power and control over Will. He is a sadist. He enjoyed it. Watching him squirm.”

“And these. Where have you seen these markings before, Mister Crawford?”

He stared at his shoes, leather well oiled and buffed. He was glad Will wasn’t present. He could talk about him like he was a thing, a corpse, something already passed and no longer living. He had died that night on the cliff. Was dead to Jack anyway. Or maybe Will had never been alive. He had been dead all along.

“Torture victims. Repeated blunt forced trauma over a matter of months or years. Likely a cane or a whip.”

“And do you think Will is a masochist?”

“Excuse me?”

“Masochists often willingly submit to violence, deriving pleasure from their personal pain and humiliation. Do you believe Will is a masochist? Would willingly allow Hannibal Lecter to whip or beat him bloody because he enjoyed it?”

Glittering eyes rose a fraction, jaw clenching. “I saw Will Graham become physically ill, vomiting outside crime scenes or thrash and scream when he got lost in the way his mind worked, making him live the horrors of dismembered corpses. He was revolted by the job, the job I made him do, because I told him blood would be on his hands if he didn’t catch them, these killers. So no, Miss Eastwood, I do not think Will Graham is or ever was, a masochist and there’s no way in hell he would submit to—“ His gaze bounced off saturated pixels, grimacing, imagining Will’s helpless screams. Like Miriam. Calling him for help all those nights. “—whatever the fuck happened to cause all these years?”
any of this."

“And what is the likelihood Hannibal Lecter would cut open, mark with a knife, and torture the so called ‘love of his life?’ against his will? By force.”

“I think the evidence speaks to that.”

“But in your professional opinion?” Miss Eastwood prompted.

Jack replied icily. ‘I do not have an opinion. I am a man of facts. It is a fact Hannibal Lecter drugged and coerced Will Graham during their therapy sessions, framing him for his, The Chesapeake Ripper’s crimes. It is a fact Hannibal Lecter attempted to murder Will Graham in his kitchen with a linoleum knife. It is a fact that I watched gouts of blood pour over my friend’s tearful eyes, mumbling for mercy, as Hannibal Lecter sawed open Will’s skull to eat him.”

“Given these escalating incidents of violence, do you believe Hannibal Lecter is capable of sexually abusing or preying on his so called partner in a more physical sense? For example, do you believe Doctor Lecter would have resorted to force, to assert his dominance and control, by sexually assaulting, former agent Graham? To put it bluntly, rape.”

Jack chuffed dry skin peeling from his lower lip, stomach churning violently, vision darkening. Disengage. Detach. “Yes. It is not a far stretch for a partner who engages in mental and emotional abuse to slip into more physical acts of violence. Sexual assault is not out of the realm of possibility. Hannibal was cutting Will open long before they fell off that cliff together. His violence with Will was always measured, calculated, exacting. I exploited the opportunity to catch him, twice, and hoped there would be enough of my friend left to save.”

“But you didn’t save him, Agent Crawford.”

-He will always fight his way back to himself.-

“No.” The agent turned thick fists in his lap, remembering the pure ecstasy of pain when they had slammed over and over again into Lecter’s body. When he wanted him dead. To kill him. Still wanted it. Now more than ever. For taking his friend and using his body, flaying a monster to life. “And I will always be responsible for the harm, the destruction, I let Hannibal Lecter bring against him. I broke Will Graham, yes. But Lecter destroyed him.”

*

Unmistakable. Wafting salt filling his lungs. Drowning. Struggling to breathe. The Atlantic. He tries to pretend it is the sea. It isn’t. Skin. Hot and pressed to his mouth. His legs go numb. He grips the basin of the sink, snorts in a breath to regain composure. Grinding teeth not nearly loud enough to contain the unruly betrayal of his racing heart. The fleeting copper taste of what Hannibal had torn from Will in an attempt to silence the boy’s abhorrent, offensive righteousness perversely clings to his tongue. Wine red in dreams, lust and fury fueled. He can taste him now. Flooding his mouth. Hot and dripping.

He bites his tongue. Makes it bleed. Closes his eyes. Blots out gnawing hunger, craving roving across his body, willing him to turn, to look, to see. To see Will, solid and real, in the hallway outside his cell. Stifles a moan of pain when the sensation turns ragged, demanding, insistent. The boy needs to be seen by him. A single glance. A moment of acknowledgement. To exist. In his eyes. In his world. Accepted. Loved.
Chilled pleading breath and running water of lantern lit cages flicker to life in his mind. He cuts out the frail whisper of his beating heart mirroring the same need. To look back. To be seen. To know they are connected. He does not need. He never needed before Will. He spits fresh blood in the sink and watches it ooze in the steel basin. He does not need him. Not like this. Not here.

Hannibal returns to his cot wordless, neither looking left or right, but straight ahead. Registers a plaintive plea, a sigh or a grunt, *please look at me*. He sits. Clasps his hands around the knee crossed over his leg. And closes his eyes.

Will does not exist here.

Hannibal will not let him exist here.

He does not exist either.

He is not here.

He closes his eyes.

He is not here.

They are home.
Condensation dripped down a glass placed on the witness stand. “We appreciate you taking time from your busy life to be with us here today, Mrs. Graham.”

A platinum blonde head whipped up, nostrils flaring and hissed, “Foster. It’s Molly Foster. Didn’t have much of a choice, did I.”

Her frigid eyes bore into Jack Crawford. He is sitting in the front row again to show support of her presence. Hands folded over the bench, almost penance, almost sorry for sending some Armani suit to serve her a subpoena in the middle of a crowded grocery store, carton of eggs dripping at her feet, while the entire town looked on. Whispering. Speculating. Aftermath of rot and destruction left in his wake.

Having to explain to her boy that ‘yes, I lied to you’ and ‘yes, your father, Will is still alive, but he isn’t your father anymore’ then sputtering justifications, as if she needed to, to a child, ‘I did it for your own good.’ Walter screamed he hated her. They didn’t speak for weeks. When they did Wally said he was glad. Glad Will was gone. Scrawny brute force and abandonment burning in his eyes.

Yeah. Like she had a choice. Ever. The bastard.

“Apologies. You were married to Will Graham, now Will Lecter, for two years, were you not?”

She nearly spit out her drink. She set down the glass. Her hands began to shake. It didn’t matter how many times she heard it. It made her stomach turn. That thing’s name and her dear man’s mashed together. Like some vile incantation of the Devil.

“Last time I checked, yeah.” Molly crossed arms over her chest, radiating hostility.

She wanted to childishly add, he was mine, stare straight in the camera, glowering.

Miss Eastwood’s over plucked eyebrows lifted minutely, cordiality smothered by lipstick faltering. “Do you believe he is guilty of the crimes he stands accused of?”

“Relevance?” Silas sighed, resigned to the perfunctory duties and questions expected, chin in his hand, scribbling an endless circle in the corner of notes.

“Testimony to Will’s character.” The reply returned, equally half-hearted.

Even the jury collectively sighed.

The trial was over. Judgment passed without Silas to wage the war, told to yield, stand down and retreat.

“I believe he is guilty of being weak. Preyed upon by that thing for years.” She stared down the barrel of the camera when she said it. “And had no choice but to survive however he could when he was taken.”

The words, rehearsed over and over again when she lay alone at night, fell easily from her mouth, soured like spiced cider she used to serve Will at Christmas. As easy as the lie had come to being. Clinging warmly in the dark.

“You don’t believe he ran away with Doctor Lecter? That Will left you, his wife, for another man. In
fact, married, this man. Claims to have fallen in love with the same man who tried to kill him, tried to murder you and your son.”

There is a jagged bullet wound in her shoulder. One she touches absently in the steam of the shower. Evidence of how far Lecter was willing to go to keep Will. To claim him. Rage flaring to life, burning deeper and deeper in her chest, more excruciating the bullet that had torn through her. Resentment.

“Bullshit.” She snarled. “That’s what I think. He loves Lecter about as much as he loved waking from nightmares, screaming, cradling his stomach begging for his life and the life of that girl to be spared.”

-Please, god, don’t. Don’t. Let her live. You can have me, you can have all of me, just let her go.-

-Will, Will, it’s me. It’s Molly. Wake up.-

-Take me. I’m yours. Only yours. Let her live, Hannibal, I’m begging you. Take me.-

“And before Will disappeared? How was he then? His state of mind.”

She sometimes used to find him weeping in the middle of the night, buried at the back of the hall closet, whiskey on his breath and inconsolable. She never considered heartbreak. Only trauma. But a broken heart has to happen somehow, sometimes piece by piece, till all that’s left to hold is dust and an overwhelming uncertainty of how to silence the memories of what caused it. When all one can hope for is a switch to mute the sound, not peace, not wholeness, just enough stillness to dull the loss. Fragments. Like the broken mirrors filling the rooms of those unfortunate souls long ago.

She thought again of Jack. Scorn ringing irises molten silver. Falling on the man watching her from his safety of the first row and the justifications of the law. He straightened, thinking of it too, their half screamed conversation over the phone when he had called to tell her the joyful news, eight times in a row, as if she hadn’t seen it plastered all over the media. Crackling from radio speakers like some sick joke.

- I told you, TOLD you, to leave me out of this, Jack! That I didn’t want any part of it and yet here you are, again, on my goddamn doorstep taking my life from me! Did I not sacrifice enough? Have I not endured enough for you? For your sanctimonious bullshit? I want absolutely nothing to do with this. Stop calling me. –

-But he’s alive, Molly. Will is alive. Barely. But he’s there. Your husband came home.-

-My husband never came home! You made sure of that. Even if he had!-

The accusation had rung false. They both knew it. She had made sure of it too. Told Will to go with righteousness blazing in her heart and tenderness in her touch.

-Come see him, Molly, that’s all I’m asking.-

-That’s not all your asking.-
It wasn’t.

-We could save his life. You’re the only one who might be able to convince him to testify. Turn against Lec—

She hated that fucking name. She had thrown the phone. Watched it splinter on the stone mantle. The one she and Will would lie near, in front of an open fire, talking, kissing, embracing. How gentle he had been with her then, trembling when they made love, tears in his eyes as if it hurt for her to hold him after, cocooned in her thighs and tender arms. When he was her’s. When she thought he was her’s. (Had a single part of him ever belonged to her? When all she was, had been his.) She swept up the pieces, left them in the dustpan, on rug burned knees in tears. Of her phone. Of her life. Her heart.

She bought a new phone. Kept the number. Then waited. For Lecter to call. To gloat. To tell her Will was dead. Taken from the world at last. Then neither body nor call came. It hurt far worse than the finality of grief ever could. (How is one expected to find closure without a body?) Living with the wretched possibility that Lecter didn’t call because Will was alive. With him. Happy.

That's why she was here, wasn’t it? Because her sweet man preferred the Devil’s arms, cradling the demons inside him, more than he had loved her?

“We were a family.” The testimony Jack wants her to say, the same excuses she gave to Wally (to herself, it was easier that way wasn’t it?) before simply proclaiming Will was dead, blistered her lips, her throat, sinking to that closed off part of her heart once belonging to a sweet man. Her man. “He was happy. He was a decent and kind man. Gentle. A loving father. He would never abandon us the way he was abandoned.”

“Was?”

“As.”

A minute too late. They all hear it. That she no longer believes what she’s saying. Not anymore. Doesn’t know what to believe. Even now. What she knows is true. Too horrid a thought. It is easier not to think.

Alive and happy. While she was forgotten.

Silas removed his glasses, balancing wire delicately in forefinger and thumb, surveying various smudges with far more interest than addressing her. She was inconsequential. He didn’t even show her enough respect to stand. “You said Will is decent. Kind. Gentle. A loving father. You did not say he loved you.”

“He did. Will loved me.”

He did. He did. He did.

“But Will does not love Hannibal?”

She had seen the leaked footage on the internet. Searched it out one night when she was on a third bottle of wine and Wally was at a neighbor kid’s house. Nails raking a plaid suit jacket. Hips fused together, grinding, aroused. Never able to erase exactly what Will looked like gripping that thing and kissing it hungrily, passionately on the mouth, wet tongues entwined, crimson smeared across
their hands and cheeks after a florid marriage proposal. She would never forget the after taste of vomit, walking calmly to the porch, to be sick over its side. Kept it perpetually bookmarked, an open tab, in case she woke aching for Will at night.

The microphone screeches feedback after a shout. “He loved me!”

“But not Lecter?”

“How could he? He’s a fucking monster!”

How could you.

“Will?” Hazel eyes flicked up. The pause lingered like lightning in the air. “Or Hannibal?”

She glowered down the peak of her nose, eyes crossing, blurring resentment, and kept her mouth firmly shut.

“One more question.” Silas considered the dimming screen of his phone, pursed lips, chin tipped at an angle as if weighing what he was meant to ask by proxy. “How often did Will say Hannibal’s name in your marriage bed, half conscious, and sexually aroused?”

She tore her gaze from the attorney and locked it on the taunting blue green of the video recorder perched in the middle eye, contempt curling her lip. “I don’t have to answer that.”

Her voice shook, frigid. Nearing hysterical. Sobs and something else. Betrayal. But she never called it that. Refused to call it that. Acknowledge it. Acknowledge what lived in every moment of their lives, minute by minute, even when entangled in sweat soaked sheets and each other’s bodies, when it was most obvious to her then, when Will withdrew, gaze empty, somewhere else, with someone else, only once calling her by that fucking thing’s name while spilling inside her. They never spoke of it.

-Hell, oh hell, Christ you feel so good, Hannibal.-

She remembered the helpless way Will would nuzzle her body and cling, roused from night terrors and memories, and begged her to never to leave him, abused animal whining for affection and acceptance. She hated him. Her eyes misted. Stuck on the wedding band she still wore. She still fucking loved him.

“And what does it matter? Even if he did, Will was still fucking me.”

Shuffling paper and murmured conversation thrum. Molly has locked her eyes on the door, storming the aisle, to spill out in the light and keep walking, forever and ever, never look back. This time she would not look back.

Lambskin sticks to her skin after the imprint slides from her bicep. Her first instinct is to tear away, thrash, slug the pale freckled cheek. Silas wrinkled his nose, sensing the heat of her fury, and kept his eyes too on the exit. After a moment, he whispered softly, “Will wants you to know he is sorry. For everything. That he is sorry he could not be what he promised.”

How could you do this to me? To us?

“You tell him—“ Molly inched up on tiptoes, snow skin bleeding crimson, ice frosting her eyes. “—I hope he burns in Hell!”
Crinkling newspaper smudges fingertips black. Another page turns. The front page Helvetica headline screams: “MURDER HUSBANDS ON DEATH ROW.”

Hannibal intently focuses on various graphs illustrating the volatile nature of the NasDaq, chewing his lower lip as if he has some personal or financial investment in the plunging faith of the American economy. He swivels on the stool, leaning heavily on cold metal, sighing. Out of the corner of his eye, residue from scotch tape and palm prints dirty the center partition of the glass. He wishes he could clean it. It’s obscuring his view. But it’s not on his side. His side. Like his side of the bed. His side of the car. His side of the kitchen. Except it was none of those things. Strange how easy it was to accept now. A prison cell, his final possession.

Something has been droning on in the background for over an hour. On and on and on. Undertones of a current trying to seep through glass, underneath it, around it, trying to find some path to reach him. He peers over the newspaper at the tape residue again. There’s a five by five Polaroid looking back at him. Not always. Sometimes it turns away. Returns to face the other side. Aegean blue and caramel undertones fill the glossy surface, hears the rush of a nondescript ocean on a nondescript beach, could be anywhere, littered in hundreds of postal stamps as it bounced from place to place to reach him. Except he knows exactly where it is. A single conch shell the punctuation of a sentence drawn in the sand saying: Wish you were here.

A small comfort. To know Elias and Peter are safe. Cared for even after his life drains from his body, buried, forgotten.

Glass shudders violently, palm hammering against it. “It’s been a fucking month. Do you plan on talking to me at any time during our incarceration? Or should I just wave cordially at you before they flood my body with lethal toxins or tighten the noose around my neck?”

Hannibal turns the page. His eyes flit over the personal columns. The boys might try to communicate with him this way. There’s nothing out of the ordinary. Or rather nothing not mundane and trivial, dribble, perfect waste of ink and space.

“I’ll settle for a general nod in your direction then. Suits me fine.”

Water is running. Spitting out frigid cold. Splashing. Then blank for several seconds.

“Least you could do is pass the comics. Seeing as how they’re taking up space on your floor anyway.” Mocking grates his ears. “What? Is it too far? Are you too feeble of age to bring it all the way over to our nearly joined cell? Or hard of hearing?” Pitiful whelps of laughter echo eerily, blackened forest springing up all around him, Autumn chill nipping at his exposed skin. “Typical. Too self involved to give even the slightest thought as to what my needs might be. I’m just your husband after all.” It begins to snow. “Or is it your pet? Or your victim? I get so confused sometimes.”

The older man loosens his grip. He has torn off a section of the paper, a grainy photograph of a happy family enjoying some local festival, all smiles and beaming faces. There is an ache behind his eyes, ringing the sockets, he can’t quite place. He lets his vision fade. Feels the smooth nape of Will’s neck pressed to his mouth, holding close, crackle of fireworks lighting his skin cyan, violet, red, heat of smoke in the night sky. His cheeks are damp.
“Hey!”

_Hey!_  


“I do not cease to exist simply because you will it so!”

_Bang, bang…bang…bang._ It stops. Something else in the air now. Salt. Heavy. Rain. Flooding the streets and plastering clothes to his skin. He’s standing outside his house in Baltimore, washing off the blood of his family from his hands once again. The rain softens, mist cool and sliding on his face, subsiding and vulnerable.

“Hannibal. Please.”

Exhaustion washes over him. He folds the paper and limps to the cot, curling up on its scratchy wool blanket, pressing his spine to the glass. There’s comfort in its constant pressure. Like lying down in frigid snow and letting death claim you if you simply let your eyes close. He does.

Ebb and flow, a plaintive sound, unconsciousness feeling for the thread it belongs too. Perhaps the rain again. No. Something broken. Feeble whines. He’s heard this sound. Vignette of the study brightening to sepia tones behind closed eyelids. A memory. The past. Entirely too vivid. Winston is scratching at a closed closet door, wet nose trailing the crack beneath the door, watery brown lifting when Hannibal draws near. Pelt silken smooth, stroking a flank to soothe. The whining persists. Emanating from inside the closet. The older man slides to a crouch, leaning his forehead on the wood, tone hushed, _you’re home, Will, home and I will let no harm come to you here._ His aching heart drags him to sit, pushing a palm through the slot between door and frame, whimpering and harsh breathing growing louder. It seems too near, too real, to be part of this dream. He tips his head on the wall. He will hold vigil throughout the night, awake, knowing the younger man’s hand will be sticky, from saliva and blood, where he had pressed his wrist between teeth to muffle weeping, when it finally reaches for him. Sleep pulls him under, hollow heart pulsing in his ears, praying Will might finally allow himself to be touched again.

Another day, perhaps another night. Sleep takes Hannibal with ease, surrendering to it, scratching off another measured moment of his existence.

His eyes open. Constellations falling from a velvet sky are watching over him. His haze of sleep gives them a wavering aura, silver glistening, tenderly caressing his empty heart.

Then suddenly they fall. Hurtling from the sky. Unforgiving and cruel. Gashing open his body, stoned to death for his sins, carefully orchestrated by his god’s watchful eye. His design. “I wish I would have killed you. I wish you were dead.”

The older man exhales harshly through nostrils. Oxygen rushing through his blood tears him forward in time. Surroundings coming too sharply in to focus. Like stepping from a pitch black room into the glare of daylight. Will is here. Lying beside him, mirrored image, knees tucked to his chest, to complete the crescent of a full moon their bodies create. Spite turns the boy’s irises inky black, Atlantic come to repossess the borrowed time it once granted. Hannibal reaches for Will, to scatter the shadows clinging to his body, souls of the damned pulling him under. Poised fingertips meld with smooth cold. Glass. His body jolts. His throat constricts, panic gnawing his lungs, ravaged by a scathing hunger and need to touch Will. His palm print smears the glass.

“If only you possessed the foresight and stomach to do so, we might yet have been spared from your pathetic weakness.” The older man senses his shadow move, claws poised to wound, allows venom to drip from jagged fangs.
They are no longer a blurred existence, one body, one mind, but two devastating forces struggling to surface. Fighting to survive. Twins in the confines of a womb cannibalizing the other’s life force. For sustenance. For something to do. To pass the time.

Will searches his eyes, smile rippling, his own demon rising to greet the other. “If only? Hell. I tried to kill you, and me, twice, and you just wouldn’t have the decency to die, or let me die. And Jack apparently wasn’t inclined to let me hang, at least not without official permission. What’s your excuse exactly?”

The pain radiating from Hannibal’s chest scorches his battered body as he struggles to stand, black filters his vision, the room spinning. He catches himself on the table. He clutches at seams of his well tailored world of pretend splitting, letting Will in, here with him. Real and alive. He longs for the sleek stitching of his suits to wrap around him and stave off the blundering beat of his now changed, heart, humanized and weak.


He can’t be here.

Will is not here.

“I love you,” Hannibal snarls.

And in that moment it is the cruelest thing he has ever said.

“And look where that fucking got us. Your love is detrimental to my health. Infection eating away at my good sense and sanity.”

They move in unison. Reflections prowling the edge of the glass. Pacing. Bloodied hearts in their palms to be wielded as weapons. Fangs bared. They come to stand beside their cots, arms slung in pockets, to shield shaking fists.

“An infection you asked, no, begged, to know and consume so you might better understand the man who vowed only ever to kill you. Are you surprised I have upheld my end of the bargain?”

“Funny.” The younger man’s eyes glint. “I don’t remember that part of our marriage vows. Though I do distinctly remember a killer weeping against my body moaning and pleading for me to never forsake him. Because who could ever love you besides me? Who would want to? The little lost monster consuming everything in his path in the name of his dead sister, abandoned, and unloved. Until me. But I could stop, Hannibal. I could never love you ever again. No matter how much you beg.”

Time has furled, inverted, placing them across from one another in leather chairs and whispering flirtatious poison, threat of death the sweet undercurrent of romance.

His heart fragments, shards of a teacup scattering. Red veils his vision. Pools in the back of his skull. Seeps his throat. Fills his mouth. He imagines slamming Will to the floor, caressing his throat, strangling him until his body goes slack and breath stales on his tongue, where Hannibal might kiss his beautiful corpse and make believe his final words are, ‘I love you too.’ Tear him open, inch of flesh at a time, and consume their memories.
The masked, unfeeling demon molds to every placid feature of Hannibal’s face, as if it never left, speaking with his curved mouth, rhythmic and cold. “You continue to bear the assumption of choice, as if you still possessed the freewill I stripped of you year after year, bound you to what you most hated. To love a killer. To love me.”

“You still trying to spin that bullshit with me? You are such a pathetic liar.” Will arches his back, his beautiful and vulnerable throat, offers strangled laughter. “Here we are. Full circle. It’s perfect really. You have to commend them.” He starts to clap, slow punctuated seconds, to match their clock running out. “They wanted us dead. Just not quickly. Not painlessly. Too humane for the likes of us. Not when we can give them a show. Heaven would never have us, Hell refused us, but Purgatory. Right where you and I belong. Where we’ve always been.”

“You have only yourself to thank for your good fortune,” The older man notes, bowing dramatically.

“No, Hannibal.” The vicious smile fades. He follows the slide of a throat swallowing, lets out a heated breath, wants to rip the laughter emanating from it out. Finish what his teeth started in the van. “Once again you have mispronounced the word us. They have us to thank. Alana and Jack. She knew you would fall on your sword. Like the last time. When I didn’t ask. Just like I didn’t ask this time. Knowing…” The younger man reddens his mouth with fingertips, pointed teeth stark white and enticing, dragging and nipping, tongue lewdly wet, trailing. Hannibal’s legs lock, fists then arms beginning to shake, thick rushing blood pooling hot in his groin. “I would follow only to tear it from you.” Will licks his fingers one more time and slides saliva on the glass, where Hannibal’s mouth hovers just on the other side. “So I could ram it through your heart myself.”

Will spins suddenly on his heel, victorious, as he did so many times when leaving Hannibal to the cruelty of his thoughts and endless amounts of empty time to think of him, only of Will, consumed, as he had always been. Firmly cemented in his mind. Permeating his lungs. Ravaging his walls and protection. Eaten from the inside out. Till he was hollow. Where Will would burrow inside. The perfect fit. A disease that could never be cut out.

Never be forgotten. There is no getting rid of him now. Only granted peace, killed, when Hannibal himself finds death.

“You ought to pen them a well scripted thank you card for finally recognizing our loving union. After all, Doctor Lecter, it’s the polite thing to do.”
Chapter 47

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Christ, he was tired. Jarring cursive floated off the yellow page and circled, round and round, words eating one another until nothing was left. Silas covered aching eyes. The court was too bright. He was still drunk. The slightest creak of a bench or whisper jolted his nerves, temper and annoyance flaring. He bore the scars of battle everyone from the start had known he could not win. Except him.

Creak, creak, creak. A bright fire engine red dolly whirred passed. Bumped up two steps. Made a quarter turn, realized the dolly wouldn’t fit, and deposited Doctor Hannibal Lecter directly in front of the witness stand like a UPS package. Or a finely wrapped Christmas present dripping in blood red glencheck plaid on black. The dolly folded him to a sitting position, leather straps arresting his upper and lower body, a possessed doll on display. His weathered hands were folded loosely in his lap, thumb picking at a rust colored substance beneath nails. He wore a dim smile, disarming, the way a gentle hand can lay on the back of a neck, caressing, right before a paralyzing snap. He has a black eye. And a busted lip.

Silas shook out of his stupor and stood. “Your Honor, there seems to be a mistake, I think you may have confused which Lecter is due to take the stand. Will is scheduled to appear, not Doctor Lecter.” He glanced from the judge to his client, moue rippling, perplexed. “And what the hell happened to his face?”

The older man looked back passively, marble smooth and stony. Not even a blink. “I may have tumbled in the shower this morning.”

Why the hell was Doctor Lecter blatantly lying? What was going on? Had Jack Crawford played some part in this?

The bailiff and a guard moved the court recorder’s desk to the far end of the room. She wore a put on expression, as if she preferred to sit next to a serial killer than have her things relocated.

“According to the memo,” Judge Napolatino noted, dangling cream colored paper between forefinger and thumb. “I received hand delivered from your office this morning, Mister Silas, Will Lecter is currently experiencing a bought of food poisoning and is too ill to appear in court. As such his husband, Doctor Lecter, is going first. Is that correct?”

Fingertips splayed on the table, entire weight of his body shifting, focused on the slip of paper. That was his stationery. His official letterhead. And what appeared to be his flourished signature at the bottom.

What the hell?

He loosed gnawing anxiety from his tongue and stammered out the only answer he could give. “Yes, s-s-sir. I must have forgotten.”

His stomach pitted. Leather clung to sweating palms. Like hell he had forgotten.

“I recommend you get a good night’s sleep and soon, Counselor.”

“Yes, sir.” Silas nodded emphatically, still staring at the peaked profile of his client’s face. He tipped his palm up, cradling a myriad of questions, waiting for some kind of acknowledgement. “Right
This wasn’t right.

He had spoken to Hannibal in the wee hours of the morning, every surface of the room plastered in notes, evidence, potential cross examinations, searching and searching and searching for a way out. At the very least a detour. To buy them more time. A reduced sentence. Anything, anything they could use. Nothing. It didn’t look good. It wasn’t good. It was hopeless. When he had flung the last box of documents from the table, Hannibal had put a hand on his shoulder then, warm and secure, and quietly praised his loyalty and steadfastness, urging him to step outside for fresh air, to absorb it all in his place. He had abandoned everything to stand underneath the smog copper sky and waited for divine intervention. Then he went to a bar and got hammered.

He had abandoned everything.

His gaze snapped to dark mahogany eyes fixated on the prosecutor shuffling her stack of notes. She bristled, looked up, flashed a smug smile and returned to organizing. Everything. His briefcase included. He always carried a pad of letterhead with him in case of emergency in the inner zipped pocket. Sealed safely away with the twenty four karat rose gold fountain pen Hannibal had sent to him upon passing the bar, ‘Improvidus, Apto, quod Victum’ engraved on its side with a note pressed to the velvet lining reading, ‘You shall surely overcome all who dare to entire the ring. For how foolish must a man be to challenge the phoenix who rose from the ashes?’

Jack didn’t orchestrate this. Doctor Lecter did.

Fuck. His chest froze mid inhale. Furtive gaze flicking from exit to exit, surveying the potential spray of bullets that would surely riddle every single person in the room if Doctor Lecter tried anything.

Please. He pressed lambskin to his mouth, silently pleading. Don’t do anything reckless.

“May I, may I approach my client, Your Honor?”

“Make it quick.”

He jerked across the courtroom, frowning when Hannibal watched with utter disinterest and goes back to studying his hands. It is blood. Blood under his nails. Who’s? Will’s?

“Doctor Lecter,” Silas shielded the older man with his body, leaning close, hushed. “Where is Will? What’s going on?”

Hannibal offered a congenial jagged smile. “Unconscious, I imagine, where I left him.”

The lawyer blanched. “Alive?”

“To the best of my knowledge.” He answered with an unsettling wink. “Now, run along, we have much to discuss and a very brief time to cover all of it.”

“It is your witness, Miss Eastwood,” The judge announced, hedging to the far side of his bench to keep an eye both on Lecter and the immediate prey spread sparsely throughout the room.

For the second time in five minutes, Silas was positive he will be sick.

“It would appear even the best of us are at your beck and call, Doctor Lecter.” She smiled coyly, twirling a stray curl. Secrets cling to the twich of sauntering hips. Some kind of tell lilting her pleasantry. “Do you have an ulterior motive for requesting to take the stand or is there something
you would like to tell the court? Something you may have left out in an earlier statement during questioning?"

“As a man who prides himself on accuracy, I feel the need to set the record straight,” Hannibal returned, smile honeyed and sticky, a well placed trap.

“Oh?” The prosecutor’s self assured smile slipped, struggling to curl back up under an oppressive weight of purposeful silence. “Would you care to explain?”

Hannibal twitched thumbs together, something dark rising in his gaze, voice slightly rough. “I am not terribly inclined to do so, no.”

“And why might that be? Afraid to incriminate yourself, Doctor Lecter?”

The serpent’s smile returns. “Genuinely concerned I will be unable to form words small enough for you to comprehend, Counselor.”

“Perhaps, you might humor the court by trying your best to speak plainly.”

Empty black eyes sweep the courtroom, abruptly freezing. Hackles raise on the back of Silas’ neck. His mouth twitching. He followed the gaze. Alana and Jack are straightening, spines digging the wooden bench, rigid and staring at Doctor Lecter with open contempt. He is speaking directly to them.

“You have drudged up my past in all its glory and failed to mention my most notorious feat of all. Left out the lasting detail. The entire retrospective of my life’s work muddled and clumsily displayed.” Doctor Lecter leaned out against his restraints, unblinking, head cocked to the side. His razored tongue slicked a canine, curling ever so slightly. “You have made a mistake and I intend to correct it.”

An inexplicable chill frosts the air.

“And what mistake is that?”

“You misspoke. You said the Dragon was my last known victim.”

“Given international laws, as Mister Silas has so often reminded us, any of your presumed victims outside of this country have no precedence on this case, Doctor Lecter.”

Doctor Lecter shot a patronizing smirk her direction. “This particular one is entirely relevant and within the States full purview for prosecution.”

“You want to give us, the State, more evidence from your own testimony, to prosecute you with? Why?”

“I find myself in a most generous mood.”

“Your Honor?”

“I will allow it.”

“Who is your last known victim?”

A wolf’s smile. “Will Graham is my final victim.”

“What!” Silas was positive the outrage, distantly reverberating, comes from his mouth.
“Are you confessing to perjury, Doctor?” Miss Eastwood sidled up to the jury box, mock shock flaking mascara clumped lashes.

His hands are clenched under the table, shaking. Everything too loud. Too bright. Too nauseating. Out of his control. They’ve spoken. Doctor Lecter and Eastwood. They’ve gotten to him somehow. Despite his vigilance.

“An infinite amount of it. But seeing as how it no longer amuses or benefits me, I would like to proceed with this trial in earnest.”

“Doctor Lecter, I urge you—“ His hands are planted on the table, knees knocking together.

For fuck sake, please don’t pass out, he begs his body.

“Sit down, Silas. Unless you would like to be permanently relieved of your duties.”

“What are you doing?” The question falls flat, pitifully quivering.

“Switching tactics.” Threat gleamed pupils, a warning for him to stay silent. “Trying on the truth.”

Lipstick stains teeth. “Could you tell us what that is?”

“The truth is…” Doctor Lecter lifted his chin, directing a caustic gaze down the peak of his nose, expression a puzzle distorted and rearranged, utterly empty and blank. “I have no romantic feelings for that man. I could never love him. At times, I don’t even like him. I tolerate his existence. Will Graham, has and will always be, my pet.”

Everyone has forgotten to breathe. Their bodies shutting down. Pallor whitening from strangulation. Choking on the poison fuming through the air. Each gripping their own version of a crucifix, a pearl necklace, a paint chipped chair, a blasphemous rose gold pen, as if it might shield them from the shadows rising high on the wall and turning to winged beasts crawling the ceiling, starved and impatient.

“Wind him up and watch him go. Fascinating when a rage takes him, don’t you agree? I got what I wanted. The prosecution was right about that. But after you have tossed around your plaything, watched over and ensured a disease sets fire to his brain, murdered his friend and child, and drawn out the killer within him, well. There’s nothing left to do but ensure your obsession is devoted only to you with a cocktail of hallucinogenic drugs and a bit of coaxing. It is terribly exhausting to convince someone, of either sexes, to fall in love with you. I imagine if Bedelia du Moreau were with us she might agree. Captor bonding requires entirely too much up keep. The only true benefit was the amusement of mediocre carnal entanglements, sex—mostly consensual. His only redeeming quality is his eagerness to take cock, follow instruction, and swallow.”

Someone is choking and wheezing in the background, shock, more likely repulsion.

“Shame about the pre-fabricated wife and child escaping the Dragon. It made it far more difficult for Will to accept his new role in life with his other still alive and breathing.” He studied his nails, frowning. “I digress. The novelty does come to an end. And I suppose I could have tried to saw open his skull again and eaten him, but you had to ruin my plans once more, didn’t you, Jack?”

Jack Crawford braced on the bench in front of him, shaking from an effort to stay in one place. Weighing the consequences of breaching the aisle and beating the man grinning at him unconscious. His eyes shadowed sockets. Locked on Doctor Lecter. Jaw clenched so hard every muscle in his face and neck is shaking from exertion.
“I thought perhaps the boy might come in handy in an event such as this one. But I see now he is of no use to me at all, as a defense or even a much needed distraction. He is appallingly boring and rude. And unless we are going to roast Will on an open fire, I see very little value in letting the State render his death as well as my own. They would just spoil the meat.”

Alana Bloom has grabbed Jack’s middle, like she could stop him from vaulting down the aisle and snapping Hannibal’s neck. She is luminous white, the moon, storm blue eyes wide, raining down her cheeks.

“1-I-I-I need a moment to confer with my clients!”

“I wish to proceed.” Comes a terse retort.

“Hannibal, p-p-p-please!”

“Hold your tongue. Or I will divest you from it!” Doctor Lecter snarled, force of glowing eyes sending Silas cowering in his chair, stunned to silence.

Who is this demon wearing Hannibal’s face?

“Doctor Lecter, are you recanting earlier statements, testimony, and prior documented claims as a whole? Why the sudden change of heart? This need to confess. Why should this court believe you aren’t lying now?” Miss Eastwood fumbled the question without a single breath as if she is afraid someone might object again and bring Hannibal to his senses.

“What have I to lose? What would be my motive? I am not under the misguided notion it will lessen my sentence or spare my life.”

Oh god, he can’t stop this.

“What are you looking at?”

“Admiring my masterpiece.” Doctor Lecter is drinking in the crime scene photos, graphic, hideous displays of Will’s body. Eyes half closed, teeth biting a lower lip, transcendent, savoring, dreamily breathing out the rest. “My only living tableau. Aside from Miriam Lass that is.”

Miss Eastwood turned a shade of withered algae on a beach, throat clicking, trying to make herself speak without throwing up. “Would you like to tell us about your work?”

“Show me the rest and I will consider doing so.”


“Stop.”

“You were wrong, Jack. Or rather, ignorant. Perhaps you ought to return to the classroom and reeducate yourself on the psychosexual nature of biting.” Hannibal directed a vindictive smile the man’s direction, thumping his fingers and palm slowly, timing each word to land precisely. His tone dropped, sultry and low. “It does not require ‘quite a bit’ of force to create a lasting impression of one’s claim. Not just once anyway. The process of traumatizing the flesh takes place over months at a time. Opening and reopening to achieve a lasting effect.”

There was a tinny gasp from the jury box. “Oh my god.”

Silas raised his gaze enough to find Doctor Lecter beyond a fan of lashes. He blinked. Once, twice.
He is too numb to be shocked by the well tailored erection bulging beneath plaid trousers. Too tired to devise whether this too is part of some elaborate act, deliberate, a selling point, or a natural response for a man aroused by sharing his crimes.

“You must ensure the bite sinks deep enough to break the skin, but not overly irritate underlying muscle. Proper cleansing and antibiotics are paramount for staving off infection as you wait for the skin to heal. But you must not wait too long or the flesh becomes calloused, making reopening the wound painful for one’s intended. Unless.” He wears a brilliant smile. “That is the desired effect.”

“Do you…would you call that torture?” The prosecution swallowed again, brow and mouth parallel lines etched on her face.

Doctor Lecter sighed, as if explaining himself was an inconvenience, exasperated and bored by the content of their conversation. “I deemed it therapeutic. Cathartic. At least for one of us. Even I tired of the melody of Will’s screams. Our sessions varied in depth and exercise. Each one a push to achieve the intended results. And they always concluded with a lengthy convalescence and comfort.”

“Comfort?” A small voice asked.

“You cannot bind a man to you with violence alone, Counselor, you must reassure him the agony he endures can only be dispelled, tenderly cared for, by the same hands that break him. It is not difficult to foster a need for physical intimacy from someone already broken by the world and starved for its affection. To maintain it though? This is the challenge. Bathe their wounds, mend their body, and reassure them they are in need of discipline as much as they seek affection and they will kneel willingly. Seek you out for comfort. Searching for heat of a mouth or hands. Offer themselves up for your pleasure. They are yours eternal.”

Muffled crying. Alana he suspects. There was water underneath the fire she presented. No matter what she said. Some small part of her still deeply cared for Will.

“Will Graham claims he is in love with you? To anyone and everyone who will listen.”

No one bothered to correct her this time. Too engrossed and horrified to object.

Doctor Lecter scoffed, elbow twitching, what would have been a dismissive gestures of his hands. “There is no claim. He is.”

“For the record, once more, you are not romantically inclined towards Will?”

“I do not love him.” Something ticked Hannibal’s nose. What was intended to be derision. It’s not. It’s fragile. “He means nothing to me. I tailored a specific persona to endear him to me and ensured a lasting emotional and psychological dependency remained to suit my needs. An extension of therapy.”

What web are you spinning now for us to believe?

“Was…was this therapy?”

The poster board shivered. Miss Eastwood slid over a blown up photo of Will from behind, cropped from shoulders to knees. A topography of scarring, history from past to present, varied in its chapters and depth.

“No.” Doctor Lecter merely glanced at the image, without lingering, without savoring. His entire body unconsciously swiveling from it. Whatever was captured in this photo he takes no pride in. His voice stayed flat, consonants riddled with what Silas hears as shame, guilt. “That was punishment.
An occasional caning was necessary to remind Will of his place. To force compliance. Have you ever heard chains chime as a body becomes rigid then slackens with each lash breaking open the skin? It’s quite soothing.”

No one noticed the tailored monster’s cock becoming flaccid. Whatever persona he had tried on disagreeing with him. Hue of grey green blooming on his mouth. Strained and disgusted.

“As is the sensation of all that fears you asking to be cradled to your chest. Or teaching him to associate physical pain, scent of blood, with arousal and being helpless to quell the need it creates. In the beginning, it was an enthralling thing to behold, a spectacle of overwhelming loss. A single nick of fresh blood on his body, flushing shame on his face even as he pleasured himself. Later, waking to the boy riding my cock with his hands at my throat and hatred in his eyes. It was much more thrilling than taking him by force. To see him wage war of humiliation and lust.” Crimson eyes search out Alana again, narrowing. "Alana, sometime in the near future I would like to seek your second opinion on something. When Will was clutching my ass to drive me deeper into his body, over and over, while simultaneously begging me not to touch him, is that consensual or assault? Or something else entirely. Or are we not yet able to define Will Graham’s need to be fucked by a sociopath?”

“Enough!—“ Jack Crawford’s bellow shakes the entire courtroom, held back by an armed guard as Freddie Lounds keeps Alana from clawing free.

“If you’re in need of another bit of evidence, Jack.” Buttons popped, white dress shirt folded open. Slick red ribbons coat his chest. Defensive wounds. Claw marks. Hannibal smiled darkly. “Might I offer this lovely exhibit?”

It happens in the blink of an eye. The courtroom doors bang open. Will lunged blindly in, teeth bared, weaving unsteadily from side to side. He is naked from the waist up, trousers unzipped and slung dangerously low. Freddie Lounds jumped to action, bulb of a camera sputtering wildly. Feet dragged heavily, one foot in front of the other, a stumble bringing him to his knees. Large palm prints burn the circumference of his throat. His chest heaves a demonic cry Hannibal’s direction. His mouth contorts, opening and closing, raw gurgling. Three guards burst in and wrestle him to the ground. His spine is covered in deep welts and bloodied scratches. He is hauled to his feet. Tears plaster his face, struggling, mouth moving, and Silas thinks it sounds a lot like, 'how could you?' Then he is gone.

“Or you can ask Will for another photo-op,” A hollowed voice pools the room in darkness.

Silas stood. Shouting and banging and havoc raining down around him. He removed his suit jacket and folded it over the briefcase on the desk. He hauled the tie from his throat, let it spool at his feet. He popped three buttons on his dress shirt, like it would help oxygen flow to his brain, bring his blurred vision in focus. He mildly believes he will pass out. He needs another drink. A hundred more. Let whoever approaches first take him home and pound the screeching static from his brain. He removed gloves, finger by finger, curt tugs, divesting himself from his skin and releasing his soul to freedom. He held them to the light. The scars, mangled raw flesh of his youth, unchanged. His hands trembled. Nothing to hide now.

This is who he is. Disfigured. Professionally and physically. Disgraced.

He will never practice law again.

How could he?

When everything he had ever believed in was absolutely wrong?
Hannibal anticipates rage like a coming storm. Jarring deep in healed bones. Confirmed when wheeled to a darkened stairwell, left alone and unguarded, where Jack greeted him with a friendly smile and pummeling fists, connecting with his body over and over again, till sweat beaded his brow and he was wheezing. Two broken ribs later, the anticipation changed. Spiked pulses as the wheels of his gurney bump along an uneven waxed floor, two armed guards flanking either side of him. Radiating as the endless corridor narrows and the unmarked door at the end comes in to view. He shivers violently, bile rises in the back of his throat, leather straps jerking loose. Legs then torso then arms pulled free of the straight jacket. Yet the sensation of struggling to breathe only worsens, air thick with electricity, key card buzzing a lock.

Jaw clenched, shoved forward, and in. He catches himself on the inner wall. He is shaking. He is finding it more difficult to manage physical pain, channel it, regenerate the demon’s skin he slid on effortlessly and hoped it was not too thread bare after years of being discarded. He hadn’t anticipated this. The jackal being forcibly thrown back in the den. They were supposed to protect Will from him. Was that not the law? Had he not been grisly enough to be labeled murderer and abusive husband? His shoulder cracked, grimacing. Perhaps this is recompense. At one time Jack wanted Will to cut him out, from his life, from his heart.

He is giving you one more chance to do the right thing.

Eerie silence greets him.

Cut me out and let there be enough of you to survive, my dearest.

A wood paneled television in the corner hums, white pixel lines warped and waving from top to bottom on a loop. Unlocked shackles slither beneath the metal table. The older man scents the same cologne from when Jack cracked his nose with the brunt force of his head.

Reckoning then. By Jack’s design. Willfully encouraged he imagines.

Will is fully dressed, wrinkled pale blue button up fastened to his throat and tucked neatly in belted trousers, seated at the center of the metal table. Delicately laced fingers press his cupid’s bow, chin tucked, eyes closed. Buzzing halogen lights cast serene turquoise on the planes of a smoothed face. Seemingly at peace, or lost.

‘Lost in thought?’

‘Not lost.’

Molten copper lingers. He knows without seeing blood seeps fine fabric, fireworks captured mid-explosion. A lasting impression of possession marking Will’s back where they fucked on the dirty floor, Molly Foster’s voice warbling in the background, clawing and biting to create tessellations of ownership.

“He loved me!”

“Tell me it meant nothing.” The last of their argument heats the room. Hannibal’s snarl scalding the
nape of Will's neck. His left eye ached from a jarring elbow connecting, bruising surely showing by
now. They are crouched, naked, melded together. His chest is slicked with the younger man's blood.
Their flesh slapping, trousers lewdly bunched around the younger man's shaking thighs. "Take it
back," He growled again, jamming a forearm underneath Will's semen soaked belly using the
leverage to drive his cock fully in. An unintelligible moan puffed the forearm locked around a sweaty
chest. "Say it." Will arced, nearly sobbing on another thrust, nails raking bulging muscles in
Hannibal's neck, down his collarbone, yanks and scratches graying hair on his chest. He shoved,
palm between shoulder blades, mercilessly grinding a face twisting in pain and pleasure on the
cement. "Tell me you did not love her."

"Tell me you didn't fuck Bedelia and we have a deal," Will volleyed back, straining to glower from
a single eye, panting, trying to canter hips to meet another brutal thrust.

He wrenched Will's arm vengefully. Her presence does not belong in this room here with them. The
reminder of Hannibal's transgressions blackening his beloved's mouth. "I cannot."

Will clawed free and bit a forearm, snaring the older man by hair, yanking him over his yielding
body and sinks teeth on a lower lip, snagging a corner and lapping at spurting blood. "Neither can
I." Crimson trailed their chins, tongues lashing hot. "We can't change it. Let our past die and be
done with it."

He clamped the younger man's nape, forcing his body to a position of supplication, of prayer. "Say
it."

"Okay." The older man loosened his grip. Will streaked blood on cement, grit of the floor dragging
up roping thighs clamped at his hips, digs fingers in soft flesh beneath Hannibal's ribcage. He bared
his throat, head tipping back to rest in the curve of a shoulder, silvery blue starlight rising. He slid to
the tip, settling down on a pulsing cock, seated in the older man's lap. They both groan. "I love
you," He breathed. The older man's heart spilled from a gaping hole in his chest and in the next
breath, hips swivel and coax tenderness from their bodies. "I love you." Will sighed in Hannibal's
mouth. "God, I love you." They shudder, gripping and touching every inch of one another,
desperation and lost time suddenly seizing them. "I love you. I love you. I love you."

The older man's eyes flick to the television again. Will has seen his testimony. Either in part when he
regained consciousness or in full if he decided to play it back, ingrained in his mind what betrayal
looked like, frame by frame. Suffered through it like the rest. The room is suffocating. It still smells
like them. Sweat. Sex. Blood. Moans of goodbye disguised as love. Truth revealed only when
Hannibal wrapped his hands around Will's throat in the midst of climax and choked him
unconscious.

"I love you," Hannibal groaned, forehead pressed to Will's, gripping a windpipe. Waits till his body
subsides, fight draining, leaking tears streaming from closed eyes, before he begged, "Forgive me.
Please forgive me for all the pain I have caused you. I hope I will be kinder to you in another life."

He wet his lips, careful to raise the timber of his voice to inky starlight. "Will?"

Withering petals of a smile formed. Will's voice has returned, smoke charring the walls of their home
ravaged by flame, billowing his lips to remind Hannibal this is the one thing he could not take. His
voice. "I had a feeling a moment ago. This...sensation of stumbling. Falling. Much like the time
blood was pouring in my eyes as you took a bone saw to my skull and it occurred to me too late I
had never been the one in pursuit. A well carefully formed illusion you let me believe. But you have
always been my trailing shadow, haven't you, Doctor? Following. Lying in wait. Striking when you
ensured I am at my most vulnerable.”

He steels himself for the worst. For the chain to wrap his throat. Last sight of Will. Pitiful self hatred and disgust radiating in the eyes Hannibal had come to love so much.

“You used me.” Will says casually.

The older man blinks. “I did.”


“It was more compelling than the photographs.”

“You got what you wanted.”

“And what is it I wanted, Will?”

“To fuck me over one last time. In every sense of the word. How does it feel?”

“Satisfactory. Fucking you has always been my greatest amusement.”

“And making me a liar. A goddamn fool. Your fool till the end.”

“You did that all on your own. I cannot in good conscience take credit for that.

“Was it all a lie?”

Hannibal wishes he was dead. Or is he? Is this Hell? What it feels like to eternally burn?

“Yes.”

This time Will stands to meet him. Death is imminent. His hands are steady. His gait sure. A hunter kneeling silently in the forest, his bleeding heart a rifle taking aim, unblinking, prepared to pull the trigger.

*Good boy. Don’t be afraid. Make it swift.*

“I want to hear you say it. To my face.”

Their conversation from earlier bleeds in to the one they’re having now.

“I do not love you.”

“Again.”

“I never loved you.”

"Three times a charm."

"I do not love you, Will."

“And?”

“You mean nnn—“ Will seizes Hannibal by the throat, slamming him on the wall. He grins when the older man manages to choke out the rest, to become one another’s voice, smoky and strangled. “—nothing to me. My pet. My plaything.”
“You touched me. Held me. You were inside me. I know you.”

He resists blinking away tears, coughing as fingers clamp his windpipe. The older man weaves together his best impression of the man who wore his skin in Baltimore, reptilian, and utterly bored. His eyes aren’t quite right. His mouth not cruel enough. It’s difficult to recall this version of himself, the one Will had drowned then loved. The second act far more violent then the first. “You know what I allowed you to see. We fucked when it suited me to stave off the tedium of your company. Used your mouth so you might choke on the morality and righteousness you incessantly preach for a few minutes of peace and quiet.”

“You were tender.” Will snorted.

He doesn't believe. He needs Will to believe.

“You are far more susceptible to my influence, drawn to it, too weak willed and touch starved, to realize physical contact is just another tool to bind you to me,” Hannibal says, trailing fingers finding the Dragon’s scar on his cheek, before pushing digits in a snarling mouth so hard and fast it causes Will to choke.

Hannibal’s head cracks, pain ravaging the back of his eyelids. Will slams him again and again, a third time for good measure, till the older man’s hands drop, swaying, and shouts, “You told them you raped me! It was always consensual.”

Dazed, his vision whites out, hearing himself speak from some corridor in his mind, empty chamber music clashing. “There’s far more satisfaction in controlling the mind then controlling the body. It is much more challenging to leave mental and emotional scarring.”

“You never raped me.”

“No.” Hannibal holds Will’s gaze, smug smile jagged, and replies forcefully, knife tearing through the younger man’s stomach once more, to achieve the outcome he desires most. For Will to leave him. “I left that tedious bit of pageantry to Nicolas Lisandru.”

Will's mouth slackens. Blue eyes flicker black.

He's missed his stomach. Plunged the knife deep in the boy's heart.

Raw screams pierce the room. Will rams his fist in Hannibal's eye. He staggers back, takes another hit to the stomach, barely contains a groan hearing another rib crack. His flesh burns. He nearly faints. He can't. Not now. The performance is not complete. Hannibal lowers his center of gravity and tackles Will around the waist. They skid back and fall against the wall. Knuckles hammer his kidneys in sharp bursts. When his vision turns red the older man startles, desperate to remain conscious and in control. He can't let the starving frost bitten boy from his youth take over. He has the younger man cornered. Vaguely feels nails clawing at his cheeks and eye sockets. Spit plasters his mouth. His gaze on a creamy throat. He loves Will. Slips further. Has always loved him enough to maim him. His teeth sink in the knob of a shoulder before he can stop. This is an act, pretend, pretend, pretend.

The younger man howls. A knee connects to his groin. He stumbles, purposefully catches his left foot on a right ankle, praising the unyielding force of Will's body in pursuit, knocking him to the ground. Lighting crackles eyelids. He lays flat on his back, gratefully stunned. Distantly he is aware of Will hitting him, over and over, blood gushing and filling his mouth. He wishes he could smile, pride stifling warm in his chest, and softly kiss gashed knuckles to soothe their ache.
Then it abruptly stops.

Will coils hands in the jacket's lapels and falls over Hannibal's body, face pressed to the center of his chest covered in blood. He muffles agonized screams behind a palm. Then he is choking down sobs, pathetically weeping, weakly battering the older man's heart with a limp fist. Through his swollen eye the ceiling becomes the Norman Chapel. He isn't going to make it. His pretense is unraveling every second. His arms shake, pinning them to his sides, terrified he will embrace Will and roll him supine and kiss him again and again and again, find shelter in the warmth of his body, and plead on hands and knees for forgiveness.

Why couldn't the Atlantic have left them in eternal peace?

"Release me," Hannibal snarls. Will blankets his body, sobbing even harder than before, vaguely aware of lips kissing his throat. He knocks him off, towering above the crumpled figure of his dearest boy. "I ought to relieve you of your vocal cords and carve that smile open on your stomach with my teeth."

"Heartless monster." The younger man drags his body across the floor, clutching his side and collapses several feet away.

"A bit slower on the uptake than most." Derision drips the older man’s bleeding gums, tearing off the ruined tie at his throat and hurling it to their feet.

"I want to go home." Will curls tight in the corner, knees drawn to his chest, face pushed against them. His shoulders began to shake. Then his entire body vibrates, rocking back and forth. Wailing noise suffocates Hannibal, abject pain of a dying animal begging to be put out of its misery. "I want to go home. I want to go home."

Hannibal turns before Will can see the monster’s façade crumble. Tears well. He shoves fists in pockets. Fingernails draw blood. Seep through the lining. Stain his thighs. He forces the words through clenched teeth. "Then leave."

Sobs eventually soften and stop. The older man fixes a blank stare on the wall. He cannot bear to watch Will go.

Thick laughter rumbles. Hannibal turns his head and freezes. Glittering blue lifts inch by inch. Feral teeth curving. They are on the stone patio again, ravaging the Dragon, passion radiating in their eyes. Winter chill reaches Hannibal bone deep. Except he is the one being hunted. Will howls laughter, echoing off the walls, deafening and then he claps, pace deliberately even and sharp, mocking.

"Is this what you imagined would happen? The return of your wounded profiler with a few well placed phrases and theatrics, begging and screaming to be kept away from the big bad cannibal. Or were you just hoping I wouldn’t notice the splitting seams of your well tailored performance?" Will stands, movement blurred, lunging. He grips Hannibal by the nape, growl coiling, touch bruising. "They may believe you, Doctor Lecter, but you forget—“ Hot tongue and teeth scrape his cheek, linger at his jaw, and seal over his neck. He prays for Will to tear out his throat. End it. The older man’s knees buckle. Held up by the arms around him. He grows hard, gasping when Will wrenches him closer and bites his pulse ruthlessly. He could die like this. Poetic. “You are my monster. You can’t hide from me.”

The older man grips shoulders and kisses his husband hard. Will shoves, dragging saliva and blood from his mouth, sickened by the taste of him. He leans on the wall, arms crossed, face a sea of demonic shadow, tattered leather wings sprouting. Hannibal sways unsteadily, sweat trickling his back. He must have sustained a concussion. “There is a deal to be had. If I plead guilty to all charges
and allow them to commute the death sentence, to hang me in a month's time. Miss Eastwood says you have a fighting chance to walk from this under the guise of emotional and physical battery and duress. Easier for everyone that way. No need to draw out a lengthy mourning. Tell them a story, my dearest, whatever it is they need to hear.” He steps forward, hand out, stroking a curl slung dangerously over a brow. His touch had far more influence over Will than the sound of his voice.

“William, let me—“

Frigid blue eyes pin him in place. “Let you what.”

His hand dropped, entirely premeditated justifications coming out a single noise of distress. A chest expands and deflates with a hissing breath, dark peeling from paint on the wall. Will pivots, glittering gaze and attention fully on Hannibal, stripping him of clothes then skin, muscle, prying open his bones to see a heart quickening to panic. The younger man sneers. Will surges forward, forcing Hannibal to retreat in tandem, limping, his shadow self sensing its dark mate’s return.

“Manipulate me? Let you explain as you are accustomed, after fucking the entirety of my life?” Hannibal’s heels hit the wall, then his hips, his spine, his shoulder. Will braces shaking arms on either side of his shoulders, but makes no move to touch him. “And well, who could blame you? The blame lies mostly with me. For not having stripped you of the assumption it is a behavior I am willing to tolerate. My mistake for having thought I had made that perfectly, crystal clear.” Eyelids sink dangerously to glinting slits. “When I told you the last time…was the last goddamn time. Did I not enunciate clearly? Did I not use language plain enough for understanding? Tell me, Hannibal, exactly what I did to deserve this.”

“I am trying to save your life!”

“I don’t need saving!” Fingers gnarl roots of his hair. He is thrown forward. His face slams the metal table. Cartilage snaps. His nose breaking on the second impact and spraying red. Will drops him. “Least of all from you!”

Groaning louder than necessary, hoping to call out his husband’s innate need to nurture and care, Hannibal rolls on his back and bows his head between knees, slumping submissively. He speaks softly, watching his blood ping the floor. “You are angry with me. You have every right to be. I am begging you to listen to reason.”

“I am angry with you?” Will barks laughter, gripping Hannibal’s chin, nails biting his jaw and forces him to look up. He twists a trembling lip, sneering when the older man winces. “And you are giving me permission? How very, very gracious of you. How very gentile. How quaint.” Both brows wrinkled a forehead, snarl becoming another glinting smile. Will sling hands in trouser pockets, side eyeing Hannibal, lazily rounding the table. “Oh, I’m not angry.” He laughs, low and sweet, licking lips suggestively. Pauses where the older man’s shadow stretched on the floor and considered it, dark angles slashing cheekbones. “Just trying to put a name to which emotion is fighting for dominance.”

“They are crying out for sacrifice, for blood, let them sacrifice the monster. I am what they want.”

"And I—“ Will shoves Hannibal on the table, pinning him with a knee grinding at the center of his chest, chokehold on his throat. “—am deeply moved. Thankful for marrying a man who continues to think and speak for me. Can’t you feel how much I appreciate…” The older man wheezes, choking as fingernails dig his trachea, others raking his arm and biting scar tissue on his bicep. He resists, only for a moment, instinct to survive hissing mournfully as agony ravages his chest, broken bones giving beneath the boy’s weight. “…your second grand romantic gesture? Even more than the first.” Will leans in, gaze fixed on blue chasing the crimson of a slack mouth, watching it tick when he pressed full bodied on Hannibal. Fingertips sensing a suppressed groan of pain blurring pleasure.

“That I would greet you with open arms and tell you that this time, this time, I understand you
needed to violate my consent. Humiliate and eviscerate my character for a noble cause. For me. For us. For the greater fucking good, huh? Just like the rest of them. You might as well have given Jack the knife and let him slit my throat. That’s what I’m good for. Fucking bait. You said we were equals. You said I was your partner. You lied.” He manages a weak shake of his head, quivering hand coming to rest gently on Will’s cheek. It was met with a punishing squeeze. “Liar.” He scrabbles weakly, attempting to reel Will in, desperate for the pressure of his mouth one last time. “That’s what you are, Hannibal, a pathetic goddamn excuse for a man.”

Tears mist amber eyes. Hannibal slides from the table weakly and falls to his knees, molding shaking palms to the floor, gasping in lungful after lungful of his husband’s scent to keep some part of him within, violent hum of his voice in the air. The younger man stares on apathetically, eyes dark, hatred carved in the caverns of a once tender face.

Do you intend to watch him kill me?

I intend to watch him change you.

“You…” His lungs shudder, croaking. “…will live. No equation I could…ever pen…would be able to return that to you. With a single signature, I can give it…all…back. Your life. Your freedom.” Flickering firelight lifted to look up at Will, pleading. “Some of what I have taken I can never return. This, my life for yours, I can offer to you as freely as my heart.”

“Get up,” Will commands coldly. Hannibal stays. Supplicant. Weeping. “Get up, or so help me Christ I will leave you bed ridden.”

The older man heaves to stand. Will deserves a worthy opponent, to face him, until he is driven in the dirt, where he belongs. His entire body decides to shriek reminders of old age and atrophied will power. His leg gives way. He pitifully sinks back to the floor, leaning his forehead heavily on the younger man’s warm thigh. They have been here before. He closes his eyes.

“And if I took it?” Will murmurs, softly running his fingers through Hannibal’s hair, smoothing blood from a forehead. “This thing I did not ask for and don’t want? What life would I have? What picket fence are you imagining? Freshly painted pre-fabricated wife and kids? Your burning letters warming our lives.”

Bile fills the older man’s throat. He shoves his cheek in a bloodied palm and kissed it’s center.

The younger man crouches, cupping his husband’s face, glassy lake filling dark eyes. “Run back to Molly?” Will kisses Hannibal when he says it, pressing the woman’s name tenderly to his lips, open mouthed with a flicking tongue.

Hannibal’s entire body flinches, gaze falling from dark madness filling Will’s eyes.

“Drink away our maddeningly polite life. Think of you as we lie in bed. How you taste when we fuck.”

Blood stains molars, pooling metallic underneath a tongue. He must remain mute. He cannot speak. He will beg Will to stay. To be his always. For eternity. In death.

Leather dress shoes crinkle, shift encroaching on the shadow of the older man’s body, leaving him in disgrace on the floor. “I will hate you. Never speak to you again. Is that what you want?”

Hannibal nods weakly, breathing harsh. “The most suitable, if not more humane, arrangement for us both.”
Christ. His eyes water. He will never survive the loss of Will.

“I said we wouldn’t speak.” Will wrenches Hannibal’s face up, sees the abject pain turning his irises golden and snarls. “Not that I wouldn’t see you.” A sickening twist of his stomach, memory of their reflections intimately melding on glass, never able to touch surfacing. “I’ll see you. Every. Single. Day. Watch you wither. Age. Beg for me to speak to you, to say something, anything. Until the day they put a noose around your neck. And then.” Breath blistered a chin, violent kiss following. “I’ll watch you die, Hannibal, just like I promised. Till death.”

He senses his shadow self hurling against caged bone, rabid and starved and terrified of losing soft whispered acceptance pressed to it in the night. Glassy eyes lift, whisper hollow echoing. His otherness pulling seams of his skin. “I will dissolve the marriage. You will bear no rights to see me then.” Pupils blew wide, violence a crescent of steely blue. “The ink is dried. It is done.”

The younger man becomes vacant. Ghost shimmering inside deathly white skin. He is touching the scar on his ring finger. He realizes his mistake immediately. Will thinks he has divorced him. That isn’t what he meant. He signed the prosecution’s confession. He signed away his freedom for—

Will spins on his heel and marches to the door. He hammers on it once. “Open the fuck up!”

“Will.” Hannibal wrenches after on knees, clinging to cashmere trousers, weeping. He loves this boy. He is going to die for him. “Will, please. I lov—”

“Hurt me, Will, just stay.”

A punishing backhand connects, splitting open a peaked cheekbone and dislodging a tooth. “Say it and I rip out your fucking tongue!” Will screams.

Please, please, He begs in his mind, cradling his cheek. These moments may be my last to see you. Touch you. Allow me this.

“Allow me a goodbye.” Instead Hannibal rasps.

Will’s eyes open. They are fathomless black, antlers sprouting from hooked claws and wrapping his body in protective thorns. “You do not deserve a goodbye. You do not deserve to live your last remaining days bearing the mark of my forgiveness.”

“I love you,” The older man whispers, drawing his mouth over palms, wrists, any skin within reach he might kiss. If he is to lose his tongue, he wants to savor the taste, to keep the frail confession within his body.

White light blinds them.

Will stares right through him, wrenches his hands back, repulsed, and turns for the door, lip curled. “I fucking hate you, Hannibal.”

Chapter End Notes

Marked for Death x Emma Ruth Rundle

who else is going to love someone like you that’s marked for death
who else is going to be with you when you breathe your last
who else is going to take my place and hold and keep you safe/sane
who else is going to stay

you were right on time to break your head and make the death bed
you were right on time to crash those galaxies and flat-line
you were right on time to make the light inside of me a life
you were right on time to meet me, crazy love, and watch us die

* * * *

Improvidus, Apto, quod Victum : Improvise, Adapt, and Overcome

Oh don't worry, my darklings, Dark! Will is/was not about to suffer fools. Even one he loves.

(It breaks my heart to see all of you in pain, so uh... what I can I do to make it better? Hm? Talk to me!! I'm here for you.)

(Did I mention this has a happy ending? I'm sure none of you currently believe that.)

Also, on a side note, this is something I've been trying to motivate and talk myself in to for awhile (or rather talk my anxiety into quieting enough to let me) and I hope you will join me! I would love to dedicate more time to my writing and share the experience with each of you on a more personal level. Even if you can't tag along on this particular adventure, know how very very much you are appreciated regardless!!

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Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

*Self righteous, presumptive fucking cunt.*

Will hates labels. Hates them about as much as he hates society’s need to use them. To find himself offering them at his own expense. To remedy their discomfort. As if they somehow mattered more. He less. Giving them the luxury of a pedestal, to look down, define him. A necessity they needed to allow him his own existence.

Shards glitter inside another cage the world has deemed him kept in.

What word would they use to describe him now?

*Impulsive.*

He supposes it may have been impulsive. No thought at the forefront of his mind as momentum carried his fist forward, shattering the mirror above a metal utility sink reeking of fresh vomit and his husband’s spit. At least now he didn’t have to look at that worthless, tear stained piece of shit in its reflection. Glimpsing it moving, from piece to piece, searching for its other half.

Will sags on a musty cot. He splays aching fingers, wider and wider till they hurt. He wants it to hurt. To match the agony of internal screaming. He clenches a fist, fresh blood bubbling from broken knuckles.

*Violent.*

He laughs low. Sure. Pain blisters his wrist and fizzes up his forearm. He can accept that. Likely the only label he would accept if he had to choose.


*"We are just alike."*

And maybe that's what love is in its most honest form.

An accompanying sonnet of what Hannibal had tried to give, then cut out of him. To end the other that wore Will’s face and dared deny him. Crimson tide of regret and mourning. Too early or too late to understand love would always be offered at the point of a blade.

*This, however…*

A jagged pane shakes from a bloodied palm and clatters at his feet. Fiery eyes watch, wearing his husband’s smile. He sneers back.

*…what will they call this?*

His soaked palm slips on metal.

*Desperation? A spiral?*

He groans, knees cracking cement.
But that isn’t what this is.

His body sways on all fours, vision tunneling at the sight of ragdoll flesh flayed open on his forearms. He shakes, neck straining, head hanging. Where poison and lust ran slick and wet, enveloping his body in velvet sinew and jagged antlers, glow of white dead eyes approving.

*Do it rough.*

He hacks out a laugh, rolling supine.

*They think they’re in control. It thinks it’s in control. He thinks he’s in control.*

Not anymore. Not now.

*I’ll take it all. God, I’ll take every fucking thing he has ever known.*

*I’ll crush him.*

*And then. Maybe then.*

*Hannibal fucking Lecter will understand he is not God.*

*He does not get to have what he wants.*

*Not while I’m still breathing.*

*

Black leather stilettos swing in a left hand. Stocking feet glide a tiled floor noiselessly. Chilling a single pinky toe where mesh has torn open. Prey scurrying quietly through underbrush. Alana walks nervously through white washed corridors, passing endless rows of empty barred cells. Acrid bleach stings her eyes. At least that is what Alana tells herself. Not guilt, that thing pulling her here upon instinct.

Guilt. Or love. Aren’t they the same?

She pauses beyond a darkened cell. There are no windows here. Not a single one to act as reminder of the cruelty of time, marching on, with or without, lost souls. Metal creaks eerily. She squints. An oil spill seeps spread eagle on the floor, sallow rise and fall of protruding grey the only sign it is breathing. A white serpent coils protectively over medical tape crusted in dried blood beneath a cot.

“Here to pour salt in my wounds,” A low growl calls. “Or are you more partial to a spoonful of bleach to the eye sockets these days? Maybe you could drag in a bucket of ice water and drown me. Give it a personal touch. Abiding by torture is one step closer to becoming me, becoming Him.”

She flinches, startled by a chilled embrace, fist at her throat, knows it is whatever thing lives in Will, freely moving in the world, as the man himself lies rigid.

She swallows, touching where phantom fingers dig, to pry the millstone of his soul loose, and murmurs, “They told me you asked to be separated from Lecter. I wanted to see if you felt clearer headed without his direct influence. More like you.”

“Like you have ever had any idea what ‘me’ is.” Black laughter putrefies the air. “If it had been you, Alana, who found me the first time…I wonder, would you have cut me down?” Silver pierces the dark. “Or given a helping hand? Or is that what this is? Take two to try, try again. Or are you hoping I am worn down enough to do your biding? To wield me as weapon against Hannibal once more.”
Her stomach sours. Her lip curls, accusations and justifications.

“Trammel versus the United States is very clear about protecting married spouses against condemnation.”

The shadow twitches, contorting to a crouch. She does not hear it slither. “IS? That son of a bitch.”

“The finality suicide offers would certainly speak volumes, far louder than any testimony you could give us now,” She interjects flatly, the emotionless understanding of a therapist who hadn’t seen Will lying sweat soaked and bloodied in the arms of a serial killer. “It would be understandable given what you’ve been through.”

Will materializes beside the bars in an instant, silver glinting, hiss hateful. “Is that a preemptive standing ovation? Or encouragement?”

“Neither.” Alana takes two steps back and hits the cement wall behind. She sets down high heels before she can drop them. She wrinkles her nose. He smells different. Changed. “Would you like to talk about what Doctor Lecter said on the stand?”

“Are you fucking joking.”

“What he did is unconscionable. And we…” She holds her breath, heart racing, and forces herself to move, parting dust with each slide of her feet. The shadow monster gathers, towering, higher as she draws near, claws flexing on bars to test the tensile strength of her mangled spine. “…let him. One day everything repressed will return.”

She drags two fingertips along a sandpaper jaw, palm sliding down a silk skirt to a switchblade strapped to her thigh. This is mercy, she thinks. For all of us.

“I can help you be free of him.”

Revulsion blackens the whites of eyes.

She doesn’t step back quickly enough.

Will snarls silken hair and hauls Alana forward. She yelps. Steel rams a blush stained cheek and lipstick smeared gasp, cold force rattling soft trembling skin. Her bones grind, wrist crushed in an unforgiving grip. Bruising pools breasts heaving on prison bars. A wet palm glides her throat, cupping ugly purple blotching her cheek, stroking the pain it creates tenderly. A thumb hooks her jaw, digs beneath bone, jamming deep enough to feel back molars. She whines, forcing eyes open and chokes.

Black. Will is dripping in black. Anemone tendrils spread poison from flapping skin curtaining glistening red muscle.

“Oh god,” She moans.

Blood. He’s covered in blood.

Teeth graze her ear, breath searing. “You gave me to Lecter, Alana, there’s no redemption. Not for you. Not for me. No coming back. Nothing to resurrect except screams. But you have always been deaf to my cries for help, haven’t you?” He wrenches her hair, scalp blistering. “I would wake with wounds, freshly sutured, and not remember what caused them. Discover bite marks on my ribcage.” Will’s voice grates, hauling Alana harder against steel, another gasp torn out. “Palm spreads on my thighs. And this ache inside me. Not knowing if I consented, to what I could not name, or if it was
even real, except the crime scene of my body screamed it happened, again, again, and again.”

Nails rake her throat. White pearls scrape, winding tighter and tighter. She can’t breathe.

“Every morning—“ Red stained tears turns chiffon opaque, clinging to black lace. “—I asked, myself, him, ‘Did you force me? Or did I ask you to do it?’ and he just...smiles. Kissed me softly and said, ‘Who we are and what we desire are the same, no distractions to separate us now, to cultivate our love. And how I adore you.’’’ His eyes screw shut, a wrenching sob escaping. Scabbed fingers snag silken stockings. Will slides a hand up her skirt and wraps his hand around a leather bound knife. “I tried. I tried to end it. We survived. God, I could have saved you. But not now.”

The snap of a springing blade is deafening.

Melting snow widens, spilling, muddying a grave reading, *Here lies Will Graham. “P-p-please.”*

Shadow reins her in by pearls, freshwater, a single opal at its center. She gasps, nails slashing blindly at Will’s face, blood caked and desperate. Margot. A gift from Margot. She will never see her again. Or her children.

“No.” Will shakes his head, stiletto blade pricking her carotid. “No.” He scours blood across his forehead, eyes glassy, raking hair. “No,” He mutters, addressing something in the dark. “No, I can’t. No, not her. Please not her.”

Alana wrenches at the fist at her throat, garbling for someone, anyone to hear her, drenched in spittle.

“I’ll do anything,” Will sobs, hand shaking, blade scraping a throat raw. “Anything, baby, please. Please.” He grips the side of his neck, harder, and harder, veins and tendons bulging, choking out, “I’ll be good. I’ll be good. Hurt me, not her.” His eyes fly open, blood shot, unseeing. The blade rises, gleaming. “God, Hannibal, I’m begging you.” Will throws himself against bars, screaming, “Please, not her!”

Cold.


Mournful blue frozen in blinding white.

“You really don’t know if you’re going to come back from this do you?”

Alana hurtles to consciousness coughing, eyes rolled in the back of her head. She heaves to the side and spits bile, curling inward, to protect feedback of shattered bones screeching remembered agony. She frantically presses fingers to her pelvis, sobbing pitifully to find it intact. Waxed tile scrapes elbows and knees, one following the other, vision tunneling from black to white.

Lemon and bleach. And copper. Heavy in the air.

“Help,” She whispers to a blinking red light overshadowed by endless black.

She touches her throat, to coax urgency, need, sound. Her pearls are gone. They roll through the prison corridor like extracted teeth.

A shaking hand jams in a skirt pocket, gripping plastic and glass. It clatters. Time and date flashing. She blinks hard and reaches again. Alana chokes the phone and shakes it with all her might. It buzzes. The flashlight flicks on.
Inky blue pixels arc cement walls, leap through bars, and illuminate pooling red. She hasn’t seen this much blood since Lecter’s kitchen. Feathers drift on the mist of dust particles. Above, a blade, her blade, is buried in the mattress.

She whimpers to someone for help again, skirt tearing as she heaves to her knees, half expecting to find Hannibal standing over her to finish it.

“Be blind, Alana. Don’t be brave.”

Light sweeps left, mirrored shards glistening, then back.

Contorted and half dragged, Will is sprawled face down, shelved underneath the morgue drawer of his prison cot, flesh on his arms carved open, gushing blood.

Alana covers her nose and mouth to smother a lurch of bile.

He’s still. So still.

She could let him die.

It could be over.

He’s barely breathing now.

They could be free.

“Help!” She calls hoarsely. “Help!” She cups her mouth and screams, covered in blood, in Will’s blood, she’ll never be free, never be free of him. He will haunt her. Every afternoon cast shadow a demonic possession lying in wait. “I need help!”

Chapter End Notes

Well. Fuck, everyone, that was a really long hiatus. Uh. I actually hadn't realized that much time had passed...

In truth, I was swept up in the momentum of life/work and carried off for a bit in very pleasant distractions. I've also been working on EB on and off since, but had a severe case of writer's block. Which I'm guessing was inevitable after almost, what? 200 chapters between this one and TS? I'd estimate there's about 30-40 chapters left to publish?

The last few weeks ago (with the support of a dear friend and inspiration of 'Polar,' let's talk about that for a second) I am back at it and ready to dive in. And uh, shout anything else you'd like at me. :) I've caught up on my backlog of comments. I read/answer all of them. xoxo

(Chapter summation: Welcome back, Dark!Will. Fuck you, Rodriguez, karma. And by association, Alana and Jack. And Hannibal is in SO much trouble. Hope y'all ready for a wild ride. He is gonna have to suffer, AHEM, *work* to earn Will back.)
Important Announcement Next Chapter. <3
“If I would have known, oh conqueror and destroyer of men…” Autumn leaves rustled flickering candlelight. “…I would have fettered my naked body in the irons of subjugation, and lain down, offering safe passage for the tread of holy feet. Bathed the ravages of war from your skin and anointed you in the blood of gods and kings.”

Will eased heavy eyes open. A red haze draped Hannibal’s body, sitting at the foot of the bed, black leather bound book in hand. Another shiver shook his sweat soaked body, flirtation a grotesque rasp. “If you think blood sacrifice will break this fever, I’m all for it, angel.”

Maroon eyes refracted, book snapping shut. The older man hovered, pushing wet hair from Will’s forehead, pressing a cool wrist to it. “I am willing to appease the pagans if modern medical science does not bend to my will,” Hannibal murmured, genteel smile rippling.

Will had been sick for a week. He can see Hannibal’s smile straining, twitching, to keep up appearances of being in control, unafraid. Absently he wonders what the scent of fear clinging to his husband’s skin smells like.

The younger man cupped a palm caressing his neck, a poor guise of taking his pulse. He resists the urge to roll aching eyes. He lifted it to his cheek, moaning relief when Hannibal pressed an iced washcloth to the center of his chest. “What were you reading?”

“Stream of consciousness,” The older man answered, cupping a nape and lifting ice water to Will’s mouth, smile thinning when he struggles to drink. “A form of poetry. Sonnets if you like.”

Will sputtered, weakly pushing a straw. His head was pounding. He sank to damp pillows, groaning, “By whom?”

A throat cleared. “The author is unknown.”

Will smirked as unsteady fingertips dragged ice down his torso. He creaked a yellowed eye open. “Do you intend to tell me on my death bed or yours you have penned thousands of sonnets for me, Hannibal?”

Something dark clouded his husband’s face. Hannibal slid forward, an elbow bracing the mattress, fingers tangling dark curls and bent to claim Will, breathe healing and life and prayer into his body.

“Contagious,” Will mumbled, clapping a hand over his mouth to protect him.

“You are.” The older man canted his head, silver strands falling in amber eyes, transfixed by the barrier placed between them, struck by the possibility of denial. “And yet I would let contagion rage me…” Hannibal framed Will’s face, kissing deeply, tongue seared by heat of what had dared take residence within. “…if it meant you would allow me refuge in your bloodstream.”

Blue eyes widened. “Gonna be sick.”

“Unspeakably rude even for you.” Hannibal bristled, nose twitching.

“No, oh god.” Will clutched his stomach, trying to choke back bile rising from laughter. “You
fucking soft bellied romantic. I need to vomit.”

“Ah.” The older man blinked, once, twice. He scooped Will from the bed and hurried to the adjoining bathroom, muttering, “You simply could have said that.”

*


Glowing medical screens cast eerie blue over spider web tubing hanging above a hospital bed. Linen shrouds a figure draped in beige rot of freshly dug earth. Gnarled fingers hang limply from a plot marker of silver handcuffs. Venetian shades have been drawn to keep horrors within, faceless thick robes patiently guarding what it has come to claim.

Beep. Beep, beep, beepbeepbeepbeep.

Watery grey flutters. Slick algae snakes waxy limbs shuddering free. A dam of saltwater floods past tubing torn from nostrils.

Death exhales release. The last of its carnal embrace sliding from sweat soaked skin.

Will moans hoarsely, one hundred and fifty afflictions of love straining to reach for burnt ash collected on a far wall. “H…h…annibal?”

The shadow peels from paint, looming. “For a sacrificial lamb you sure don’t seem to understand it doesn’t mean a goddamn thing if you don’t die.” Meaty fists brace a plastic rail, black glinting down. “Or would you miss him too much?”

Contempt flinches a mouth caked white. “Jack. Why are you here?”

Jack draws open a grey suit jacket to reveal a leather holster and firearm, malice radiating dark caverns. “Here for you, son.”

Will’s laugh, sandpaper thin scrapes, cut off by a shuddering wince. He digs heels in a rock hard mattress and propels himself upright. A handcuff on his left wrist snags white bound stitching. He growls through a wave of nausea, vision tunneling. “Do you consider sacrificing all your children an act of God?”

Something shifts in the corner of his vision. Will jerks its direction to defend himself from unknown threat. And then, his lips peel from teeth, parched and cracking as they stretch wider and wider.

“Hello, Rodriguez,” The younger man purrs. “Want to make a deal?”

The attorney looks far different than he remembered. Likely because the last time he saw him, he was pinned beneath Hannibal’s hard body and squawking for mercy, coughing up gouts of blood. The mangled mess of his tongue winking from the courtroom floor.

“Isn’t one.” A plastic chair scrapes tile and stops with a sharp tap.

“He speak for you now?”

Rodriguez clutches his briefcase, oil slicked hair stuck to an even sweeter forehead. Will’s cheeks hurt from a sneer he can’t smother. His heart leaps gleefully at his good fortune. The man shakes like a leaf. The attorney turns a sickly shade of yellow and molds to a corner nearest the only exit, deathly silent.
Finally. And all it took was severing your tongue.

A derisive snort sounds at his back. “Seems that way.”

“They are going to hang me, Jack!” Will howls, lunging, snapping wildly at Jack, handcuff cutting his wrist, deeper and deeper, tearing open sutures.

Jack leans forward, inches from Will’s face, dark gaze warming at the sight of his former protégé leashed at last. “Should have thought about that before you murdered a man.”

“A man you sent to kill me.”

“Memory hazy, Graham? To kill Lecter, as we all had agreed. Did you get confused as to who was the lure and who was the fisherman? Or couldn’t you help yourself? Like you couldn’t help mutilating that kid’s body.” The agent taunts and pulls out his gun. It lies on a corner of a crossed knee. “You fled FBI custody and left with him, Will, the rest is on you. Whatever version of that you may believe, or want me to believe.”

“He would have escaped.”

“Never were a good liar.”

“Wasn’t I?” Frigid eyes harden.

“I may have dangled the bait, but I sure as hell didn’t ask for it to be devoured whole, only a willingness to play the part. Hannibal Lecter wasn’t going anywhere without you. Dead or alive. Believe you coined that love.”

“If education serves, pretty sure that’s called obsession.”

“Same thing for the two of you.”

“You always were the first to encourage it.” Blue eyes carve open healed scars on the agent’s face, remembering how they looked spurting blood. How Hannibal tasted after. “Simpler cover up with me out of the picture. The Dragon, The Cannibal, and The Profiler all dead in some bizarre love triangle. That it?”

“Sure Freddie would have put a good spin on it.”

“Necrophilia isn’t really all that hard to peddle. Even for her. Then again neither is a lack of morality or conscience. How is Miriam these days? Still in the psych unit? Or has she finally come to her senses and bitten a bullet?”

“This you’re way of sweet talking me?” Jack glances up from cleaning his government issued firearm.

“Guilt is an effective motivator.”

“And you, Will? What are you guilty of?”

“Poor judgment, mental instability, and not being alluring enough for Death to want my company.” The younger man snorts, rolling his eyes, and glances at Rodriguez. “You are bound by oath to uphold the law. You seriously don’t have a goddamn thing to say about this? I will give you Hannibal Lecter on a silver platter. Isn’t that what you want?”

Rodriguez clutches his briefcase tighter.
“Doctor Lecter made sure Thomas wouldn’t be doing much talking. They managed to suture most of his tongue back on, but until it’s healed he’s stuck with pen and paper, and years of physical therapy.”

“Better his silence than your voice.”

“You get me.”

“Afraid I’ll kill him or fuck him? Imagine you’d choose the former. Easier to sort and neatly file among appropriately labeled social norms.”

A lock clicks shut. Will swivels. Rodriguez is gone. His shadow backlit on the other side of pulled blinds.

“You’re not going anywhere.” Screeching machines warp and fade to silence.

Will’s heart slows then leaps to a hammering gallop. He yanks on the cuff strapped to his wrist, fighting vomit working its way up his throat. “Little difficult given current circumstances, even for me, Jack.”

He fucking wouldn’t.

“No, Will.” Jack leans over his bed, close enough for Will to make out the whites of his eyes. A cold muzzle jams his chin. Will goes perfectly still. “You aren’t hearing me.”

The younger man can taste a steady pulse beating in a thick neck. His lip curls. “So you are denying my right to counsel then?”

“For authenticity, I haven’t denied you anything. He’s here, isn’t he?” The agent straightens. The gun stays where it is. Jack pulls something from a breast pocket and lays it within reach. “In five minutes, you’re gonna put this in your IV.”

A glass vial gleams on the beige blanket, white label reading, Morphine.

Will scrapes his tongue raw on gritted teeth, forcing breath through his nose. “And why would I do that?”

He didn’t survive Alana’s half baked assassination attempt just to have Jack murder him.

This isn’t how I die.

“See.” Jack pauses, pulling out a syringe. He tears the cap off with his teeth. “Rodriguez witnessed you swiping this off the orderly that was just here while you pretended to be unconscious. I hear you were overcome with guilt, with grief, just couldn't stomach what you've done.”

I’m his.

“If I need drugs, I just hit this button.” Will waves a remote threateningly.

His to consume.

Thick fingers haul the remote away. It clacks the hospital bed. “You do it. Or I will.”

To display.

Jack crosses the room in three easy strides. He stops in front of the machine dispensing medication
and clicks it off.

*But not yet. Because I’m not done yet. I’m not fucking done with him.*

Will feels ice cold, then splintering collision with the Atlantic, seconds before fire ravages his body. He bites back a scream, writhing. “Must have a goddamn type for father figures violating my consent.”

Jack coils tubing in a palm, liquid dripping from a needle, and glances over his shoulder, smile curving. “Not violating you, Will, that’s Lecter’s job.”

“You want to know me, Jack?” Will bares teeth, snaking fingers hauling bloodied needles taped in veins out. “Well.”

Bones break with a sickening snap.

“This is how I go!”

*

A distorted whimper is this first sound Jack hears when he wakes.

The second, associated with sickly scent, sugar burning on a stove, gentle and chiding, “No, no. You aren’t going anywhere. Not this time. Not when I still need you. Sign this. Here. Here. And this last one.”

He tries to stay awake. His eyelids flutter. They’re heavy. So heavy. And he is so warm, baking beneath afternoon sun, a tropical breeze on his skin, and Bella’s perfume filling his lungs.

“See, I made a promise.” A blurry hand pats a pale cheek above. “And I intend to keep it. But before I do. Thank you for your service.”

The last sound he hears is gurgling, gut wrenchingly familiar, gasps for air, before darkness engulfs him once more.

When Jack surfaces, he calls out to the shimmering starlight of Bella retreating.

“Jack.” Will peers down from where he sitting, brief case balanced on knees, and wags a pen, scolding. Clear tubing hangs from his arm, machine beeping noisily when he shifts. Scratch marks cover his throat. His mouth is painted red. “I realize we’re getting older, but your reaction time is truly abysmal.”

His neck hurts. He sluggishly paws at his jugular. Touches a threading pulse. Waits to find another gaping wound of jagged glass to bury nails in. Jack pulls a needle from his neck.

A pen angrily scratches something out, again and again and again. Will nods, laying two pieces of manila paper on the hospital bed, and smooths them lovingly.

“What are you…?” Jack blinks hard, struggling to stay conscious.

“Signing my life away to the Devil.”

He struggles to move, stuck to the floor, dead weight. His gaze flicks, rolling to the left, colors muted, muddy. There’s something blocking the front door. “Where…?”
“The Devil?” Will smiles, shrugging lazily and tips his head back, sighing. “Really the wrong atheist to ask. If I had to hazard a guess, I’d say the closest we’re gonna get is Hannibal Lecter, don’t you?”

He blinks, vision shorting out. “Rodriguez. Where?”

“Currently? Acting as a decoration.”

When he opens his eyes again, Will is crouched over him, expression vacant, assessing. The younger man reaches out. Jack manages to crack a nose with his skull before pitching forward gracelessly. Fingers coil his lapel and haul him upright, propping him between a metal cabinet and chair.

“You really have to stop showing your hand. But I do appreciate the assist, and means, and opportunity. I couldn’t have done any of this without you.”

Wet splashes his cheek. Ping, ping, ping. Jack cranes his neck up.

What was once Rodriguez hangs above. Glistening angel wings of skinned flesh and muscle flutter from wired tubing. Mont Blanc fountain pens nail wrists to drywall. Blood drips from a handcuff stuck inside a severed carotid and spills down a naked chest. Arterial spray forms a halo behind a head held up by a canary yellow tie. There’s something pinned to a lapel. Documents. Stamped. Official letterhead. The outermost page is stained in bloody cursive, Matthew 5:38-42.

“Do it, you fucking coward!” Jack screams, lunging.

The agent crumples to the floor face down. Will laughs softly and pats his shoulder, a consolation for trying. He rolls Jack over, eyes the color of moonlight, shining and hopeful.

“Do you know what Mason did to Hannibal at Muskrat Farm?” The younger man crosses his legs, adjusting a swollen hand before draping it in his lap. “He tied him up. Like a pig. Branded him. Said he would skin him alive. Inch by inch. Eat him in decadent, bite sized pieces while keeping him alive for as long as possible.” Will makes a face, disgust warped by madness clinging to the sockets of his eyes, head shaking. “I wouldn’t want that for my worst enemy. Lucky for you...” The younger man lies back, next to Jack, and glances over. “Your Fate isn’t mine to decide.”

* * *

**Chapter 50: Preview**

*Present Day*

Death Row, Location Unknown

8 months and 2 weeks till Execution

“Eating me in dreams isn’t a Freudian clue, Hannibal, it’s just your subconscious reminder of your incessant need to fuck me.”

“Your needs or emotional state of being is no longer my concern.”

“Too bad that twitchy mouth of yours invalidates indifference.”

“I have nothing left to offer, except permanent conclusion.”

“Offer? No, no, no.” Will tsked, laughter drawling thick and throaty. Ice blue eyes tearing heat from the older man’s body in a single flick. “You trained me to take, not ask. And I’ve done well. I’ve
taken it all. Skinned you raw. Extracted your heart. Brandished the hot iron of your name. Stolen your freedom. And soon will come for your life. But my hunger for you is without limits. And I want more. I want something else.”

“Do you cast yourself as Death in my undertaking, dearest, prepared to pull the soul from my body as you place the noose at my neck?”

“Choking the life out of you is old hat. And I only reward you when you’re obedient, when you deserve it, when you ask.”

Chapter End Notes

Lovely x Billie Eilish

Isn't it lovely, all alone? Heart made of glass, my mind of stone Tear me to pieces, skin to bone Hello, welcome home

* * *

And. Scene. What did you think?

Announcement : After giving this A LOT of thought, I've decided remaining chapters will be released on Patreon exclusively. I know this may be met with some backlash. But after 200 chapters (which will remain free for you to read here, and I will continue to answer comments) I would like the opportunity to write this series, with your support, and have both TS and EB self published in physical copies. This is something dear to me to accomplish. For the price of a cup of (expensive) coffee, you would give me a strict weekly deadline, a chance to interact personally, and invest in something we've all grown and built together since the beginning. Not only that, there's character artwork, rewards, little ficlets, and future beginnings of our favorite soft boys story, Elias and Peter.

Friends, you mean the world to me. (Especially those of you that have stuck around throughout it all. Your devotion is without parallel. I owe you so much, for being a light in my world, a great comfort, when its been dark.) This has been such a beautiful experience. You believed in me. None of this could have been done without you. I hope you'll continue the journey with me. As always, my door (and inbox) is open! Always feel free to message me, ask questions, comments. I'm here!

All my love, itsbeautiful

Tumblr: http://hallofmybeginnings.tumblr.com/

Patreon: https://www.patreon.com/itsbeautiful
Dearest Alana,

Sorry I wasn’t able to see you off or thank you for the current accommodations.

It is good to see Hannibal. To be with him again. Though I don’t suppose that was your original intention. Or Jack’s. But I don’t think any of us wanted Rodriguez’s apt crucifixion to be in vain. And since I cannot write him to give thanks for a second chance with my beloved, I have settled for you.

(Not that I’ve any intention of thanking you for trying to kill me—again—or thanking you for using my husband to get to me. Three times now. But who’s counting?)

I would like to rectify a wrong. For lying to you before. For not being honest.

Let us only speak truths from now on.

Hannibal will not die for me, not as long as I’m still breathing, till death do us part.

And Alana? You had better fucking hope they kill me first. Because if they don’t…oh if they don’t, everything you have, what I spent years protecting as if it were my own—your wife and children—they’ll find out exactly what I am capable of.

In the mean time, if you would like to keep your family’s name from becoming a caption beneath a Tattle Crime article screaming ‘Black Widows of the Verger Estate Massacre,’ or out of morgue drawers, I suggest you leave well enough alone.

All my best,

Will Lecter

* * *

Lightning mercilessly lashed a velvet summer horizon. Three consecutive crashes of retribution shaking rafters. Raindrops shuddered on a cold pane of glass, subsiding to their fate, to become a muddied pool of trampled earth.

“Hannibal.” Dark heat beckoned, slick and heavy, an enveloping mist trailing from a grey winding river to fill the study.

[...]

Chapter 50

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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[...]
Chapter End Notes

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Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

8 months, 1 week, and 3 days till Execution

... 

Will laughed, palm over his heart as if hurt, in mock apology. “Oh. We’re comparing futile efforts in stupidity and intention, that it? In that case your ill conceived tryst in Italy is right fucking up there with the worst possible idea you have ever had!”

“Aside from falling—“

Light refracted silver in Will’s eyes, a weathered stone’s agonizing fall, fall, falling endlessly in a crystal clear lake, like they had together, in each other’s arms, and before that, the ocean’s tide. Rippling rings striking clearer and clearer, humming what lashed on Hannibal’s tongue, reaching for the last weapon to wield within his grasp, and strike, drag all that remained to the fiery depths of Hell, where Will had left him.

He only wished to wound, not kill him, god not again, not again, I cannot live without him, and instead let love—two pointed blade, murderess and conqueror of all—die on his lips before he buried another knife in Will, on their lips, and left them both bleeding out, never to pen another equation to retract.

“—failing… to kill you,” Hannibal whispered and forced his gaze to the floor to keep thousands of bloodless kitchens refracting within hidden.

[...]

Chapter End Notes

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"Look, at me."

He slowly inhaled. Lungs straining from oxygen. It is the last his boy will likely allow him. Hannibal flicked his gaze upward.

"Good. You do remember how to obey." Knuckles, encrusted in rubies, dripped to the floor. Eyes a roiling storm darkening the horizon of the home they once shared, crackling lightning and screams of men calling out as they were dragged to their deaths. “For better. Worse. Till death. Right beside you. A shared paupers grave should they allow us that.”

The older man’s lip curled disgust. “I preferred contempt over these romanticized overtures of death.”

“Wouldn’t need to spout sonnets…” Will resigned to his cot, face down, before waning adrenaline and fury take him to a concrete. He falls. It is Hannibal’s body he collides with, sharp and unforgiving, flesh cut to ribbons and impaling him. “If the man I fell for would stop continually surrendering to its embrace simply to see I follow him to Hell. Content with resurrecting me to surrender me to death, but only at his hands.”

Maroon eyes flicked down. “Rest.”

“I haven’t slept without you in years." Will sighed, flexing fingers at the small of his waist, mouth pinched grey. "Any idea the kind of hallucinations that kind of sleep deprivation has on a man? What I would give for a sex induced coma or bottle of ambien.”

Resentment lashed a tongue. “I appear to be all out of prescriptions for either at the moment. “

A single blue eye creaks open, fever bright. “Can’t you just slip your human form and mount me.”

“Ought we be discussing your dreams, dearest, or shall I feign indifference? Or continued ignorance.”

[...]

Chapter End Notes

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It was a routine. One Frederick could set his watch to with a cream cheese Danish in one hand and a fountain pen in the other. After a brief set of notations, his secretary would bring a steaming mocha. He then stretched out on a black leather chaise after his bottom desk drawer provided several heavy splashes of Irish cream. He would arrange his MacBook on the coffee table or his stomach, plug in headphones, and wait.

At exactly eight o’clock, he listened to the stirrings of monsters waking from slumber, click of their teeth not yet evolved to have conversation. Thirty minutes later the meal trays arrived, pleasantries exchanged, mostly by Hannibal—ever the polite schoolboy that one—with whatever orderly had pulled the short straw that day and lost. Then a wolf pacing the confines of its cage began, around and around. When finding no new weakness or hope of escape, halted, and tense howling began.

It was the hushed conversation, the ones wavering from fury to adoration in the middle of the night, that roused Frederick’s suspicion the most.

Low groans rose loud enough to decipher. “Nnn, Hannibal, tell me more.”

“Would you let my fingers spread you wide, Will?”

“The hell?” Frederick’s eyes snapped open and jolted upright.

His laptop slipped, headphones jerking his neck forward. Piping coffee lurched, hovered at a silver rim, then poured down a chest. He shouted, averting near disaster only by way of his laptop toppling to the floor, black wire popping free of its discreet slot.

“Oh Doctor Lecter.” A salacious moan rumbled. “Just like that.”

[...]

Chapter End Notes

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“Are you—“ Knives glittered in the dark. “—touching yourself?”

Hannibal licked chapped lips, fist shoved inside a sweat soaked uniform, and nodded slowly.

“Stop,” Will hissed.

Shame heat his face. Shudders from his mouth. He can’t bring himself to let go. He cupped from balls to tip, a little tighter, the way Will would hold him right before a vicious down stroke, pumping hard until the room would tilt and leave him dizzy. He shivers, thighs trembling from welts marks of his own making, imagining Will’s teeth tearing in to him, tearing him open. He smeared come on the head with a thumb, moaning.

Just one more stroke.

“If you come…” The cot creaked dangerously. Will slithered on hands and knees, black flies swarming, buzzing. “…without my explicit permission, your severed dick—“ Glass screeched beneath nails. “—will be the last fucking necktie you ever own.”

[...]
Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 55

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Flame consumed petals lifted to plead for balm of rain laden skies.

12:00 am.

The witching hour. Where damned and demon alike roam.

“I said no…” Will repeated louder, pupils slowly dilating, fixed on the palm twitching pitifully on Hannibal’s thigh, inching closer to a uniform accentuated bulge.

This. Just this.

Thirty seconds of relief. Release.

From this Hell. From his mind. From his body

He could control this.

Violence shredded his name. “Hannibal. Put your fucking hands where I can see them.”

Teeth ground a plea to holy ash. Hannibal placed trembling palms on rusted springs and steel, bowed his head, throat clicking.

“Good.” Black seeped from eye sockets, staining bone bleach teeth. “Now. What do you say?”

_Blessed Saint Alexander._

He hissed eternal prayer to any deity who might take pity. “Thank you, Will.”

_Deliver me from this endless torment._

[...]

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 56

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Click. Click. The recording halted.

“Fascinating phenomenon, isn’t it? We all presumed you mad, and with good reason, for years without any tangible proof. Now this, this is something else entirely. Perhaps the initial whispers about the true nature of your burgeoning romance was true. A madness shared by two. Any comment on proving or disapproving that theory? It would give my next book such bolster if I were to have a direct quote from the source. Though, mind you, there would be speculation to its credibility.”

Cold chain shivered on velvet.

“Doctor Bloom and I never imagined Lecter would be more isolated in your company. We stored him in the hospital for three years with only his thoughts, with no hope of seeing you ever again, and he thrived. It seems you bring out the worst in him. How does that make you feel?” Frederick Chilton peered over a rim of espresso and jotted a quick notation in a leather binder. “Indifferent it seems. Not a stretch. You never were capable of emoting well. If at all. It's a wonder you survived Lecter this long and he didn't grow bored with his windup toy. Regardless, given your predilection for collecting strays, might you have an estimation for how long till he turns feral? We cannot afford to lose more staff. It is far too costly. As a result, I was told to consult you. Otherwise we will need to move him to a far more secure location.”

Will seeped through shadow, ice blue fixed on a pale throat. “We’re done here.”

“We yet have another thirty minutes, Will.” Doctor Chilton set down a delicate painted cup, clasping scarred hands over a folded knee. “You belong to me. Until the bitter end, whether you like it or not.”

“These are the same restraints you used at the Baltimore State aren’t they?”

Frederick’s eyes flicked to the exit to his office and back to Will, fair blue a muted grey, pupils a centimeter larger than before.

“Figures. Never were one to spare a penny to update infrastructure. Why fix what ain’t broken and all that. See.” Will leaned over the barrier of marble coffee table, the only thing between he and Chilton, coiling a metal chain in his palm, fixated on an adam’s apple bobbing. “Spent a lot of time being carted to and from your dunking tank, prodded by your accolades and student doctors alike. Spent a lot more with Abel who had gotten to know them much longer. Every little detail and weakness in their design discovered or passed on. So you can keep me here. Test the response time of your guard placed outside. Or you can send me back to my cell and leave us the fuck alone. I’ll give you thirty seconds to think it over.”

[…]
Chapter End Notes

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“You might ask the physician to check your hearing during the next examination.” The older man shackled a wrist behind his back and tipped his chin over a right shoulder. “Agent Starling—"

Gnarled fingers raked dark curls, nails scratched a throat, blue gaze piercing. “Stop saying her fucking name, Hannibal, or it will be the last thing you say. I’ll cut it from your lungs.”

“When she next visits I will be sure to inquire after her first name so I might make habit of addressing her in a way that less offends you.”

Will toed the perimeter, caged animal pacing, claws out.

Maybe this was his form of punishment. To show Will he too could play their game. Play it well. Dangle a pawn between them. He could revoke privilege. Offer up the most precious parts of his intellect reserved for his husband to another out of spite. Simply to see what he would do. Until their mangled bodies wrecked upon collision, caught fire.

Or kill one another. Or others. Countless, countless others.

“If I did not give you permission.”

His throat constricted, a scream lodged in his trachea, where Will was firmly controlling him with unwavering grip. “The intellectual rapport allows me a distraction from the monotony of our daily lives.”

“You are not allowed distraction. You are not allowed reprieve!”

What he would give for arterial spray of a victim, anyone, anyone, anyone, as he plunged a knife in their throat. He had never been so fucking hungry.

Hannibal pivoted sharply and glided silently to the partition, shoulders and spine snapped to attention, glowering down. “Am I suddenly cursed with an utter lack of eloquent and clear communication? I must have—”

“I don’t want her here!”

He would get down on goddamn knees and pray if it meant choking Will to silence on his—

“Would you consider, for a solitary second, you are allowing base emotion to over ride rationality?”

“I swear to Christ if she comes again, she won’t be the one leaving you here to rot! I’ll let them transfer you!”

He cast a tongue on slick teeth, eyes hooding. “Pardon, me, Will. I think I misheard you. Let them, what?”

Will tipped his chin defiantly. “You fuckin’ heard me.”
Chapter End Notes

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“Beg for it.” Charred ash growled.

His lips slid apart, eyes drifting closed. “Please.”

“Try again.”

“Please, Will.”

“No. Sincere. Like you really want it. Like you really want me.”

He rubbed his cheek on a thigh on the other side, breathing unsteady. “Pretty please.”

“And?”

“I need you, Will.” Mounting starvation filled a lifting gaze. Pleading for abject suffering to be lessened or increased by the dark deity looming above. “Let me earn my penance.”

Peering down his nose, the younger man cocked his head, smirking. “You’re very obedient when you need something. Willfully submissive. Even before. Not overtly. Consenting to my return to your services as a psychiatrist without batting an eye.”

‘Do you plan to point a gun at me?’

‘Not tonight.’

“Why do you succumb?” Will crouched on all fours, prowling the glass. He pushed a hand slowly down the older man's torso, pausing just above a leaking head. “Is it conscious, or beyond your ability to willfully control?”

Hannibal pressed full bodied to the partition, gasping, as if he could feel it. “I am yours.”

“I wanted you bled dry. You took me back. Let me in. Why?”

“I could not refuse a patient seeking my help after such a traumatic episode.”

“I tried to fucking kill you, Hannibal. Twice. Surely you weighed the odds of me trying again? You just gave in.”

“You looked so lovely,” He murmured weakly. "I could not resist. I cannot resist. You are my weakness.”

[...]

Chapter End Notes
The lid creaked open. His stomach plummeted.

“Is this—” Hannibal shuddered, throat clicking, before he snapped the lid shut. He breathed deep. Held it. Exhaled fully before looking up. “A proposal? Or sentencing?”

Will pushed dark strands curling beneath a damp brow, pursing lips. “Both.”

“I apologized,” Hannibal answered quickly, throat constricting.

The memory of unexpected pleasure fizzed and curled his toes.

“You did.” The younger man nodded. He turned fully to face Hannibal, gaze sliding from his face to the contents of the box. “Repeatedly. With great sincerity.”

“It will not happen again.”

“You’re right. It won’t.” Will tipped his chin, hands slipping in pockets, charm ruthless. “Because we are going to return to our lessons. And you are going to exercise restraint as beautifully as you once did. Before I ruined you.”

Is this what it feels like to exsanguinate?

Numb flooded upward from his toes and fingertips, cold rooting his chest and lungs, head swimming as cohesive thought slipped beneath a murky surface. This is his punishment. For being incapable of hiding what Will had demanded he seek out.

"The crime does not merit this type of punishment. It was a biological urge I could not control, not explicit disobedience."

"Oh, you think I'm giving you a choice?"

"You cannot enforce it."

"I don't have to force anything. You'll do it because I want it."

“To what end?” He asked vacantly.

“For my personal benefit. No, let me rephrase, for my peace of mind.” Copper filled the air, metallic and thick. “Show me how good you can be, sweetheart, put it on.”

[. . .]

Chapter 59

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

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[. . .]

Chapter End Notes
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Chapter 60

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

7 months till Execution

“Hann?” Will rolled over and blinked awake to find Hannibal’s cot recently tidied and empty.

The panic crests first. It always does. His chest grew tight. His toes curled. He forced a stalling heart to stutter, lungs expanding, forced himself to exhale. To remind himself he is not drowning. Not suffocating. Not lost. Not alone.

A rolled section of newspaper rustled his feet. He stooped to retrieve it. He lay back and held it above his head like charted constellations, staring at the photo with equal longing. Among sightseers and locals, there was a pencil sketch of Hannibal leading him by the hand through a trail of winding cherry blossoms. He touched where their hands were linked. Followed it to the other hand, where the older man was brushing a soft petal from his hair, and touched his head.

It must be spring on the East Coast.

Warm tears touched a flourishing note written in the margins:

“All breathing human passion far above, that leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy’d, a burning forehead, and a parching tongue.’ ~J. Keats

He curled on his side, bringing the blanket between his knees and arms. He held it and the paper against his chest. He closed his eyes and let the murmur of blossoms, whisper soft, falling from Hannibal’s mouth, soothe him to sleep. And as he dreamed, he woke to their house beside the sea, and smiled.

[. . .]

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 61

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

6 months, 3 weeks, till Execution

“It really is a best seller you know.”

A paperback book skid across the table and slid to a stop in front of Hannibal. He peered down at muddy swaths of sapphire and umber filling the entire cover. He frowned. Inarticulate brushstrokes attempting to mimic baroque painted a tasteless scene straight from Harlequin novels lining shelves of third rate airport shops. He nudged it a quarter inch to the right and tilted his chin. He supposed if he squinted he could see the resemblance.

There had been some attempt to copy the stylization, an ode to William Blake certainly (though he suspected it was a direct memoriam to Dolarhyde, to tack on a few dollar signs to whatever riff raff scurried under his banner.) There was mild success conveying passion of the painter’s symbols entwined, encircled front to back, sharp teeth spread on a neck, plush lips lifted to the heavens, in rapture or terror. He was, as to be expected, cast as the Dragon, leathery wings sprouting from his back, claws enfolding a narrow waist. Will was clothed in the proverbial sunlight of righteous vindication, and little else.

“A thousand circulated copies at this very moment. Probably more since we’ve started talking. And that’s just in the United States alone. Surely we could expand internationally if we moved from self publishing to a house.” Freddie Lounds leaned across the aluminum table, gold bangles jangling as she tapped two red manicured nails on the table and smiled wide. “Despite that, we’ve gained a cult following across most of Europe rather quickly. I am even fielding several requests for a graphic novel of the more adult variety.”

[…]

Chapter End Notes

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Chapter 62

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

They tangled effortlessly, memory alone guiding them, to rediscover the fit of their bodies fluid in motion, endless in the perfection of wearing one another’s flesh. Fingertips caressed a pronounced ribcage, strumming, notes of a soft please. Warm lips sealed his throat, kisses deepening to soft suckling, moving down his chest. The older man tipped his head, heavenly escaping, and planted twitching hands on his knees. A tongue swirled a straining tendon.

“Have we concluded this internment of denial?” The older man groaned, catching hips rocking into his cock, to entangle their limbs, stretching Will’s arms over his head. “Or are my services not yet needed.”

A lazy smile rippled. The younger man flicked a wrist free and gripped a torn collar. Hannibal lifted his arms, muffling a pleased chuckle. Will spread the tattered remains of cotton, balling it at his waist, before drawing it slowly down.

Cerulean blue widened, falling to red adorning a glistening shaft. “You’re wearing it.”

“I was not given a clear timeline for the repercussions of my actions.” Hannibal gripped Will’s chin, before it can fall, taking his fire and fight with it, and raises blue eyes to meet a steady hearth of protection and kindling. He kissed him softly, once, tousling silken black curls, voice dropping low. “And it was a gift. Am I as you desired?”

[...]

Chapter End Notes

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(Sorry I keep forgetting to post chapter previews as they’re published!)

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