What Do I Know of Life After Death?
by QueenofLit

Summary

Many people say that Will Graham has an empathy disorder, brought about by the abundance of mirror neurons of childhood never burned away.

What very few say, as very few know, is that those mirror neurons stayed in defense of a far darker thing, lurking about in the shadows of his skull. They helped him connect to others around him, a barrier to the evil inside, a balance with which to find himself.

And then Harry Potter went to die, and the horocrux was destroyed.

After that, the mirror neurons he'd never known he'd had were more of a pain than they were worth, honestly.
So, I'd been playing around with this plot bunny, and then stumbled upon Shainira's video which just - it made it all come spiraling out from 'would be fun to write' into the realm of 'MUST WRITE!' And holy shit IT WORKS!!! Harry's born 1980, right? Well, going on that he'd be 33 in 2013, when the show starts. Will Graham is 34 at the start of the show, which is very obviously set in autumn, so that would make Harry also 34, right? And even if not, who the fuck cares? It's only a year off!!!! And so yeah, this happened.

I'll add important notes as needed, but for now just know that the war ended much differently for Will than in HP canon. HP canon is compliant up until after Sirius' death in OOTP, and after that goes wonky. It'll be explained as tidbits come out, and feel free to ask questions about anything.

As far as Hannibal canon, we're going to follow the show pretty closely for a while before it all veers off into the ninth dimension. So yeah, pretty heavy borrowing of canon dialogue. For now if it happens in the show but you don't read it in the fic, it happened.

Disclaimer: I own nothing (obviously)
Jack Crawford was in his classroom, and Will wondered what fate had in store for him this time. He could nearly feel the hands of destiny wrapping around his throat, ready to choke the life out of him and make it stick like it hadn’t the last time. More like eight times, Will mused as Jack introduced himself.

“We’ve met,” Will interrupted, hoping to drive the man away by sheer rudeness. It wasn’t hard to do - he had a lot of unresolved issues when it came to authority figures.

Jack was apparently made of sterner stuff, or just more stubborn. Really, it was ridiculous how easily some men in the FBI ran from Will when he scowled. “We had a disagreement about the exhibit.”

“I disagreed with what you named it,” Will corrected.


Will had seen evil - had seen it breathe and laugh and slaughter and crush bone in order to walk again. He had stared it in its cold, pale face and felt its rage boil his brain from the inside out. The twisted souls in Jack’s museum held no ability to even fathom the face of true evil.

He went for the simple explanation, not wanting to waste his time with an answer the man would never understand. “It’s a little hammy, Jack.”

The conversation moved to teaching and horses and posts, Will’s social cocktail making an appearance. It was easier to let people assume Autism and Aspergers than it was to fake emotions and concerns and social graces he simply didn’t have enough care in him to put the effort into developing. He’d spent his whole life not knowing how to affect the ways normal people lived and interacted, too focused on staying alive to care.

“I can empathize with anybody,” Will protested for the thousandth time, nearly rushing through the age-old explanation. He tried to finish gathering his papers, wanting this sudden ambush to either be over or get to the bloody point already. “It has less to do with a personality disorder than an active imagination.”

He never could refuse the urge to save someone - even if he knew it was a trap.

It was increasingly feeling like one, Will unable to turn his brain off and simply walk away even though he knew it was the smart thing to do. His mind was already picking up the trail as Jack gave it to him, tidbits and facts falling into place in his mind like dementedly-edged puzzle pieces. “Then they weren’t taken from where you think they were taken,” Will stated, resigning himself to his fate even as Jack questioned him on the true location. He refused to be anything he wasn’t, however, no seer or diviner of the wind. “I don’t know. Someplace else.”

He always had been terrible at Divination.
Will stared at the happy picture given to him and felt that old resolve harden his heart against the sorrow he was about to dive into. “One through seven are dead, don’t you think?” he found himself asking almost without conscious thought, eyes flitting about the photograph to soak in all he could. “He’s not keeping them around, he got himself a new one.” And didn’t that just bring back memories he’d tried so hard to bury? Snatchers and their love of toys - only found broken and discarded once the novelty wore off.

Toy didn’t seem to sit right for this description, heavy like the wrong sauce in a dish, so Will pinned poor Elise back to the board to view the group as a whole. “They’re all very... Mall of America. Lots of wind-chafed skin.”

“Same hair color,” Jack agreed. “Same eye color. Roughly the same age, same height, same weight. So, what is it about all these girls?”

Like templates of dolls. Or, not templates, but the dolls themselves. Fresh off the manufacturing floor, drawn straight from the template. “It’s not about all of them, it’s about one of them,” Will observed, the taste of truth heavy and unpleasant in his mouth. “He’s like Willy Wonka - all these girls are chocolate bars and hidden among them is the one, true intended victim. Which, if we follow through on our metaphor,” Will continued, uncertain if he’d ever watch that particular movie again now that the comparison was locked and lodged in the back of his skull - just another rotting bone lining the walls of his forts, “is your golden ticket.”

Jack at least took his words seriously, believing and expanding upon the train of thought instead of brushing him off as so many of Will’s superiors had in the days before he made investigator. “So is he warming up to his golden ticket or just reliving whatever it is he did to her?”

“Oh she wouldn’t be the first,” Will interjected. “Wouldn’t be the last. He would, um, hide how special she was. I mean, I would. Wouldn’t you?”

That might have been something on the list of “things you shouldn’t state aloud,” but Will was tired and could already feel the strain of his gift beginning to itch at the back of his consciousness and so took the opportunity to retreat even as Jack stated, “I want you to get closer to this.”

“No.” Will cut him off. There had been a reason he’d stopped being a cop, and it wasn’t because he’d been stabbed. “You have Heimlich at Harvard and Bloom at Georgetown. They do the same thing I do.”

“That’s not exactly true, is it?” Jack pressed. “You have a very specific way of thinking about things.”

Will couldn’t help the unamused laugh as his gut turned sour. Somehow or another, it always came back to this. “Has there been a lot of discussion about the uh, specific way I think?” His smile lacked the hangman’s humor that formed it. Felt stretched and flimsy over his upper row of teeth.

Jack’s countenance was far less dominating than was probably usual for him, his voice almost gentle and comforting (as if it was a matter that warranted consoling) as he said, “You make jumps you can’t explain, Will.”

“The evidence explains,” he interjected, tired of this argument. He’d had it far too many times already. He wasn’t a psychic, wasn’t a seer. Just... broken.

“Then help me find some evidence.”

This was a man staking it all on his last hope, no matter how much or how little it helped. Will was
more affected by his quiet desperation than he wanted to be, and knew he should say no. He knew it wouldn’t be good for him, wouldn’t be smart - he’d already given his all to war and blood and death, how much more could fate demand of him?

In looking anywhere but Crawford, Will caught sight of eight smiling girls who would never again know the feel of the sun. Would never live to legally drink. To feel the wind in their hair, be annoyed by others, to learn to stand on their own as adults in an ever damning world. Would never live to see all of that vibrant potential fulfilled.

With a sigh that caved in his very lungs, he gave in. “That may require me to be sociable.”

Will tried to remember that sense of wanting to help gain justice as he stood in Elise Nichols' house doing his best to ignore the parents. There was despair here, heavy like a thick, weighted blanket. Even worse was the despaired hope of a desperate father, cloying the back of his throat and making Will resist the urge to throw up.

It’d been too long, Will thought as he revealed to Jack that the girl had been taken here. He didn’t even need his gifts for that, death hanging about the house as if to welcome him with open arms. Fingers twitched as he put on blue gloves, refusing to reach for the stone that sat heavy in his pocket or make a motion for a wand he could never again use. No matter how many times he destroyed them, however far he chucked the offending items away, they always returned to him.

He’d been too long out of practice at this human interaction thing, it seemed. Will found himself handling the father with short and clipped instructions, offering the holding of the cat as an ill boon in place of comfort he didn’t know how to offer. It came not to matter, as the man dropped the cat once the room was revealed.

The grieving father nearly collapsed, and Will fought the urge to sigh.

Something was wrong. He didn’t try to think about his days in the minds of killers, but he remembered enough to know that something here was amiss. There was no surge of power, or lust, or joy. Quiet desperation seeped into his skin, clogging his pores with tears. But what, why?

Because he -

“Are you Will Graham?”

Will lurched from one man’s mind back into his own, the separation as painful as the knife wound in his shoulder had been. He gasped, and sputtered, and attempted to right himself in the center of who he, Will Graham, was. “You’re not supposed to be here.”

Her mention of his monograph helped center him, as did the stone’s heavy presence in his pocket (loathe as he was to admit it). Despite himself and his desperate attempts to throw off the conversation, Will found himself liking this agent even as she boldly asked if he was unstable. She reminded him of Susan Bones.

Jack came in then, allowing Will to draw away and retreat to the relative safety of the window.
Others were there, chatting, and the mention of antlers finally made that odd emotion fall into place. He interrupted the conversation with bits of herbology and potions lore he had certainly never learned in class. “Antler velvet is rich in nutrients it actually helps promote healing. He may have put it in there on purpose.”

He wasn’t fond of Jack’s look as the man asked, “You think he wanted to heal her?”

At least the weird headspace had an answer now. “He wanted to undo as much as he could,” Will replied, trying not to let the feeling resonate with his own sentiments from memories best left forgotten, “given that he’d already killed her.”

“He put her back where he found her,” Jack bounced the theory back, at least taking it seriously. Granted, what else could it have been?

“Whatever he did to the others he couldn’t do to her,” Will stated. His eyes remained glued to the innocent face of the girl who could have been sleeping. She was a much more peaceful corpse than most he’d seen, and Will fought to keep the phantom ache in his heart separate from himself. He’d been out of practice too long - he needed to strengthen his forts.

“Is this his golden ticket?”

“No, no,” Will mumbled, voice barely above a whisper. “This is an apology.”

Oh great, now they were all looking at him. And his head hurt. Fantastic.

“Does anyone have any aspirin?”

The late hour meant Will was around to see the poor dog running about with a leash and no owner. It was a sight Will couldn’t abide, his own abandonment already close to his thoughts thanks to the old memories this case brought up. He spent more time than most would, luring the dog close, but as he saw the newly named Winston safe and clean and fed, it made his whole day seem worth it. Will was happy his new companion had a proper, good sleep. Even if he was denied the same.

He’d thought it was her spirit come to haunt him. Will reached out to her, to try and clean her and comfort her, send her into the next life better than she’d parted the last, but it was no use. The corpse refused to be gentled, floating away and refusing his touch.

Will awoke in a heavy sweat. Cursing but too tired to care more than that, he laid out towels and stripped before attempting to get more rest. Rest was key - sleep was his friend. It was the only way he’d get out of this with sanity intact. Years of nightmares and the harsh nature of war had taught him that much.

It hurt. He ached - his brain, his eyes, his bones. There were no answers or leads to be found. No answers made men frustrated. Frustrated men turned to their oracles. Oracles, Will though sardonically, get shoved and pushed and prodded until they explode. It had happened before.

So Will was hiding in the bathroom. It was a sound, trial and error proven method - there was no shame in self-preservation. Only the dead held the luxury of that thought. Which didn’t keep him from flirting with the dead, holding his head under water in a filled and stoppered sink to wash out the killer taking up residence behind his ears.
The water was suddenly thick, heavy, and copper swarmed his nose, and Will forced himself to breathe out harshly instead of the scream waiting for release, holding himself there a moment more before emerging from his impromptu bath.

The filtered air hit his wet face, cooling him. Will luxuriated in the feel for only a moment before drying his face.

Anger, rage, frustration. A storm cloud of emotions was billowing into the room, and Will fought the urge to sigh.

It was Jack, no surprise there, who revealed himself by demanding, “What are you doing in here?”

“I enjoy the smell of urinal cake.” Will was far too tired to curb his tongue - Jack would have to learn to deal with it.

“Me too,” ah, so Jack was choosing to ignore it. “We need to talk.” Those words never boded well, and Will’s increasingly horrible mood was only reinforced by Jack’s sudden hollering when another agent walked in. “Use the ladies room!”

Will leaned against the sink and looked away, face locking back into the tightness he’d come in here to remove. It was going to be one of those conversations - joy.

Jack was pacing, always a good sign. “Do you respect my judgement?”

Yay. Will just barely nodded before realizing Jack was probably the kind of man who needed vocal confirmation. The noise of agreement was all he was willing to give at the moment. At least the pacing had stopped.

“Good. Because we will stand a better chance of catching this guy with you in the saddle.”

Only the desperation still peeking out at the edges of Jack’s face kept Will from launching an attack of his own. He knew people were depending on him, damnit - he also bloody well knew how to do his damn job. “I’m in the saddle, just um - confused as to which way I’m pointing,” Will admitted. This would probably go smoother if he threw the man a bone. “I’ve never dealt with this kind of psychopath - I’m not even sure he is a psychopath, he’s not insensitive he’s not - shallow!”

“You know something,” Jack accused, not letting him off by even an inch, “or else you wouldn’t have said it was an apology.”

Oh, like that bit wasn’t bugging Will just as much as it bugged everyone else. He gave into the need for motion, pacing a bit as he blurted out everything that bothered him, because it just didn’t make sense. “He couldn’t honor her - he feels bad.”

“That sort of defeats the point of being a psychopath,” Jack pointed out, as if Will hadn’t known that already.

Annoyed, he snapped back, “Yes, it does!”

Jack yelled back, apparently not one to ever just allow someone else to be the alpha dog for even a moment. “Then what kind of crazy is he?”

Will’s sigh was trapped behind a clenched jaw, and once loosened escaped in a statement. “He couldn’t show her he loved her, and so he put her corpse back where he killed it - whatever crazy that is.” Oh, and didn’t the knowledge itch under his skin, urging Will to move and pace again. He kept stopping, or, kept trying to stop. To lean against the sink as he might normally and to not allow
this killer any more hold over his blood than he already had.

But the restlessness was there - itching, twitching, longing. Their killer was deeply upset by the child he’d been unable to properly show his love for, and the need to express that love to it’s fullest potential was all the stronger for the knowledge of failure.

“You think he loves these girls?”

“I think he loves one of them,” Will countered. His face was probably twitching, given Jack’s odd look, but he couldn’t bring himself to care at that moment.

“And-and yes, by association I think he has some form of love for the others.”

“There was no semen, there was no saliva,” Jack droned on, voice hard and unforgiving. “Elise Nichols died a virgin and she remained that way.”

Rage. It flooded his vision and only the fact that the world turned harsher and brighter with it instead of cold and dead let Will realize it wasn’t his own even as he spat, “That’s not how he’s loving them! He wouldn’t disrespect them that way! He doesn’t want these girls to suffer he kills them quickly, and -” Will breathed deeply, forcing his finger away from it’s accusatory positioning inching into Jack’s space and made himself drop the rage that didn’t belong to him. It did no good to be so fully trapped in the thoughts of those who believe themselves in rightful suit with death. “To his thinking, with mercy.” Will turned away then, hoping beyond hope he wouldn’t be provoked any further today.

Jack was having his revelation quietly at least, and oh how Will had always hated this tedious business of everyone cluing in to the facts that have only been screaming at him for days or even weeks before anyone else even knows there is a fact to be learned. “A sensitive psychopath. Risked getting caught to tuck Elise Nichols back into bed.”

“He has to take the next one soon,” Will said. He refused to turn around, hands gripping the cold edges of the gleaming white sink. He won’t give into the urge to look at himself in the mirror - doesn’t want to acknowledge that it might not be him staring back. “He knows he’s gonna get caught. One way or another.”

There was warmth under his hands. Will doesn’t look. Doesn’t have to. It is a warmth all too familiar and he knows it isn’t real. The sensation is too much a recurrence for him to believe there truly is blood under his hands. Not anymore. It is merely the ghost of blood long shed and dried.

Jack, despite appearances and assurances and confidence in his own ability, was getting slightly worried. And so he turned to the most obvious answer, albeit more subtly than he dealt with most people. “Graham likes you - thinks you won’t play mind games on him.”

“That’s because I don’t,” Alana replied instantly. She was looking as impeccable as ever, and her stride never paused, never wavered from its strength, never faltered. It was one of the things he liked about her, difficult though she might be. “I’ve been as honest with him as I’d be with a patient.”

“You’ve been observing him while you guest lecture here at the academy, yes?” Jack countered, setting up the hook. Everyone wanted to get into Will’s head - he’d learned that much at least.

Alana tried to deflect. “I’ve never been in a room alone with Will.”

“Why not?”
Alana didn’t look too impressed with him, but was still cordial. “Because I want to be his friend - and I am.”

“Oh,” Jack baited, casually putting his hands in his pockets, “seems a shame not to take advantage. Academically speaking.”

“You already asked me to do a study on him Jack,” Alana reminded him, coming to a stop to make her point more emphatic, “I said no. Anything scholarly on Will Graham would have to be published posthumously.”

“So,” Jack tried, unwilling to back down, “you’ve never been alone with him because you have a professional curiosity?”

Alana’s sigh and accompanying half-aborted eye-roll informed Jack she was coming to the limits of her ability to humor him. Jack had always held respect for her - that didn’t mean they got along. “Normally I wouldn’t even broach this, but what do you think one of Will’s strongest drives is?”

She was beginning to use the tone of voice that signaled her therapist side was in full force. Jack crossed his arms and gave the matter serious thought. The only answer he could find, however, refused to be a comfort. “Fear.” Alana nodded at him, which was even less reassuring. “Will Graham deals with huge amounts of fear. Comes with the imagination.”

“It’s the price of imagination,” Alana interjected. The small difference in word choice was a point too important for her to quietly ignore.

“Alana, I wouldn’t put him out there if I didn’t think I could cover him,” Jack objected. The smaller woman crossed her arms and gave him an incredulous look. She never had been intimidated by him - unfortunately that was one of the reasons they worked well together. “Alright - if I didn’t think I couldn’t cover him eighty percent.”

“I wouldn’t put him out there!” Alana insisted yet again. She’d only been saying the same thing since this whole mess began.

“He’s out there,” Jack pointed out. “I need him out there. Should he get too far out there I need you to make sure he’s not out there alone.”

Alana wasn’t impressed any more this time than she had been any other time. “Promise me something Jack. Promise you won’t let him get too close.”

“He won’t,” Jack promised. “Get too close.”

Alana looked as if she didn’t believe him, but let the matter drop.

Later that day Jack hung around on the edges of the exam room as his team discussed the body. He was watching Will more than the others, admittedly. Something that proved needed as Will suddenly went still, ceasing all of his nervous back and forth glances and finger twitching to focus on the body with a blank gaze that looked like he was zoning out.

Will came back to himself nearly five whole minutes later with an interjected, “She was mounted. Like hooks. She may have been bled.”

“Her liver was removed,” Zeller commented, as if Will hadn’t spoken. Jack tried not to notice how out of all of them, Katz was handling Will’s oddity the best.

“Took it out, and then - yep, he put it back in.”
“Huh,” Price gave voice to what all of them were wondering. “Why would he do that? Cut it out if he was just gonna sew it back in again?”

Will twitched - just a blink of his eyes, but a twitch all the same - before speaking as if the words were tearing themselves from his mouth, “There’s something wrong with the meat.”

Everyone turned to stare at him. “She has liver cancer,” Zeller stated in shock.

Will nodded, almost as if he wasn’t surprised. “He’s um. He’s - he’s eating them.”

As Will turned and fled the room, Jack had to admit that perhaps Alana was right. Will needed an anchor. And Alana had given him just the man for the job.

It was time to pay a visit to Hannibal Lecter.

Chapter End Notes

Did I say heavy borrowing? Sorry, I meant *complete and utter verbatim stealing*. Things do pick up a bit, I swear, I’m just using the episodes to get the first glimpse into the thought process of our people, because Will who was Harry is vastly different than Will Will.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

A wild Hannibal appears. Things get interesting.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took so long, it's been raining like crazy here and rain always makes my wifi run for the fainting couch with all the aplomb of a victorian maiden. So, yeah, this took longer than I meant it to.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will was already unhappy about the intrusion. Jack all but begged him to dive headfirst into the depths of depravity, and now it wasn’t enough? He had to go and ask help on the profile from another man - a psychiatrist at that! When Will had told him to do so in the beginning, but no - Jack could only listen to his advice when the magic eight ball wasn’t working the way he wanted it to?

No. Will was not pleased.

He did attempt to be cordial, at least. Tried to collar the beast inside that wanted to snarl and cut and leave bleeding men in his wake as he shouted the fact that he’d led a war at fifteen - he didn’t need a helper to do his damn job.

The collaring didn’t extend to his tongue. “Tasteless,” he couldn’t help but to mutter at the mention of idiots sharing photos of the dead and laughing over it like frat boys finding pin ups online.

Unfortunately, the doctor caught the attention of the animal inside before Will could fully squash it.

“Do you have trouble with taste?”

“Nor mine,” was the casual reply. An interested glance showed the older man still studying the board, turning the response into an almost off-handed remark. “No effective barriers.”

Will hadn’t lived this long without some sense, however. The casual air was just this side of too much, and Will had learned long ago not to trust perfect acts. He spoke his next words into his coffee cup, movements too tense to truly play himself off as not dangerous. Best to go for defensive then - normal enough, in these circumstances anyway. “I build forts.”

“Associations come quickly,” Hannibal continued as he walked back to his own seat.

“So do forts,” Will parried, voice flat. He quickly glanced in the direction of the man, unable to let him completely out of his sight just yet. Much as his instincts were screaming danger, he was too tired to play this game anymore. Sleep hadn’t been coming any easier recently - he doubted it would
for many months now, even if they did manage to wrap this case up quickly.

Hannibal noticed he was looking at his coffee cup instead of following proper social procedures for a conversation (nevermind the fact he didn’t want it to be a conversation at all) and commented, “Not fond of eye contact, are you?”

Will sighed. It seemed it would take more to make this one back off. “Eyes are distracting,” he answered truthfully, though his voice was rough with disdain. “See too much, don’t see enough - and,” here, Will turned to dare to look the psychiatrist dead on, “and it’s hard to focus when you’re thinking um,” full eye contact on the first meeting. Hermione would be proud. “Wow, those whites are really white or, he must have hepatitis or, is that a burst vein?”

Hannibal, damn the man, wasn’t dismayed by Will’s obvious taunting. He gave a silent huff of laughter and smiled - with eye crinkles! He looked charmed. Ugh.

“So - yeah,” Will barreled on. “I try to avoid eyes whenever possible.” He hid in his coffee cup again, making no move to disguise it. The blatant dismissal was usually enough to turn people away. To make it even more apparent, he flipped a page of the file and called out blandly, “Jack?”

Hannibal was apparently not one to take the bait, catching all of Will’s attention at once with his next statement. “I imagine what you see and learn touches everything else in your mind. Your values and decency are present yet, shocked at your associations. Appalled at your dreams. No forts in the bone arena of your skull for things you love.”

Frighteningly accurate, enough for Will to give a tell by the slight opening of his mouth in his surprise. Not quite on the mark, but more than anyone else had been able to surmise.

He was a psychiatrist. Will was suddenly certain of why his instincts had been blaring caution. This had happened too many times before for him not to see it now. Everything became starker, clearer, and his wand hand curled and twitched - aching for the familiar grasp of his old power.

Will bit with words instead. “Whose profile are you working on?” Knowing who was behind this, Will whipped his head around to bore holes into Jack. “Whose profile is he working on?”

Hannibal was offering platitudes, tying them together by associating their talents and inability to turn them off as an attempt to make him calm down, but Will refused to look away from Jack. He knew all the tricks. More than that, he knew the look of a chess player unhappy that his pieces had begun to unravel the game.

There was a reason Albus was the only member of the war’s dead not remembered through the naming of the children of the survivors.

“Don’t psychoanalyze me,” Will bit out, letting some of the danger carried in his very bones seep into his tone. “You wouldn’t like me when I’m psychoanalyzed.”

“Will,” Jack started in attempts to regain control of the board.

Will wasn’t having any of it. He’d promised himself that much long ago. Hand still twitching for a weapon he hadn’t held in just over a decade, Will stood and grabbed his bag. “Now if you’ll excuse me I have to go give a lecture. On psychoanalyzing.” He left without another look at either of them, grateful he’d conquered the greater parts of his temper by this point in his life. It wouldn’t do to murder the head of the BSU in the center of Quantico, after all. Even if he did deserve it.
Hannibal’s first impressions of Will Graham were conflicting. He was timid, hiding behind loose clothes and glasses and an appropriation of autistic tendencies in order to dissuade people from looking too closely. Yet for all that Will Graham tried to be a shadow passing through life he had a core of steel - steel like the hull of an old ship, battered and tried and tested from its very infancy and yet all the stronger for the layers of wounds and gore. It showed itself in the remarks just a learned distance away from smartass. In the set of his shoulders and the way Will pieced clues together with frightening speed. The way he tensed as if for a fight, the vein in his neck prominent as he threatened with all the slick grace of an aged predator, “You wouldn’t like me when I’m psychoanalyzed.”

Hannibal noted a strange hook of Will’s tense hand, one that usually spoke of a desire to rip and tear, even as the younger man fled from the weight of Hannibal’s analytical ambush.

It was absolutely fascinating, this dual nature - darkness and light and fire and ice all rolled into one fiercely capped bottle. He wondered what would happen if he loosened the top of that barrier.

This sudden leap into the FBI’s notice was proving very interesting indeed.

Making a quick decision, Hannibal leaned forward to get another look at the kind of girl he would need. “This cannibal you have our friend looking into, I think I can help good Will see his face.”

The ravens had come. To feast on the offering or to peck at the last vestiges of the soul. The clearing would have been abandoned at moonrise - the wild magic about him swirled with thick stomachs glutted on a blood sacrifice so near the autumnal equinox and ley lines merging not fifty miles to the south of them.

All of which was distracting, but not so much as the sight itself.

A girl pale as death draped artfully over the dismembered head of a stag, only pierced so far as to keep her in her place. Her skin had set porcelain in death, a wave of ebony trailing to the ground, hair unbound.

It was lovely. A sacrifice to the oldest gods, those drenched in blood and war and decorated in the beating hearts of their enemies. Will had seen nothing like it in years, and the sight left him breathless. He struggled to regain his composure, his footing, because these people were not his comrades - they would never understand the depths at which such art affected him - would not give him time or refuse to judge him this aspect of his broken nature.

Finally, Jack’s words began permeating his skull. “The stag head was reported stolen last night just fifty miles from here.”

“Just the head?” Will repeated back. This was no hunter, who had staged this - he wouldn’t feel the impulse the way their perpetrator did. Something else was in play.

The explanations of shrikes went straight over his head as Will drew nearer the offering, unable to resist. It called and sang and hummed within his very bones - he couldn’t shake the feeling that this was meant as an offering for him. “He wanted her found this way.”

The killer inhabiting his skull reared up in indignation and rage, shoving aside the rival killer attempting to gain entrance in the bone fort of Will’s mind. “It’s petulant,” and the hint of reverence and the slight smile vanished, gave way to the oncoming flood of anger. “I feel like he’s mocking her. Or,” Will added, struggling to push the foreign mind back, “like he’s mocking us.”

Jack leaned in then, trying to regain Will’s focus as he knelt at the head of the offering. Jack’s voice
cut in. “Where did all his love go?”

Will snorted, even as his eyes darted over every detail, etching this design into his mind. “Whoever tucked Elise Nichols back into bed didn’t paint this picture.”

And such a beautiful picture it was, even as Zeller informed them the lungs had been taken while they still filtered air for breath. He hadn’t seen anything like this since they’d gotten hold of some Death Eaters on the Winter Solstice. He just hoped his awe wasn’t broadcasting clearly on his face - that would raise some uncomfortable questions.

Speaking of... “Our cannibal loves women. He doesn’t want to destroy them, he wants to consume them - keep some part of them inside.” Starting to freak himself out for once, Will stood and began backing away from the display before things got complicated. And also, because the Solstice comparison had brought a few things to light. “This girl’s killer thought she was a pig.”

Will was only able to walk so far before Jack was asking, “You think this was a copycat?”

Agitation laid heavy at the base of his spine. Will needed some time to get his head on right again - he couldn’t tell the source of the anger and that was always a warning sign. “Our killer had a place to kill and cannibalize and no interest in - in -” in sacrifices under blood moons, desperate prayers to ancient gods, the feel of blood - warm and slick against skin, “field kabuki!” Inaccurate words for what the staging meant to him, but more than likely fine for what this copycat had desired to do.

“So,” Will barreled on, feeling more himself now that he had something to focus on, “he has a house, or two, a cabin - something with an antler room. He-”

Shit.

Will felt the breath get knocked out of him entirely with the weight of his revelation. “He has a daughter. Same age as the other girls, same hair color, same-same eye color, same-sa-same-same height!” He was stuttering now, hands twirling about in agitation and unable to stop himself. “She’s an only child. She’s leaving home.” Will choked, and forced the sob down as he beat back memories and fears and untold horrors made real. It was pressing in now, spurred on by foreign panic, and Will was too tired for his normal defenses to work as they should. “He can’t bear the thought of losing her.” Will blinked back tears and began his retreat. “She’s his golden sn-ticket.”

*Don’t get wound up, Will,* he told himself. *No commiserating, no kinship - you can’t afford that. Not with a child at stake.*

“What about the copycat?” Jack called after him.

Will shot over his shoulder the briefest of statements, needed to leave before he broke down in front of a field of agents. “Intelligent psychopath, sadist - hard to catch. He might never kill like this again. Why don’t you have Dr. Lecter do a profile - you seem so highly impressed with his opinion.” The implication that it was better appreciated than Will’s own probably wasn’t lost, but Will couldn’t even savor the slight victory. He had to get out of there - had to find a quiet place to mourn Ginny in private and fix his mind.

He’d need to be on top of his game if he were to save this child.

Will had slept maybe all of three hours - too long going over old occlumency meditation techniques to root out the stranger in his brain and exorcise it only to feel the breath of the stag on his neck every time he closed his eyes - and so he wasn’t at his best when some irritant woke him before the alarm.
“Fu’ing basrd,” Will grumbled, stumbling over his blankets as he made his way to the door. “Gonna rip a’ arm offff - fucker be’er run while ‘e can, the shhi -”

He opened the door to find Dr. Lecter standing there, pleasant as ever and looking far too awake for... whatever time it was. “Good morning Will. May I come in?”

Will looked around and managed to speak somewhat clearly. “Cra’frd?”

Thankfully, the man understood his mangled speech. “Disposed in court. The adventure shall be yours and mine today.” The doctor stopped speaking to look around another moment, and then asked again, “May I come in?”

Will paused, unsure why the question unsettled him. There was something about the man that caused his instincts to advise caution, and a small part of him that wished to run away. But it was too bright, and too early, and he just wanted to crawl back into bed, so Will nodded briefly and turned to walk back into the room, allowing the doctor entrance. Will would have gone right back to bed if he could have handled a stranger so close while he slept - but there was no way he could even if said stranger hadn’t set off some of his instincts, and so Will went to the coffee maker and began poking around to get a pot going. It seemed like Dr. Lecter was probably speaking, but Will couldn’t really tell and honestly didn’t care. He didn’t have the capacity for it this early, and so stared at the small pot until there was coffee in it.

Will was on his third cup before remembering he’d thought the doctor was speaking. He looked to where the older man was sitting patiently at the small table the room had been furnished with. Will was probably wearing a very befuddled face at the moment as he asked, “Were you saying something earlier?”

Dr. Lecter smiled then, looking charmed. Seriously, what the hell? Most everyone Will knew was annoyed with him or actively starting hating him when he was rude to them, and Dr. Lecter was looking at him like Will was a particularly fluffy puppy. “I brought breakfast, now that you have woken enough to appreciate it,” Dr. Lecter commented, gesturing to the insulated bag on the table and... plates? He’d set everything up? And brought his own cutlery, Will noted with slight amusement.

Then his words filtered through the haze, and Will felt the blush start to burn his face. He rubbed the back of his neck in embarrassment. “Um, sorry bout that. I’m not really a morning person.”

Dr. Lecter smiled at him then, one corner of his lips farther up than the other but the expression was too kind to be a smirk. “Interestingly enough I had managed to come to that conclusion already.”

Right. Will decided it was probably best if he didn’t speak and sat down with his coffee. A cup which was immediately replaced by Dr. Lecter with a cup from his thermos that smelled better than the hotel stuff. “I am very careful about what I put into my body,” Dr. Lecter commented as he took out the glass tupperware and began serving. “Which means I end up preparing most meals myself.”

Will nearly groaned at the thought. “Can’t stand cooking,” he admitted while picking up his fork. “So thanks - I probably would have eaten a granola bar otherwise.”

Dr. Lecter looked slightly scandalized. It was vastly amusing. “That is hardly sufficient nutrition for a man of your age.”

Will shrugged. He’d grown up on far less - but no way was he about to admit that to a man he didn’t know, much less a psychiatrist. He speared a bit of eggs and ate to avoid commenting. It was absolutely delicious (he was almost sad to still be waking up - it would probably be even better if he
was completely aware) and so he said so.

... Was he supposed to use the plate? Dr. Lecter wasn’t, so Will just put the container on the plate and ate it out of that. It would probably save the man some dishes.

It was quiet but a moment before Dr. Lecter spoke again. “I must apologize for my analytical ambush. However, as it is likely to happen again I must use my apologies sparingly, lest they lose all meaning.”

Will sighed. “Let’s just keep it professional, yeah?”

The other man seemed particularly unimpressed with that. “Or we could socialize like adults. God forbid we become friendly.”

Will wrinkled his nose and remembered why he hated psychiatrists - needling, prodding, poking little balls of slime. This one was just taking longer to scare off. “I don’t find you that interesting.”

Dr. Lecter paused a moment, waiting to catch his eyes in a rare moment before stating blandly, with an undercurrent that spoke of finality and destiny and death, “You will.”

Silence a moment more, and then the real talk began. “Agent Crawford told me you have a knack for the monsters.”

Will sighed and pushed his plate away, giving room to cross his arms on the table top as he leaned on them, putting himself forward slightly as if leaning in closer. It was a little early for this, but at least he was fully awake now. “I don’t think the Shrike killed that girl in the field.”

Unbelievably, the man across from him didn’t question his judgement for a moment. He simply slightly mirrored Will’s posture and asked for clarification. “The devil’s in the details: what didn’t your copycat do to the girl in the field? What gave it away?”

“Everything!” Will replied, unable to keep his hand still. He ran it over his mouth before gesturing as he explained. “It’s like I had to see a negative before I could see the positive.” With a sigh, Will rubbed his hands over his face and did his best to not show how deeply the present had affected him - because a present it was, no doubt about it. And he was increasingly certain it had been meant for him, no matter the fact he had no evidence to support the sickly pleased feeling in his gut. “That scene was practically gift wrapped.”

Dr. Lecter seemed to understand where his mind was anyway. The worry and fear and inability to understand why bugging him beyond all belief. “The mathematics of human behavior - all those ugly variables. Some bad math for this Shrike fellow, huh?”

Will didn’t do more than glance at the doctor, not wanting to answer his question and pouring himself another cup of the man’s divine coffee. He kind of wanted something stronger at the moment, but he’d promised Hermione he’d curb his drinking problem and he wasn’t about to get beat up for going back on that promise now.

Dr. Lecter let the matter drop. Will found himself warming up to the man despite himself. “Are you reconstructing his fantasies? What kind of problems does he have?”

Will had to huff a laugh out at that. “Oh, he has a few.”

And there was the opening - Dr. Lecter didn’t disappoint. “Ever have any problems Will?”

Will gave him a great innocent act, blinking his eyes prettily and gesturing at his chest before giving
his head a slight shake and returning his hand to the table. “No.”

“Course you don’t,” Dr. Lecter replied with a smile, seemingly missing the small one on Will’s face. “You and I are just alike: problem free. Nothing for us to feel horrible about.” He waited, watching, as Will ate another bite of the sausage before apparently deciding to just go ahead and speak his mind. “You know Will, I think Jack sees you as a delicate little teacup. A piece of fine china to bring out only for the special guests.”

Will had to put his fork down and laugh at that, leaning back in the chair. It was a ridiculous notion, however astute. He always felt more like an unruly chess piece than anything else, and as his laughter died down a thought nagged at him. “How do you see me?”

Will was wholly unprepared for the answer he got. “The mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by,” Dr. Lecter stated, eyes never blinking and face entirely serious, voice smooth and calm as the air before a storm.

Will could feel his brows furrow a bit as he pondered the shocking statement. Two meetings, and Lecter could tell that Will was a predator playing house. Or maybe the doctor just sensed the capacity for danger, and he’d certainly hit that protective streak on the mark. It’d been awhile since his “saving people thing” was a problem, but with this consulting business it would probably rear its ugly head again.

It was... strange, to be so easily seen. Will couldn’t yet tell if it was something he liked.

Dr. Lecter raised in his estimation when he let the moment die with a casual gesture and the parting instruction of, “Finish your breakfast.” Will continued to stare at him a moment more - this puzzle of a man that Will was finding surprising difficult to unravel. Perhaps he was interesting after all.

He didn’t know why Hobbs stood out, but Will had lived too long to ignore his instincts now. They kept him and several others alive, and so Will was willing to trust those odd feelings without any more explanation needed. Thankfully Dr. Lecter seemed willing to trust him, despite the rather flimsy excuse of “he’s the only one who didn’t leave an address”. The fact the man missed days at a time was slightly more relevant. It wasn’t long before they gathered all the files needed and made it to the Hobbs residence, reasonably sure backup wouldn’t be needed.

That turned out to be a bad idea. Will stepped out of the car and nearly straight into the past. He could almost feel the unconscious magic inspired by panic singing in the air, rushing to him and searching for purchase within his veins. It was uncomfortable - drenched in memories of times he’d fled to the states to avoid in the first place.

It almost wasn’t a surprise to see Hobbs in the doorway, shoving out a bleeding woman before shutting the door again.

Will barged through the door, instincts on haywire as the latent magic settled under his skin, dragging him down further into the past and making him forget to call out as a proper cop should. No, it was on quiet feet he stalked into the kitchen, and silently he held the man holding his daughter close with a knife to her throat at gunpoint.
The daughter was pleading, and Will felt wild magic pulse and throb like a panicking pulse all throughout the house. This was old land, filled with old secrets and ancient, untamed magics.

Will prayed to it, unable to connect but hoping it would hear him anyway, as he aimed with a precision that was all Harry and took the path of least resistance to his goal.

A single shot, a small jerk, and Garrett Jacob Hobbs fell to the floor dead. Half of Will’s brain was on how nice the splatter from the headshot looked against the homey yellow walls (he’d admitted his own crazy to himself long ago, on the fields of battle stained red from carnage and grief) but the other half was all concern. He rushed forward to catch the gasping girl, quickly wrapping his hands around her throat. She was bleeding, but the jerky cut hadn’t gone deep, and Hobbs had missed her jugular, thank Merlin.

Hannibal entered the room, watching for a moment as Will knelt on the floor, completely confident even splattered with blood. The headshot was immensely effective, and Hannibal appreciated the simplistic barbarity of it. As had he enjoyed the view of Will stalking into the house, silent as the grave and just as deadly.

He found himself wondering if perhaps Will could be altered into a true equal, instead of just another pet project used to relieve boredom.

Thoughts for another time. Will was kneeling on the floor, steady and sure as he told the gasping girl that she’d be alright. His grip on her throat was amateur but strong - a good holding position until more qualified help arrived. Hannibal wondered where he’d picked that up. Surely a cop didn’t see that many throat wounds?

“Damn it, Lecter, get your ass over here!” Will hollered out.

Hannibal dutifully walked over and knelt by the two. They were a compelling picture but Will was right - there were more important matters at the moment. “How large is the incision, and where?” he asked, preparing to take over.

“’Bout a couple inches,” Will replied. The sudden tensing in his arms showed that he too was readying to make this as quick as possible. “Starts where my middle knuckle is.”

Hannibal nodded, placed his hands over Will’s, and after a count of three they switched. Hannibal grasped on firmly, lifting the girl’s head with his other hand to keep it elevated. Will immediately contacted the police, speaking in a roughly formal way that Hannibal assumed he’d picked up during his own time as a cop - EMT request and address and perpetrators and other factors that were apparently useful.

They kept the girl alive, and Hannibal saw her to the ambulance and even the hospital. After that Hannibal managed to pull some strings, getting the girl safely transferred to a good facility in Baltimore. All of which would endear him to the man he truly wanted to see - this violent protector with a core of unrelenting steel. Not to mention, the two brunettes had looked so beautiful communicating silently on the linoleum floor, spattered in blood and with eyes only for each other.

Hannibal hadn’t thought of family in years. He wasn’t sure why the subject chose to rear it’s head now, but he decided that was a question for another time. For now, he would grasp the hand of a stable young woman who had managed to survive her own father and lure in his prey by presenting a vulnerability.
Will stumbled through the fireplace the moment he got home: powder, fire, and a quick word all he needed to fall into the arms of his closest family. Hermione and Ron caught him (as they always had and always would) and held him as he shook. The battle mind state he’d been thrown into so suddenly had worn off sometime during the flight home and the crowded space hadn’t helped matters any. But this place was always calm and warm to his senses. Even his fucked up mind recognized the scents and sounds of home. Will buried his face in Hermione’s hair, leaned against Ron’s strength, and let them take care of him.

It had been a hard-learned lesson, letting people care for him, but time and again the other halves of his trio had proved themselves worthy of the effort.

When Will came back to himself he was tucked away in a soft bed wrapped in blankets. He could hear the clatter of pans and smell something frying away. Eggs, as usual, with some toast and jam no doubt. They knew he couldn’t handle complex meals very well after ordeals that sent his brain spiraling into the past.

So Will got up, blanket curled around his shoulders and feet shoved into thick socks, and wandered down to the kitchen. Ron was at the stove, and Hermione immediately shoved Will into a chair and gave him a cup of soothing tea.

Will gave his best friends a crooked smile.

“Are you ready to talk about it?” Hermione asked, sitting across from him with her own cup of tea.

“Minnesota Shrike,” Will stated by way of answer. “Cannibalized girls that looked like his daughter. Couldn’t bear losing her - headshot. She’s in the hospital.”

“Any idea what tipped him off?” Ron asked. They were used to his incomplete sequencing of events by now.

Will shook his head. “Can’t - car? Phone? He’s stuck, can’t think.”

Hermione put down her cup of tea. Ron turned off the stove and put the cooked eggs aside. Will took a gulp of tea and placed his own cup on the table.

Together, the three of them joined hands and closed their eyes. Will put himself entirely in their hands, and didn’t resist the brush of their minds.

It was an old form of legilimency. One learned and perfected out of necessity. Will kept the two safe in his mind, and they rooted out the strangers there. It never got rid of them - not entirely - these foreign minds that Will took on, but it did ensure that those separate entities couldn’t take root, couldn’t burrow down and change Will into someone else. It was the barrier and fort that kept Will himself.

Once that necessary task was completed Will found himself once again bundled and fed and shoved off to bed. Hermione and Ron kept watch over him that night, and Will was too occupied with nieces and nephews to freak out come morning. Returning to his house (with plenty of warnings of what should happen if he didn’t call to check in that night) meant giving proper care to the dogs, and Will called in a favor by asking Alana to cover his classes for the next couple of days.

Without truly understanding why, Will found himself drawn to the hospital that Dr. Lecter had informed him Abigail had been transferred to. It was an odd compulsion, one not solely born of Hobbs’ lingering traces. Perhaps it was old habits returned to prod him once again. Whatever the
reason, Will was soon at Abigail’s side. Dr. Lecter was already there, sleeping with his hand gently grasping Abigail’s as if to tether her to the land of the living. Will sat in the other chair and simply watched as two chests rose and fell steadily. There was something about the sight that pulled at his heart. With a slight smile of wry amusement, Will wondered if he was about to adopt another stray or two.

Chapter End Notes

I read a fic years ago where Harry was like, the worst morning person ever and the Gryffindor boys drew straws to see which poor soul had to go wake him up and it just became my headcannon, which is why Will is such a horrid morning person. It's not so bad in this chapter, but it definitely will be in later ones. And we start to see bits more of how bad the war got in this version of events - much more of a real war than the books.

As always, feel free to ask for clarification on anything that confuses you. Hope you enjoyed it!
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Will gets roped into the team, and Hannibal falls a little in love.

Chapter Notes

So I'm writing these while watching the show, yeah? Which is great and all cuz I love the show, but apparently means on occasion I have to go back and overhaul the damned chapters because they slip into present tense instead of past tense. As in, nearly all of this chapter. So yeah, this one is also out later than I meant it to be. Sorry :(

Okay, the antler room was new. Even with his extreme history of strange things this stood out as weird. It must have been where Hobbs had been taking the girls to bleed them dry.

Oh, Jack was talking again. “He can’t have made all those bodies disappear all by himself.”

Will scoffed, not even bothering to try and hide it. “He was eating them, Jack.”

“There must have been some parts he wasn’t eating,” Jack countered.

“Not necessarily,” Will added absentmindedly, trying to figure out what the strange twisty horns on the upper right center of the room were from. They looked vaguely familiar. “You can boil bones into stock for soups, and grind up most everything else. Besides - he might have been using them for other things.”

“Other things?” Jack asked sharply.

“Pipes, stuffing, leather,” Will shrugged. “Primitive man used every part of the animal for more than meat - if Hobbs was a hunter in the most traditional sense he’d find everyday uses for the parts he couldn’t eat.” He’d done it himself, a couple of times when no other options were around. It wasn’t as hard as one might think.

Jack didn’t look happy, but called in for a team to examine the household anyway. It was nice to be treated like he knew what he was talking about again, in an odd way, Will decided. The police academy had been difficult because it had taken so long to gain back the kind of respect he’d already had by the time he’d been legally an adult. When he’d finally gotten around to reading the Narnia books (after much needling from some of the older ladies in his apartment building - considering they were always bringing him food, Will had tried to humour them) Will had felt Peter’s sting quite profoundly - it was difficult, going from leading men in war to not being trusted to tie your own laces, let alone handle a combat situation. Jack giving him that level of acknowledgement right off the bat was appreciated, even if Will still wasn’t entirely certain he wanted to be here.

After he hung up, Jack continued as if they hadn’t been briefly interrupted. “It’s a lot of work
disappearing these girls, disposing of them, and then only leaving what’s in this room,”

Jack didn’t need to be quite so subtle - it was a rather obvious conclusion. “Someone he hunted with?”

“Someone who’s in a coma. Who also happens to be someone he hunted with.”

Will grimaced. It was a highly sour taste in his mouth, likely as it might have been. However, he’d for whatever reason zeroed his protective instincts on Abigail, and so he didn’t give Jack the confirmation the man was so obviously fishing for. “Oh that’s rich Jack - accuse the one who barely survived for the deaths of the others.”

Jack’s voice was slightly raised in his own anger at Will’s snark. “We’ve been conducting house to house interviews at the Hobbs residence, and here. Hobbs spent a lot of time here - lot of time with his daughter here. You have to admit she’d make the perfect bait.”

Will sighed and turned his attention to Jack. “He might have used outings with her as bait, but Hobbs killed alone, Jack. He never would have been able to reroute the desire to devour her into a stand-in if she was there with him. Check college visits or something - if he went with Abigail, that’s most likely how he found his victims.”

“And Abigail Hobbs got the details from the girls,” Jack concluded, looking triumphant.

Huh, likely true. She’d make a great lure. However, Will was trying to protect Abigail, not get her crucified. So Will made sure none of his joy at wiping that smug look from the other man’s face showed on his own expression. “And Abigail Hobbs thought she’d had a nice outing with her father,” Will interjected. “If she’d known, she would have drawn away. The whole point of this was that Hobbs didn’t want to lose her - scaring her off would have defeated the purpose.”

Jack frowned, but as he obviously noted the logic there Will was simply pleased at a job well done. That pleasure flew out the window the next moment, however, as Will noticed a glint of red hair. He picked it up from the floor, careful not to disturb the antler or evidence sign, and said, “Someone else was here.”

Jack cursed, and they took the hair to evidence. Thankfully, after that Will was allowed to go back home. Hopefully this would be the end of his consulting.

Will very nearly didn’t show up to class that next day. He knew they were likely to applaud him, no matter how tasteless he found it. Slaps on the back and wordlessly handing the victor a shot of vodka was how they’d done it in the war - he greatly preferred that method to this horrid display.

“Sit down and be quiet,” Will ordered as he walked into the classroom, shoving his glasses on as he walked to the podium. The shocked students pittered off and sat, their unappreciated show dying rather quickly. “Yes, I managed to stop a serial killer. But I also might have done something to tip him off, resulting in the death of his wife. We don’t know for certain what caused that violent outburst.” Will placed his bag down and turned around, making eye contact with each student in turn to impart the seriousness of his words. “However, that only makes it easier to blame myself. Not only that, but I orphaned a girl on the cusp of adulthood - doesn’t matter that I saved her life. These are the things no one else is willing to teach you - the unfortunate aspects of guilt that mean you are human. You will save lives by ending lives at least once in your career, and it will shred you apart inside.”

Will turned to face the board and hit the clicker to turn down the lights. “We are going forward as
planned, with the importance of trophies to most serial killers.”

The class was well behaved, even if there was an increase in trainees who tried to talk to him after class. They were systematically ignored. Will had office hours - they knew how to use them. Alana coming to visit was a surprise. One that didn’t particularly bode well, given the set of her shoulders. “How’re you holding up?” she asked as a greeting.

Will gave her a wry smile. “I’m alright, considering. Checking up on me?”

“I didn’t want you to feel ambushed,” Alana replied. Will had always appreciated her honesty.

“How’s class?” Almost as soon as he asked, Will noticed the hulking figure of Jack Crawford in the doorway of his classroom. Wonderful.

“Ambush comes later,” Alana stated. “As in immediately later. Soon to be now. Whenever Jack arrives,” she concluded with a hand motion that spoke of surrender as she noticed Will was staring over her shoulder.

“Jack!” Will greeted with false cheer, abandoning his post to go collect his things.

“How was class?”

“They applauded. It was inappropriate,” Will replied shortly.

“The board certainly disagrees,” Jack countered. “You’re up for a commendation. And they’ve okay-ed active return to the field.”

“Question is,” Alana interrupted, “do you want to go back to the field?”

Ah. That was the ambush.

“I want him back in the field,” Jack mostly told Alana. “And I told the board I’m recommending a psyche eval.”

“Fantastic,” Will couldn’t stop himself from commenting bitterly. “Are we starting now?”

Alana looked slightly panicked. Will tried not to be offended. “Oh, the evaluation wouldn’t be with me.”

“Hannibal Lecter’s a better fit,” Jack interjected. “You two don’t have a personal relationship. But if you’d be more comfortable with Dr. Bloom-”

Will stopped that train of thought at the source. “I’m not comfortable with anyone in my head.”

“You’ve never killed anyone before Will,” Alana tried to reason. It was so ridiculous a notion, Will laughed.

“I used to work homicide,” Will stated, not wanting to go into the times before that. “I’ve killed my fair share.”

“You currently used to work homicide because of your reluctance to pull the trigger,” Jack insisted as Will attempted to exit the classroom. “You just killed a man with a perfectly executed head shot.”

Will paused, and turned back. “Wait - so the psyche eval isn’t a formality?”

“No, it’s so I can get some sleep at night!” And didn’t Jack actually look worried - well that was
unexpected. “I asked you to get close to the Hobbs case. Now I need to know you didn’t get too close. How many nights did you spend in Abigail Hobbs’ hospital room?”

Nearly every night since she’d been transferred. Will conceded that the man might have had a point. He wasn’t about to admit that, however. “Therapy doesn’t work on me.” Ah deflection, his old friend.

“Therapy doesn’t work on you because you don’t let it,” Jack countered, stalking closer as if he could bully Will into going with the weight of his stare.

“I know all the tricks,” Will protested. There was a sinking feeling in his gut - he wasn’t going to get out of this one, was he?

“Then unlearn a few,” Jack started in, but Alana interrupted him before a real argument could brew.

“Why don’t you have a conversation with Hannibal? He was there too, he knows what you went through.”

Will didn’t want to dignify that manipulation with a response, so he walked away. No use screaming against his fate - it’d never worked the other times he’d tried it.

Jack’s voice could be heard halfway down the hall, most likely. “Come on Will! I need my beauty sleep!”

How the hell had that man managed to get his post?

However, it was a mandatory eval. So Will found himself in Dr. Lecter’s office anyway. Wonderful. At least there was a balcony he could hide on under the pretense of looking at the rather impressive book collection. Until the man stepped forward with a file in his hands, obviously waiting for Will to comment. He wasn’t pushing, however, which was why Will ultimately asked, “What’s that?”

“You’re psychological evaluation,” Dr. Lecter answered. “You are fully functional and more or less sane. Congratulations.”

Will furrowed his brows. That hadn’t been what he was expecting at all. “Did you just rubber stamp me?”

“Yes.” Well, at least Dr. Lecter was honest. “Jack Crawford can sleep well knowing he didn’t break you, and our conversation can continue unhampered by paperwork.”

Odd move. Smooth, but odd. And so this time when he paced the length of the balcony, Will spoke. “Jack thinks I need therapy.”

“What you need is a way out of dark places when Jack sends you there,” Dr. Lecter countered. It was accurate.

Will didn’t say that he’d already lived in the darkness for longer than he wanted to admit - didn’t mention the fact that it was living in the light that now felt alien and strange to him. Couldn’t speak of it to such a stranger, even one whose job it was to discuss the worst of humanity. Only Hermione and Ron really, truly knew, though they had never been told. And perhaps Draco and Neville also, though they’d never made it clear if they did.

Instead, Will went for the answer that didn’t involve explaining how it felt to die only to breathe again. “The last time Jack sent me into a dark place I brought something back.”
“A surrogate daughter.”

Will stopped. Looked down at Dr. Lecter. That hadn’t been what he’d meant at all, nor what he’d assumed the therapist would say. Dr. Lecter seemed content to let Will pace, going over to his desk to organize papers as he continued that train of thought. “You saved Abigail Hobbs’ life but you also orphaned her. It comes with a certain amount of obligation regardless of empathy disorders.”

Oh, Will really didn’t want to talk about this. “You were there - you saved her life too. Do you feel obligated?”

“Yes.”

Will looked down, the simple and honest answer having struck him to the core.

“I feel a staggering amount of obligation,” Dr. Lecter admitted. “I feel responsible. I fantasized about how my actions could have resulted in a different fate for Abigail Hobbs.”

Will broke eye contact, feeling slightly overwhelmed. Despite that, here was another self-proclaimed champion for the young girl. Only one way to tell if that was true. “Jack thinks Abigail may have helped her father.”

And then the man had to ruin it with the oldest cliche in the book. “How does that make you feel?”

Will rolled his eyes and fired back, “How does that make you feel?”

“Horrible,” Dr. Lecter replied, and Will had to verbally agree with him. And then the doctor stated, looking at the items he was rearranging on his desk, “And yet it is entirely possible.”

“Not the way Jack thinks,” Will countered tersely. He knew Abigail had likely helped, but he didn’t want to crucify the kid for it. It’s not like she’d had a whole lot of options - Will refused to see her burn for that.

“I suppose Jack will ask when she wakes up,” Dr. Lecter continued on, allowing the subject to pass. “Or ask one of us to ask her.”

Will felt his face scrunch up in confusion. This was a very strange session. “Is this therapy or a support group?”

Dr. Lecter gave a small chuckle at that. “It’s whatever you need it to be.” Just before Will scoffed at the idea again, the doctor calmly remarked in a voice of quiet power, “The mirrors in your mind can reflect the best of yourself, Will. Not just the worst in someone else.”

Will didn’t reply. How could he? He wanted it to be true - but his abilities were completely in defense of the darkness that had been sealed inside, because there hadn’t been enough light. With such reason for their beginning, how could what Dr. Lecter said possibly be true?

Will was in the shooting range again, focusing on his form and aim. He’d come back here several times already, clearing his mind with the simple and yet encompassing mindset needed to sink the bullet into his preferred target. One shot. Two. Three. Five. Eight. Nine.

The clip was empty, and Will hit the button to draw the target close again as he heard someone approach. “You’re a Weaver? I took you for an isosceles guy.”
Will shrugged as he changed clips. “Rotator cuff issue.”

Beverly gestured with her hand, and Will dutifully stepped into the stance. He didn’t jump as she felt his right shoulder. “Woo! You are tense.”

“I got stabbed as a cop,” Will answered, vaguely amused. Beverly still reminded him slightly of Susan, but she had a charm all her own that he was warming up to.

“Yeah I got stabbed in the third grade with a number two pencil,” Beverly countered. “Thought I was gonna die of lead poisoning.”

“Might be difficult,” Will sassied back as he let the woman manhandle him into a slightly different stance, “seeing as pencils are filled with graphite, not lead.”

Beverly didn’t comment, but Will felt the amusement warmly wrap about the space like a lazy cat. “See if that helps with the recoil.”

“Stand back,” Will warned. After a moment’s pause, he aimed at a blank space on the opposite side of the target from his other hole and fired. It was only a slight difference, but it would ease the wear of many shots and help him keep up the stamina longer. Not that he expected to be caught in long, drawn out gun fights, but it was always good to be prepared for the worst.

“You sure you were a cop?” Beverly questioned, obviously unimpressed with his aim.

Will put the gun down and flipped up the table to take the target down. “I hit what I wanted to,” he remarked casually, fingering the hole in the left shoulder of the silhouette he’d been firing at before Beverly joined him. Only half a bullet wider than it should have been - he was out of practice.

Beverly leaned over his shoulder and to his senses her shock rang out loud as a shout. “You fired all of the bullets through the same hole?”

“No,” Beverly replied with an odd tilt to her voice. “Jack sent me down here to ask what you know about gardening.”

With a sigh, Will put down the divider and took the noise cancelers off his neck. It appeared his practice would have to wait - there was murder afoot.

This was... different. Will looked at the men fertilizing a crop in shallow graves and immediately began searching for signs of magic. Unless there were drugs in whatever was being fed to them intravenously, there was no real other explanation for how living people had stayed still and allowed this to happen. Will had seen men grab their intestines off the ground and run for the cover of forests, organs dropping behind them like bread crumbs. Not everyone reacted so violently, but very few simply laid down and accepted their fate. Those who did often would attempt to end their life before allowing the enemy to do as they pleased - to end the pain before there could be any more. He doubted this killer found nine people willing to simply lie there and take it in their shock without any struggle whatsoever. The reports would say for certain, but until then Will needed to know if this was a case he needed to call the Magical Bureau of Criminal Affairs in on.

“They were buried in a high-nutrient compound,” Beverly commented. “He was encouraging decomposition.”
“Intravenous fluids. He wanted to keep them alive,” Zeller added before backtracking. “At least, for a little while.”

“Long enough for the fungus to eat away at any distinguishing characteristics,” Price interjected.

Will liked this forensics team - they were fast, and focused on the details that mattered. It was refreshing. “No restraints?” he asked, just in case he missed something that wasn’t evident from where he was standing.

Price shrugged. “Just dirt.”

“The end of the air system comes up over there,” Beverly pointed to a nearby tree. “It isn’t a very good system which clearly wasn’t a priority. He isn’t lazy.”

No, he certainly wasn’t. Will said as much, and then the team cleared out, joking about shiitakes. It was more amusing than Jack’s passing “welcome back” as the man also left.

Time once again for Murder Mystery Theater. Joy.

With a deep breath Will closed his eyes and let the pendulum swing. It swung until the dirt was heavy, the air crisp and clear, the mushrooms young. An empty grave - and here, Will made the pendulum stop.

_He began to plant._

“I don’t bind his arms or legs because I bury him in a shallow grave. He’s alive - but he will never be conscious again.” There is certainty there. He is yet unsure as to the why, but the certainty is complete and full. Self-assured.

_He attached a tube for air into the man’s mouth, nearly surgical except for the shine of duck tape. “He won’t know he’s dying. I don’t need him to.”_

_The tubes attached, wrist held in place as young trees to an unmoving structure of wire. The crop ready to be sown._

_“This is my design.”_

_He looked about to survey his work, and saw - Garret Jacob Hobbs._

Will didn’t jump. He didn’t startle. Will was too used to hallucinations to give himself away so obviously. Nevermind that they hadn’t come along in many years, so solid and real. Nevermind that they had never before interrupted a reading, appearing in the middle of one to shock him out of another’s head.

There was a hand on his.

Will did jump at that, shaken beyond belief at the fact that a hallucination had just- no, not a hallucination. Hobbs was gone, leaving a grey corpse that shook and shuddered as he drew in breath to use in a cry for help. Will looked up and hollered, “Alive! This one’s alive!”

The EMT’s weren’t sleeping on the job, fortunately. They came quickly, taking over and tending to the nearly-dead. Will hopped out of their way and tried to get his breathing back in order as he
distracted himself with the sight of sun glinting off autumnal leaves.

That was most definitely not what he’d expected.

Hannibal had not expected to have his report returned at all, let alone so soon. “This may have been premature,” Will informed him, and Hannibal wondered what caused the nervous energy in the man. It was nearly overflowing, positively brimming beneath the surface of Will Graham’s skin.

So, he asked. “What happened?”

Will’s mouth turned down slightly on one side. It was an oddly endearing face. “I saw Garret Jacob Hobbs.”

“Association?” Hannibal had to question.

“Hallucination,” Will corrected. The immediacy of the reply and the certainty of his tone made Hannibal think the man had previous experience with hallucinations. How very curious. “I saw Hobbs lying in someone else’s grave.”

Hannibal was tempted to ask about that, but ultimately decided on the question that would keep Will from raising all of his defences. “Did you tell Jack what you saw?”

Will’s snort was answer enough, yet he did verbalize it as well, though far less crudely. “No.”

Since most others had probably made a large deal of such things, Hannibal decided to go for the easiest and most likely answer. “It’s stress. Not worth reporting.” That last bit was a lie, but Hannibal wanted Will where he could observe him, and he’d likely be thrown from field work if he reported hallucinations.

“You displaced the victim of another killer’s crime with what could, arguably, be considered your victim.”

Will stopped his nervous pacing at that, continuing to rub the back of his neck as he countered that idea. “I don’t see Hobbs as my victim.”

The steel in that denial that informed Hannibal that Will was telling the truth. “What do you consider him?”

Will shrugged at that, as if it was of no concern. “Dead.” A simple answer, one that would be a lie on most others. Yet something in the set of Will’s shoulders proclaimed it to be truth. Hannibal caught a glimpse of far too many corpses to count hiding in the corner of Will’s eyes, a glimpse of echoes past. The casual admittance was only so casual because death held no power over this one.

How very interesting. Hannibal would have to tread carefully, but he would not be satisfied until every last answer was laid bare for his leisurely perusal.

To not give the game away too soon, Hannibal decided a change of subject would be best. He looked at the file but a moment before walking around the desk to put himself closer to Will as he asked about a detail that had been bothering him, “The arms. Why did he leave them exposed? To hold their hands? To feel the life leaving their bodies?”

“No, that’s too esoteric for someone who took the time to bury his victims in a straight line,” Will answered. He began to walk away, putting more distance between them again? Or just full of that
nervous energy he had displayed every other time Hannibal has seen him? “He’s more practical.”

“He was cultivating them,” Hannibal threw out.

“He was keeping them alive. He was feeding them intravenously.” Will stated for clarity. He was leaning on Hannibal’s desk now - very nearly sitting on it - and so Hannibal mirrored him slightly, leaning his arms on the desk. He spared a moment to think it might be a sign that Will was warming up to him, to take so casual a stance despite the slight tension still in his shoulders.

“But your farmer let his crops die. Save for the one that didn’t.”

“And the one that didn’t died on the way to hospital,” Will said so quickly he was almost interrupting. “No they weren’t crops - they were fertilizer, the bodies were covered in fungus.”

Hannibal took a deep breath and mulled that over. Obviously it was upsetting Will, and so he put more thought into it than he might otherwise. Only one idea was worth mentioning. “The structure of a fungus mirrors that of a human brain - an intricate web of connections.”

Will did not meet his gaze when he blinked in a moment of cautious revelation, yet Hannibal could behold its beauty all the same. Will was quickly becoming one of the only people Hannibal had met that was able to keep up with his own thought process. “So maybe he admires their ability to connect the way human minds can’t.”

“Yours can,” Hannibal couldn’t help but to interject.

Thankfully, it just made Will laugh. “Yeah, ah not-not physically.”

He was so unwittingly charming that Hannibal had to straighten and readjust his coat lest he act impulsively. Will Graham could undo him in a moment - he could not forget this fact. Yet the parallels between this moment and their conversation were too alike to pass up, because for all that Will could undo him he also held the potential to understand, and so Hannibal asked, “Is that what your farmer’s looking for? Some sort of connection?”

Will raised his eyebrows and then his eyes to look at Hannibal’s own for once. It was vaguely reminiscent of a puppy, and Hannibal felt a squeeze on his heart.

This man should not have been so lovely, as covered in flannel and sub-standard apparel choices as he was, but there could be no denying the facts. Will Graham was beautiful, and Hannibal found himself longing to drape him in silks and velvets in order to bring out the potential there.

*Perhaps something crimson,* Hannibal mused as they rounded up the session and make their goodbyes. *He would be heavenly painted in his life’s blood - a field somewhere, where it could be painted like tribal markings, or wings.*

Freddie Lounds had been appallingly rude, but it wasn’t the fact that he found her tabloid an amusing source of sometimes useful information that stayed Hannibal’s hand. Considering she’d had an official appointment killing her at this juncture it would bring suspicion upon him. More than that, however, was the fact that it had been the object of her rude behavior and not the behavior itself that roused Hannibal’s inner beast. The attack and threat to Will Graham had been what made it roar, not her actions, and Hannibal had been so shocked he’d allowed Lounds to leave with her life.

And so, unfortunately, it was not the loin of Freddie Lounds that he shared with Jack that evening. Although Hannibal suspected that Will would prefer to be the guest to that particular meal.
It was perhaps the possibility of that image one day being true that made Hannibal so defensive when the conversation inevitably turned from Jack’s history of home-cooked meals to Will Graham’s unexpected visit. “I am sure Will recognizes the necessity of his own support structure if he is to go on supporting you in the field.”

“Well I believe that a guy like Will Graham knows exactly what’s going on inside of his head,” Jack politely objected, “which is why he doesn’t want anyone else up there.”

Hannibal did not even remotely agree with that assessment. At all. It was more than clear from only three meetings that Will was immensely uncertain about what happened between the barriers of his own skull. The medical history of PTSD alone would prove Jack wrong. “Are you not accustomed to broken ponies in your stable, Jack?”

Jack paused for a moment, obviously respecting his expertise in this area. “You think Will’s a broken pony?”

“I think you think Will is a broken pony,” Hannibal couldn’t help but to counter. Why else would Jack be pushing this relationship so hard? It was obvious that Jack was attempting to wine and dine him into becoming Jack’s personal anchor for Will Graham. “You ever lost a pony, Jack?”

Jack gave a wry smile at that. “If you’re asking me whether or not I’ve ever lost an agent in the field, the answer is yes. Why?”

Honesty would be his best recourse, and so Hannibal told the truth. “I want to understand why you’re so delicate with Will. There is steel in his eyes that speaks of surviving far more than this will expose him to, not to mention he was a cop for many years. Do you not trust that he is strong enough to survive this? To know his own limits? Or are you afraid of losing another pony?”

Jack tried to deflect, though his tone stated they might soon be on unstable ground. “I’ve already had my psych eval.”

Hannibal smiled and allowed it to turn into a joke. It wouldn’t due to alienate Jack Crawford at this stage in the game. “Not by me. You’ve already told me about your mother. Why stop there?”

Jack laughed, also allowing the moment to pass, and they toasted an ambiguous concept before continuing in a more pleasant vein.

Hannibal resolved to spend some time figuring out why he felt so fiercely protective of Will Graham after so short a time. It could become inconvenient if left unchecked.

Will didn’t want to be here, but the remnants of corpses on sterile autopsy tables were easier to take than a fresh crime scene was. Besides, there were worse places to be. And this team really was a competent forensics team, so there wasn’t all that much to complain about, honestly. Could be much worse.

Still.

“What were they soaked in?” Will asked.
Price was the one to answer. “A highly concentrated mixture of hardwoods, shredded newspaper, and pig poop - perfect for growing mushrooms and other fungi.”

“It was not the mushrooms, though,” Zeller interjected, raising a finger to emphasize his point. “They all died of kidney failure.”

Beverly walked in then, throwing a file down as she added in the test results to their brainstorming. “Dextrose in all the catheters. He probably used some kind of dialysis or peristaltic to pump fluids after their circulatory systems broke down.”

Will paused in his journey to grab his coffee cup. That bit of information was catching at something in his brain. He didn’t have enough information to form a full thought, however. Just fractions of pieces and the knowledge that there was no magical residue at the site or on any of the bodies or graves. “Force-feeding them sugar water?”

Price popped up then. “You know who loves sugar water? Mushrooms. They crave it.”

With the speed Zeller added his own thoughts, Will briefly entertained the notion of the two as a tag-team on a debate team or something. “Recovering alcoholics. They crave sugar. Uh,” he turned to Price and waved the file he was holding in a vaguely apologetic way. “Don’t take that personally, buddy.”

Price, amusingly enough, was quick on the uptake. “Oh I’m not recovering.”

“Feed sugar to the fungus in your body,” Zeller continued, “the fungus creates alcohol, so it’s like friends helping friends, really.”

There it was. The connections in his brain clicked into place - so obvious of an answer he was surprised he missed it till now. How else would their killer be able to keep his victims in shallow graves? “It’s not just alcoholics who have compromised endocrine systems. They all died of kidney failure?” He’d walked to the front of the main autopsy table the others were gathered at, and had a great vantage for the confused faces of his teammates. Really? They hadn’t got it yet? Seriously? Will spelled it out for them. “Death by diabetic ketoacidosis.”

Beverly at least was quick to believe him, aiming at Zeller a harsh, “Did you know they were diabetics?”

“We don’t know they were diabetics,” Zeller protested. “No, they’re all diabetics.” Will was surrounded by stupid people, honestly. Was it so hard to make the connection? It was completely clear to him - it’s not like he had any more knowledge than these guys did. They were trained professionals after all. And they still looked so confused! “He induces a coma and puts them in the ground.”

“How is he inducing diabetic comas?” Beverly asked. Her voice held a touch of incredulity, but at least she was taking this somewhat seriously.

It was obvious. “Changes their medication. So, he’s a doctor or a pharmacist or he works somewhere in medical services.”

Beverly spoke up with more than questions, finally indicating that someone else was following this train of thought. It’d taken them long enough. “He buries them, feeds them sugar to keep them alive long enough for the circulatory system to soak it up.”

“So he can feed the mushrooms!” Price joined in.
“We dug up his mushroom garden,” Zeller added.

“Yeah,” Will hated the fact that he knew this next bit for certain. “He’s gonna want to start a new one.” Yeah, he didn’t want to be here. Uncaring of how rude it was, Will left. He’d already done all the hard work anyway - they could handle it from here.

Handle it they did. Eldon Stammets - floating pharmacist. They had a SWAT team with them this time, which made Will feel better about his chances to get out of there without killing anyone. After it was all said and done, he was even more thankful, considering it was only after the fact that Will realized he hadn’t even properly asked for the baton. Just, held out his hand and expected it to be handed to him. Thankfully these guys weren’t as stupid as some teams Will had worked with, and they were able to get to the gist easily.

The article wasn’t a surprise either, unfortunately. Will spared a moment to wonder what it said about him that he was almost expecting that sort of trash to pop up during inopportune moments. Beverly at least tried to handle it with some tact, stopping once she realized what Lounds was saying and protesting when Jack told her to keep reading.

“Let me guess,” Will interjected. “I’m a psychopath paid to catch other crazies because I can think like monsters - which obviously means I’m one too.”

Beverly stared at him in shock.

Will took pity on her. “Not the first time it’s been said - won’t be the last. Now that I’m no longer needed, I’ll return to my lair.” Will walked away before anyone could object or offer pity, Jack too focused on Lounds to offer any protests anyway.

He spent that night, like every night, with Abigail. As if by his very presence he could protect her from all the things he knew existed in the night. The stag walked by the room, roaming the hallways. Will let it - it was an old companion. If there was something worth his attention, it would let him know.

He must have fallen asleep at some point, since he woke to Alana reading. It was only a light nap, so he was able to be much more personable much earlier than usual, though he did spend twenty-two minutes listening before trusting himself to speak without it coming out as a flood of cursing.

“What’cha reading?”

Alana seemed rather startled as she quickly looked at him - apparently she hadn’t realized he’d woken. “Flannery O’Conner,” she answered, good humour returning easily enough. “When I was Abigail’s age I was obsessed with these books. I even tried to raise peacocks because she raised peacocks. They’re,” Alana shook her head slightly at the memory, her mouth slightly clenching, “really dumb birds.”

“They are,” Will agreed. Draco had been teased mercilessly for the stupid things when they’d taken Malfoy Manner.

Alana smiled, and then put on the gentle face she used when she was about to bring up uncomfortable subjects. “I’m about to broach the topic of that ‘takes one to know one’ article.”

Will snorted before sitting up. Might as well try and wake up the rest of the way. “Didn’t read it. Didn’t care. It’s probably not any worse than anything else I’ve heard.”

“She called you a serial killer, Will,” Alana gently protested.

Will shrugged. He’d been called devil-spawn, savior, the Heir of Slytherin, mass murderer, terrorist,
Public Enemy Number One - all things he couldn’t legally tell Alana, however, and so he didn’t. His silence spoke volumes enough.

Alana was quiet for a bit, and Will could almost see the thought forming in her head when she noticed him looking past her to Abigail again. “Abigail Hobbs is a success for you.” Ah, she’d jumped to the wrong conclusion.

Will rubbed his face - it was too early for this with a woman who did her best to not be in a room alone with him, as if that would force her not to have a crush. “A measure of success, yes. I’ll still feel better when she’s breathing on her own power.” With a sigh, Will pushed the blanket he didn’t remember grabbing off. “You want to get coffee or something? I need some caffeine.”

Hannibal was mildly disappointed when Will showed up only to demand proper paperwork and fill it all out. He had thought Will would resist proper legal therapy as an institution, given his extreme aversion to it. Will must have sensed his confusion, for he looked up and gave an odd smile. “I know it’s odd, but you’re the only psychiatrist I’ve managed to be able to handle, and I’ve had too many people selling my secrets before.”

“Protecting yourself,” Hannibal commented. “Although I do hope you wouldn’t think so lowly of me.”

Will shook his head. “No, no. You’d think that was the pinnacle of discourtesy. But I can’t settle this part of my paranoia, and besides,” here Will paused, looking up from the forms to make solid eye-contact with Hannibal, “this is the best way that I can protect you, if we’re to do this.”

Hannibal blinked in his shock. “You believe yourself a danger?”

Will’s smirk was a thing that spoke of beautiful blood and transcendent madness. “I know what kind of crazy I am, Dr. Lecter. I can’t legally tell you the reasons for all of it, but the result is something that will worry a vast majority of any form of law enforcement.”

Oh. Oh he was stunning. Hannibal finished his part of the paperwork with something approaching impatience - he wanted to slice Will Graham open and dip his hands into that marvelous brain and read all of the secrets held within.

He had the perfect place to start, once they had all of the paperwork settled. “When you shot Eldon Stammets, who was it that you saw?”

Will scoffed at that. “Not Hobbs,” he replied. “Not something as simple as that. In that moment Stammets was one of them and all of them.” Will sighed, shaking his head. “I’ve had too many people I care about taken from me, Dr. Lecter. I historically react quickly and harshly to such threats. So, no,” Will turned away, looking out into the room with his back to Hannibal. “I didn’t see Hobbs when I killed Stammets - I saw a threat, and the fastest way to eliminate it.”

Fast it had been - one perfectly clear shot through the heart. This man grew more lovely by the second. Thank god Hannibal had agreed to Jack Crawford’s crazy request. “Did it feel good? The way killing Hobbs felt good?”

“Killing Hobbs felt just,” Will countered. “Stammets dying was a relief.”

“You didn’t feel a single spring of zest? Despite the fact that at both times you were saving Abigail Hobbs’ life?”
Will’s jaw clenched and then released. “There’s always a rush, though I wouldn’t call it a spring of zest. I know I’m broken enough to enjoy ending a life, Dr. Lecter.” Will shrugged in a manner that was far too casual to be associated with the words he was saying. “People break in odd ways. Sometimes they recover, other times they don’t. This is my wound and instead of healing I’ve… absorbed it.”

While Hannibal was sitting in shock over that statement, Will sighed and rubbed a hand over his face. “I should’ve stuck to fixing boat motors in Louisiana.” He finally sat down in the appropriate chair.

Hannibal found his voice again. “A boat engine is a machine, a predictable problem, easy to solve. You fail, there’s a paddle.” Hannibal got up from his position leaning on his desk and went to sit in his own chair in hopes of better catching Will’s eyes. “Where was your paddle with Hobbs?”

“Doesn’t matter,” Will replied tersely. “You’re supposed to be my paddle now.”

“I am,” Hannibal replied instantly, mirroring Will by leaning forward. “Why are you still so focused on Hobbs? You said yourself you don’t consider him your victim, and even that killing him felt just.” Hannibal paused, ensuring he had eye contact before driving in the first coffin nail. “Do you really feel so bad because killing him felt so good?”

“But it didn’t,” Hannibal finished for him. He shifted forward about an inch, thrilled by the prolonged eye-contact with his patient. “Killing must feel good to God too - he does it all the time. And are we not created in his image?”

Will looked away then, blinking his eyes back to Hannibal every so often like a nervous dog. “Depends on who you ask.”

Hannibal pressed on. “God’s terrific. He dropped a church roof on thirty-four of his worshippers last Wednesday night in Texas while they sang a hymn.”

Will didn’t react as Hannibal had expected him to. “Worship no false gods,” he murmured softly. His eyes spoke of ancient sorrow and pain. “For they will lead you astray and crush your hopes to dust. Honor the true gods - the wind, the sky, the earth - honor and fear them. They gift life just as easily as they gift death, and the only sacrifice they revere is blood.”

Chapter End Notes

So, Hannibal chatted a little with Jack in this one about Will, but as Will is now officially his patient, with paperwork and everything, Hannibal won’t be doing that ever again, not in any real kind of information besides a vague "Will is fine" or "Will needs rest, you push too hard" kinda way without any specifics whatsoever.

And I mentioned it in a throwaway line, so I figured I’d explain better than the summary here - Will's empathy is due to the fact that he had a horocrux from magical hitler in his head at a young age. To help protect him from that influence, his mirror neurons never went away, like they do for most children. It made him balanced and normal, until he
destroyed the horcrux. Then he had too many mirror neurons with nothing they were defending against and suddenly knew way too much about everybody. So yeah, that part of Will's life wasn't fun.

And yep, this Will is way darker than cannon Will. Cannon Will is terrified of the possibility of becoming the killers he hunts, because he knows he could so easily go down that road, but this Will faced that problem during the war. He knows he is that kind of killer, and so it much more at ease with himself and his own darkness, which is part of the reason Hannibal is falling for him harder than a sack of bricks. Oh, my two stupid boys.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Abigail wakes up, and Will finds all of those long-ago protective instincts roaring to the forefront once more.
Hannibal? He's just in it for the lolz.

Chapter Notes

Might I stress again how unreliable a narrator Will is? Because he is, and also he might need therapy for a lot of issues that never got solved after the war. Not sure how many of those Hannibal is willing to fix, however. So, yeah, Will has some opinions that are really not healthy in the slightest. You'll see what I mean eventually. Also, I haven't diverged from Hannibal cannon too greatly, but only up till now - this chapter is way divergent.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will was just glad he'd already gotten a cup of coffee in him by the time he'd stumbled out his door to let the dogs out. It meant he was mostly cordial to Alana when she showed up out of nowhere, although the fight instincts her sudden appearance awakened did a lot to jolt him to awareness as well.

Will took a deep breath in once Alana’s figure had become recognizable. He held it a moment, and let it out. On the last half of the exhale Will lowered the gun he’d drawn from his boxers. “Didn’t hear you drive up,” he stated.

Alana, thankfully, looked wary. She should be - he wasn’t exactly a nice person. “Hybrid,” she replied candidly, “great car for stalking. I’ll call next time.”

“Please do,” Will stated. He drew a tired hand over his face. Ugh, adrenaline spikes and withdrawals weren’t fun when half-asleep. “Coffee?” Wait - Alana, who was attracted to him, boxers…. “I find myself compelled to cover up.”

Alana smiled at him then, charming and sweet and sunshine and everything he could never have. “I have four brothers.”

“I should put pants on anyway,” Will insisted. “Coffee’s already made, help yourself.”

Alana nodded and followed, and soon Will found himself wearing pants and downing his second cup while she tried not to noticeably deliberate and sipped at her own coffee.

Will sighed. “What is it?”

Alana fixed him with a long, measuring stare. “Abigail Hobbs woke up.”
Okay, Will was awake now. He put down his coffee mug and stood, heading for the downstairs dresser with his quick getaway clothes. He stripped off his slept-in shirt and dug out something more appropriate. “One and twenty-five,” Will commented, although he might be faster than that. He grabbed a button-up and threw an arm through it as he headed for the closet.

Alana watched him warily. “You should finish your coffee first, Will.”

“I’m awake now,” Will retorted. “Not gonna stop me Alana, so you might as well come with.”

“The first person she sees shouldn’t be the man who killed her father,” Alana protested.

Will snorted. He had a feeling Abigail was stronger than that. “She can punch me if it’ll make her feel better. Let’s go.”

Alana sighed but dutifully followed him. She opted to ride in his car, and Will left the door open for his dogs since he wasn’t sure how long he’d be gone. Hermione had warded the property, it’d be okay. Alana was showing her disapproval by her silence, so the ride went rather quickly and without conversation. Will only barely remembered to turn off his car before striding into the hospital.

The nurses smiled at him, and a particularly kind one greeted him by name three rooms down from Abigail’s. “How is she?” Will asked.

“She’s doing good,” Cheryl replied honestly. “It looks like she’ll make a full recovery - we’ve got plans to transfer her to a psychiatric facility later this week. She’s breathing normally and has come down from her initial panic well.”

Will nodded, thanked her, and then steeled his courage to go see Abigail. She was indeed awake, sitting up and staring blankly at her hands. Will remembered sitting in that exact position many times - he felt for this kid. She wasn’t half as prepared for such violence as Will had been at her age.

“Hello Abigail,” Will greeted softly, so as not to startle her. Confused brown eyes met his own. “Do you remember me?”

“You’re the man who killed my dad,” Abigail replied, a quiet tremble in the corner of her lip.

Will nodded as he pulled up a chair and sat by Abigail, studiously ignoring the sour tang of Alana’s disapproval. “Yes. And I’m sorry.”

Abigail’s mask cracked the slightest bit, her eyes widening by the slightest amount. “You are?”

“I never had a father,” Will admitted, doing nothing to hide whatever expression his face held as the old pain welled up again. “But I had a godfather, for a short time. I got him killed.” Will’s smile held no mirth. “So yes, I am sorry for causing you that pain. It never heals, but it does get easier at times. And if you want to punch me, you’ve got a free pass.”

That shocked a startled laugh out of the teen. “Wh-what?”

Will shrugged, leaning back in his chair to relax his posture. “I managed to land one on the woman who killed my godfather - it’s very therapeutic.” That was understating the harm he’d done the woman, but no one really needed to know that.
“I don’t think I can recommend that, Will,” Alana interjected, ever the voice of disapproval.

Carefully hidden from her sight, Will winked at Abigail. Abigail looked like she wanted to smile back. It’d take a while for her to smile again, but she’d get there. “Either way,” Will continued on, “I am indebted to you for that loss, and I’d like to make it easier on you however I can. Just let me know.”

Abigail thought a moment, and Will found himself approving as he watched the wheels in her mind turn. Abigail looked him in the eye and went for the most pressing question. “What’s going to happen to me?”

Good girl - she’d need all the wits she could garner for this. And so Will gave her a leg up. “First, they’re going to get you transferred to a psychiatric care facility. The facility will deliver therapy while keeping you shielded from the media, which is going to be brutal.” Will fixed Abigail with a hard stare and ignored Alana’s firm warning. She needed to know this. “And they will be brutal, Abigail. In the absence of a person to blame they will make one. Without bodies to mourn they will make you the target of their rage. They will burn you at the stake simply for the fact that you survived your father when none of the others did.”

Alana was mad now. “Will! Stop thi-”

Will spoke over her. “Jack Crawford will ask if you helped. Others will assume you did. I am going to be on your side, but I cannot help you if you don’t help me.”

Alana had gone silent, faintly twitching in Will’s peripheral. Abigail, however, only showed a slight tremor. She at least understood what he was trying to do. Trying to hold back her sorrow, Abigail gave a weak smile. “I overheard the nurses talking. My Dad killed girls that looked like me, didn’t he?”

Will nodded, keeping his face stern even as his eyes empathized with her.

Abigail swallowed and looked away. “He always told me that if you didn’t honor every part of the deer, it was just murder. Whatever’s left of them is probably holding our house together.”

“Putty for pipes,” Will replied gently, saying what she couldn’t. “Stuffing for pillows. Bones for knives. We found some of it, but your confirmation will help things along. Thank you, Abigail,” he finished, leaving out the obvious last item on the list in case she hadn’t realized it yet. “Would you like a hug or that punch?”

Abigail looked back at him in shock a moment, and then gave a watery huff of amusement. “I think I’d rather punch you when you’re not expecting it. I wouldn’t oppose to a milkshake if you’re insisting on being nice.”

Will nodded, one side of his lips quirking up. “I think I can charm Cheryl into letting me sneak you one. I’ll leave you with Alana.” Will got up and left, not allowing Alana’s glare to phase him.

Abigail needed space but now knew he was a valuable resource, he’d gotten enough to satisfy Jack, and had what he needed start the fight to make Abigail be considered a victim. He’d accomplished what he’d set out to do. Now, he had an errand to run.

Hannibal called while he was out. “Hey,” Will replied as he answered his phone. “Something wrong?”

“I heard that Abigail has woken up,” Hannibal replied. “I wanted to see how you were.”

Will blinked oddly at his keys as he registered that Hannibal had been honestly concerned about him.
“I’m alright,” Will answered. “I’m getting her a milkshake at the moment - told her she was free to punch me at any time.”

The line was silent for half a second - obviously he’d shocked Hannibal. “You’ve already been to see her?”

“Alana showed up at my house to convince me not to,” Will explained as he picked up the shake and headed back to his car. “I can be a right stubborn bastard sometimes. Don’t think she expected that.”

“Likely not,” Hannibal agreed. “Would you like to come over later today and discuss this development?”

Will thought for a moment. “No, but I might want you to join me next time.”

“There’s already a plan for next time?” Hannibal sounded slightly surprised.

“Oh yeah,” Will admitted. Then he laughed. “I make some choices without really thinking, Dr. Lecter. Apparently I’ve decided to help Abigail as much as she’ll let me.”

“A worthy endeavour,” Hannibal replied. “I would love to join you. Shall we discuss times at our next session?”

“Sounds good,” Will agreed easily. “I’m pulling up to the hospital now, so I’ll talk to you later.” Will deliberated with himself as he pulled into the parking lot. “Dr. Lecter?”

“Yes, Will?”

“Thanks for checking up on me.”

Hannibal’s tone was warm and comforting. “Any time, William. I hope you will call if anything changes.”

“Sure.” Will was glad he was on the phone - he was honest-to-Merlin blushing like an idiot. “Goodbye, Dr. Lecter.”

“Goodbye, Will.”

Will saw that Jack was calling as he parked the car, but decided to ignore it. He managed to sneak the milkshake into the room, ignoring Alana’s continued glare of disapproval as he gave it to Abigail. “Chocolate,” she stated with surprise. “How’d you know?”

Will shrugged as he pulled up the other chair. “Besides the fact that it’s statistically the favorite flavor of nearly all Americans? You look like a chocolate person.” Will took his glasses off to clean them for the sheer ability to do something with his hands. “The few times my comrades and I found ice cream were desperately needed, and I learned quick how to tell favorite flavors in order to brighten as many days as I could.”

“Comrades?” Alana questioned with a raised brow.

“We were a rebellious group,” Will admitted with a smirk that hid how pleased he was at getting away with that one.

The room drifted into a silence that was only comfortable for Will (which probably said something about him) before it was shattered by his phone ringing again. Will sighed and hit the ignore button again. “Guess we should get back,” Will commented, standing. “Don’t want Jack standing on my
“Jack’s calling you?” Alana asked, to which Will nodded. Alana then frowned as if she’d bitten into a lemon. “Does Jack go to your house when you don’t answer often?”

Will tilted his head to the left. “He hasn’t yet, but I know the type. He pushes until he has the answers he needs, no matter the broken pieces left in his wake - what are a few pawns in comparison to the greater good?” His voice was bitter, but Will was too used to it to attempt to cover it up. “He’ll drag me bodily out of my house if necessary in the pursuit of saving lives.”

“That doesn’t justify leaving you out there with no help, Will,” Alana protested as she put a gentle hand on his arm.

Will smiled at her. It held no warmth. “Trust me Alana, I know.”

“Then why do you let him?” Alana asked.

Will looked back to Abigail, who was watching the exchange with large eyes. “When the benefit no longer outweighs the pain, I won’t let him anymore.”

Abigail’s eyes widened in shock. Will nodded at her and turned to leave.

The second meeting was both easier and harder. Easier because Will had at least started off on the right foot with Abigail, harder because he had to not only comfort her but to undo whatever lies Freddie had told her.

“Perception is the most important thing in your life right now,” Freddie’s voice filtered through the door, and Will felt the world go cold and sharp.

He opened the door, taking the women by surprise. “I wouldn’t say that,” Will interrupted. “Media perception is slightly important, but it’s also a fickle, unreliable bitch.” Will smirked at the irritated Freddie Lounds. “It’ll hail you has a tragic hero one day and rake you over the coals as a blood-soaked tyrannical child of the devil the next day. If I’ve learned one thing in my life it’s this: never trust a journalist.”

“You only say that because you have something to hide, Mr. Graham,” Freddie replied with a smile that would fool no one. “Is it perhaps the fact that you were too unstable to pass the screening process at the FBI?”

“Maybe it’s the voice in my head I strangled at seventeen,” Will countered, “Or the fact that I believe in unicorns. How ever will you tell? That is, if your gossip rag cared at all for any kind of credible sources or even slightly believable truths.”

“I’m afraid I must ask you to leave,” Hannibal interrupted, far more polite than Will. All Will wanted to do was bash her head against the doorframe - preferably with enough force to cave in her skull.

Freddie courted the monster inside by offering her card to Abigail. “If you want to talk -”

Will snatched the card out of her hand and ripped it in half. “We’ll find someone capable of more than spewing filth, thank you.”

Freddie glared at him, but left.
“That went well,” Will stated into the awkward silence. Hannibal looked amused, even though Abigail didn’t. “I’ll make sure the nurses put her on the restricted list,” he added. “Abigail - she writes Tattle Crime. If you want to look it up and see for yourself please do, but know that she’s the worst kind of tabloid writer.”

“She seemed a little off,” Abigail replied. She still looked tense, and Will cursed all the ruined hard work he’d put into helping her.

Oh, right. “This is Dr. Hannibal Lecter,” Will introduced with an awkward wave. “He was there with me that day and wanted to see how you were.”

“You’ve been in bed for days Abigail,” Hannibal stated, always the man with a plan, “Why don’t we go for a walk?”

Abigail nodded, and after they waited for her to change clothes she even trusted Will enough to take his arm for support. Not all was lost, then. They walked to the garden in mostly silence, and then Abigail spoke. “My mother was dead when you found us, wasn’t she?”

Will grimaced. “I’ve seen too many wounds like it - there was nothing we could have done for her. So I focused on saving you.”

Will helped Abigail sit on the bench out in the greenhouse as she spoke. “He was loving right up until the second he wasn’t. Kept telling me he was sorry, to just hold still. He was gonna make it all go away.”

Will knew the look in her eyes (that slightly dashed hope - what had this child seen and known to make her accept death, even for a moment) and sat down next to her. “There was plenty wrong with your father, Abigail, but there’s nothing wrong with you.”

Abigail looked to him, disbelieving blue eyes locked on his.

Will took her hand and refused to look away. He would chase her doubt out if it was the last thing he did. “You say he was loving and I know it to be true - that’s what you brought out in him, Abigail.”

A wry, watery smile. “It’s not all I brought out in him.”

“That’s because your father was selfish,” Will replied, cutting that train of thought short. “He loved you as best as he knew how - but he couldn’t adapt to the realities of you growing up. The blame for that rests entirely on him. It is not your fault, Abigail, that your father couldn’t live with the thought of losing the best of his life.”

Abigail looked at him, flummoxed and sad. “How can you possibly know that?”

Will’s smile held no mirth, despite how gentle it was. “I’ve seen its like many times, Abigail. The choice to let you go or to do what he did lay solely with Garrett Jacob Hobbs - you were only a tiny factor. Ultimately, it was all up to what he decided he could or could not do.”

Abigail looked away then, and Will kindly pretended not to see her tears even as he squeezed her hand once before letting it go. Softly, she confessed, “I’m worried about nightmares.”

“We’ll help you with the nightmares,” Hannibal stated easily.

Will sighed. “There’s no getting used to something like what you’ve experienced,” not sound psychological advice, but truth from one who knew to one who needed more than this coddling place could offer. “It bothers me too - I know I’ll see an increase in my nightmares.”
Abigail looked at him again. “So killing somebody - even if you have to do it - it feels that bad?”

Will blinked as his hands felt heavy with slick substance and the sweetest copper filled his nostrils as his ears echoed with the drip, drip, drip of joy’s delights and the echo of a laugh bubbled in his throat as visions of splitting skin danced behind the darks of his eyes.

Swallowing, he managed to answer truthfully, “It’s the ugliest thing in the world.”

They stayed in the garden in silence a moment more before leading Abigail back to her bed to rest. Once settled, she gripped the blanket in her hands and softly decreed, “I want to go home.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Will promised. They saw her settled, ensured she had numbers to reach them at, and left the tiring girl to her rest. Will had just barely been able to keep himself from tucking her in - helping Andromeda raise Teddy had given him more mothering tendencies than Hermione currently possessed, not to mention all the times he’d cared for his nieces and nephews.

Freddie Lounds was waiting for them outside. Will spared a moment to wonder how in hell someone managed to have as little self-preservation as this woman did. He’d thankfully left his gun at home, but it didn’t make him any less dangerous. Especially when her fake-ass smile just made him want to tear those lips off her face with his short, blunt fingernails. Slowly.

“Special Agent Graham,” Freddie started, straightening from her position leaning against Hannibal’s car and holding out her hand as she walked closer. “I never formally introduced myself. I’m Freddie Lounds.”

“Now you want to play nice with the man you called a psychopath?” Will asked, glaring at her through his glasses. “Trying to salvage this joke from the mouth of madness?”

Freddie took only a second to change her approach from friendly to apologetic. “Please, let me apologize for my earlier behavior. It was sloppy.”

“You got that right,” Will interrupted. “Antagonizing the man you’ve already said is a danger to society isn’t exactly sound tactics, Freddie.” He was mocking, but he wasn’t going to hold back. She’d shot first, after all.

“Potential danger,” Freddie parried back, smirking. “I can revise that opinion. I can also make it a lot worse. Would you like to give me a quote?”

“You want a quote?” Will smiled, showing teeth as he stepped forward enough to be threatening. He was done playing around. And if she focused in on him, maybe she’d lay off Abigail. “If you really thought I was dangerous, Freddie, you’d run. It isn’t very smart to piss off a guy who thinks about killing people for a living.” Will let the warrior inside smile out at her, blood-soaked and hungry for more, and though it was but a fraction of the truth it still felt like victory when Freddie paled and took a slight step back. She had her quote, but now maybe she’d wise up and leave the real predator alone.

Will hunted those who ate death for lunch - he was the largest monster in the room.

“It isn’t very smart to piss off a guy who thinks about killing people for a living.” Jack looked away from the computer, bypassing Will and looking directly at Hannibal. “You know what else isn’t very smart? You were there with him, and you let those words come out of his mouth.”

“Ec-fucking-xcuse me?” Will interrupted, hands clenching the arms of the chair so tightly the plastic
gave a squeak of protest. That certainly got Jack’s attention. “He allowed me to speak for myself like a fucking adult? What the bloody hell do you think I am, Jack? A child?”

Jack did that one-handed placating gesture thing that mainly just infuriated Will for how condescending it was. “I didn’t say-”

“Yes, you did,” Will interrupted. He’d had another near-sleepless night, and he was running too high on his rage already to just let this go. Jack reminded him far too much of every other authority figure he’d had in his life. “I am not a cripple, Jack. I’m not mentally handicapped, and I’m not in need of a babysitter. I am perfectly capable of being responsible for my own fucking self. I’ve handled more than you will ever know in your life and I have brought people out the other side alive.” Will stood, snatching his bag and clenching his other hand into a fist so tight he began to bleed.

He had to get out - if he stayed a moment more in this man’s greater good condescending bullshit he was going to need Hermione to bail him out of jail for murder. Jack only got a word of protest out as Will headed out the door, tossing an enraged, “Fuck you,” over his shoulder as he left.

Will went right to the shooting range and killed a few of their stupid paper targets, and then he borrowed the gym to beat up a dummy for a while. He was bruised and tired and had probably pulled a muscle by the time Hannibal found him. The older man looked down, slightly amused. Will could admit he probably looked amusing, laid out on the floor in his jeans and t-shirt and panting through his sweat.

“Are you feeling better, Will?” Hannibal asked.

Will did the doctor the courtesy of thinking about it. “No,” he answered, “But I’m less likely to murder Jack in a fit of rage, so...”

“That is a benefit,” Hannibal commented. He gestured to a small case. “May I tend to your hand?”

“What?” Will looked at him askance, and then looked at his hands. One was bleeding. “Oh yeah - I cut myself, didn’t I?”

“And likely did it no favors with your workout,” Hannibal chided slightly. He went over to sit on a bench and Will followed, allowing the man to clean and bandage his hand. He’d really gouged some deep welts with his nails - he was impressed. “I’m almost impressed,” Hannibal echoed his thoughts, and Will laughed.

“Never doubt my ability to make something bleed,” Will admitted with a wry grin. He then winced as Hannibal let him pull his bandaged arm back. “I might have also pulled something.”

Hannibal sighed. It wasn’t put upon or troubled, however, it was more like the fond noise Will made at his friends when they’d done something ridiculous again. Putting his kit back in order and snapping it closed, Hannibal stood. “Come then - I’ll see what I can do about that and then we can talk about that outburst over dinner.”

Will winced. He really, really did not want to have that conversation. “I should probably go home-”

“You’re joining me for dinner at least,” Hannibal called as he walked away.

Will sighed and followed, resigning himself to his fate. Hannibal, at least, was a kind option.

Hannibal wondered just what it would take to gain access to the confidential parts of Will Graham’s
file. It was sure to be an... enlightening read. He suspected there was far more to the profiler’s past than anyone assumed, if the way Will had reacted to the massage was any indication. Will had refused to lie down, choosing instead to sit backwards in one of the dining room chairs, and his only rule was that Hannibal was not to go anywhere near his neck. Hannibal had taken the warning for what it was, and it was only because he had agreed that Will allowed the massage to happen in the first place.

Such reactions generally spoke of an exposure to great acts of violence. Hannibal wondered what blood Will had waded through, and what it would take for him to do so again.

It also meant Will’s mask was of such excellent crafting that Hannibal felt the need to applaud. No one even suspected the man of having PTSD, let alone the violent kind of past Hannibal knew he must have had. They all knew he had been a cop, but beyond that more than likely assumed Will had led a boring, uneventful life. Even Jack, despite having the upper hand of having read Will’s file.

And so, Hannibal made an excellent meal for the man currently relaxing upstairs in his guest room bath. He’d had it planned for a while so it wasn’t truly a hardship but it was still something which required slightly more effort than he usually put in for dinner with friends. It was ready by the time Will returned, curls plastered to his forehead and looking far better than he had at the beginning of the evening. “A modified Boudin Noir from Ali-Bab’s Gastronomie pratique.”

Will raised an eyebrow. “Pot roast not good enough for you then?”

“I strive to enjoy myself in all areas of life,” Hannibal replied, the comment not bothering him. “Cooking is one of my deepest passions.”

“Good for you then,” Will stated. He did eat, however, which was all Hannibal had asked of him. Although perhaps next time he would ask the profiler not to slouch so much he was practically hunched over his food. He watched with a glow of pride as the profiler showed a face of pleasure - and he didn’t even suspect what he was eating. “This is really delicious.”

Hannibal nodded his acceptance of the praise, although most interpreted it as thanks. He let the meal pass by awhile in silence, enjoying his own taste of banker. When Will had eaten half his food, Hannibal spoke. “Are you feeling recovered from your strenuous afternoon?”

Will sighed and put down his fork to drink his wine in a highly inappropriate gulp. “I need harder liquor if we’re going to talk about this,” he commented wryly. “And aren’t these talks supposed to be limited to your office?”

“I am supportive of unorthodox therapy,” Hannibal answered easily. “And I feel in most cases it is best to talk of problems as soon as possible - you’re certainly strong enough of character to handle it.”

Will looked up suddenly, surprise evident on his face. “You don’t think I’m an unstable, wilting delicate flower?”

Hannibal repressed the urge to snort. He settled for giving Will an unimpressed look instead. “If you were able to perform more than adequately as a cop in a large city despite your empathy, I highly doubt ‘delicate’ is a word I can use to accurately describe you.”

Will smiled then, big and bold and full, and Hannibal felt his breath catch for a moment. The man was... lovely. “You know Dr. Lecter,” Will commented, “I think you’re just about the only person to think so in almost a decade.”
Hannibal raised an eyebrow the slightest bit as he pondered that. It was... unthinkable. Did no one see the monster within as Hannibal could? Or if not the monster, at least a glimpse of steel and knives and a will as strong as the storm? What imbeciles.

Will took his silence for what it was and got to the heart of the matter. “This topic is close among those I’m not legally allowed to divulge, so forgive me for being vague. It’s just that I’ve seen Jack’s type before. Grand chess masters moving their pawns as fits them for the pleasure of the “greater good.” It doesn’t matter what evils they commit in order to achieve it, it doesn’t matter the lives lost or children destroyed.” Will finished off his wine and paused a moment to stare into the empty depths of the glass. “I lived my formative years under the thumb of such a man - Jack runs counter to the promise I made myself to never be such again.”

“Then you don’t believe Jack has your best interests at heart,” Hannibal commented.

Will snorted. “I know he doesn’t - it’s a fact. That’s why he reached out to you, isn’t it? So he could push me to the brink and let someone else pick up the pieces.”

Hannibal tilted his head slightly to the left. “Why do you allow it then? Why not quit?”

Will took a deep breath as he thought, gaze directed up and to the right. “I’m not entirely sure myself. I am saving lives, which is an old compulsion, but one I thought I could easily shake off. I need to figure out where my desire ends and Jack’s begins.”

“She doesn’t do so,” Hannibal commented, although he wanted nothing more than for the profiler to continue to be in Jack’s grasp - it made things so much easier to manipulate into his own favor. “And know that whatever choice you make, I will support you.”

Will looked at him a moment. And then the moment passed, and he closed his eyes with a sigh. “Have anything stronger?”

Hannibal nodded and began to clear away the table. “If you would join me in the study I believe something can be found. But only if you remain the night - I wouldn’t want you driving so long this late.”

Will nodded easily, and Hannibal let their desert remain waiting in the fridge as he found a rather potent cognac. Hannibal rejoined Will in the study and poured them both a glass before playing a nocturne on low as Will took the initiative to light the fireplace. They then settled in the large chairs with their drinks. Will hummed appreciatively after his first sip, and the night dissolved into silence as they both stared into the flames. It was... surprisingly easy. Nearly domestic. Odd.

Will wondered why Alana looked surprised when he and Hannibal met her at the facility to take Abigail home. Of course Hannibal had told him about their discussion and Jack’s decision, and of course he’d insisted on coming. Abigail’s face even eased as she saw him enter behind the others - no way was Will going to let her walk back into that darkness on her own.

Hannibal and Alana kept up an easy conversation on their way to the airport, and again on the plane. Will was content to let them - he popped a couple aspirin and focused on not stressing out. Abigail looked anxious, so he slipped her a couple when Alana’s back was turned. She’d be fine. And she was, even when they pulled up at her house.

Honestly, Will didn’t know why everyone was so set on walking on eggshells around the girl. She was handling it with battle-calm - she’d adjust and move on soon enough if they only allowed her to.
It’s not like she’d collapsed screaming in a fit of tears or anything, Merlin.

She even held in her tears at the fact that some bastard had written “cannibals” all over the doors. Will stayed close all the same, but honestly Abigail was processing this much better than some grown men Will had known.

Abigail paused to look at the still-red porch. She was clenching her hands together. “Is this where my mom died?”

“Yes,” Will answered her, standing near but allowing Abigail some space.

Abigail tried to smile. “I was sort of expecting a body outline in chalk or tape.”

“They only do that if you’re still alive,” Will explained, “and taken to the hospital before they’ve finished processing the crime scene.”

Abigail stared in silence a moment, and Will stood silent witness as old senses hummed along his veins. Their house was full of old magics, and they responded readily to Abigail’s blood. He wondered if she knew the power surrounding her as she opened her mouth and spoke, “Goodbye, Mom. Fly swift.”

That last was soft as wind, and Will nodded his head in respect as the magic flew apart. He didn’t comment - knew intimately that each person had a different farewell to send their loved ones off to their ancestors in peace. Let her grieve as she would.

The house was a bit harder for Abigail to take. Things were boxed up, pieces torn apart in search of the missing girls. Holes in the walls and sections of pipe removed (odd, there weren’t as many as Will had thought there’d be for a house this size), the shells of pillows after all the stuffing had been removed. Jack had wanted remains, and after Will had told him where to look he’d found them.

Alana took Abigail’s silence as they entered the kitchen to be problematic. “If you ever want to go, just say the word and we’ll go.”

“Go where?” Abigail replied instantly with a wry and bitter smile. “The hospital?”

“The woods,” Will spoke before Alana could. “The river. The sky. England,” he added with a shrug. He hadn’t lived in Grimmauld Place for years, but it was habitable. “As far from here as you want to be.”

Alana sent him a glare, but Abigail gave him as much of a smile as she was capable before moving on. “Who turned all the pictures around?”

“Crime scene cleaners do that,” Will informed her. He’d promised her answers - she would get all the answers she wanted.

“The did a really good job,” Abigail commented, gaze focused on the linoleum floor. “Is that where all my blood was?”

Will blinked back the sight of flooding crimson. “Yes.”

Abigail turned to him then. By the slight spark in her eye, she either wanted this to hurt him or had very morbid interests. “You do this a lot? Go places and think about killing?”

Will swallowed down a laugh. It would be inappropriate. “Not for many years, but still more often than I probably should.”
“So you pretended to be my dad,” Abigail pressed on, the hint of sorrow clear on her face.

“It’s less pretending and more understanding,” Will revealed, tracing patterns on the upper window moulding with his eyes. “I piece together the crime scene to see how the murder was done, and then try to piece together who would do it. I begin to know them, letting myself grow smaller in order to do so. It’s a delicate balance,” Will finished, finally looking Abigail in the eye, “between myself and the killers in my head. Your father’s only one of many, Abigail.”

There it was - the face of a child looking for comfort. Will had seen it far too often. Abigail was reaching out to him to ease her pain. “What did it feel like? To be him?”

“Warm,” Will told her. He tried to explain in halting fragments of sentences. “With... undertones of... ice. He was unlike the others. There was a great deal of love and yet... nearly hollow. Like talking to a shadow suspended on dust.”

Abigail raised her eyebrows. “No wonder you have nightmares.”

Will tried not to let his face show the hilarity inside. Oh, if only these people knew.

Will let Abigail have her silence and her space, letting Alana guide the rest of the trip. He wasn’t sure anymore if he should be here or not, but he needed to be here and so Will wouldn’t allow himself to feel awkward about his presence. Abigail was vulnerable here - Will would protect her.

They’d moved to the living room when Alana hesitantly broached the subject of the copycat. “Abigail,” she started, gentle and ready to withdraw the subject the moment Abigail reacted adversely, “There was another motive in letting you come home.”

Abigail looked at her, something sharp in that gaze. It was calculating. Will suddenly wondered what it was the girl seemed so intent on finding and taking back with her. “I thought you found all the parts already.” She didn’t have to gesture at the holes in the walls or the missing pillows to make her meaning clear.

Alana aimed for comforting. “Jack was hoping you would remember something from earlier that day. If you don’t want to, you don’t have to, Abigail, but Jack is insisting.”

Abigail looked cautious now, her eyes flickering between Will and Hannibal nervously. “What kind of thing?”

“Your house received a call from a blocked number,” Will stated, tired of Alana beating around the bush. “A copycat, who admired your father’s kills. We believe whoever called warned your father we were coming, causing him to panic.”

The spark in those eyes meant Abigail definitely remembered. “Is that why we’re here? To re-enact the crime? You be my mom,” Abigail pointed to Alana, and Will suppressed a sigh as she turned to him, “You be my dad,” Abigail turned to Hannibal, movements sharp as if in excitement, “and you be the man on the phone.”

Maybe she was one of those true-crime junkies. Will gave in and rolled his eyes, turning slightly away from the group. The suggestion was absolutely ridiculous, and there was no way he was going to do -

A door opened.

In seconds Will was facing the sound, planted solidly in the line of sight, and had his gun out and ready. “FBI,” he called out. “Who’s there?”
“Marissa,” a young woman’s voice replied, “I’m Abigail’s friend.”

Will didn’t even look away, despite the teen coming close enough for him to see. “You know her, Abigail?”

Abigail sounded unsure. “That’s Marissa. Are we... still friends?”

Marissa rolled her eyes and seemed far too casual for someone with a gun in her face. Oh, the constant arrogance of teens who were fortunate enough to not have learned any better. “Of course we are silly,” she chided. “I’m not an idiot.”

Will lowered his gun and put the safety back on before slipping it back into the holster. His paranoia was still winning out, however, so while the girls went outside to chat Will followed, giving them plenty of space but keeping them in his line of sight.

“Why are you being so protective, Will?” Alana nearly sounded like she was accusing him. “They’re safe.”

Will leaned against the side of the house but didn’t take his eyes off the girls and the surrounding area. “A teenager found out Abigail was here and nearly took us by surprise - someone with fewer good intentions could do the same.”

“You think the copycat might show up here?” Hannibal questioned. He, at least, seemed willing to cater to Will’s paranoia without making a fuss.

Will hummed. “It’s a possibility. I was thinking a family member of one of the other girls.”

“Someone who blames Abigail for the crimes of her father,” Hannibal added. It was nice how the man’s thoughts so effortlessly fell parallel to Will’s own. “They might be looking for revenge.”

Will nodded. Alana was asking something, but the air was suddenly thick and tense, like wards screaming of intruders. Will straightened and sharpened his awareness. The girls looked tense, heads whipping towards the trees as if - person!

Will shot off like a rocket, screaming, “On the ground!” as he ran. Abigail, thankfully, had some good sense in her head. She dove and dragged her friend with her. The mystery person was fleeing already, but Will had him in his sights now. A quick stop five feet behind the girls, breathe in, aim, feel the path aline, breathe out, fire.

A cry of pain and the rustle of twigs. He’d got him.

Will was running again the moment the recoil had ceased, and it didn’t take him long to pass the two scared teens and dart into the forest after his prey. The golden touch of fall made tracking crimson easy, and this boy was no forest being. City dweller, most likely. Unused to the movements needed for silence in the forest.

Will caught up with him almost half a mile away, tackling the boy to the ground. He was whimpering - pathetic. “FBI,” Will informed him as he sat up and dragged the boy’s hands back to cuff him. “You’re under arrest.”

“You shot me!” the man protested, ginger and skinny and pale.

“It’s only your leg,” Will replied, locking the cuffs on. Thank Merlin he’d thought to bring them.

“You’ll be fine. Come on.” Will hauled him up and supported the boy as he led him slowly back to the Hobbs’ residence. He called local PD quickly, and then turned on his captive. “What were you
“I heard the Hobbs girl would be here,” the boy answered. At least it seemed Will had scared him enough the kid was being truthful. “I wanted answers - she helped her Dad kill my sister.”

Will bit down the urge to hit him. “Which one was your sister?”

“Cassie,” the boy replied.

Will wracked his memory for names. “Nick Boyle?” the ginger nodded. “Well congrats, you’ve now frightened an innocent. Abigail was the intended target, her father wouldn’t have involved her because the compulsion to turn on her would be too strong. Besides,” he added, “your sister wasn’t killed by Hobbs.”

Nick turned to look at him, gobsmacked. He stumbled over a root and Will hauled him up again.

“Your sister was killed by a copycat,” Will explained. “And watch where you’re going, I’d rather not carry you back.”

Nick was silent the rest of the way. As they cleared the tree line, Will noticed some of the cops from the last time he’d been here. One of them whistled. “You sure got good instincts man, you sure you don’t wanna be a cop?”

“I was,” Will replied. “This is Nicholas Boyle. Far as I can tell it’s just an emotional outburst but I’ll leave you to figure out the rest.”

The cops nodded and took him from Will, and Will headed for the house. They were probably all inside, but dear god the panic was starting to creep up. What if Boyle had been a distraction? What if someone else had gotten in? What if the copycat -

Will heard an argument and slumped against the wall in relief. A mom and a teen yelling about her being away from home, and Hannibal’s calming tones. They were safe.

Will took a deep breath in to battle back the ghosts of blood and death. Holding it all inside tightly for a moment, he then let it go in a whoosh of air. Settled once again (for now, at least) Will went to join them. It took one look to know what was going on, and how to stop it. Hannibal looked slightly offended, Marissa was ready to hit something, Abigail was shrinking behind Alana and the woman he guessed was Marissa’s mother was practically snarling. Time to shock everyone into enough of a silence that he could get them all away from each other, Will thought.

“The police have the intruder now,” Will stated softly in a voice meant to carry as much as to comfort. “I have to thank you, Marissa,” he addressed the teen, who looked at him in startled surprise. “We weren’t nearly as prepared for unintended visitors as we should have been. Mrs. Shurr,” here, Will turned to address the mother, whose mouth was hanging open. “You should be proud of your daughter. She’s a loyal friend. Her loyalty might have just saved Abigail’s life.”

That shut the woman up. Quite dramatically, too, with an audible click as she closed her mouth.

Alana and Hannibal looked impressed and Will tried not to feel insulted that they thought so little of his people skills. They’d only seen him socialize in non-combat situations before, and he really was pants at those.

So instead he focused on Abigail. She was the mission, after all. “It might be good to start heading back. You got everything you need?”
Abigail looked slightly like she was missing a limb, rubbing her hand in a strangely familiar way and eyes full of sorrow even as she answered in an affirmative, “Yeah.”

Will nodded. “I’ll put the bags in the car, then. Please stay with Hannibal and Alana, and we’ll get going shortly.” He turned to the other two, holding out his hand. It had proved an effective parting technique in the past. “It was nice to meet you, Marissa, Mrs. Shurr.”

They shook his hand in a daze, and Will left again to grab the luggage bag and duffle that held Abigail’s things. He’d feel much better when she was safe in Baltimore once again.

Hannibal drove the small group back to the airport that night, thinking on his passengers. Abigail was holding up rather well, all things considered. She’d also made it clear that she recognized his voice, for all the good it would do her. Yet Abigail was smart, having already concluded that speaking up now would do her no good. Hannibal decided he should spend more time cultivating this relationship - the girl held great potential. It would be interesting to see what path she took.

Will, leaning his forehead against the window and sleeping soundly, was the most interesting of Hannibal’s passengers by far. Not only did he possess that thrilling empathy and wondrous mind, but he had the instincts of a predator. Hannibal hadn’t known there was a threat until Will was running to defeat it, drawing his gun without a moment’s hesitation. Hannibal wondered if it had looked the same when Will killed Stammets. It had been beautiful in it’s precisely controlled chaos, and Hannibal longed to see what would happen when that control shattered to pieces. It was a surprisingly stronger urge than his normal curiosity. Granted, Will Graham seemed to bring out extremes of feeling in Hannibal, much more so than nearly any other person before. He would have to plan for that reaction in the future.

Hannibal would have to cook up something special for Alana. This venture into the FBI was turning out to be the most interesting thing in over a decade. It was, dare he say it, fun.

Chapter End Notes

I am absurdly happy that Will manages to tell ridiculous tales and never once lie. Does it show? XD
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Families, Christmas, budding feelings and murder. Everything a happy cannibal needs to grow some emotions.

Chapter Notes

From this point on if it happens in the show but isn’t mentioned in the fic, it probably didn’t happen. At least to the main characters, anyway.

And I worked on this a while but am only still moderately happy with it so I hope it's not too far beneath the standards of the other chapters. I just wanted to take advantage of Christmas happening in this ep, and build some relations between Abigail and Hanni since they don't have Boyle to bind them together, and introduce a plot point, but the interjection of all that feels awkward and abrupt. So sorry bout that :(

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal had bribed Will’s rather well-behaved dogs with sausages and found the perfect place for the shreds of Cassie Boyle that he’d brought along. Fishing lures - a thing he would find absolutely quaint had he read of it in the news after another’s capture. It would be lovely and simplistically elegant, a weaving of death delivered by hunting into the hunting of a means for sustaining life.

Just as Hannibal was reaching to begin his task, his phone rang.

Curiously Hannibal noted on the screen that it was Will himself calling. Partially suspicious the perceptive man somehow knew already, Hannibal answered with a calm voice. “Good afternoon, William.”

“Hello,” Will replied. “This is okay, isn’t it? I haven’t caught you at a bad time, or - or overstepped or something?”

Hannibal felt immensely fond at the stuttered concern for some strange reason. “Not at all. I said you were free to call whenever you may need me, and I meant it. What seems to be the matter?”

Will was silent for several moments, and then he spoke as he did when revealing great secrets in Hannibal’s office, as if speaking them quietly made them less likely to be discovered. “She looks like her,” wasn’t exactly an explanation, but it opened up a well of nuances and delicate connections that Hannibal wanted to pluck until the secret unraveled.

“Who is it, Will?” Hannibal asked, poking at the matter but leaving the interpretation up to the profiler.

“Mrs. Turner,” Will answered, taking the easier way out. “The mother of the family that’s been murdered.” A sharp breath, a muffled echo of cloth and surface - was he sliding down a wall to sit in
a more protected position on the floor? “I’m not handling this well,” Will admitted. “Can you - would you mind - no, you’re probably busy, I-I’ll stop bothering -”

“I was just out to feed your dogs,” Hannibal interrupted before Will could talk himself out of relying on him. “They look well.”

“They’re not too lonely, are they?” Will questioned, latching onto the new topic with ill-disguised relish.

“They miss you,” Hannibal stated, mainly because he thought it might be something Will wanted to hear. “But they look well - you’ve done a very good job training them.”

Will started stammering in a way that made Hannibal visualize the blush probably staining the younger man’s cheeks. “I- uh, I try, I guess - th-thanks.”

How absolutely unaccustomed to praise was this man? He really was a psychiatrist’s dream, wasn’t he?

“I couldn’t help but notice your bookshelves,” Hannibal stated as if he hadn’t been snooping. “You have quite the collection of classical literature.”

“I found my tastes fall more into debates on morality than any tales of space pirates or magic,” Will replied wryly. “I got several looks at the precinct when they caught me with Dorian Grey on my desk.”

“You are interested in morality?” Hannibal replied, feeling his interest catch with a spark of certainty. To better facilitate the discussion, he stood and walked over to the structures in question in order to see which of the books were most loved.

“Morality has been a rather overly discussed topic for most of my life,” Will replied in a wry tone. “It became less a question of right and wrong and more a matter of the grey areas that make up most morality - what we could live with, what we couldn’t, what must be borne for the greater good - what must be born because it must.”

Hannibal wondered which categories the strain of his empathy and the saving of lives fell under. A question for another day, considering Will had asked for reprieve. “And so you collected works where those lines become blurred,” he commented instead, “but ultimately realign in the end.”

Will snorted. “I don’t think you can claim that for a lot of them, especially Dorian Grey.”

Hannibal paused, the aforementioned book in his hand. It was worn and well-used, but obviously cared for. “Can you make a case otherwise?” Hannibal asked. “Grey dies in the end, drawn by fear to a mad state where he destroys all that he had - it is a direct result of the path he refused to turn away from. It can be argued that had he not given into temptation, Grey would have kept on living forever, as Basil’s love is what enabled the magic of the painting to flourish. He dies as all sinners must - a common ending for the impure since the beginning of literary tradition.”

“But it was that madness that was his undoing,” Will countered easily. “Fear of being discovered led to his pursual of the painting - too long pursual grew an illogical hatred and resentment of his fallen state which is what led to his destruction of the painting. Darkness was lurking inside of him from the beginning, and he was unsuited to acknowledge the reality of this fact. Such brought out the madness that was his end - a cautionary tale, true, most of that kind are - but one owing nothing to blank morality and more to a failing of self-acceptance.”

Truly remarkable insight, and the trails of thought it implied would be brought up in their next
session - Hannibal would have to dig more into this to see if the seeds of an idea lurking in the back-
most corridors of his mind would be allowed to take root. They were his most dangerous rooms, he
would have to tread lightly.

“Interesting theory, but I must ask,” Hannibal remarked as he set the book back, “why is your copy
of Frankenstein currently serving as a coaster?”

“Shit,” Will cursed. “I must have forgot - Hermione’s gonna have my head if she sees that - would
you mind taking the glass off?”

Feeling immensely amused, Hannibal grabbed the partially-full whiskey glass and carried it to the
kitchen. “Hermione?”

“One of my oldest friends,” Will replied. “She’s a book nut, always has been, and I’ve been lectured
on proper book care way too many times already.”

“I wonder why I haven’t heard of her before,” Hannibal said, placing the glass in the sink to wash
once off the phone.

Will was quiet for a while before softly admitting, “I don’t have many, far less good friends, and I
tend to be protective of them.”

“It is entirely natural to be protective of the life you held before,” Hannibal stated, taking a guess.
Will was still quiet, however, and that had not been the point of this phone call. “Regardless, you
have not answered my question - why was Frankenstein your coaster of choice?”

“It was a gift,” Will replied with an embarrassed rush of a sigh. “And I couldn’t throw it away, but I
hate it - absolutely hate it - all of the annoying tropes without any real seeming substance or
compelling characters and so it winds up tossed about rather often. Not sure if I’m unconsciously
trying to give myself a legitimate reason to throw it away or not.”

There was a strange feeling in his chest, and before he knew it, Hannibal was laughing.

Will was silent on the other end in shock. He got over it momentarily, chuckling along for a short
period of solidarity. Once their amusement had abated, Will remarked with a slight air of shock, “I
should probably wash before Beverly shows up to grab a late lunch with me.”

“It seems your fears were baseless,” Hannibal commented. “You are making friends already.”

“Maybe,” Will replied, sounding as if he didn’t believe that in the slightest. Whatever it was he
suspected to be the true cause, he didn’t say. Will was silent for a loaded beat, and then he
whispered, “Thank you, Hannibal.”

“Anytime, Will,” Hannibal replied. They traded goodbyes and hung up, and Hannibal returned his
phone to his pocket before taking off his jacket and rolling up his sleeves to wash the glass. He set it
out to dry, let the dogs out, and ensured their food and water was adequately stocked. When the dogs
were inside and sated, Hannibal stared a moment at the fishing lures before turning to leave.

There would be more opportunities, and Hannibal had other plans to devote his time to in the
meantime.

Hannibal opened his office door to find an entirely agreeable change of routine. “Do you have an
appointment?”
“Do you have a beer?” Alana questioned right back. Hannibal couldn’t help his smile as he let her in – Alana was nearly always a refreshing presence, one of the few people Hannibal could say that about with complete sincerity. And so he got her a beer, and prepared himself to help her fix whatever was wrong.

“Interesting day with Abigail,” he said to get the conversation going.

Alana took a moment to lightly toast his own glass of wine before answering with an almost sigh, “Yeah, the grief work, trauma intervention, it’s all on course. I think she might be suffering from a low-grade depression,” she added before taking a large drink.

Hannibal nearly raised an eyebrow. “She?”

“Nothing wrong with a little self-medication, right doctor?” Alana replied cheekily.

Hannibal quirked a corner of his mouth up in a smile and raised his glass in agreement before indulging a bit himself. It was a particularly good vintage - such a shame Alana preferred beer.

Alana took a large breath in and then finally just let it all out. It was one of the things Hannibal liked about her - she didn’t beat around the bush or take thirty minutes to get to the heart of the matter. “Professional neutrality be damned. It’s so hard to watch a bright young girl go so adrift.”

And there was the feeling that could help Hannibal in his own goals. Not to mention he’d gotten the distinct sense that all the walls and gentle handling were driving Abigail up a wall. And over it, if the nurses were correct. So Hannibal broached the matter. “Perhaps it’s time Abigail’s released from clinical treatment.”

Alana’s face showed just how ridiculous she found that notion. “Released where? Back into the wild?”

Hannibal pushed on. “Spending each day immersed in trauma might be doing more harm than good. She should be out in the world - finding her footing, giving her the confidence to move forward.”

Alana was being stubborn again, it would seem. She directed her eyes at the ceiling to counter without being overtly rude. “Abigail’s in no condition to tackle what real world issues like - where is she gonna-”

Hannibal had to look at his shoes a moment before interrupting her. “I’m not suggesting abandonment. There are programs for outpatients, halfway houses, things where she could get the help she needs without being so constantly reminded of her trauma.” Here, Hannibal looked Alana in the eye and let her see the sincerity of his next words. “And you know any of us would help her all we could.”

Alana didn’t look impressed. “Hannibal, this is a girl who was very attached to her parents, and you stepping in as a surrogate would only be a crutch. I think Abigail needs to figure things out for herself in a safe, clinical environment, and that will give her the confidence to move forward.”

There would be no winning this one. Alana was a wonderful psychiatrist, but awfully stubborn. And so Hannibal nodded his head and said those words which would calm her down the most. “I defer to the passions of my esteemed colleague.”

He’d just have to keep up with his visits to Abigail. She seemed a very bright girl, with a little guidance she could blossom into a beautiful monster.

“Passion’s good,” Hannibal commented wryly. “Gets blood pumping.”
Will has been hiding in the corner for the proceedings of their evidence gathering ever since the Turner home. Always the defensible corner, always the one with the best sights of potential threats, always the one from which he had the best chance of protecting the others.

This case was getting to him. Hermione had been calling every night, and she and Ron flooed over last night to help him sleep, even with all the preparations for a Weasley Christmas. Will wanted this one to be solved quickly - he wasn’t sure how much more he could really take.

The flippancy of the forensic team wasn’t helping. Will couldn’t bring himself to truly begrudge them their tried and true defense mechanism, but it left a sour taste in the back of his mouth and did little to chase away the ghosts of his past.

Zeller always seemed to be the one who really got to him. “I’m glad we didn’t have guns in my house,” the man commented, “Would’ve shot my sisters just to get them out of the bathroom.”

Will was too tired to clench up even as he told himself the man truly didn’t mean it - none of them did.

It didn’t make such casual mentions of killing family any easier to hear. Not to one who did just that.

“I liked having a big family,” Beverly countered. She’d become a strange support to Will during this case - he made a mental note to ask Luna to help him pick out a good Christmas gift for her to show his thanks.

“My parents gave me a gift,” Jimmy added in his vein of self-deprecating humor. “A twin. Who wouldn’t want two of me?”

Then they turned to Will. It was nice, he guessed, that they still attempted to include him.

Zeller spoke first. “Let me guess - only child.”

Will couldn’t manage to summon the effort not to be creepy and so his reply came out flat. And perhaps slightly accusatorial. “Why do you say that?”

“You’ll have to forgive the orphan for being boring then,” Will bit back. He wasn’t in the mood to put up with Zeller’s shit.

It certainly killed the mood pretty quickly. Beverly, thank Merlin, managed to move them over the gigantic awkward silence fairly quickly. “I was the oldest so, all the friction rolled downhill.”

Jack cut in then, probably grateful to get at least slightly back on track as he walked over to examine another of the bodies. “Yes, all the attention and responsibilities heaped on first-born children prepares them for success in the future.”

“My baby sister got away with murder,” Beverly commented. “She had them all fooled.”

“I thought middles were the problem,” Jimmy interjected.

“Middle’s the sweet spot,” Zeller countered.

“Always trying to figure out where they fit in,” Will interrupted him. He was getting tired of this and
walked over to join Jack at the autopsy tables. “They can be great um, politicians.” He faced Zeller a bit more fully and added, “Or lousy ones.”

Zeller’s face showed surprise at the zing, and Will could hear Beverly chuckle slightly behind him.

“All the victims have defensive wounds except for Mrs. Turner,” Jack stated, ignoring the peanut gallery. He held out a photo, and Will took it. It was the evidence photo of Mrs. Turner’s last moments.

Will was too tired to think of Ginny, and noticed something that had escaped him in his earlier shock. “There’s forgiveness.”

“What kind of victim forgives the killer at the moment of death?” Jack asked.

Will didn’t even have to think about that one. He’d seen it once before. He met Jack’s gaze for a moment to show how serious he was. Then he looked down at Mrs. Turner, briefly seeing bronze skin and a gentle smile. He let out a heavy breath. “A mother.”

She’d been German, Will remembered. Searching for her youngest son. She’d only joined the thick of the war to ensure he came home safe.

Will tore his gaze away from the corpse to look at Jack, wanting to be sure the man understood exactly what they were dealing with here. Jack’s shoulders were rounded down, his eyes wet and countenance heavy with sorrow.

As of now, they both knew the boys were truly lost. Nothing they could do would help them - not these ones.

Will sitting across from him, Hannibal began their session with the entirely overused, “Tell me about your mother, Will.”

Will gave a bitter smile and responded as Hannibal had thought he might. “That’s some lazy psychiatry Dr. Lecter. Very low hanging fruit.”

Hannibal refused to rise to the bait and countered, “I suspect that fruit is on a high branch - very difficult to reach.”

Will’s countenance seemed to fall as he finally answered with truth. “So’s my mother. Never knew her - not really,” was added on, almost as if it was a correcting clarification that must be made.

It was an odd detail. “An interesting place to start.”

Will turned slightly away and did what he was best at - deflecting. “How about your mother? Let’s start there.”

It was issued as a challenge, but Hannibal refused to fail as so many others had. Not interrupting the flow of their conversation and knowing it would only endear Will more to him (nothing bound understanding and a sense of solidarity like the knowledge of alkeness in being orphaned) Hannibal easily replied, “Both my parents died when I was very young. The proverbial orphan until I was adopted by my Uncle Robertas when I was sixteen.”

Will’s eyes flashed with sympathy even as his whole countenance seemed to droop. “You have orphan in common with Abigail Hobbs.”
Still deflecting, but this was one Hannibal could hook under his skin and twist to get to the heart of the matter. “You’ll find you and I both have a lot in common with Abigail. She’s already demonstrated an aptitude for the psychological.”

Will gave a wry smile, the first genuinely positive emotion the man had shown since greeting Hannibal with a thanks for watching over his dogs. “I think that’s more your wheelhouse than mine - I got a degree in forensics, not psychology.”

“Yet you teach psychoanalysis,” Hannibal countered.


Hannibal tilted his head, intrigued. “What would you describe your subject as, then?”

“Battle tactics.”

Will seemed to be prepared for confrontation, as this was likely a definition that had gained him many questions and arguments before. Hannibal had some questions of his own, of course, but they would be answered in due time. It wouldn’t do to put Will on the defensive - he was so apt to shut down entirely when that happened. And so Hannibal only waited a beat to show his slight confusion before changing the topic. “This family, were they affluent?”

Will shrugged one shoulder, taking the new direction with ease. “They lived like they had money.”

“And your family?” Hannibal asked. Something was bothering the man about this case - something more than any other, even Garrett Hobbs. He would know what it was by the end of this.

Will gave a wry smile. “My parents were rich, but they both died when I was young - younger than unassisted memory allows. I didn’t even know they were rich until I was eleven - couldn’t touch more than enough to help with school until I turned seventeen.” Will took a deep breath as he readjusted his grip on the arms of the seat. “No, my uncle and aunt were fairly well-to-do but I always lived as if we were poor.”

“Why is that?” Hannibal questioned, careful not to lean forward in his seat unless his show of interest scared Will off.

Will snorted. “My Mother’s sister took me in but not... willingly. She’d hated my mother - hated my father even more. She and my uncle were... not the most accommodating of people. They valued a sense of normalcy above all else.”

Will didn’t continue, and Hannibal didn’t push. It was all too clear what that must have been like for as unusual a child as Will’s empathy must have made him. He sat with the common tensed shoulders that spoke of an unhappy home. And as Hannibal thought back to the overly stocked pantry and Will’s tendency to hunch over his food (less of a lazy slump and more like habit practiced to look casual, in hindsight) as if to shield it from being taken away, he was suddenly all too terribly aware of just how unhappy that home most likely had been.

“You cannot understand why these children would kill their families, not truly,” Hannibal remarked as he quieted the rage softly growing in his bones. “Not when you envy them the fact they had them.”

Will looked to him, his expression a question in itself.

Hannibal said nothing, but nodded slightly in answer. That he felt the same would further serve to bind Will even tighter to him, a thing smart for avoiding detection and an idea growing entirely too
appealing on its own merit.

Instead of continuing that train of thought, Hannibal asked. “And Mrs. Turner reminded you of your mother?”

“Slightly,” Will admitted, looking away. “The shade of her hair and shape of her face - more round than sharp - reminded me more of Ginny.”

Hannibal cocked his head to the side. Will must have been in a vulnerable place indeed, usually getting facts of the man’s past was akin to pulling teeth. “Ginny?”

Will’s jaw, in perfect profile at this angle, tightened and loosened. “I was going to marry her,” he spoke softly, as if an admission to the wind. “She-” Will’s throat closed on a choking sound, and he said no more.

Hannibal observed him for a while. All the plans he’d had for this meeting seemed inadequate to the place they were at now. Questions probing the reality of Will’s morality and how grey it might be, and his acceptance or rejection of that, were ill-suited topics to follow in the wake of painful recollections of family lost. So Hannibal stood, gaining Will’s attention as he walked to gather his coat. “I believe we should end here for the day, Will. As I have no more patients and it is still rather early, how about we walk in the sun while we can?” Hannibal turned back to look at Will, who seemed so lost and confused and so very vulnerable in that moment. It spurred an odd compulsion in Hannibal he had not felt since the end of that cold winter. “I find the sunshine adept at chasing away old demons.”

Will stared a minute more before he stood. Hannibal held his coat out for him, and soon they had locked up the office and began meandering down the street.

Will turned his face to the sun and breathed, and Hannibal found his breath catching in his throat. Will looked like one of Botticelli’s lovers, lit in the dying sunlight as he was. The relaxation his expression gained as he breathed in the peace of the day made him ascend beyond the most magnificent of Michelangelo’s angels. This strange creature of lingering shadows - this man with the infinite capacity for darkness inside of him - was more beautiful than any heavenly sight Hannibal had ever before been fortunate enough to witness.

How much more lovely would he be at peace with himself? With the strains of society stripped away? How might he seem directly fallen from the heavenly host with the stain of blood he’d shed on his hands?

Hannibal allowed their walk to progress in silence, leaving Will to his thoughts as he himself attempted to root out an errant elusive impulse. This man could find out everything about him and see the most hidden secrets of Hannibal’s mind without trying if he so desired.

It should not have been a thrilling thought, filling him with a strange anticipation of future joys. That was the opposite reaction of what Hannibal should feel towards this man who could see him imprisoned, and he needed to find out why he was reacting so strangely before things could progress any further.

Classes ended, the students let go with joy and a bounce to their step that translated their desire to run out the door. Will couldn’t help but to chuckle at them slightly, packing his briefcase. It wasn’t like he didn’t share their excitement - Christmas at the Burrow was always a wonderful thing.
It was a quick walk to his office to drop off his bag and snag the packed duffle he’d brought along this morning. The break was only a week long, but it would be a nice reprieve all the same. He’d notified Hannibal he’d be gone, and Abigail, and was looking forward to seeing his family. Perhaps they could chase away the ghosts of the Turner family.

Will was stopped by Jack on his way out of his office. It had happened so often, Will wondered if he should pencil it into his schedule. “Going somewhere?” Jack inquired, looking pointedly at the duffle thrown over Will’s shoulder.

Will sighed. “Classes are out for break, Jack. I’m going home.”

Jack didn’t look happy with that. “Home, Will? We still have an active case -”

“Which your actual agents can handle,” Will interrupted as he shouldered past the other man. He had a plane to catch. “There are no new leads, and you have my number if any arise. You’ll have to figure in the time difference between here and England, though.”


“Like I said,” Will called over his shoulder, “Home.”

The plane ride was as terrible as ever, but it was worth it to stroll out of the gate into warm arms. A sea of them, as well as a cry of “Will!” so loud it might as well have been a call to arms.

Will let himself relax into the sea of Weasleys, patting any nieces and nephews he could reach. “Did you all have to come?” he asked. “I haven’t been gone that long guys.”

“It’s been a whole year!” Roxanne protested in that long-suffering way all ten year olds had.

“It hasn’t been that long,” Will protested.

“Almost forever!” Hugo piped up. He was attached rather firmly to Will’s knees with the octopus quality six year olds emulated. It was nearly always endearing.

“I saw most of you a month ago,” Will objected. Had he at least patted them all? He couldn’t remember. “Who didn’t get a hug?”

Rose, Lucy, and Fred Jr. clamoured for attention, as did George. He was the only other adult in the pile-up, but some things never changed. Will shifted children until each one had gotten a full hug in, and then burrowed his head into George’s shoulder and simply breathed deep the calm of being near his family again.

George laughed, gentle and kind. “Rough time of it then?”

Will nodded and made an unintelligible noise in reply.

“Well let’s get home and you can rest up,” Hermione instructed as she took his bag and handed it to Ron. “You are going to sleep a full nine hours tonight Will Graham - don’t even try to weasel your way out of it!”

Will laughed. “Wouldn’t dream of it.” He untangled from George, dutifully picked Hugo up, and followed his family to the floo and portkey station that had been set up by a very clever young witch three shops down from the airport. She must have been making a mint, and had started a chain all over Europe. Magical travel - that was one thing he certainly didn’t miss about magic, but at least they weren’t apparating since Hugo was still too young to do so safely.
One ungraceful tumble later, and Will was home. The smells of christmas baking preparations assaulted his nose, and the atmosphere at once became lighter and brighter. There were almost never any shadows at the Burrow, despite all that had happened to it and its occupants. Ron and Will shared a look as the kids immediately snagged his hands and started dragging him up the stairs to show him everything they’d made or accomplished since he’d last seen them. Will focused on each and every one, allowing the simplicity of being proud of them to push back the nightmares that were trying to crowd in his head once again.

Then came dinner, then wrangling the children through bedtime routines, and then finally Will was able to sink into the couch with two fingers of whiskey and a tired Hermione right next to him. “How’s Angelina?” Will asked George as the older man sprawled in a nearby chair.

“She’s good,” George answered. “Got a quick tour at the moment, but she’s teaching quidditch more and more instead of playing it in order to be closer to the kids.”

“I forgot how fast the little buggers grow,” Will commented with a sigh.

“Fred’s shooting up like a bean sprout,” George added. His smile was less painful than it used to be, and his son’s name (which had been entirely Angelina’s doing) rolled easily off his tongue. It had been a full year before George could even say it. “Complete opposite of Ronnikins.”

“Oh!” Ron objected as he came to sit on Hermione’s other side. “I’ll have you know I’m nearly as tall as you!”

Hermione rolled her eyes at him, and Will smiled in response. They didn’t bring up his work, the case he was currently on, or anything having to do with death. No one mentioned Ginny, and Will had to be grudgingly grateful for the fact. It was nice to have a night with no demons, for once. The night passed companionably, and Will was only slightly tipsy (Hermione hadn’t even nagged him for the third drink) as Ron made sure he got to his permanent “guest bed” without issue. Every now and then it was nice to be coddled. And it was always nice to be home.

Hannibal got permission to sign Abigail out for Christmas. He hadn’t had anyone to cook for on the holiday before (without it being a large affair) and he found himself looking forward to the challenge. The morning of Christmas Eve he checked Abigail out of the facility and then took her shopping for some clothes she could truly call her own style. Afterwards they returned to Hannibal’s house, where Abigail became his sous chef in the kitchen.

It only took until one for Abigail to ask, “Why are you being so nice to me?”

Hannibal smiled as he prepared a glaze for the ham. It was truly ham, at the moment - no need to tempt if Abigail would recognize the taste. “Do I need a reason?”

“I won’t tell,” Abigail sounded purposefully flat in her tone. Likely she didn’t know if she should be challenging or not.

“I know,” Hannibal replied simply. “You are a smart girl Abigail, a very little shark in a very large pool. I confess myself curious as to where you will end up.”

He turned away to place the glaze in the fridge, and Abigail took the moment she was safe from his sight to ask her true question. “You’re curious? Like you were when you called my house?”

“I am always curious, Abigail,” Hannibal answered truthfully enough, turning to Abigail and letting her see a portion of the truth of him. “However, very rarely do I find my interest holding for long.”
Abigail nodded, and then motioned to the onions. “Know a way to chop these without crying like a baby?”

Hannibal smiled, and the moment passed on into more pleasant waters. Abigail was very smart after all - he was certain she’d gotten the message. And she was a wonderful student, chopping the vegetables perfectly by the end of preparations. Then it was only a matter of putting everything away to keep till the morning, with Abigail and himself changing clothes before settling in the dining room for a light dinner. Hannibal inquired about Abigail’s schooling, and her evolving interests, and the evening passed companionably in that vein. Abigail was thrilled to not be required back at the facility until the afternoon after the next day, and so Hannibal saw her to bed and cleaned up before heading to bed himself.

It was... odd, he decided. Odd to have another person under his roof who knew that he was a killer and yet was still there and willing to smile at him. Odd to look forward to a Christmas with a tree that held actual presents, and a person to gift things to. It didn’t meant it wasn’t nice, however. Although, it would have been nicer if Will had stayed. He could have gotten the man to come along, had a family for Abigail to align herself with and erase those negative associations the concept now held for her. It would certainly have been wonderful to have both of them at his table tomorrow, smiling their stunted smiles and perhaps looking forward to doing so again.

Perhaps he had been alone too long. That had to explain why these stupid familial urges kept cropping up around Abigail and Will. He only had to wait it out - it would pass.

Hermione sighed as she got the chance to sit down. One good thing about a large family - there were always people to help even out the workload. The morning had been chaos, as usual, with wrapping paper flying in all directions. She knew they’d still be finding pieces in furniture and tucked between cracks in the stairs for months. She wasn’t complaining, however - she would always be grateful the burrow had passed down to her and Ron (if only for the fact that everyone else already had homes, and Hermione and Ron had been there already during Molly’s last days helping to care for her in the final stages of her illness).

Hermione surveyed the living room as Ron and Angelina entertained the children outside in a large, unruly game of quidditch. The others adults were gathered outside or in the kitchen washing up.

Will, as usual, was asleep on the couch. Covered in shreds of colorful paper and a nephew or two, he was breathing deeply and Hermione couldn’t help the smile. She had told him of the incident last week, where Scorpius had bitten another child in primary for calling his uncle strange. Even so young, all of the children knew that Will loved them more than anything - including his social aversions and difficulties with large crowds.

“That’s where the little bugger ran off to then.” Draco handed a cup of tea to her, which Hermione took gratefully. He had one for himself as well, and took the seat next to her. It was strange, the friendships that forged in war. But Hermione and Draco had worked closely in making school reforms for many years, and sometimes she could hardly believe this was the boy who’d called her a mudblood and believed it.

“He loves his Uncle Will,” Hermione commented, smiling as Will shifted in his sleep to ensure a firmer hold on the tiny blond boy in his arms. “I’m not sure whether to blame him or Teddy for Hugo’s obvious infatuation.” Her youngest was tangled up in Will’s legs further down the couch, comfortable in the strange position and dead to the world with his new stuffed dragon toy jammed firmly in his mouth.
Draco chuckled quietly. They settled into companionable silence for a few moments, and then Draco spoke. “How likely do you think he is to take us up on my help?”

“Considering his rage at this Crawford fellow, it won’t be long,” Hermione replied. Yesterday they’d all been in the Burrow, and so they’d finally had that chat with Will about his job and why he looked so tired. Finding out Will was intentionally using his gift again wasn’t really a surprise (in fact they encouraged it) but the fact that he only used it to catch highly prolific serial killers was alarming, more so the fact that it was more than the one-time consult they had assumed it was. Hermione had told Will to remember his saving people thing, and they’d all informed him that he was to call them in for backup at any moment, no matter the circumstances. They still kept the DA coins on their persons, after all, so it wasn’t like they were hard to reach. It wasn’t exactly healthy but they had long ago come to terms with it.

And they weren’t exactly useless in the muggle world either. Neville might have gone on to teach at Hogwarts, but Ron had some legal authority as an Auror, and Draco had his law degree in both the magical and muggle worlds. He and Hermione had been roommates during school (and boy hadn’t that been an experience) and she’d gotten a degree that allowed her legal ambassador rights in the muggle world as well as the wizarding one. She was one of the muggle liaisons in the ministry, and it was extremely helpful in staying up-to-date on the political scene.

They were in positions to be of more than enough help to Will, no matter the fact he lived half a world away, was firmly ensconced in the muggle world, and was bad at keeping in touch. He did write each of them once a month without fail, but other correspondence was slightly spotty.

Hermione turned to Draco. She didn’t want to bring down the mood of the holiday, but being prepared trumped all. “Should we tell him of the rumors?”

Draco frowned into his mug, giving the matter due thought. “If it keeps circulating, yes,” he finally answered. “But the ministry has been talking of revealing itself to muggles periodically for ages. Yes, I personally believe we can’t afford not to anymore, but it’s still only murmurs at this point. For now, let him sleep.”

Hermione nodded, and the two went back to their companionable silence watching over Will’s dreams. The man would return to the states in two days, tired from the social interaction but with renewed light in his eyes. They’d miss him but would be ready should he call. The whole matter already held a heavy sense of foreboding, and Hermione knew she wouldn’t be the only one increasing her daily practice after this. Tomorrow she would send out a pulse through the DA coin strapped to the underside of her watch (as they all wore them, never removing them) two warm buzzes - the symbol to prepare.

She really hoped nothing would come of this - the rumors of political upheaval or the shadows that haunted Will - but only the coming year could truly tell.

Chapter End Notes

Pretty sure this is one of the only fandoms where I can get away with letting my pretentious ba in english thoughts shine without it seeming out of place XD. Took a Dante course in undergrad and was beyond thrilled when S3 used The Vita Nuova for like, the base metaphor of the entire season.

No, Will hasn't gotten over Sirius' death nor stopped blaming himself for it. I told ya'll
he had big issues still hanging around his head. Stubborn cutie-pie moron.

And no, Hannibal didn't plant anything. Because Will-Who-Was-Harry would never forgive him and I do want these two idiots to fall in love, no matter how slow the burn. Hannibal just needs some time to figure his shit out.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Secrets are revealed, and the murder family grows a bit closer to becoming reality.

Chapter Notes

I didn't like ch 5, but I love this ch, so here - have it a week or two early. (I'm on, like, ch 9 or 10 writing wise, and try to post once I finish writing a chap so that things can keep to a fairly regular schedule instead of a whole bunch at once and then nothing for months because of writers block - happened once in my early days of ff writing.)

Will was in the middle of one of his favorite talks when Jack walked in. Talking about bite marks as both sexual behavior and fighting pattern always made for some truly hilarious faces on the students, especially those who were so earnestly copying down every word he said. There were always students like that, and they usually had the best reactions because they were just so fully engaged. He thought Jack would wait, as he had a few times before, but this time the man stormed in and declared, “Alright. Class dismissed, everyone out.”

Will halted his pacing, looking at Jack in shock.

The students scattered, and Will threw his papers down onto the floor. He imagined it was Jack’s skull instead, crashing and scattering into a wide, white mess, and felt marginally better. He took a couple of breaths to calm the urge to make the flight of fancy a reality and stated in a voice too accusatory to truly be flat, “You’re making it rather difficult to provide an education, Jack.”

Jack ignored him. Will was getting rather tired of being depended on and then so routinely ignored. “We found a match to a set of prints we pulled from the Turner home and they belong to a thirteen year old boy from Reston, Virginia. His name is Conor First.”

Will’s rage tempered a bit, dragged down by the sudden stone in his stomach. “Another kid?”

“A missing kid,” Jack corrected, still not looking at him. He seemed unwilling to part from his almost sentry-like position leaning against the desk with crossed arms and glaring at the classroom at large. Likely he didn’t want Will to see how affected he was. “He vanished ten months ago. The case was never solved.”

A pattern nagged at him. Will took his glasses off. “How many kids in the Frist family?”

Jack finally uncrossed his arms, showing some of his emotional turmoil as he bowed his head under the weight of his admission. “Three, just like the Turner family.”
Will hatted patterns.

Jack took in a breath and stood up properly. “We’re ready to go when you are, and you’re ready to go now, so let’s go.” Jack finally turned slightly and looked at him. Figured it would happen when the man was ordering him around.

Oh no. That face was far too drawn. The stone inside fell to his gut. “You’re expecting a crime scene.”

“Yes I am,” Jack stated as he turned and walked away. Obviously, Will was supposed to follow.

Rage simmered in him with a renewed vengeance. Will followed, of course, but he was seriously reconsidering his life choices. Maybe he should call Draco up after all. For one thing, he was just a consultant. He was still a teacher first and foremost. Will was angry enough about being so suddenly pulled out of class that his rage didn’t die the entire trip there. He understood the need Jack had to make Will tag along uselessly (when the team was perfectly capable of cleaning a crime scene without him) and his excuses for why it was alright (how could he not, with his oh so marvelous “gift”?!) but these trainees - these kids - were going out to the battlefield of the FBI and it was Will’s job to ensure they were prepared for it.

He’d seen too many children die because they hadn’t been adequately trained - too many bozos and fakes and incompetents to give them the skills needed to fight off the slaughter belonging to ruthless masters of darker arts than any of them could conceive of. The war would have gone a lot differently had Dumbledore simply given them proper DADA teachers instead of setting each one up as a test for him and him alone - letting them learn how to live, not just scrape by with their lives hanging by threads.

So he was already an hour simmered in his foul mood when they entered the house behind the SWAT team, and his mind already traversing down dark corridors when the smell hit him.

Will coughed as he fought off the screams echoing in his skull, reminding himself the moving shadows were only hallucinations and not real. Then he entered the home proper - saw the Christmas celebration torn to shreds by the death hanging in the air, the unmistakable scent of long-burnt flesh, the glimpse of a child in the fireplace, and promptly fell to his knees.

Someone was calling his name - his right name, the name he had given himself - but he couldn’t hear it loudly enough to find the speaker under the onslaught of screaming voices.

Colin - Colin was crying, screaming, burning - he had to get to him, had to put the fire out! Georgia’s voice joined, and Harry felt sick to his stomach - she was only twelve! She was just a second year! Leave her alone!

He couldn’t move - he was stuck - stuck and unable to do more than listen as children begged their savior to help them.

Harry summoned his strength and flung himself forward against his bonds as hard as he could. They broke, which dimly registered as odd, but his head slammed to the floor with all the force of a freight train before he could truly question that fact and then he was lost inside the darkness.

When he awoke, he was outside with a medic standing over him. The white coat and penlight confused him only a moment, until he remembered Harry was of the past and that he was Will, now - there was no war.
Will groaned and grabbed his head. He was pretty certain there wasn’t a war, but this sure felt like the aftershocks of Tom’s anger issues.

“Doing okay?”

Will turned his head to the right and peeked at Beverly through his fingers. Beverly - no war. Thank Merlin. “What hit me?”

Beverly snorted, but it only sounded amused in self-defense. “The floor,” was her helpful reply, and Will put the pieces together rather easily. “Christmas killings or the smell?”

Will sighed and cooperated with the medic, waiting until he was declared good to go with a minor concussion before turning to Beverly to explain. “The smell. Not the first time I’ve seen children burning alive.”

Beverly winced in sympathy. “Old case?”

Will fought off the urge to laugh like a crazy man. “Something like that.”

“Will.”

Will sighed, turning his attention to Jack. He’d wondered when the man would show up. “I appreciate the lack of screaming,” he mentioned, too worn out to control his smart mouth. He wondered if it would get him into trouble or if he’d gained enough sympathy points by braining himself to avoid that.

Thankfully, Jack seemed concerned enough not to comment on it. That didn’t make him any more tactful, however. “What was that, Will?”

Will fought the urge to roll his eyes - it’d only make his head hurt worse. “I believe the medical profession calls it a flashback, Jack.”

“It looked like PTSD,” Jack countered. Will spared a moment to appreciate the fact that Beverly was standing her ground and refusing to leave his side despite the tense atmosphere.

“I was diagnosed with low levels of PTSD a long time ago, Jack,” Will replied, suddenly just wanting to go home and crawl into bed. “I’m sure it’s somewhere in my file, and though it hasn’t been an issue in ages it is a factor in why I couldn’t pass the exams to become a real agent.”

Jack refused to let it go, obviously disbelieving. “You got that from being a cop?”

Now Will was angry. Or he would have been, if he’d had the energy. He had already been angry far too long that day, and braining himself was never fun. His rage was a sluggish serpent coiled in his chest at the moment. Still, he gave it a good go. “You can get PTSD from a lot of things, Jack,” he chided. “Saw several good men get it in the precinct. You’re right, though - mine comes from surviving terrorist bombings at seventeen.”

It was enough of a shocking answer to make the man back off. Will sighed in relief as Jack left, and wasn’t completely surprised when Beverly decided he needed a hug. He was surprised when it felt amazing, however, and at his willingness to lean into it. Will listened to the pulse of Bev’s heart and comforted himself in the warm energy of her life. She drove him home, and picked him up the next morning, and didn’t say another word about the whole thing.

Will reluctantly admitted that Hannibal may have been right - he seemed to have made another friend.
If nothing else, the episode meant everyone was decidedly less eager to play ‘let’s pick on the weird guy’ in the labs the next day. Will sat on an unused autopsy table and no one said a word. He took advantage of that fact to let himself droop a little. He was quieter too - let the team whose actual job this was do their fucking jobs for once.

“Mr. Frist and the children killed first,” Jack stated, pacing between the covered corpses, “saving Mrs. Frist for last. Same as the Turners.”

“Well not exactly the same,” Will spoke up. Jack was still displeased with him, and he might have been taking some pleasure in poking the man by being partially cryptic. “Something went wrong.”

Thankfully Beverly was in his corner and kept Will from running his mouth like an idiot. She interjected, “Not a single present under the tree for Mrs. Frist.”

“He took her presents. He took her motherhood.” Ah, thank you Trelawny for teaching him just the right lilt to a dead tone to be infuriating. Jack certainly thought so, since he crossed his arms and turned away from Will completely.

“Shooting her once wasn’t enough,” Zeller pointed out as Jack looked at Mrs. Frist. “First bullet travels beneath her scalp to it’s final resting place - base of her neck.”

“It still didn’t kill her,” Jack pointed out.

Beverly’s words were more helpful. “Hydrostatic shock of shell hitting skull would’ve caused brain damage.”

“Her body went into convulsions,” Will added. His tone was completely dead now. Forget subtle and petty revenge - he just wanted to go home.

“Shot her again. Put her out of her misery.” Zeller paused and cocked his head. “Different gun.”

“So someone else shot Conner’s mom,” Price surmised.

Jack and Price walked over to the third table. “So who is our additional corpse in the fireplace?”

How did no one get it? How was it that no one could just understand on their own, and admit it, and let Will fade into the background? He didn’t want to be here, dwelling on things he thought he’d escaped when the war had ended. He wanted this to be over.

For it to be over, however, Will had to speak. He took a breath and stared at the overhead lights, avoiding the sight of charred child, and only let a portion of his annoyance seep into his voice. “I’d say Connor Frist.”

They were all looking at him now, weren’t they?

“He’d been prepped to shoot his mother, not watch her suffer,” Will explained. He looked down from the ceiling and, yep, all staring.

Jack at least seemed to be on the uptake. “Connor couldn’t put his panic back in the bottle, so he got shot too.”

“Whoever shot him, disowned him.” Will hopped down off the table. Fuck it. “I’m going home.”

No one moved to stop him.
He looked stressed. Sitting there still as a soldier, bags growing under his eyes. Beverly had volunteered to take the news to Will in order to keep an eye on him. Someone had to, it was becoming alarmingly clear. He was a sweet guy, with humor under that prickly exterior, and obviously possessing a heart of gold if this case was any indication of how hard he took this use of his strange abilities.

Beverly would look after him. Jimmy was just a few days of her poking him into submission behind her, and Brian would eventually see it too. She’d make sure Will had people in his corner, especially because against Jack she’d need all the help she could get.

“Ever heard of Willard Wigan?” Beverly announced as she finally walked into the room. Will could use a jolt out of whatever headspace he was in. “He’s this artist that does micro-sculptures, like putting the Obamas in the eye of a needle.” Will didn’t react, face perfectly still as porcelain, so Beverly put down the coffee and walked around to his side of the desk. “He’s so focused that he can work between the beats of his heart. I guess archers do the same thing, right?”

Will just made a slight noise of inquiry, and Beverly gave up. If he wanted to talk about work, they’d talk about work. “What are you looking at?”

Will shrugged one awkward shoulder. “Both these kids are small. Underweight for their age.”

Oh, Beverly hoped this wasn’t going where she thought this was going. “You think there’s a connection?”

Judging by the way Will was blinking nervously and started rubbing his hand over his face, he’d obviously thought of that too and wasn’t very happy about possibly adding abuse to their already complicated case. His words allayed her fears however, even if they only seemed to slightly comfort him. “I’m thinking possible ADHD diagnoses for both the boys. Ritalin, Focalin, any medication containing methylphenidate can affect appetite and slow long-term growth in kids.”

Good. She didn’t want to think the kids were just really good at hiding it. It only brought up more questions of why this whole case seemed to hit Will harder than any of the others they’d worked on so far. To lighten the mood, Beverly continued on with her comparison. “Another thing about Willard Wigan - he had a lonely childhood. He used his tiny sculptures as an escape.” Beverly turned around to lean on the desk, giving her the perfect view for Will Graham’s confused puppy face. She wondered if he’d gotten it patented yet.

“Who’s Willard Wigan?” Will asked.

Beverly scoffed and rolled her eyes. “It’s a good thing you’re cute, Graham cracker.”

Will looked even more confused at that and started mumbling, “You’re not the first to call me that, I hope you know. Very original.”

Beverly ignored him. “Price got a hit on the ballistics-matching program he’s been running on the two family murders. The bullet that put Mrs. Frist out of her misery matches three used in a murder in Bangor, Maine, a year ago. Mother of a thirteen-year-old boy shot to death with her own gun.”

Will’s jaw tensed and unclenched, and just like that the shadows were back. “Thirteen-year-old milk carton material?” The words seemed to have been forced out of his throat, and the look Will gave her made Beverly want to check his forehead for a fever. She managed not to joke that Will looked like milk carton material - she didn’t know how he’d take it.

Beverly shrugged instead, and pointed to the coffee she’d put on the desk earlier. “That’s yours -
“Thanks,” Will replied. He shut his laptop, ran tired hands over his face again, and then pushed himself to his feet. Beverly waited patiently for him, let him take the time he needed. It was another reason she’d volunteered - Jack would have rushed him, and it was clear the man wasn’t sleeping. Beverly wondered if she needed to start keeping a file on him, or if she should find Dr. Lecter and ensure he knew how bad Will looked. Not that the rest of them looked much better, granted, but still.

Will followed her to Jack’s office, where they all crowded around the screen. Jack pulled up the missing persons page in question. “C.J. Lincoln disappeared six months before his mother’s murder, hasn’t been seen since,” Jack informed them flatly. Even he was showing the strain of all of this, which was the best indicator for difficult cases Beverly had.

“He has none of the characteristics of a sadist or sociopath,” Will added in.

“Right,” Jack agreed. “No shoplifting, no malicious destruction of property, no assault, no battery. He was kind to animals for god’s sake.”

Will sounded frustrated. “The firearm says we are looking at the Peter Pan to our lost boys.”

“But it takes a sophisticated level of manipulation to convince young boys to kill their families in cold blood,” Jack countered.

Beverly and the others just watched, confused at which side of the argument Jack and Will were on - they kept switching.

As Jack did now. “Well he’s older. He’s been out in the world. Maybe he picked up a few things.”

“You usually don’t pick that up on the street,” Will pointed out. “Not unless you’re fighting a war, or have a need for it.”

Jack shrugged. “Killing his own mother wasn’t enough. Maybe he felt he needed to free some other children like he’d been freed.”

Will twisted his mouth and didn’t look convinced. Beverly wondered what again what personal issues this was bringing up - why he specifically pointed out “war” in his example.

Ultimately, it seemed just as likely as it didn’t. So they cautiously decided they’d found Peter Pan.

“Abigail’s lost too. And perhaps it’s our responsibility, yours and mine, to help her find her way.”

The case had left Will more stressed than usual - all those children just giving away what Will would have destroyed anything to gain - and it made him think irrationally about the fact that he’d taken that very thing from another child. Talking with Hannibal had helped, as it usually did (surprisingly enough), but those words just wouldn’t stop ringing in his head.

Before Will really knew what he was doing, he had parked at Port Haven and signed in. He was only just talking himself out of it again when he managed to stumble upon Abigail - quite literally. He’d been wandering a back, seldom used corridor and tripped over her legs - she’d been sitting on
“Oh my God, I’m sorry!” Abigail proclaimed, leaning forward in attempt to help him. “Are you okay?”

Will sat up easily enough, giving the girl a tired smile. “I’m fine - bit of a clutz really, wasn’t watching where I was going. Didn’t even notice you till now, sorry.”

Abigail sat back as he settled down against the wall, the both of them staring across the narrow hall at each other. “Lost in your head?” she asked.

“Very.” Will replied. Taking a deep breath and screwing up all the courage he had (he’d faced down a Dark Lord, a teenage girl shouldn’t be this frightening) Will finally just admitted the truth. “This case is getting to me - children killing their families, mothers last - and it’s just bringing to the front all of my unresolved feelings about you.”

Abigail seemed to be taking the news of the case he probably shouldn’t have given specifics about rather well, cocking her head in that odd, almost dog-like way she had and ignoring that to ask, “Me?”

Will smiled, though it was more of a pained thing than happy. “You had a father who loved you and I stole that from you. No matter how much you knew, how involved you were, you still knew he was only doing it to avoid killing you - because he loved you too much.”

Abigail looked at him with wide eyes, frightened.

Will’s smile turned gentle. “I’m not going to tell, Abigail, although if we talk up captor bonding and how much worse it is with family and the fact you were dependent on him I don’t think you’ll get much trouble about it.”

Abigail’s lip trembled slightly, but her voice was even as she asked, “Why?”

Will sighed and leaned his head back, staring at the ceiling. “I never knew my parents,” he began slowly. “Once I was eleven, it seemed everyone in the world knew about them. They were constantly telling me how I had my mother’s eyes, my father’s talent at sports. They had so many years that I never got. I would have done anything to have them, and having them I would have done whatever necessary to keep them - I know myself well enough to know that I wouldn’t just lure for them. I’d kill.”

Abigail was silent a while, and then she cautiously asked, “Which sport?”

Something in the way she said it caught Will’s attention, and he looked at her. Studied her, stared into her eyes and let his empathy show him what the nagging feeling was.

She stared right back, braced as if readying to fight off a Legilimens, and it all clicked.

“You’re a witch,” Will stated, blinking in shock. “Your father probably an old pureblood - house far away from society, barest of electric amenities - it makes so much more sense now.” Another thought occurred, and Will crawled over to sit next to Abigail. “Shit - you’re probably thrumming with the need to do magic - it must be crawling under your skin like a snake by now. Here, I’ll keep an eye out, do you know lema?”

Abigail turned to him, plain relief obvious despite her confusion. “No - but I don’t have my wand.”

“I’ll get it,” Will promised, “but it’s not hard to do this without one - it was made for lost wizards.
Here,” Will took her hand, and showed her how to form her fingers as if around a tiny bowl. “Think of it as a pool of light that will rest in the bowl your hand makes. Focus the energy, and when you have the image firmly in your mind, wiggle your ring finger three times and say lema - should only take twice the energy lumos does.”

Abigail focused, and three minutes and one whispered word later, a soft light filled her hands. Abigail laughed in glee, and the light fed off her joy to shine brighter.

“Shh!” Will covered her hands with his, helping to block it from view as he looked around. “Focus - make it softer, gentler, like a light in a far window, or a lantern in school corridors.”

Abigail focused, and the glare receded. She played with it for several minutes, Will holding his hands high enough that she could see the light as he kept an eye on their surroundings. After six highly alert minutes, the light dissipated.

Will found himself with an armful of young brunette, and he couldn’t help enveloping Abigail in a hug as the lost kid clung to him. Will found himself stroking a hand through her hair slowly, nearly humming to comfort her as he had Teddy when he was younger. “Can I teach you to fish?” Will found himself asking. “Properly, I mean - maybe replace some of those associations with newer ones, better ones.”

Abigail gave a short laugh against his shirt. “I don’t think Dr. Bloom would like that.”

“I’ll talk to Alana.” Will snorted as a thought occurred to him. “Probably have to get Hannibal’s help to convince her fully - two psychiatrists arranging a playdate for their damaged pups.”

Silence rang a moment, and the Abigail asked, “Are you messed up too?”

Will sighed, taking her weight more fully upon himself. “I only have an honorary degree from the Hogwarts class of ‘97 - so yeah, probably more than I know.”

Anyone in the wizarding world would know what he was talking of. Abigail certainly would - she was a smart girl. She burrowed deeper into his arms, breathing a sigh of relief, and Will knew it was going to be hopeless to ignore his feelings for her. It would probably only hurt to pull away at this point, being her only magical connection in a world of muggles. She needed him, just as he had needed something, anything, all those summers at the Dursley’s. Summer before fifth year had been torture. He wouldn’t put this gentle soul through that, not if he could help it.

“I’ve got a small flashlight,” he stated softly. “Don’t let me leave without giving it to you. At night, hide that and a book under your covers and hold the flashlight in your hand as you cast lema - it’s a small enough blast of magic that it shouldn’t be traceable if people are looking for wandless magic here, and if you use it sparingly most people will assume it’s the flashlight and not notice anything off about it. Especially if you learn how to match the frequency with the actual light’s.”

“And when the nurses bring up the fact I’m not sleeping with Dr. Bloom?”

“Be defensive,” Will answered. “Evasive. Eventually, let her wear you down to the point you mumble out nightmares.”

Abigail scoffed. “That really works?”

“Every time.” Will laughed slightly. “I know - I didn’t think it would either.”

They fell into silence for several minutes, and then Abigail pulled away. Will let her, ignoring the twinge of pain in his heart. It promptly vanished when Abigail invited him back to her room, where
she sprawled out on the bed and Will took a chair. “So you're a Legilimens? That's the big secret?”

Will actually laughed at that. “Nope - too many mirror neurons,” he clarified, tapping the side of his head. “My empathetic abilities are entirely muggle.”

Abigail winced in sympathy. “So, no turning it off then?” Will shook his head, and she commented, “No wonder you wear such ugly glasses.”

If Will hadn’t done the same himself all those years at Hogwarts, he’d have been amazed at the personality change. Abigail was immensely relaxed around him now, and it made Will’s heart ache with a familiar warmth even as he put the small flashlight on her bedside table. “Well to be fair, my eyesight has always been shit,” he remarked before asking, “What was your best subject in school?”

Abigail grimaced. “I did well in charms, but what I loved was history - not much of a career builder there.”

Will snorted. “We were taught by a ghost who probably didn’t even know he was dead - history was never my strong suit. That’s why the muggle colleges, I guess.”

“They’ve got such a wider range,” Abigail added, kicking her feet behind her and picking at her bedding. “And there’s more options for career paths, even if I don’t know what I want yet.”

Will shrugged, purposefully not reflecting back any of the anxiety Abigail was currently trying to hide. It was a big pressure put on kids - Teddy was going through the same thing. “You’ve got all the time in the world to decide. I switched several times - hell, look at Hannibal: he’s ridiculously successful and he went from surgeon to psychiatrist rather late in the game.”

“Well is right,” Hannibal added, making both inhabitants of the room jump. “There’s no need to devote your entire future to one career option yet Abigail, you’ve got plenty of time.”

“Christ,” Will breathed, hand over his heart. “How long have you been lurking there?”

“Only long enough to hear your good advice,” Hannibal replied with a smile. “I had thought Abigail might want some company on this fine day but you seem to have beaten me to it.”

Will tried not to flush at the fact that it was Hannibal’s words that had driven him here, but knew himself well enough to figure he’d failed in that endeavor. Hannibal was at least kind enough not to comment on it and changed the subject. “I had wondered if you might like to join me for dinner?”

Abigail immediately perked up, and then looked to Will with a furrowed brow. “I didn’t think Dr. Bloom was letting me out yet, since I got out for Christmas.”

Hannibal actually looked slightly mischievous for once. “Alana does not necessarily have to know.”

Will shrugged as the girl continued staring at him, letting it be Abigail’s decision. She thought only a moment before she looked back up to Hannibal and stated, “I don’t think I should - I want to go fishing with Will, and I need to be good to convince Dr. Bloom to let me.”

“Fishing?” Hannibal asked with a raised brow. Will studiously avoided his gaze. “That sounds like a marvelous idea. We could make a day of it, if you will allow me to cook the catch.”

“That’d be great!” Abigail perked up immediately. “We could all go out together - maybe stay the night and just enjoy the weekend.”

“The weather’s supposed to be clear in two weeks,” Will commented, mentally reviewing the state of
his house. He could clean the mess in two weeks. “That’ll give me time to fix up that hole in the bedroom wall, get a pull-out up there for Alana.”

“She will most likely insist on coming along,” Hannibal agreed. “It would be a nice retreat for all of us. Shall we invite her to dinner and start in on convincing her?”

Will snorted, even as he nodded. Alana was convinced of very little she didn’t believe in - it would be an uphill fight to accomplish. He found himself believing that if anyone could do it, however, it would be Hannibal.

“I should feed the dogs,” Will stated, standing as Hannibal took out his phone. “If I’m staying away late, that is. If Alana would rather not have me over just let me know.” It was still the early afternoon, but even so. He liked to be prepared for these things - his dogs deserved it.

Abigail looked like the idea was preposterous, but before she could comment Will bent over and kissed her softly on the top of her head. Which immediately felt like an instinct he shouldn't have followed through on, and so Will stammered an awkward goodbye and fled.

Hannibal watched Will leave, immensely amused at the sight. “It seems you two have gotten closer,” he couldn’t help but comment.

Abigail looked down at her duvet and went back to picking at it. “We talked it out. He’s kind, and he understands - my dad, and-and why-”

“Why you still love him,” Hannibal gently finished for her. Abigail nodded slowly, and Hannibal walked over to take Will’s vacated seat. “Will understands things many others don’t, and this trait does not always herald itself from the advantage of his gifts. He is, truly, just that remarkable a man.”

Abigail gave him a shrewd look. “That’s a rather warm tone for a psychiatrist.”

Hannibal allowed a small one-shouldered shrug. “I confess myself thinking of Will more and more like a friend, despite the short time we have known each other.”

Abigail raised an eyebrow at him and retorted, “Aren’t you supposed to be withdrawn and neutral?”

“I am supposed to be objective,” Hannibal corrected. “But yes, I have found myself having a harder time of it with William than with others.”

Abigail smiled then, and Hannibal felt like he had successfully navigated some defense. She certainly had taken to Will then, hadn’t she?

Speaking of, Hannibal excused himself and called Alana. She picked up immediately, so he must have caught her at a good time. “Hello Hannibal.”

“Hello Alana, is this a good time?”

“Yes of course, what is it?”

Hannibal gave Abigail a smile. “I was just visiting Abigail and wanted to know if you would object to my taking her home for dinner? The food here is... adequate,” Abigail giggled at his tone, “but I find myself in a cooking mood.”

“You’re always in a cooking mood,” Alana replied. Hannibal could hear her sigh heavily. “Are you
certain that’s a good idea, Hannibal? I told you that you stepping in as a surrogate would only hamper her recovery.”

As if he’d forgotten. “Abigail and Will have both expressed interest in an outing. I suggested this dinner with myself and you present not only as an opportunity to discuss it in a location away from the safety this place must represent in order to help Abigail in case any arguments arose but also as an opportunity for you to see them interact in a safe, controlled environment.”

Alana was quiet for a beat, and when she spoke she sounded angry. “They’ve been interacting more then? I’m not certain how to take that, Hannibal.”

“Whatever their initial interaction, it has changed,” Hannibal reassured her. “Come, let us have dinner, and you can see for yourself. If you still feel that way I shall endeavor to help limit their interactions.”

Alana sighed again, and gave in. Hannibal gave her a time for dinner, thanked her, and bid the woman goodbye.

Abigail was staring at him in wonder. “You have to teach me how to do that.”

“I imagine the week was more trying than she’s let on,” Hannibal replied. “Usually it is not so easy - Alana’s strong will is a large part of why I mentored her.”

Abigail was smiling, however, and it was a good look on her. “Can Will come early and help us prepare?”

Hannibal found himself smiling back, indulging her. “Of course. Allow me to call him; why don’t you grab your coat?”

Abigail jumped off her bed, and Hannibal stood to stand just outside the door as he called Will. Will, as he might have guessed, was unbelieving. “She agreed?”

“Likely she wants proof that you two are still antagonistic,” Hannibal admitted, “but she did agree. It is the perfect time to convince her otherwise. And you may bring a change of clothes for the morning - I have a guest room, and I know it is quite a drive to be making so late. I would feel bad asking, only Abigail has expressed a desire to see you there.”

“She did, huh?” Will asked wryly. He sounded amused.

“I confess to wanting you there as well,” Hannibal allowed himself to answer truthfully. “Although Abigail specifically requested you arrive in time to help us with the preparations.”

Will sighed. “Seven?”

“Seven-twenty,” Hannibal corrected. “Dinner is at eight, but we will welcome you anytime.”

“Um... thanks. I’ll-I’ll be there. Uh, bye.”

The line went dead, and Hannibal fought back a feeling of fondness. He would certainly have to decide what to do about these feelings, wouldn’t he? And soon.

Will was on his way home when Jack called him. Another lead, another meeting. He was too tired for this. And so he didn’t even bother with propriety (beyond calling Hannibal to let him know he
might be late, or non-existent) and simply sat on the small table at the edge of the room, leaning his head back against the wall. Will even had his eyes closed, that was how little he could bring himself to care at the moment.

Jack was using a laser pointer to show the drawn pattern on the board. “Bangor, Maine. Stamford, Connecticut. And recently Reston, Virginia.”

“This places each of the murders approximately five hundred miles from the one before it,” Price commented.

“Right,” Jack affirmed. He was also sitting, as was Beverly when Will checked the room layout lazily. At least he wasn’t the only one too tired to care.

Zeller, as usual, was the voice of dissent. “You’re trying to establish a geographical pattern when the murders were weeks apart.”

“Other patterns too,” Will chimed in. “Intruders are minors, middle children from traditional, affluent families.”

“We know they’re moving south,” Jack interrupted, voice suddenly loud in the near-empty room, “so that means we wanna cover the border of North Carolina and Georgia. We need to get files on every missing boy within two-hundred miles of North Carolina.”

“There’s a pattern,” Will started again. Why, again, did no one else notice? “Less to do with geography than psychology.”

Jack finally let him run that train of thought, although he sounded disbelieving. “What kind of kid does this?”

“And what kind of kid follows a kid that does this?” Will pointed out.

Jack looked a moment away from sighing in exasperation. “There’s no indication that these kids came from abusive families.”

Will shook his head slightly. “No, no, no.” Seriously, come on. Did he have to spell it out for everyone? “Captor bonding. It’s a passive psychological response to a new master - it’s been an essential survival tool for a million years. You bond with your captor, you survive. You don’t,” Will took a shuddering deep breath in as he leaned his head back again. He really needed to stop drudging up memories of the war. He finished his sentence on the exhale, “You’re breakfast.”

Speaking of food, Hannibal and Abigail might just have to be disappointed. Jack had caught hold of Alana sometime and dragged her in to help sort through the mess of missing persons files. She also agreed with Will this time. “Without the interference of a leader these kids would never consider violent action.”

“Our missing kid’s a boy,” Will stated, trying to help weed out erroneous files. He had to clear his throat, hating how close to home this case hit. “A paradox in the midst of a normal family. He’s an outsider who doesn’t look like one. He’d have a vocation - something inventive or mechanical.”

“Here’s one,” Beverly called out. “Family moved from Biloxi to Charleston to Fayetteville in the last three years. He won a junior high award for his work on some pretty sophisticated computer circuitry.”

Alana was clearly troubled by something and asked, “Why do you think these kids are susceptible to C.J. Lincoln?”
“Because our boy may have a brother but their ages or interests keep them apart,” Will answered. “So, he’s a brother without a brother.”

Alana nodded, and said, “Brothers looking for a mother.”

Will went still and looked at Alana, all the noise in his head silenced.

Alana tilted her head in a tiny shrug. “They’re killing the mothers last.”

..... Well shit.

Will excused himself and went to knock on Jack’s door, file in hand. He only waited until the man looked at him to speak. “It’s not just C.J. Lincoln. There’s an adult with some formative sway. It’s a woman - a mother figure, I think. She’s,” the words nearly hissed out, painful to say, “looking to form a family.”

Jack looked contemplative. “Family can have a contagion effect on some people, that influences them to adopt similar behaviors and attitudes.” He looked just as unhappy as Will.

“Whoever this woman is,” Will stated as he abandoned his perch in the doorway, “she wants these children to burst with love for her. But she has to erase their family to do that.”

“So,” Jack continued the train of thought, “she abducts them, convinces them no one can love them as much as she does, and then makes damn sure of it.”

“A security camera in, uh,” he checked the file again, “a convenience store in Alexandria, Virginia caught footage of one Chris O’Halloran this morning. He was with an unidentified woman.” Will gave Jack the file and turned away.

“Where’s this kid’s parents?” Jack asked.

“Fayetteville, North Carolina.”

They headed out immediately, and Will asked Alana to pass along his apologies to Hannibal and Abigail. He had to admit, he did like how efficient SWAT teams were. He’d been along on a couple of Ron’s auror missions before the man had received his own team and had not been very impressed. Granted, things were a little chaotic after the war, but still. Not being able to just bark orders and have them followed was one reason Will hadn’t wanted to become an auror. Perhaps it was better now that Ron had taken over, and the ministry worked to become slightly less inept after the war.

They swarmed the backyard just as C.J. aimed to take the first shot, and one of the SWAT team fired, taking him down. Everyone scattered, but Will only had eyes for Chris. He’d failed too many children, he wasn’t going to fail this one. “Chris, wait!” he called out as they ran around the pool. Oh, he hoped the kid wasn’t gonna jump in. He was too old to be dragging soaking-wet angry kids out of their drowning location of choice.

The kid stopped and pulled a gun on him, causing Will to draw his own on instinct. The cocking of other, more powerful guns, made him grimace and curse his own battle-trained instincts. Going against every last screaming muscle in his body, Will forced his arm up. “Don’t shoot!” he ordered. “Don’t shoot,” he repeated, this time to Chris. Will did his best to calm his instincts by focusing on the scared child. “It’s okay,” he told him, “you’re home now. Put the gun down, Christopher.”

A woman in an ugly salmon jacket came out of the shed then, creeping up behind the kid. Her gun was positioned oh so carefully, pointed at the boy’s heart in a way that would allow her to turn it and shoot him in a moment. Her own, twisted facsimile of a loving hug as she ordered in a sickly sweet
What the actual fuck?

Will felt his inhibitions die. The woman wanted Christopher to prove his love by killing a man, knowing it meant that he’d be shot, probably badly, and then stuck in jail or a mental hospital (if they were kind) for the rest of his life? She really was a piece of work wasn’t she?

Will would be glad to take her down. Starting with taking her “son”.

Will lowered to his knees, placing his gun on the ground. A kid trembling that much wouldn’t be able to shoot before someone got into a good sniping position with Will making himself such an obvious non-threat. “Christopher,” Will added in a soft, gentle tone, just to really drive it home, “please.”

A shot, and the woman went down in a spray of red. Shoulder shot, good form. Will was on his feet and taking Christopher’s gun before the child even got a good look at where the woman had fallen. He made sure to keep the kid turned into him so that he couldn’t see the bleeding woman. Poor boy had been through enough trauma.

Beverly was running from the tree line, marking her as the one who’d taken the shot, and Will found himself impressed. It seemed he could depend on her more than the others he knew. Good - it was nice to know someone had half a brain around here. “Come on Christopher,” Will gentled the boy. He remembered what it was like. “It’s all over now, I promise - the worst part is over.”

“I’m sorry about dinner.”

Hannibal leaned against the kitchen counter and held in his sigh. Normally he wouldn’t dare to be so crass, but Abigail had been worried, and Alana had mentioned that Will would be heading into a dangerous situation, and in these circumstances Hannibal felt it alright to accept a phone call during dinner time. Besides, the time away would give Alana a chance to interrogate Abigail about her changed attitude towards Will.

“I understand completely, Will,” Hannibal replied. “It was a sudden invitation, and your case was certainly more important. Did you manage to get there in time?”

“ Barely,” Will answered with a sigh. “They were just starting when we entered. I had a gun pulled on me by a child.”

Hannibal paused. That was... an odd inflection. Almost as if Will was tired of it, implying that it had happened before. “We’ll talk of it in our next session then,” he finally settled on. “Is everyone alright?”

“Everyone made it out alright.”

Hannibal rephrased. “Are you alright, William?”

There was silence for a moment. “I’m not sure,” Will finally answered. “I just need some sleep, I think. I’ll get there, in time.”

“You cannot always just let things work themselves out,” Hannibal advised. “I can bump up our next session if you need to, and my door is always open.”
He wished he could see the expression on Will’s face. The man in question simply changed the subject. “If Abigail wants I’ll swing by, but it would be near midnight and I’m not sure how late she’s allowed out and.”

“We’ll simply plan better for next time,” Hannibal assured him, cutting the tired ramble off. “Abigail is aware you’d be here if you could. If you wouldn’t mind though, perhaps you could inform me when you arrive home, so I know you haven’t gone to sleep behind the wheel?”

Will chuckled at that. “I’ve been looking bad, haven’t I? I’ll text you - if that’s okay?”


“Will do,” Will replied, and they both hung up.

Hannibal returned to the dining room and gratefully noticed nothing was broken. “Will won’t be joining us,” he commented. “They did find the boys, however - arrived just in time to save this third family from what I understand.”

Alana breathed out in relief. Abigail still looked slightly troubled. “And Will? He’s okay?”

“Shaken,” Hannibal admitted, though he kept the details to himself, “and tired, but he’ll be just fine.”

“I should take Abigail back,” Alana commented, standing. Hannibal was glad to see they had both finished dinner.

He didn’t need Alana’s significant look to inform him she wanted to continue a conversation, it was clear without it. So Hannibal merely nodded before turning to Abigail. “I hope you have a good night, Abigail. I’ll drop in sometime next week when my schedule allows it.”

Abigail nodded, and then surprised them both by hugging him. Hannibal hugged her back briefly, before pulling away and seeing both women to Alana’s car. Once they were gone, he turned his attention to the dishes in attempt to root out the disappointment he felt. Odd, that his house had never truly seemed empty after guests before, even if he was still perturbed that Will had been unable to make it.

Chapter End Notes

Surprise! Abigail's a witch! Yay!

Also, I did mention that the war in this story went very differently from the books and was much more brutal, right? Because it was. I forget if I mentioned that, I'm kinda half asleep and procrastinating laundry and calling apartments and everything else I gotta do before the move.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Sleepwalking and corpse angels always make for fun revelations. At least, Hannibal thinks so. Will is just annoyed.

Chapter Notes

I really like this chapter. It's a good ep, which made a good chap. Would have had it up sooner, but our fucking wifi's bein a little bitch again. Srsly, we just need to switch servers or something.

Also, sick. Woo-hoo. Gotta go back to work tomorrow cuz there's no one left to cover, which will be fun.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The road was familiar. Stretching on and on for miles - an endless grey amongst endless trees beneath an endless sky. It was comforting, here. Familiar. Nothing to do, no one to save. Just his feet, and the pavement, and the journey.

He’d... forgotten, why he had to go. Reasoning escaped him. But if he’d already come this far then there must have been a reason. And so, with no desire not to, he continued on.

A huff of breath, and echoed steps of hooves on asphalt.

The stag was familiar too. It had been with him since that night in the forest. Been with him the night he’d saved himself, and the only father he’d ever known. It had led him all his life, from the shadows. But the pale silvery mist had long since been given form - black and twisted and feathered like a creature unsuited to daylight. Strange. Nearly monstrous.

It huffed, and he found his feet stopping to let the stag nearer. Closing in though not on prey. No, on something... else. Something far more precious, and far more deadly.

He found his eyes moving to look before he could reprimand them, and the stag replied by nudging his hand. Gently, so gently, as if to alleviate the cold of it’s touch.

... Cold? Was it... wet?

His eyes faced where prompted, head bobbing slightly in the movement’s wake. As beckoned, he looked.

Lights. Red and blue will o’ the wisps, far away and yet near. Odd. He’d never seen any on this path before, nor so tangled together as if they were not many lights, but, maybe, two...?

He swayed, and blinked, and suddenly the lights formed an object. Car. Police car. Flashing lights... road? He was?
Will winced and moved an arm to shield his eyes from the lights as they grew harsher. Sound was filtering in, slowly, as well as the details of the road. It was the same as before, and yet changed. Something... different. And not just the parking police car.

He didn’t know if he could muster the energy to handle threatening. And that was... concerning.

The one to his left looked him over, flashlight ready. “You lost?” he asked.

Will winced and turned slightly away for a moment, hissing slightly at the sudden influx of noise. He wasn’t - this was the - wasn’t it?

Will looked back at the cop. “Uh, what?”

Kindness, thankfully, was at the forefront of the man’s emotions. “What’s your name?”

Will blinked. He focused on the question. “Will Graham.”

The cop was apparently sticking to the book on this one as his partner quickly surveyed the area. “Do you know where you are, Mr. Graham?”

Uhhh... “No.” Will shook his head and sniffed again.

The cop nodded. “Where do you live?”

“Wolf Trap, Virginia,” Will answered before he began to cough. Oh, god, it was cold. Will tried not to shiver.

“We’re in Wolf Trap,” the cop stated, nodding gently, and Will found himself mimicking the motion without meaning to, “so that’s good. You’re close to home.” Then the cop shined his light to the side of them and asked, “Is that yours?”

Will took a moment to look, half-convinced the stag would be there. To his fortune there was no beast of shadows, only mottled fur. “Oh,” he couldn’t help but to feel overwhelmed with a surge of love for his newest pack member. “Hi, Winston.” Will moved to pet Winston, who danced awkwardly away (Will didn’t exactly blame him - it must have been a tense... however long he was out) but the shift of his feet turned on his pain receptors and he winced again. “Can I sit down, my feet are sore,” Will asked the cop, a bit roughly.

The cop nodded, kindness and sympathy warring for dominant emotion. “Why don’t we take you home?”

Will shivered, and finally gave in to the need to rub some warmth back into his arms. “Okay.”

They were kind as they got Will and Winston set up in the back of the police car. Will wrapped up in the blanket they gave him, and petted a now-calmer Winston as the dog rested his head in his lap. Then came the necessary questions. “Are you on any drugs? Medication? Prescription or otherwise?”

Will sighed. “No.”

“You been drinking?” the cop inquired.

“No.” Except, actually, wait - “Yes - not, not excessively. I had two fingers of whiskey before I went
to bed.” Thank Merlin for the fact that Hermione sent a disapproving email every time it was more than that (she’d charmed the house with an alert).

The cop, thankfully, seemed inclined to believe him. “You have a history of sleepwalking Mr. Graham?”

Will blinked, registering how soft the light looked from inside the car. Taking a deep breath, Will made himself cooperate with the questioning. Not cooperating could lead to sticky situations, and they seemed honest cops, and if he was still sleeping then it couldn’t really hurt him (not anymore). He’d been asked, he should answer.

And so Will made himself look at the cop, and said, “I’m not even sure if I’m awake now.”

Winston yawned, and Will turned his attentions to his friend. He could at least be certain to take proper care of such a loyal pup.

Will had managed to get home, ensure his dogs were fed and let out and properly pampered, and himself showered and clean and dressed before he finally gave in and drove to Baltimore. The sun was up fully - but only just - by the time Will rang Hannibal’s doorbell and thought that this had, perhaps, been a terrible idea. He’d almost panicked his way out of it when Hannibal opened the door, tying his robe shut tiredly. Then Will had stood there like a moron and greeted his psychiatrist with an intelligent, “Uh...”

Hannibal blinked. “Good morning, Will. Come in.”

“M-morning,” Will managed, entering where beckoned. Hannibal shut the front door and led him down the hall and to the right as Will babbled the entire episode in a rush as way of apologizing and explaining all at once.

Hannibal simply took him into a spacious kitchen that throbbed like the very heart of the home and starting fussing with a ridiculously intricate machine. The smell informed Will it was producing coffee. Thank Merlin.

Hannibal poured a cup and asked, “Although I may be, is it safe to assume you’re not sleepwalking now?”

Will winced. “Sorry, I know it’s early. I just...” Will trailed off a moment before sucking up his courage and finishing his statement, “couldn’t wait any longer.”

“Never apologize for coming to me,” Hannibal’s assurance came easily. Too easily, Will thought. He didn’t deserve it, and with his usual clientele Hannibal surely didn’t have to deal with this sort of thing often. Hannibal turned off the drip and added a single spoon of sugar as he continued, “Office hours are for patients. My kitchen is always open to friends.”

Will watched Hannibal stir and avoided all knowledge of that statement. Friends. Was that what they were? A patient and therapist, however unconventional? Will was still paying the man. He absently wondered if he was going to be billed for this.

Hannibal certainly spoke as if they were in session, despite the fact that he was handing Will a fancy glass mug of coffee. “Onset of sleepwalking in adulthood is less common than in children.”

Will took the cup gratefully. “It could be a seizure,” he said, unsure if the sentence was meant as a statement or a question.
Hannibal paused, thinking as he started his own cup of coffee. Rather quickly he replied, “I’d argue good old-fashioned post-traumatic stress.”

Will snorted into his cup. “My PTSD’s never made me sleepwalk before.”

“PTSD can shift and change over time,” Hannibal pointed out, although he never looked away from his strange coffee contraption. “Especially if new traumas are heaped onto the old ones. Jack has gotten your hands very dirty.”

Will almost sighed, but figured this might be a sign. Even Hannibal thought this was a bad idea, apparently. “I wasn’t forced into the field,” Will protested. It sounded token and flat, even to him.

“I wouldn’t say forced,” Hannibal countered, still looking at his coffee. Then, he raised his head to attempt eye contact. “Manipulated, would be the word I’d choose.”

Will kept his eyes on his own cup. “You and Hermione would agree,” he commented.

“You talked of this over your holiday visit then?” Hannibal asked.

Will shrugged. “The whole group expressed their... misgivings,” which was probably putting it lightly, but Will really didn’t want to go into any of that at the moment.

“They’re right to worry,” Hannibal stated. Which only meant that yeah, Will should probably do something about this if even his psychiatrist was worried.

“I can -” Will stopped, grimaced, and corrected himself, “I am moderately certain I can handle it.”

“Somewhere between denying horrible events and calling them out lies the truth of psychological trauma,” Hannibal interjected just too forcefully to be casual, while he added sugar to his own coffee.

Will was slightly shocked at the man’s bluntness. “So I can’t handle it.”

Hannibal at least backed up his claim with some good jargon as he put the stirring spoon away and faced Will fully. “Your experience may have overwhelmed ordinary functions that give you a sense of control.”

“If my body is walking around without my permission I’d say that’s a loss of control,” Will replied. Or a curse, but he’d already checked for those, at least as much as he could - he’d have to call Ron later and have the man double check.

Hannibal nodded graciously before taking a drink. When he finished, he broached a new topic. “Sleepwalkers demonstrate a difficulty handling aggression. Are you experiencing difficulty with aggressive feelings?”

Will gave a wry smile and decidedly didn’t laugh. It probably wouldn’t be socially acceptable, or smart. “I’ve had difficulty fielding aggression since my teens, Dr. Lecter,” Will answered. “We were caught up in the turmoil of things that led to terrorist bombings, and being part of that didn’t make it easier.” Will looked back down to his cup, swirling the brown liquid. It was surprisingly clear. “I learned to channel some into other things, or just - got good at biting my tongue. So I’m not feeling any more aggressive than usual, no.”

Hannibal tilted his head slightly to the left. “No more than usual?”

Will sighed. “You said Jack sees me as fine china to be used for special guests.” Will scoffed, a sudden sour taste in his mouth. “I’m beginning to feel more like an old mug.”
Hannibal smiled, charmed as always with Will’s tendency to run off with metaphors. Nonetheless, he commented, “You entered into a devil’s bargain with Jack Crawford. It takes a toll.”

Will scoffed. “Jack isn’t the devil.” He’d walked with the devil enough to know that. No, anyone who’d seen the soulless sight of a man torn asunder by his own hand knew that much - especially those who’d fought in the Second Rising.

“When it comes to how far he’s willing to push you to get what he wants,” Hannibal interjected flatly, “he’s certainly no saint.”

Will couldn’t take the fierce look Hannibal was giving him, and so fiddled with his glass a moment before finishing off the coffee. Perhaps he should give Draco a call after all.

Will couldn’t resist the inner groan as Jack pulled up at the crime scene. Motels - never a good thing.

“Room was registered to a John Smith,” Jack informed him. He seemed almost cheery. “Heh, big surprise there.”

“An appalling failure of imagination,” Will agreed, not really seeing anything funny about the situation. Seriously, he just wanted to try and get some sleep.

“They paid cash,” Jack continued as he wrestled on some blue gloves. “There are no security cameras on the premises - another big surprise.”

“John Smith one of the victims?” Will asked.

“Mr. and Mrs. Anderson, according to the register,” Jack corrected. “Mutilated and displayed.”


Jack ignored him. It was probably for the best. “I thought it might be the Chesapeake Ripper, but there were no surgical trophies taken. I’m gonna need you to prepare yourself on this one.”

Will sighed. Not this again - pushy alpha types who were never convinced he was doing enough for the cause, he’d thought he’d left that behind ages ago. “I’m prepared,” he replied in exasperated protest as he put on the stupid blue gloves. He’d fought a fucking dark lord - he was prepared for a little blood.

“Yeah well prepare yourself some more,” Jack pushed, “it’s soup in there.”

For whatever reason, the only thing to come to mind was a phrase Luna had been fond of. “Soup isn’t good for the soul.”

“Not this kind,” Jack agreed. “Alright look, there are no jurisdictional rivalries here. The local police begged us to take this. Where’s your head?”

Oh, so Jack had noticed too.

Will looked at him once, stopped walking, and sighed. Jack stopped as well, still staring at him as if he could force Will to be better by willing it. Will would have been snappier but while he hadn’t gotten much sleep, he’d also been up forever and so all of his natural morning bite was gone. He just didn’t want to start a fight right now. “It’s on my pillow. I didn’t sleep.” Will admitted.

Jack didn’t seem concerned anymore, as if that one proclamation explained it all. Instead, he
helpfully replied, “Got just the thing to wake you up.”

Great. Wonderful help, there, Jack, Will thought to himself. With a sigh, he entered the room.

Which, okay, to be fair it was weird. People turned into angels with a terrible knife (choppy cuts, unclean lines) and held together with fishing wire. It was just so... sloppy. And Jack had thought this might be a Ripper kill? Or that it was soup? Weird, yes, but - the walls weren’t even spotted!

Will breathed deep (which Jack probably took to mean he was shaken by the image) and pushed back the images of war that were filtering around in his head. Now was not the time.

Jack walked forward, pointing. “Hooks were bored into the ceiling, fishing line was used to hold up the bodies and... the wings.”

“Least we know he’s a fisherman,” Beverly added helpfully. Her normally cheerful tone was subdued.

“And or a Viking,” Price added.

“Vikings do this?” Zeller asked, sounding like he wanted to be anywhere but there.

Price answered with his well of odd information. He was starting to remind Will of Hermione. “Vikings used to execute Christians by breaking their ribs, bending them back, and draping the lungs over them to resemble wings. They used to call it a “blood eagle”.”

Jack walked back to lurk behind him as Will stated, “Pagans mocking the god-fearing.”

“Then who’s mocking who?” Jack asked.

Will sighed. “No, this isn’t mocking them. He’s transforming them.”

Beverly walked over to the bed as she added, “I don’t know if it was a good night’s sleep but he slept here. Hair on the pillow, and the sheets are still damp. He’s a sweater.”

Will was suddenly very glad he had a solid alibi for several hours of the night - and from two cops, no less. It felt like an echo when the words bubbled forth from his lips, “Madness slept here last night.”

Beverly got way closer to the gross mess on the nightstand than Will would have. She was at least thorough, dabbing and smelling to ensure it was what it looked like before adding, “He threw up on the nightstand.”

“Couldn’t stomach what he did,” Jack surmised. “Flop sweat and nervous indigestion.”

Will just wanted to know why the hell the man was still lurking behind him. Was it a power play? Was he suspicious? Was Jack just being aggravating? Will couldn’t tell, and he couldn’t muster the energy to care. “Not nervous,” he corrected with a sigh. “Righteous.” Great. This kind of killer was always a joy. Will took a step closer. “He thinks he’s... elevating them somehow. From dust to glory.”

Will noticed his hand was doing it’s normal nervous twitch, and closed his eyes with a larger sigh than before. He really didn’t want to do this, but it was obvious how he’d need to be positioned if he was going to get the best read on this man and wrap this up quickly in order to go back to sleep. “I need a plastic sheet for the bed.”
The next day, Will was honestly thrilled to escape from the lab to go to his appointment with Hannibal. Shooting down Zeller when the man was wrong (and finding out he and Beverly appreciated the same authors) was fun, but there was the fact that Jack was broadcasting a ridiculous amount of information that Will had been unable to block out (he needed to work on shielding tonight) and Will was not only tired and slightly scared, he simply had no patience for this killer. Scared of dying in his sleep - hah. That was the easiest way to go. Will had walked to his death with eyes wide open. This killer was a wuss.

Of course, it’s not like he could just say that to Hannibal. Will might need to think about starting an application to let him in on the big secret if he continued wanting to spill his guts to the man. Not to mention the fact that conversations with Hannibal were generally fun. It was... very interesting. Will hadn’t found someone he clicked so seamlessly with since the war.

“So there’s no one area of the brain that holds religious opinions, is there?” Will asked.

Hannibal was fetching a book that was supposed to help up on the balcony, but his reply was clear enough. “There is no one spiritual center, no. Any ideas of god come from many areas of the mind, working together in unison.” He turned around then, and simply made sure Will was looking before tossing the book down to him.

Will caught it easily, frowning. “How the hell am I supposed to profile someone who’s got an anomaly in their head changing the way they think?” He started to flip through the book anyway.

“A tumor can definitely affect brain function,” Hannibal stated, “even cause vivid hallucinations. However, what appears to be driving your Angel Maker to create heaven on earth is a simple issue of mortality.”

Will snorted and rolled his eyes, putting the book down on the desk behind him. “You’d think the thought of passing on in his sleep would be the most comforting option.”

Hannibal paused his own perusal of another book to fix his entire attention on Will. “What kind of death do you fear? Do you picture all the ways you could die, as the victims in the cases you solve die?”

“It certainly gives me a lot of options.” Will shrugged and put his hands in his pockets as he turned to more fully face Hannibal. “It’s not death that scares me so much as what comes after.”

Hannibal tilted his head slightly to the right. “Do you fear God, Will?”

Will shook his head. “No, no - I meant the funerals and the crying and the people who have to continue on without you.” It was the knowledge of what they’d all gone through and the fact that he didn’t want them to do so again that stayed his hand when times got bad. He couldn’t do that to them.

“Those the dead abandon,” Hannibal added, catching Will’s attention. That was a very specific word choice. In fact... Hannibal voiced the question on Will’s tongue, “Does your killer feel abandoned?”

“Most likely,” Will answered. These conversations were like talking to himself sometimes. Weird.

“Ever feel abandoned, Will?” Hannibal had to ask.

Will scoffed at that. Hadn’t everyone? “Abandonment requires expectations.” And he’d learned not
to have them. Hopefully the simple reply was acidic enough to get Hannibal to drop it.

“What were your expectations of Jack Crawford and the FBI?”

Well apparently not. Persistent bugger, wasn’t he?

Will grabbed his coffee to hide his agitation. “That Jack would poke and push and prod until he couldn’t get a response anymore, and the FBI wouldn’t interfere until someone made a big, public deal of it.”

Will glanced up quickly to see that Hannibal was shocked. “And you think this despite Jack’s promises to protect your mental headspace?”

“I know his kind, Jack would promise anything if it meant he could catch a killer,” Will retorted. “Doesn’t mean he’ll do it - after all my body did decide to take a road trip without my permission and Jack’s still yelling at me.” Will sighed and put his cup down so he could rub his face with both hands. “You can stop trying to point out how bad he is to me, I’m already as alienated as I can get from the man. I’m just... trying to figure out where the line is, especially since he’s terrified his wife’s cheating on him and fear makes him lash out, apparently.”

Hannibal’s stillness had a certain air to it, and Will looked up at him.

“You know something about it,” Will stated. “Why am I not surprised?”

Hannibal shrugged. “Just because I disapprove of his treatment of you does not mean Jack and I don’t have a professional relationship. I had both the Crawfords over for dinner earlier in the week. I cannot say what the matter is, seeing as Mrs. Crawford is now among my patients, but I can assure you there is no affair.”

Will groaned and leaned against the desk. “Great. So there’s something bigger, and Jack’s going to be even more of an arsehole. Just my luck.”

“Just because Jack and I are becoming friendly does not mean you aren’t my first priority, Will,” Hannibal interjected firmly. “Whatever I may do to help, even if just to stand there as an emotional buffer against Jack’s desires so that you may determine your own, simply inform me.”

Will blinked in the direction of the balcony rail, too embarrassed to look at Hannibal properly. It just wasn’t fair when he said things like that! Like he was - like -

Like he was a friend. A true friend, not just a paid psychiatrist. And like he cared about Will first and foremost, and damn everything else. It was... it was the first time since Sirius, to be honest. The war had always come first. And then there was everyone else’s hurts as well, and the reconstruction, and the cases as a cop. There always seemed to be something more pressing than what Will wanted. And Hannibal just barreled through that like it was inconsequential.

There was a warm feeling sitting in the base of his ribs, and Will hoped things weren’t about to go horribly awry.

Oh look, Will thought to himself, this one can fly.

It was almost four in the morning and entirely possibly that Will was hitting the delirious stage of sleep deprivation. It was most certainly not the reaction one should have at seeing another butchered angel hanging from a scaffold in an abandoned alleyway, but Will had never been normal so why
Jack walked up behind him again, also tired and stressed and Will just knew this was all going to blow up sooner or later. The man was standing slightly sideways, very close, and Will was feeling crowded enough with the police barricade blocking the only exit. “Why angels?”

“It’s not biblical, his angels have wings,” Will answered as well as he could. Spending so long in Louisiana had taught him a thing or two about Christianity. “Uh, angels in paintings and sculptures can fly, but not in scripture.”

Jack shifted his attention back to the corpse. “He’s drawing from secular sources?”

“His mind has turned against him and there’s no one there to help.” Bitterness crept into his voice again, but Will didn’t care. There were a few too many parallels in this case and his own life right now - Jack would just have to deal with it.

Jack was staring like he wanted to say something when Zeller interrupted. “Uh, Jack? Look at this.”

Jack let out a heavy sigh but turned anyway. Not before Price, who looked to the makeshift bed under the corpse and suddenly asked, “Are those... what are those?”

“Well that was weird.” Beverly flashed her flashlight at the crotch of the corpse. “Doesn’t look like the victim.”

“So they’re the Angel Maker’s?” Price asked, voice full of an incredulity that Will greatly empathized with.

Beverly also seemed like she was done with all of this, turning to Price and almost scoffing as she asked, “He castrated himself?”

“So he isn’t just making angels, he’s getting ready to become one,” Will concluded. They all looked confused, so he clarified. “Angels don’t have genitalia.”

Will shook his head and resisted the urge to rub the bridge of his nose. “He’s accepting it or bargaining or whatever the next grief stage is for him.”

Zeller laughed. “Huh, bargaining chips.” Which, okay, that one was amusing.

Will gave into the urge and rubbed his nose, and then rubbed the back of his neck as well for good measure.

“So is he done making angels or is he just getting started?” Jack asked.

Will sighed and admitted defeat. “I don’t know.”

Jack plowed on without acknowledging that. “Well he’s not just killing them when he’s sleepy, I mean, how’s he choosing them?”

“I don’t know, ask him!” Will snapped, anger finally getting the better of him.
“I’m asking you,” Jack pushed.

Will’s last bit of control snapped. “You’re the head of the Behavioral Sciences Unit, Jack! Why don’t you come up with your own answers if you don’t like mine?”

The immediate vicinity went silent, and Jack stalked forward to stand directly in front of Will. He wasn’t yelling, not yet, but Jack’s voice echoed all the same. “I did not hear that!”

“Yes, you did.” Oh, Will was not backing down. Not now, not ever. Not to men like Jack. He dimly noted the forensic team scattering. It was a smart move. “I’m not a magic eight ball, Jack, I don’t have all the answers - you’d better start taking the ones I give you instead of pushing until you find one you like better or soon you’ll have silence instead!”

“You wanna quit on me?” Jack asked, stepping closer. “You wanna walk out?”

“I want you to stop being a controlling arsehole,” Will bit out, stepping up himself. He wasn’t backing down first, and he wasn’t afraid to get in Jack’s face. “I can close cases faster than most, but I’m not a wizard, Jack - I can’t scry for answers and deliver them all to you the moment you ask. I. Am not. Your. Oracle. I am not your secret weapon, and I’m not -” Will cut himself off, taking a deep breath as he hid his face in his hands and forced himself to step back.

This man, no matter how similar, was not Dumbledore. Dumbledore was dead. He’d watched him die. No one was leading him to slaughter. Dumbledore was dead.

“I’m not well,” Will continued, softer. He took another breath and forced himself to look Jack in the eye. “I’m not sorry about what I said, but I am sorry I yelled. My temper gets the best of me even when I’m not running on three hours of sleep. I can’t do this tonight, Jack. I’ll go over the files tomorrow, but I’m going home before this really turns into a fight.”

“You do your best work with the crime scene,” Jack protested.

“And I’m not on the top of my game anyway,” Will countered, “so it won’t make a difference. I can’t be here and keep a level head, so I’m removing myself from the situation. Goodnight, Jack,” Will stated firmly, cutting off whatever else the man had been about to say. Will turned around decidedly and stripped off his blue gloves, walking past the shocked forensics team and getting the police to let him out. Then he got in his car, and drove home.

The next day brought one of the most awkward apologies Will had ever had to deliver. Will stood in the doorway of Jack’s office - the fact that it made a quick retreat available likely didn’t escape Jack’s notice. Will sucked it up, however, and manned up like the Gryffindor he was. “I came to apologize.”

Jack was tense around the shoulders and emanating his anger into the room as he waved a hand to motion for Will to just get on with it. Considering the man’s marital troubles, Will tried to let it slide.

“I had some... really horrible authority figures growing up,” Will gave the understatement of the year. “You remind me of one of them and as such I am probably making some unfair assumptions about you. It makes me lash out harshly, an attempt at a defense I might not even need.”

“Try to reign it in then,” Jack bit out. “I need you clear-headed in the field.” It was, Will guessed, the man’s way of apologizing.

So he took the easy way out and nodded before fleeing. Oh well. Things were at least patched, even
if it was with soggy duct tape and ignoring some gaping holes. Will hoped it sorted itself out and promised to talk with Hannibal about it to make himself be better about the whole thing. In the meantime, he was being cornered by Katz.

“I’ve never heard anyone talk to Jack the way you did,” Beverly stated, coming over to lean against the storage units and crossing her arms. She sounded as impressed as she was disbelieving.

Will shrugged. “He needs it occasionally, although the screaming was out of line.”

“You mean you were out of your mind,” Beverly countered with a half laugh. “My ears were burning like the first time I heard my mom use the F-word. Also, arsehole? Really?”

Will cracked a small smile at that, but she didn’t ask, so he wasn’t telling. “I have deep-seated issues with authority figures. Jack just so happens to push most of those buttons.”

Beverly turned serious. “You okay?”

Will looked to the two partially-skinned corpses between the two of them and then raised an eyebrow at her.

Beverly rolled her eyes. “I know it’s a stupid question, considering none of us can possibly be okay doing what we do but... are you okay?”

Will sighed. Beverly had been good to him, was becoming a friend despite his general lacking in social graces, and so he answered truthfully. “Not really. I’m upset, and I may need to rethink this consulting thing.”

Beverly stared at him a moment, a long, searching gaze. “This really gets to you, doesn’t it?”

“Like claws,” Will revealed, staring at the puncture marks on flayed skin where fishing hooks had once been. “They hook beneath my skin, and it’s a slow fight to get them back out when I’ve invited them in so completely.”

Beverly seemed like she wanted to say something, but Price came over then with a couple of files in his hands. “Meet Roger and Marilyn Brunner,” he introduced. “You might recognize them from such lists as Most Wanted. He likes to rape and murder,” Price clarified, gesturing to each in turn, “she likes to watch.”

The discussion turned from Will’s emotional state to whether or not their killer could be a vigilante (Will didn’t necessarily think so, considering this guy was sleeping under his kills, but he’d heard weirder before so he wasn’t willing to completely rule it out) and Will managed to escape the lab in order to put in a call to his contact in the Magical Bureau just in case there was something magical at play in this killer’s method of selection. He also asked for Abigail’s wand, remembering his promise to her. Thankfully, Jonathan liked him well enough and was a good man who felt bad enough for Abigail’s plight that Will didn’t have to bring out any manipulation in order to get it. Now he just had to work out how to get it to her.

His DA coin burned. Neville held up a hand to pause the lecture and get his students to be silent, and then tapped it once to receive the message. Three short, medium intensity bursts of heat. Not life-and-death, but Will needed them immediately. Neville turned to his class. “You’re dismissed, enjoy the free time. Michelle, would you inform McGonagall I had a family emergency and needed to leave? I’ll try to send word by tonight.”
The girl nodded and dashed off, and Neville walked quickly to the gates of Hogwarts. Once past the
wards, he apparated. It took three jumps, but they’d all gotten the hang of apparating quickly and
quietly enough that they didn’t alert the American Magical Congress about their movements once
Will had moved across the pond. Neville arrived on the back porch and let himself in, quickly
surveying the situation. Will was comforting his dogs, Ron was standing point at the windows with
Draco, and Hermione was already flipping through ward books. He could just make out the shadow
of Luna in the kitchen, probably making tea.

Neville looked to Draco. “He finally called you, then?”

Draco rolled his eyes. “Only to give me a heart attack by informing me he’d woken up on the roof!”

Neville blinked, and then turned to look at Will.

Will was hiding his face in a dog, but there was no mistaking the red tips of his ears. “I might have
started sleepwalking,” he explained, muffled but clear.

Neville sighed and shook his head. “Never a dull moment,” he stated.

Will glanced up at him then, shooting him a thankful look. Neville smiled in reply - Hermione had
panicking covered, after all, and Ron was the strategist. Neville was just there to be a firm base and
go where directed. Especially after Will’s empathy had started up and having a calm, understated
person for him to latch onto became necessary.

Luna came into the kitchen then with a tray of Will’s old mugs. She gave Will the first cup and
kissed his head, then gave Neville one and greeted him with a proper kiss before moving on to the
rest of the room. Neville smiled at his wife a moment before plopping onto the floor beside Will.
Buster claimed his lap, and Neville gave the energetic dog the required attention as he said, “I’ve had
nine kids tangled in Devil’s Snare so far this year - nine! You’d think they’d know better than that,
especially the older kids.”

“How about you, Will?” Neville asked, sitting properly now and dutifully drinking his tea.

“Not even all under fourth year,”Will stated. “Three of the idiots were sixth years - I’d taught the buggers about the plant in first year, and besides that they should know better than to pet
plants that are in their NEWTS coursework!”

Will smiled wryly, and leaned back further against the bottom of his couch as Neville rambled on
about the antics of Hogwarts students who would never need to fear for their lives at the end of each
school year. There were less dangerous stunts this way, sure, but far more in number.

The others were silent enough as Neville prattled on until the tea was consumed and Will grew
calmer. Job done, they moved on to more serious matters as Hermione sat on the chair across from
them. “Will,” she started, getting the man’s immediate attention. “We’re going to ward the house and
property to make sure you don’t walk right off a roof. But that will only fix so much - you need to
renegotiate things with the FBI.”

Will sighed and rubbed both hands over his face. “I’m helping people again, ’Mione,” he protested
weakly. It stung Neville to the core that even after all these years, that was all the man thought he
was good for.

“I know you are, Will,” Hermione stated, reaching forward to clasp a firm hand on his shoulder.
“And you don’t have to necessarily stop that. Just back off from this almost full-time agent thing to
more of an actual consultant.”
“I’ll find examples of such contracts and draw up a few examples for you to look over,” Draco interjected. “We can talk all of them over before you make any decisions, okay?”

Will still had his face in his hands, but he was at least listening. “No interrupting class time,” he stated. “Maybe... maybe a limited number of crime scene visits.”

“You work just fine with files,” Draco agreed. “Talk it over with your psychiatrist, and we’ll come to a conclusion on limiting these trips.”

Will sighed and dropped his hands in favor of petting his newest dog, who had been nosing at him. Neville had to smile at the fact that Will was two dogs away from officially becoming the canine version of Ms. Figg.

Abruptly, Will stood up. “You guys should go,” he stated, “before the kids get worried. And I should get ready for work.”

Neville sighed. If it wasn’t a battle situation, Will shouldered all of what he could on his own. It was just as common now as it had been years ago, but no less annoying.

“We’ll ward the house first,” Hermione stated gently. “Then we’ll go. You go ahead and get ready.”

Will nodded and headed up the stairs. They waited until they could head the door shut, and then Neville looked to Ron. “Please tell me he’s actually talking to this psychiatrist?” he nearly pleaded.

Ron nodded. “From all he’s said Will does actually talk to this one - they discuss more than just the cases he’s working on, even.” Ron thought a moment, and then shrugged. “I think we can let it go for now - the bloke comes highly recommended and has a good track record. Also, Will seems to like him.”

Neville nodded, accepting Ron’s assessment of the situation. Still, he was pretty sure Luna would be leaving a bag of her special tea for Will anyway. Neville wanted to bring a Narlous Fernaneind to put on Will’s bedside table to help him sleep but with Will not using any magic it was unwise to leave a magical succulent that cooed and waved at people where a muggle might find it.

Speaking of... “Do you think these wards will help? If Will’s asleep?”

The room went silent. Hermione and Draco shared a significant glance, and Hermione worried her bottom lip. “I’m not sure,” she finally said. “Will’s always had the most magic out of all of us, and the most flexible. If it’s reacting to his unconscious mind...” she trailed off.

Ron squared his shoulders, resolute. “We’ll just have to make it not worth it, then,” he stated. “Flood the wards with power, and set alarm charms just in case.”

Luna and Draco set up the alarms, while Neville added his power to Ron and Hermione’s wards. They worked as quickly as they dared, as they finished before Will came downstairs, jacket half-on. Will waved at them and bustled out the door, chewing on a piece of toast as he started his car. They watched him drive off, saddened at the events that had led to the fact that Will could no longer do this himself.

Will Graham had not so much as touched a wand in over ten years. They were his only defense, now - they could not fail.

And so it was with a greatly depleted core that Neville flooed back to his office in Hogwarts. All he wanted was to sleep for a week and stuff himself full of tea and food. Unfortunately, that would have to wait. With a small sigh Neville brushed off his robes and headed for the hallway - he had to report
Hannibal watched as Will paced - the man seemed more on edge today than usual. Understandable, if Will had really woken up to find he’d climbed from his second floor window onto part of the roof of his house. In other patients Hannibal would have taken the news with thoughts that they were likely exaggerating, yet it was all too clear that Will Graham was not a man for exaggeration. With this one, Hannibal could trust it was the truth.

“How long did it take you to sleep?” Hannibal asked.

Will shrugged. “Not sure. I’m usually a bit of an insomniac anyway, but last night was particularly hard. It was fitful, right up until my body climbed out of bed.”

Hannibal watched as Will took out a container of aspirin, opened it, and swallowed two dry. It was far too practiced a move to be a new thing, and Hannibal did his best not to frown at the horribly unhealthy implications of that. Instead of commenting on that, Hannibal noted on the more mental aspects of Will’s affliction. “It’s difficult to lie still and fear going to sleep when it’s there to think about.”

Will began to pace again.

“You listen to your breathing in the dark and the tiny clicks of your blinking eyes.”

“It’s not the first time I’ve been afraid of falling asleep,” Will revealed harshly, “but it is the first time sleep was the real fear, instead of something happening that I should have been awake for.” Will crossed his arms and took in a large, shuddering breath. “I briefly thought about zipping myself up in my sleeping bag but,” a harsh laugh, a self-deprecating smile full of painful shadows, “it sounded like a poor man’s straight jacket.”

With all their talks of morality and the flexibility of it, despite the darkest and cruelest of depths Will willingly submerged into time and time again, no matter the horrors hidden in those eyes it was fascinating that it was truly this of which Will Graham was frightened most: being locked away for madness. Losing his mind, or simply not being believed. Ignored as if he were the mythical Cassandra. Locked away and left to rot under the roiling waves of his own mind.

Hannibal would think the fear dull if not for the fact that Will’s mind was indeed so truly fascinating. And at the fact that nothing else seemed to phase him. He was scared of many things, yes, but not terrified to the point of being unable to think. Hannibal wondered what fires Will had walked through in order to stride so casually into these.

“Do you think this is affecting your work?” Hannibal asked, only vaguely curious.

Will shrugged. “I’m not operating at full efficiency, but I think it all really boils down to the fact that I can’t predict this guy. His thoughts, his patterns, his method - nothing.” Will shrugged, looking more irritated with the killer than with himself. “He’s got something making him think these people are evil, and so he kills them. I don’t - you can’t predict hallucinations or-or whatever this is.”

Hannibal tilted his head slightly. “You seem to have a distinct lack of sympathy for this killer.”

Will gave him his full attention then, looking straight at him from over his shoulder and raising a single eyebrow. The movement was rather more fetching than it should have been.

Hannibal acknowledged that it had been, perhaps, an odd statement. “You have held some manner
of understanding and sympathy for each killer I have discussed with you so far. Beyond even the realm of your empathy. Yet you speak of this Angel Maker with a tone more akin to scorn, bordering on belligerence.”

Will sighed and moved to stare out the window. Illuminated by the dark as he was, Will Graham spoke as if he were a specter of death delivering judgement. “I am in contempt of him. To fear a peaceful death, the kindest he could be dealt in his situation? To take others into the darkness of his own depravity with him simply because he fears going alone? No,” Will added softly, voice an echo in the sudden stillness, “no, I can’t understand him. Not really.”

Hannibal walked over then, to clasp a solid hand upon Will’s shoulder in comfort. To his slight surprise, it wasn’t shaken off. “Then we must hope his sickness gives him over to mistakes, so that he may be caught quickly.” Hannibal took a breath to say more, and paused.

That... that scent, it -

Hannibal looked at Will quickly, judging the man to still be lost in his thoughts. It was a risk, but minimal, and he had to know. And so Hannibal leaned in, and inhaled deeply.

Spice flooded across his awareness, sticky and sweet and full of feverish heat. It couldn’t be...

Will broke into his train of thought with an incredulous, “Did you just smell me?”

“Difficult to avoid,” Hannibal admitted easily enough. “I really must introduce you to a finer aftershave - that smells like something with a ship on the bottle.”

Will scoffed, and Hannibal knew his diversion had worked. “I keep getting it for Christmas.” Will shook Hannibal’s hand off then, turning to walk back to the chairs.

“Have your headaches been getting worse lately,” Hannibal questioned, wanting his suspicions confirmed, “more frequent?”

“Yes actually,” Will answered easily as he plopped into the chair and rubbed tired hands over his face.

“I’d change the aftershave,” Hannibal commented blithely, almost on instinct. The remaining minutes of their session went by in a blur, Hannibal’s mind alight with endless possibilities.

This could be the thing he needed to secure Will’s incarceration (if he ever got around to placing the remains in the lures). It would be a unique opportunity, to see how a mind reacted as such an illness ran unchecked and wild. Perhaps it would make the man the same, bringing forth the madness inside until it spilled forth from every pore. Hannibal stood by his initial assessment - Will Graham was fire and ice and storm and blood tightly sealed in a small bottle, and now Hannibal held the tool with which to remove the cork.

As Hannibal cooked dinner by himself that night, he found himself humming an old tune absently. This had quickly turned from interesting to fun. With a little bit of time, perhaps it would become great entertainment, the likes of which he hadn’t yet seen. And life had begun to look so very predictable.

Sipping his wine, a deep, rich red with spicy notes reminiscent of Will Graham’s new malady, Hannibal smiled.
Will figured being here meant he and Jack were on somewhat stable ground, despite the argument and shitty apology. It still didn’t make it easier, running on low levels of sleep and sitting with a woman who eked out despair and confusion. At the very least, they’d found the Angel Maker.

Jack had been handling the interview just fine until the woman mentioned that Buddish had just wanted to be alone. Will could feel a sinking hole slowly open up, tinged with the weight of revelation, and listened with half an ear to the wife as he watched Jack out of the corner of his eye. The man was leaning back slightly, his eyes slightly wet and his face slack.

Well, Hannibal had said the problem wasn’t infidelity, hadn’t he?

“A very valid point, but children could understand that too given time, and patient explanations. Granted, the Weasleys had always been a strong, resilient bloodline.”

Will reflected back calm and sympathy for Mrs. Buddish, making himself soft and easy to open up to as he leaned forward and quietly asked, “Was he ever violent, Mrs. Buddish?”

Mrs. Buddish looked away for a short moment while she shifted, and Will recognized that fear. “He was angry. But,” she conceded, “he never hit me or the boys. It was hardest on them, to see him slip away. He lost himself and they lost a father.”

Will tried to ignore the quiet sniffling of Jack attempting not to cry. Talk about shattered illusions - Jack had seemed for so long like unsympathetic granite, and now... now he was just another man made of soft, vulnerable flesh.

“I mean,” she was saying, “what kind of mother exposes her children to someone who’s losing their mind?”

It was part of the reason Will let Mrs. Buddish unload on him. It helped their case, and Jack needed the time to collect himself. “I thought that as he got weaker, as the cancer got worse, it would be less confusing for them. They could just see him as a sick man, instead of someone who was so terrified.”

Will nodded gently, still soft with this strong woman who was doing her best to move on. “And uh, did your husband’s faith falter after he was told about the cancer?”

“He may believe he is,” Will started, trying to break the news gently.

“Eliot wasn’t ever religious,” Mrs. Buddish stated, and her surprise was genuine. Which was weird, considering. “Is he doing something religious?”

“Your husband is dying, Mrs. Buddish,” Jack broke in then, full of a kindness and care Will had never seen in him before as he leaned forward and linked his hands together on the desk, “and soon. We’d just like to... we’d like to find him before he hurts himself, or anyone else.”

For once, Jack was the one who had trouble maintaining eye contact, which was probably why Mrs. Buddish directed her next statement to Will. “He had a near-death experience. He suffocated in a fire when he was a little boy. Fireman said he must have had a guardian angel.”

Yep, that would do it. Will suddenly had a sinking feeling about how all of this was going to end.
“Where did this happen?”

“Um,” Mrs. Buddish paused to think, and Will appreciated her thoroughness. “A farm. Where he grew up.” She gave the address, and Will saw her out. Jack was a looming specter behind him the entire time, so it was no surprise when he nodded for Will to follow him to the car and immediately drove all the way to the place.

Will was silent the whole way, letting Jack put himself back together. Jack was throwing himself back into the job, and Will almost hated what he knew was likely to happen next. But his safety came before the feelings of others, his family had told him time and time again. He had people to care for too.

Sure enough, when Will entered the barn he was met with a hanging corpse. Flayed even more chopply than the first, and the will it must have taken Eliot Buddish to string himself up like that...

Will was going to skip dinner tonight. Ugh, he felt sick.

“This’ll be the last one,” he stated, words bubbling up softly from the back of his throat.

“It’s Buddish?” Jack asked, as if it wasn’t obvious.

Will answered anyway. “He made himself into an angel. Wasn’t God, wasn’t man - it was his choice to die.” A choice Will had seen far too many times in his life.

“His choice?” Jack’s voice held a note of disbelief which, okay, Will could understand that.

He quickly covered a scoff in a sigh before retorting, “As much as he could make it, anyway.”

And then, Will looked away from the corpse and let out a proper sigh. It was time to face the facts. “I don’t know how much longer I can be all that useful to you, Jack.”

“Really?” Jack countered. “You caught three. The last three we had, you caught. You caught three of them.” As if the end result was all that mattered, and damn the blood lost along the way.

“I didn’t catch this one,” Will protested. “No Eliot Buddish... surrendered.”

“You know,” Jack started, voice flat again, “I’m used to my wife not talking to me. I don’t have to get used to you not talking to me too.”

Will turned around as Jack began to walk away. He wanted to talk? Fine. “It’s getting harder and harder to make myself look, Jack,” Will stated as plainly as he could.

Jack turned to face him then. “No one’s asking you to look alone.”

“Yes you are!” Will retorted. “I am looking alone, always - no one can follow me in this, not when I’m immersing myself in each killer as they kill. And you know what looking at this does to people who don’t get half as close as I do!”

“I know what happens if you don’t look,” Jack said, serious and grave, “and so do you.”

“I can make myself look but the thinking is shutting down!” Will explained, growing frustrated. Why couldn’t Jack understand this?

Jack looked briefly at Buddish. “What is it about this one?”

“It’s not this one,” Will bit back, quickly losing his anger with the unending war he could see looming above. “It’s all of them. It’s the next one, and the one I know is coming after that-”
“You wanna go back to your lecture hall?” Jack interrupted. “Read about this stuff on Tattlecrime.com?”

“Not really but I might have to,” Will stated firmly. He’d already won a war, he wasn’t required to give anything more. He didn’t owe them anything, no matter what anyone said. “This is bad for me, Jack.”

Jack, at least, wasn’t getting angry. Just a quiet wisdom that really made the Dumbledore comparison come screaming up to the forefront. ‘I’m not your father, Will. I’m not gonna tell you what you ought to do.”

“Really?” Will asked. “Cuz it seems that’s exactly what you’re going to do - it’s what you’ve done since day one, and I still can’t figure out if you know about my compulsion to save people and are purposefully manipulating me or if I’ve just been influenced by the emotions I pick up from you.”

Jack stepped forward, still non-threatening. “I’m not manipulating you,” he stated, “but I will tell you this. You go back to your classroom, when there’s killing going on that you could have prevented and it will sour your classroom forever.”

Will cracked something that felt like a smile but probably looked like a demented mockery of one. Been there, done that. “Maybe. And maybe I’ll move to Florida and set up shop as a boat mechanic.”

Jack didn’t look impressed. “You wanna quit? Quit.” And then he walked off.

Will sighed and rubbed his face in his hands. Why was it that anytime he tried to have a real conversation with Jack Crawford, he never seemed to be able to properly explain himself? Hopefully Draco would be able to explain bett -

Something was rustling. Will turned on a dime, hand on his gun and ready to fire at -

Eliot Buddish fell to his knees before him, knife in hand. “I see what you are,” he spoke as if through gravel, harsh and breathless and deep.

Will’s hand trembled. The question was out before he knew what he would ask. “What do you see?”

“Inside,” Buddish replied, “I can bring it out of you.”

The darkness inside, then, that Will worked so hard to keep caged. “Not all the way out,” he countered. Not even Voldemort had managed that.

Buddish coughed, and then plowed valiently on. “I can give you... the majesty... of true becoming...” With a final gasp, Buddish pitched forward - and promptly vanished.

Will looked around quickly, before looking up again. Buddish hung there, still dead, ropes and blood patterns undisturbed. He’d never moved. Another hallucination.

Will’s hands were shaking as he raced outside. Beside the barn doors he fell to his knees and vomited what little lunch he’d managed to eat that day. Still, he continued to heave long after the burn turned dry, and dimly he felt a hand on his shoulder shaking him. It only prompted his body to shake on it’s own, and with a deep breath Will curled in on himself, huddling as he waited for the tremors to subside. He wondered if Hannibal would mind him showing up unannounced again.

As it turned out, Hannibal didn’t mind. Will would have been been by before dark but Jack, after
driving him back to Quantico, had handed him over to medical. Will suspected it was partly to ensure he didn’t see the confrontation he was likely to have with his wife - probably at Hannibal’s office since he was her new doctor. The nurses in medical were panicky things that held him there a ridiculously long time and kept shoving a blanket and tea at him. Will had finally spent an hour with a damn cup curled like a burrito just to make the stupid nurses happy.

So it was dinner by the time Will got to Hannibal’s house, and as he knocked on the door he hoped this wouldn’t become a habit. At least he’d called ahead and warned the man this time.

Hannibal opened the door in an apron, with his shirtsleeves rolled up. “Will,” he greeted. “Come in - dinner is nearly done.”

“Uh, what?” Will followed the man in despite his confusion, hanging his coat in the hall. “I hope you didn’t cook just for me.”

“Nonsense,” Hannibal replied easily. “An appointment this late, after a shock like you’ve had, almost makes food a requirement. A good meal,” he stated, leaning down to take dinner out of the oven as Will hovered awkwardly in the doorway, “will be just what the doctor ordered.”

Will had to crack a smile at that one. “I bet that’s what you tell all your patients.”

“Yes, but only my friends have that dinner with me,” Hannibal countered.

Will had no reply for that and hoped he wasn’t blushing. He watched in silence as Hannibal plated the food like an artist might paint a canvas and dutifully followed the man into the dining room. True to form, Hannibal said what the dish was, gave interesting tidbits about it’s history, and then allowed Will to eat in silence save the initial compliments on the meal. It wasn’t until the meal was nearly done that Hannibal started their session.

“What happened today to necessitate seeing me earlier than our scheduled appointment time, Will?”

Will stopped then, putting his fork down and biting at his lip. He could tell Hannibal - the man already knew he’d hallucinated before. Still, it was a struggle to get the first word out. “I - I saw Eliot Buddish in front of me, alive, as his corpse hung in the rafters above.” They fell faster after the first few, just as they always had. “I’ve had hallucinations before, loads of times, on and off since I was a teenager but - but I’ve almost always been able to tell that’s what they were. I know they’re wrong, they’re... off, somehow, even as they happen. But this -” Will swallowed. Reached for his glass of wine. Took a large gulp. Blinking. Set the glass down before the shake in his hand became noticeable. “I had no idea,” Will finally whispered into the quiet stillness. “I didn’t even question it might just be all in my head until he collapsed and vanished before he hit the ground.”

Hannibal was silent a moment, digesting the wealth of information Will had blabbered. He tilted his head to the side and asked, “You’ve experienced hallucinations in your youth?”

Will grimaced. “I was fifteen,” he answered. “It was due to... outside influence. Largely. Um,” Will took off his glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “I’m running up on those classified bits but - let’s just say I had a chip in my brain that some arsehole used to send me false visual stimuli for a while.”

Hannibal looked like just about anyone would at that declaration - slightly disbelieving and completely confused. “I suppose,” the doctor finally stated, “that while a fitting analogy the explanation is in truth vastly incorrect.”

Will nodded, shoulders drooping. Ugh, this was why talking to muggle psychiatrists was always so
bloody difficult.

Hannibal sighed through pursed lips, but proved himself better than many others by simply letting it pass. “Perhaps it was the fact of outside influence then. This hallucination came from the depths of your own mind, nothing foreign involved.”

“Then why did I know Hobbs was a hallucination?” Will countered. “I could tell until this last one.”

“Your trauma was still new at that time,” Hannibal replied. “And you had not yet heaped more onto it. This could be an acceleration and worsening of symptoms due to your inability to let your brain process these new experiences properly.”

Will slouched in his seat and took another large swig of wine. “I’ve called my lawyer,” he revealed, “he’s going to help me come up with a contract for my consulting. Do you think I need to limit my actual crime scene visits?”

Hannibal did him the courtesy of actually thinking about it, at least. Will finished off his glass of wine while he did. He was contemplating getting up to pour himself another glass when Hannibal finally spoke. “The decision is yours, of course, but I believe it would be beneficial as long as the toll your gifts take on you are far less with only photos and files.”

Will nodded. “They are, so that’s what I was thinking too. I do my best work with the actual crime scene, but I’m not exactly an idiot even without the stupid grab bag of neuroses.” Will held up his glass and raised an eyebrow. “Got anything stronger?”

Hannibal smiled his small, fond smile at him before standing to clear away their plates. Will helped by snagging his own and taking them into the kitchen. “I hate cooking,” he explained, “but I don’t mind doing the dishes. It’s the least I can do after all the work you went to.”

“If you wouldn’t mind,” Hannibal replied, almost absently. “Dessert will take a moment to finish.”

Will nodded and focused his mind on the task - suds and fine china and the concentration needed to not drop anything - cleaning the small stack of dishes as Hannibal puttered about behind him. He turned around after placing the last dish on the drying rack just as Hannibal set two crystal glasses on the counter. “Looks amazing,” Will commented as he dried his hands.

“A dark chocolate espresso mousse, on top of a small clove spongecake,” Hannibal proclaimed. “It should be bitter enough to pair well with a rich scotch.”

Will felt a corner of his mouth twitch up as the implication hit him. “You expected to break out the hard liquor, then.”

“You do prefer it,” Hannibal stated, pouring them both two fingers. “And you sounded rather shaken over the phone so I thought it best to prepare. The guest room upstairs is made up as well - you are free to use it.”

Will shook his head even as he accepted the drink. “Keep serving me the good stuff and this might turn into a habit.”

“I would be pleased to put your name on the door, should it come to that,” Hannibal replied somewhat cheekily.

Will was so startled, he laughed.
So, yeah, things with Jack are coming to a head but despite how much of a jackass he is, he's not actually 100% a dick like Dumbledore (side note: Guardians 2 was AMAZEBALLS, you should go watch it).

Also, Hannibal is so totally on-board with the watch-Will-go-crazy plan. He likes Harry!Will more than cannon Will, but even how fond he is of Will in cannon isn't enough to make him stop his plans, despite regretting them and making sad cannibal noises like the idiot he is.

And look! A wild plot point appeared! I swear it'll get explained clearly later, but all in due time *runs off cackling maniacally*
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Nothing prompts family bonding time like murder.

Chapter Notes

Apartment hunting sucks ass. Oh well, at least I've got a wedding to look forward to this weekend.

On that note, moving schedule should be end of the month but might move to like, the 16th depending on one place I've applied for. So the next update might take a while, depending. Sorry in advance if that happens.

For now, enjoy. Wave goodbye to cannon, ladies and gents (and variations thereof) we're taking a little detour.

Will rubbed his eyes as he walked to class. Ugh, he almost felt like he was sleepwalking now. He’d taken some aspirin, but his head still ached vaguely. Maybe he could ask Hannibal for a stronger prescription or something.

“Ah, Will!” Jack called out.

Great.

Will looked up from his papers, greeting Jack with a raised eyebrow. Jack was, as usual, not so easily deterred. “Glad I caught you. We’ve got another case, come on.”

“I have class, Jack,” Will replied as blandly as he could.

“And I’ve canceled them for the week,” Jack replied just as uncaringly. “Let’s go.”

Will took a deep breath to filter past the sudden clarity in his vision that always signaled the urge to spill blood. The students would have all heard by now and it would be mean to take away this unexpected break, which was the only reason he wasn’t telling Jack where to shove it and having class anyway. “I’m riding with Katz,” Will told Jack as he walked past him to the parking lot. Thankfully, she was still there.

Beverly smiled at him and got in her car, waiting for Will to buckle in before starting the car and heading out. “Thought you might want another option,” she commented flippantly.

Will blinked and processed that statement. “You were waiting for me?”

Beverly snorted. “Course I was Graham cracker - that’s what friends are for.”
“I hadn’t realized we were at that stage,” Will admitted.

Beverly looked at him for a moment with a small smile. It was only slightly disbelieving. “You telling me you never made fast friends in school?”

“All the time,” Will answered truthfully enough. Battle made fast and furious bonds that would be strange in any other situation. “But my schooling wasn’t exactly... normal.”

“Fancy pants school or military brat?” Bev asked.

“Boarding school in Scotland,” Will replied with a wry smile as he watched the passing countryside. “Right in the middle of nowhere.”

“Lord of the Flies kinda nowhere?”

She had no idea. “All day long.”

Beverly laughed. “Mine was like Fight Club, I kid you not. There was this one time -”

The trip passed easily, the two of them swapping carefully edited stories (Beverly spending as much time adding embellishments as Will spent taking elements out) of their school days. It was easy, talking to Beverly. She was blunt enough to let you know where you stood, and Will was grateful that she’d decided he was worth the effort.

Then they’d pulled up to the crime scene, and Will saw the corpse, and the bright bits of his school days were firmly overshadowed by their horrors.

The corpse was absurdly pale, strung up on an old telephone pole in the middle of the field. He’d been shaved, dressed in tattered black robes, rolled in fuzzy green mold, and someone had sliced off his nose. Despite how ridiculous the corpse looked, Will couldn’t stop the knee-jerk reaction that had him tense and ready to flee.

Will’s hand reached up to rub the old, faded scar on reflex. *There is no burning or pain*, he told himself firmly. *Voldemort is dead. You killed him, and burned his corpse. He’s dead.*

Will took a deep breath, and forced his hand back to his side as he focused his attention on the forensics team. Some of the policemen were taking photos of impressions in the dirt - boot marks formed in early-dawn mud.

“The nose is a really weird trophy,” Zeller pointed out.

“Maybe he just didn’t like the guy’s face,” Price replied with a shrug.

“That or a foot fetish was too tame,” Beverly added. “Have you seen this guy’s feet?”

“Oh, that’s disgusting,” Zeller added once he looked. Will assumed he looked, anyway. Will himself was doing his best to avoid looking at the corpse until he got his breathing back under control.

“Some people have never heard of toenail clippers,” Price added.

“Well that’s disgusting.”

Will startled at the familiar voice and turned around, eyebrows raised in shock. Draco Malfoy stood there amidst the bustle of cops, prim and proper as usual in his smartly tailored grey suit, briefcase in hand and a single blond eyebrow raised.
The blond looked to Will then, as if there was nothing strange about his presence at all. “This is what you do all day? No wonder you’re sleepwalking, Merlin.”

Before Will could say anything, Jack came barreling over. “Who the hell are you?”

Draco’s eyebrow went from incredulous to condescending in half a second. “Draco Malfoy,” he stated, taking a card from his pocket and handing it to Jack. “I’m Mr. Graham’s lawyer. We’ll be drawing up a consulting contract. A little late, I understand, but seeing as no one bothered to inform Mr. Graham or myself as to the change in his job status it’ll have to do.” With that, Draco dismissed the man and came to stand by Will. “You need to learn to say no, Will. I called human resources and they were very surprised to hear you were already doing field work.”

Will shrugged. “Yeah, well...” he gestured awkwardly at the corpse.

Draco crossed his arms and tilted his head. Will waited, knowing what the man looked like when thinking. Honestly, he could use all the help he could get on this one. Finally, Draco drawled, “You know... it almost seems like someone took Moldy-Voldy a little too literally.”

Will snorted, and then clamped a hand over his mouth, slightly horrified. The whole team was looking at him, but Draco was too, and his mouth twitched. And Will’s twitched in response, and before he could stop it Will was laughing, arms wrapped around his stomach. Draco was laughing too, leaning against him and eyes glittering as he stated, “We tell a tale that’s hard to tell,” “Of snakely men and noses swell,” Will joined in through his chuckles.

“Swell off his face that is, and down the dell, Voldy-Moldy, he’s - wait,” Draco paused, thinking.

“No no no,” Will replied, hands circling as he tried to remember the end of the first verse. “Voldy’s - no, the Dark Lord’s nose-”

“Fell down a well!” Draco chorused with him, triumphanty.

“And that’s story so they say, of why he has no nose today!”

Everyone was definitely looking now, but Will paused and looked again at the boot prints in the dirt. “Have you gotten photos of all the shoe prints?”

The cop shook his head, but immediately moved to do so as Draco fixed Will with a look. “You don’t think...”

“Only one way to find out,” Will replied with a shrug. “You still got a copy of Percy’s book?” Fred and George had, naturally, made a dancing jig to go along with the stupid song they’d all made up when drunk one night. In an effort to preserve some history of the war, and to help George grieve, Percy had recorded it all in a book, complete with growing changes in the jig as time passed and new generations took up the dance.

Draco waved one hand, already typing something out on his phone. “I’ll have Sarah send it over - should be a copy lying around somewhere.” Just about everyone was giving them weird looks, but Will tried not to let it bother him. It was kind of deserved, at this point.

“What’s going on?” Jack asked.
“Testing a theory,” Will replied. “You might need to call in Sector Seven.”

Jack didn’t look happy about that, but it wasn’t as if he could do anything. Sector Seven was the FBI’s equivalent of the Auror department and therefore had the highest clearance ranking and most pull. They needed it in order to take over the cases perpetrated by magical persons so as to keep the secret from getting out. Bureaucracy had only helped the American Magical World hide despite the large country and high population - Will had been impressed the first time he’d seen the wheels at work.

Draco started to theorize as Jack grumbled. “If it is Moldy-Voldy, your perp has a seriously delayed reaction.”

“Maybe it all happened when they were young,” Will bounced back. “Some of the families did move to America afterwards.”

“Repressed trauma bursting forth?” Draco rolled his eyes. “How dull.”

Will agreed, but he wasn’t going to say so while surrounded by strangers and colleagues who already thought he was a freak. He -


Will shoved a hand out, blocking Draco from coming closer as he focused on that spot.

Draco didn’t tense up, but Will could hear the shift in his feet that meant Draco was prepared to move. “Stat?”

“Possible twenty,” Will replied absently as he removed his glasses with his other hand. “Three paces from the left foot.”

He concentrated harder on the look of the magic - it took so much more effort now that he only had the barest feel of magic, instead of the ocean he’d held before. Behind him, Draco sighed. “Call in Sector Seven. Twenty-nine.”

Will grimaced, but slid his glasses back on as he pulled up his phone. Jonathan was thankfully on his speed dial.

“What’s going on?” Jack demanded, his voice closer than it had been a while ago.

“You need to set up a perimeter,” Draco stated as Jonathan picked up and Will began to explain the situation. “We’ve got a land-mine.”

Beverly wasn’t as put out by having their case taken over by Sector Seven as the others seemed to be. Anything that meant she didn’t have to deal with the kind of sicko who rolled a body in mold and put a landmine under it was good with her - she didn’t need the extra nightmares. Neither did Will, which brought her to her current thoughts.

Will and his lawyer friend had talked with the head agent of the team assigned to this case, looking far more authoritative than she had ever seen him before. He stood straight, talked firmly, and Draco stood to his side and slightly behind him like some kind of lieutenant/bodyguard. It had almost looked like something out of a movie - a general imparting orders before the battle.

Now they were all in a conference room of the local police station, waiting for a debriefing and
official handing-over of duties before they could go home. She hadn’t thought her day could get any weirder, but it seemed the surprises were ready to keep rolling on in.

Will sat down in one of the office chairs, leaving only one more open. Beverly contemplated sitting on the table or perhaps leaning against the wall (she was fine with standing, not so certain about the prim-looking lawyer) when said man took the choice out of her hands by sitting very decisively in Will’s lap. He just plopped right down, looking at the papers in his hands and not even looking for permission from Will.

The second shock came from the fact that Will didn’t push the man off his lap, or even look shocked at the turn of events. He just put his hands on Draco’s waist and leaned his forehead on the man’s shoulder, casual as could be.

Beverly sat in the remaining vacant chair out of shock. The rest of the team wasn’t fairing much better, watching in silence as Will held such brazenly intimate contact with another human being without being bothered.

Draco paused in his reading and squawked. “Is that all you make? Really? What the hell, Graham?”

Will just chuckled, his shoulders shaking in his mirth.

“I pay my secretaries better than this!” Draco cried out, incredulous.

“I’m a teacher, Draco,” Will protested with humor in his voice. “Trust you to focus on the paycheck.”

“I’m certainly holding out for more with your profiling,” Draco stated. “You’ve been in two deadly situations already - if they’re going to risk your life unnecessarily they should at least compensate you properly.”

“Hang on,” Jack interrupted. “Nothing Will does is unnecessary.”

Draco pinned him with a gaze that showed exactly how little he thought of that statement. Beverly was just glad his focus wasn’t on her. “Try telling me that Hobbs wasn’t an unnecessary danger you sent him into alone, despite being in court, and I’ll pull your spine through that gap in your teeth. Ow!”

Will rolled his eyes. “Don’t murder my boss.”

“You pinched me!” Draco replied, offended.

“You sat on me,” Will responded with a shrug, as if it was Draco’s fault for being close enough for him to pinch.

“It’s not my fault you’re comfy.”

“So this is my fault now?”

“Of course it is, you bloody Gryffindor.”

“Oh, so it’s a house matter now is it?”

“When is it n-OW!”

Beverly lost it and laughed. She’d never thought she’d witness the day when Will Graham acted just like her little brothers, pinching and bickering included.
“Okay, I’m confused,” Jimmy admitted. Brian just nodded his agreement, staring at Will like he’d grown another head.

Will suddenly looked awkward, refusing to meet anyone’s eyes as he stammered out, “It’s not - I - We went to school together.”

“And hated each other until sixth year,” Draco added helpfully.

Will’s face grew soft, and he hugged Draco properly. His next statement was muffled by the shoulder he had his face buried in. “I was an idiot.”

“We both were, Will,” Draco stated softly, gently patting Will’s hands and leaning back into the embrace. “If you’re going to spend the day being maudlin, however, I demand we relocate to a bar.”

“Sounds good to me,” Beverly interjected. “Drinks after work is a tradition - you’re both invited.”

Will rolled his head enough to uncover an eye which he used to look at her in confusion. “Drinking on a Monday?”

Beverly shrugged. “Monday, Friday - same difference.”

Draco cackled. “I like this one. We accept.”

Will sighed, but didn’t protest. Beverly was going to count this one as a win.

Speaking of... “Scottish boarding school, with an English schoolmate?” Beverly questioned, one eyebrow raised.

“Will’s British,” Draco answered distractedly, head in his papers once more. “Your horrid south knocked the accent out of him.”

Will rolled his eyes and opened his mouth, but before he could reply the door opened and the dude from Sector Seven walked in. “Thanks for waiting,” he greeted, “and for the timely call. That was one nasty bomb.”

Jack looked happy to be back on track, but the man ignored him completely to focus in on Will.

Will frowned and spoke before the agent could. “No. I don’t do cases dealing with the DE.”

The man furrowed his brow. “But you have the clearance, and you’d be a great help -”

Draco stood up, expression cold as ice. Every line of his body was tense, protective fury, and Beverly had to approve. Will needed more champions, she thought. “Agent...”

“Miller,” the man replied.

“Miller,” Draco nodded. “I will send over a copy of the book in question, but my client is to have no more contact with this case, is that understood?”

Miller looked irritated. “Sir, I don’t think you-”

“Remember the name Malfoy and tell me I don’t understand the stakes,” Draco cut in viciously.

Miller glared, and grumbled, but acquiesced. Beverly once again wondered what the fuck was up with Will Graham. There were just so many little things that didn’t add up, like why he’d given orders to a higher clearance sector in the first place. Maybe he’d been a secret agent, like Bond or
something. She could see Draco being a sassy Q - although there was no way Will was that smooth. Maybe he was 009 or something.

Miller debriefed them as he handed out his business cards. “We’ve taken all of your notes and will use them in our investigation - thank you for all the work you’ve done so far. But this case is a 509, and so we’ll be taking over as that category lies under our jurisdiction. Any additional thoughts you have are welcome at any time, I’ve got the email you can reach me at on my card. Contact me at any time,” he added, handing a card to Will.

Will took the card with a grimace, his expression making it quite clear that he would do no such thing. Miller left soon after that, and Draco let out a huge sigh. “Now I really need that drink,” he announced to the room at large. “But first!” he swirled around and brandished some files like they were a sword. “Agent Crawford, we have a meeting two days from now in order to negotiate the terms of Will’s contract.”

Will shrugged. “Old friend, I told you.”

“Little close for you,” Beverly retorted, crossing her arms.

Will took his glasses off, cleaning them. It was apparently an old nervous gesture. “We had a lot of hate sex in our early twenties,” Will finally admitted, “before I moved to Louisiana.”

“Why the hell would you move here from England?” Brian asked with his usual lack of tact.

“England isn’t all it’s cracked up to be,” Will stated. Quickly, he turned and started walking away. “Let’s go - I’ll text Draco the location once we’re there.”

Beverly followed. She managed to smack Brian on the back of the head as she passed, however. Punishment for messing up the interrogation. Honestly, men.

Ultimately, they decided on the bar in the hotel for simplicity’s sake. No need to worry about designated drivers that way. Jimmy wasn’t one for heavy drinking in public and so would have gladly taken the role, but after today they all wanted to be at least happily buzzed.

Beverly was ready to throw down, however. They weren’t going to be needed in at work tomorrow, so she was going to enjoy this while she could. It was also a great opportunity to see Will let loose a little. She’d gotten back to their table from her victorious conquest just in time to see Draco join them and shed his suit jacket. “Well, it lacks elegance but I guess the practicality just can’t be beat.”

“You can pick the place next time if you also buy cabs home,” Beverly countered, slamming the bottle on the table before Slamming a shot glass in front of Will. “My good sir, you have been challenged.”

Will blinked at the bottle, blinked at her, and then eyed Draco. Once he’d gotten a nod from the blond, he smiled back at her with an alarming number of teeth. “Alright Katz, let’s play.”

Beverly smirked back in challenge, poured, and downed her first shot.

Will did the same before grimacing.
Beverly laughed. “Not up to your standards, whiskey man?”

“Just wasn’t expecting vodka,” Will replied. “Not the worst I’ve had but still...”

Beverly shrugged. “It’s what they had a whole bottle of.”

Jimmy, doll that he was, poured the next shots. “I will cut you off if need be,” he warned.

Beverly nodded, but smirked at Will as she drowned her next shot. Will paced her, and she couldn’t help the smile. She’d had the feeling Will would be a worthy opponent.

The rest of the night was a bit of a blur, really. Will matched her drink for drink, still going strong, until Jimmy took the bottle away. Beverly whined but let him, and at some point she and Will had started giggling over the properties of carpet fibers while Jimmy and Draco chatted ancient history and Brian failed to pick up some chick.

It was a good night - the kind that was completely effective in staving off night terrors for a while. Didn’t mean the morning didn’t suck, however.

Beverly groaned and hid completely under the covers, unwilling to leave the cave of blissful darkness until one of her boys brought aspirin. There was someone here with her, but her clothes were on and she had the sneaking suspicion it was an equally hungover Will Graham so she didn’t care. As long as he didn’t disrupt the structure of the blanket cave.

They existed comfortably in silence for a while, until the door opened and Jimmy walked in. “Rise and shine you neanderthals - I’ve brought aspirin.”

Beverly groaned, but Will cursed.

“Don’ fuckin - go away - not time yet - shit,” he mumbled out harshly, still half-coherent.

Jimmy had probably heard worse before, for he simply yanked the covers back, letting in all of the way-too-cheery sunshine.

Beverly cursed the sun, and then sat up in shock to watch as Will burrowed under his pillow and informed Jimmy of where he could stick various items in almost graphic detail and littered with so many expletives that it made her ears burn.

Jimmy blinked a couple of times and then stated, “Well. Guess we know hangovers make you rude.”

“Mornings make him rude,” Draco corrected as he finally showed up, dressed and ready for the day. He called from the doorway, “Up you get, Graham - food.”

Beverly watched as Will grabbed the book that’d come with the room off the nightstand and chucked it at his old friend. Draco dodged it with an ease that suggested this was a regular occurrence. “Fuck off Malfoy.”


Will groaned and didn’t move. Beverly very purposefully didn’t warn him as Draco grew near, and was rewarded with the sight of the suit-clad lawyer grabbing a boxer-wearing Will by the ankles and physically hauling him out of bed.

The floodgates really opened, then. Will kicked and let loose a torrent of insults that spanned three languages and even some Latin.
Beverly blinked as Jimmy stood by her to hand her the aspirin. “Now I understand why Draco said they used to draw straws to wake Will during their school days.”

“Is that even physically possible?” Beverly had to ask after one particularly colorful tirade. She accepted the aspirin and water and chugged both in hopes to ward off the drums in her head. Draco threw Will in the bathroom and shut the door. They could still hear mumbled grumbling from behind it, muffled though it was.

“Eh, maybe if you dislocate the legs,” Draco answered her question with a shrug.

Beverly stared at him a moment before declaring, “No wonder you two get along - you’re as weird as he is.”

“And you like him because he’s weird,” Draco pointed out, one eyebrow raised imperiously. Beverly made a mental note to ask him to teach her how to do that - it was a very intimidating brow.

She shrugged, not denying anything. That, it seemed, was all it took to win the lawyer over. He smiled at her, and left her to get ready. Jimmy did as well, and Beverly spent some time sobering up before Will got out of the shower and let her have it. He was much quieter, and remained so downstairs as they got some of the greasiest eggs they could find. He was quiet right up until they were ready to load into the car and drive back to Quantico, at which point he stammered, “I’m, uh, sorry. About - about earlier. I am,” Will grimaced, “not exactly a morning person.”

“We kinda figured that out,” Jimmy pointed out with his usual sarcasm.

“Everybody’s different,” Beverly added with a shrug. “No harm no foul, Graham cracker.”

Will made a face of such exasperated and affronted confusion that Beverly had to laugh. “Please tell me this isn’t going to become a thing?”

“You’ve been newly christened,” Jimmy added.”Welcome to the team.”

Beverly slung an arm around Will’s shoulders and drew him closer to the car, graciously ignoring the cautious look of wonder on his face. It seriously should not have taken Will by surprise that they considered him a part of their group. She supposed they’d just have to keep reminding him, then.

Since he had nothing to do with his week, Will decided to spend his Tuesday afternoon with Abigail. He had to be in town for his appointment with Dr. Lecter anyway, and he’d finally worked up the courage to give her his gift.

“I know I can’t teach you to fish till later, but I thought you might…” Will trailed off, hands gesturing uselessly. “It’s a fly tying kit,” he finished lamely, watching as Abigail tore the paper off. Thankfully, it was only a little banged up from having been thrown in the back of his car and kept there for weeks.

Abigail seemed strangely delighted. “Thank Merlin, I was dying to do something with my hands,” she remarked before turning to him, eyebrow raised. “I’m allowed to keep hooks now?”

Will blinked, thought a moment, and then dropped his head into his hands with a sigh. “Didn’t think about that. You allowed to have sharp objects?”

Abigail shrugged. “They haven’t said no, but no one’s been eager to hand me real silverware either.”
“If they take them away I’ll buy you some plastic ones,” Will decided. “Sorry. I wasn’t quite thinking when I bought it.”

Abigail cocked her head slightly, watching him. Her wariness had disappeared once she knew he was part of the magical community, but she was still smart enough to be cautious. “What were you thinking?”

Will took a seat and stretched out in it, taking his time. He gave the answer thought before shrugging. “Teddy enjoyed it several years ago, and he’s about your age. Teddy’s my godson,” he explained, seeing Abigail’s confused look. “I did what I could to help Andromeda raise him, considering...” Will grimaced. He hadn’t been in a good place, else he might have done more to raise the boy. Teddy was a port in the sudden storm of emotions pouring in from everywhere, and he loved him for more than just that, but Andromeda had been completely understanding when Will had packed and fled to the states.

Abigail knew Will was talking about the end of the Second Rising, even if she didn’t yet know how involved he’d been in that war, so thankfully he didn’t have to explain further. “Have a lot of nephews and nieces?”

Will laughed softly. “You could say that. My best friend is the second youngest of seven, and most all of them have a good number of kids themselves.”

Abigail smiled. It was soft, the edges wistful and base firm, as if to keep it from trembling. “Sounds nice.”

Will mirrored her expression, though his held more glass in the corners. “Yeah. It was just me, most of my life. I envied Ron his family for many years - at times I still do.”

Abigail went still, suddenly, and she bit her lip. Will just waited, calmly, letting the decision to speak or not be Abigail’s alone. She must have needed to get things off her chest very badly, or come to see him as more of a comfort than he’d thought, because she did speak, albeit haltingly. “Did your d- I mean, do you-” Abigail winced and stopped her sentence.

“My dad died very young,” Will replied, figuring he knew what she’d been about to ask. There was a strong curiosity lurking on the edge of his awareness so he didn’t say all of what he might have otherwise, but he still comforted Abigail as best he could. “My Uncle, however, didn’t approve of me. Thought he could... discipline the freakishness out of me.” Will showed no emotion as he flatly explained, “He’d have been much happier if I never returned from school alive.”

Abigail fiddled with a strand of her hair for a bit. Then, hesitantly, she began talking. “In the end I - I could tell something was wrong, more wrong than what I knew, anyway. And I thought at times that maybe - maybe he might, might hit me. It looked like he wanted to.” Abigail smiled then, and it was as brittle as the worst of Will’s own. She gestured to her neck in an attempt to hide her hurt and fear behind a humor that meant she was past it - a humor that meant it no longer hurt her. A wish for a future state to occur before the healing had even begun. “Guess I know why now.”

Will wanted so badly to comfort her, to tell her that he understood, that she wasn’t alone - wanted to spill the whole sordid story of the man he trusted leading him like a lamb to slaughter, so different from her tale and yet the same - but just at that moment the curiosity outside revealed itself in the form of Alana, knocking softly on the door frame.

Will turned to her, noting the rising irritation from Abigail and trying to control his own. Alana smiled apologetically, but was firm. “It’s almost time for group Abigail, why don’t you start heading over?”
Abigail sighed and seemed five seconds away from rolling her eyes. But she stood up. So Will did as well. “I guess that’s my cue,” he remarked. He began to gesture awkwardly towards the door and suddenly found his arms full. Abigail was hugging him tightly, and Will hugged her back. Leaning down, he whispered to her words of hope. “It gets easier. I promise you - it gets easier. You’ll get through this. You’re stronger than he was.”

Abigail hugged him tighter for a moment, and then let go and pulled away. She smoothed her hair a moment. Nodded. Left without a word.

Will watched her go, heart aching, before finally turning to Alana.

Alana was frowning, but looked thoughtful. “You can’t be her father, Will.”

Will couldn’t help but to snort at that thought. “I’m not a good choice to be anyone’s father,” he replied blandly. “I can, however, manage uncle.”

Alana raised an eyebrow.

Will sighed and took his glasses off to rub the bridge of his nose. “Her stability is gone - shattered. She needs a safe place to pick up the pieces and move on, and if she’s decided the man who saved her from her father is that place, I’ll do my best to be there for her.”

“She needs to learn to stand on her own,” Alana gently admonished.

Will put his glasses back on before looking Alana straight in the eye. “Some people will claw their way out of corpses to stand on their own. Some people need a wall to lean on, even if just for a day.”

Alana sighed, moving her gaze to the hallway as if she could see Abigail still. One beat passed in silence, two, and then her shoulders dropped and Alana turned back to him. “Abigail’s never volunteered information like that before,” she softly stated.

So she had been listening in to the last part of their conversation. Will was momentarily impressed.

“I still don’t know if this will help or hurt her in the long run,” Alana continued, “but I don’t know what else to do.”

“Let me help her, Alana,” Will stated softly. “I’ve got experience with damaged children. If it becomes detrimental, I’ll respect your judgement.”

Alana studied him a long moment. He wondered if the fact she thought him unstable was the reason why she was having such a hard time giving in to the inevitable. Finally, however, she nodded. “Alright. But I will stop this if I need to, Will, friend or not.”

Will found the right side of his mouth quirking upwards. “I’d expect nothing less,” he replied. Then he sighed and decided he wasn’t going to stick around long enough for the silence to become awkward. “Guess I should go get something to eat. Bye, Alana.” Will headed out then, Alana letting him go easily. Someday, Will mused, she might learn that you shouldn’t always let people go if you wanted them to stay.

Hannibal was pleased to note that Will was exactly on time, just like always. His patients were never prone to lateness (not if they wanted to remain his patients for long, truth be told), but Will was even more punctual than most. It was oddly satisfying to know that when he opened the door Will would be there, just shedding his jacket. “Good evening, Will,” Hannibal greeted.
Will gave him a slightly sheepish look, bashful for some reason. “Evening, Hannibal. Alana call you yet?”

Hannibal stood aside to let the man past, pleased to note Will took the time to hang his jacket up this time before taking his seat. “Should I be expecting a call?”

Will sighed. “She caught me talking to Abigail. She’s still not happy with it, but she’s given the okay for now.”

Hannibal nodded as he took his own seat. “I must profess I am glad at this change. You’ve been a good influence on Abigail - she seems to be adjusting better recently.”

The shrug was jerky, and Will looked disbelieving. “It’s not much, I just had something she could connect to. It’s not a big deal, really, would’ve happened to anyone who had it.”

“I doubt that, Will,” Hannibal replied easily. “You are far too willing to diminish your own values. Were you not allowed to do well in school?”

Will had never volunteered a description of his home in a word as accurate as abuse, but Hannibal knew it likely had been from what little Will was willing to discuss. Some days he was willing to speak of it, as long as the topic was introduced casually.

Today was apparently one of those days, as Will gave a slightly crooked smile. “I wasn’t allowed to do better in school than my cousin, no, but that ended after primary. No,” Will shook his head, curls bouncing slightly. “I spent many years trying to convince people there wasn’t anything special about me - and there really isn’t, I’m just me.”

Hannibal really, really wanted the un-redacted version of Will’s file. Until then… “Are you allowed to speak of it?”

Will shook his head.

Shame.

Hannibal couldn’t help but to purse his lips and sigh through his nose. Ah well, just another mystery to unravel. Seeing as that track of inquiry was at it’s end, Hannibal asked, “You were able to take the afternoon off, then?”

Will scowled. “Jack canceled my classes for a case we’re not even handling - all of them, for the whole fucking week.”

“Hopefully used productively,” Hannibal remarked, “perhaps with a call to your lawyer.”

“Draco’s in town,” Will replied. “We’re gonna meet with Jack tomorrow to make a contract for the consulting.”

“Reduced crime scene visits?” Hannibal inquired, curious.

“Three times a month.” Will shifted in his seat, almost as if he were feeling guilt at an admission of weakness. “I’ll go to all of them for a single case if it ends up being something really big, but other
than that it’ll be files and lab work after my classes. We’re hoping I’ll only have to go to two a
month, as Jack will want to save one in case the ripper comes back.”

Hannibal blinked. “The Chesapeake Ripper?”

A nod.

That was... interesting. “Do you believe he is likely to become active again?”

Will’s mouth stretched out on the right side, neither a smile nor frown. He breathed once, and then
shrugged as he furrowed his brows. “Maybe? I don’t know - the ripper’s unpredictable. He could kill
again tomorrow, he could wait twenty years, or he might retire. Maybe he’s dead.” Will shrugged
again. Then he grimaced. “It doesn’t matter. The ripper is Jack’s personal demon - he’ll always be
lunging at the bit for a chance to take him down, no matter what he has to sacrifice to get it.”

Hannibal ignored the swell such a statement gave his ego to focus on the poignant word choice.
Nothing Will said was ever accidental, each word exactly what he meant to say even if they weren’t
weighed and measured before being released into the air, as Hannibal chose his. So he tilted his head
slightly to the right, and questioned, “Do you believe yourself to be his lamb?”

Will did smile then, a crooked and dark thing which held monsters in its grasp even as it poured forth
newly spilt blood. “Many think I make the ideal sacrifice - raised to slaughter as I was - but if Jack
tries he’ll find himself learning something the darkest of forces acknowledged before their end.”

Hannibal licked his lips, his heart skipping a beat and blood humming beneath his skin in response to
finally seeing a glimpse at the monster he’d known lurked beneath. “And what was that?”

Will’s smile turned sharp enough to crunch diamonds. “I’m not that easy to kill.”

Oh, he certainly hoped so. Amused with secrets still hidden to Will, Hannibal smiled in return.

For some reason, Draco’s inability to restrain himself from putting his feet on the dash was just as
amusing now as it had been ten years ago. Perhaps it was because he now wore designer suits and
high-end loafers instead of beat up sneakers and jeans (either his or Will’s - always just the closest
ones in reach after waking). Draco noticed Will’s smile and rolled his eyes, flipping him off.

For a moment, it almost seemed as if they were back there. Twenty-two and full of a restless energy
they didn’t know how to dispose of, driving long hours through the countryside with nothing but a
couple duffle bags of clothes and a thankfully diminishing paranoia.

Draco had gone to get his law degree that fall, and Will had lasted another two months before fleeing
to New Orleans.

A piece of toast hit the side of his head.

“Stop being maudlin,” Draco ordered. “It’s too early, you’re depressing me, and I’m too beautiful to
start reminiscing about ‘back in my day’s and ‘when I was a kid’ or whatever else you’re stuck on.”

Will chuckled and shrugged. “Just remembering how annoying you were on the Road Trip From
Hell.”

Draco shoved the last of his toast in his mouth and pointedly ignored Will, flipping open some file
and going through the pages again.
The rest of the ride was spent in easy silence, Will absently turning the radio to some old blues station and the early sun just gaining traction. Meetings at nine were the worst - Will was lucky most of his classes were afternoon ones. He hated mornings.

Security was at least easy this morning, getting Draco his visitor's pass with minimal fuss, and soon enough Will was standing in front of Human Resources. Draco held his shoulders tightly as he briefed Will quickly. “You want adequate pay, control of your classes, and lessened crime scene visits,” Draco reminded him. “I’ll take care of everything else, you just nod along. Got it?”

“Let you do your job, got it,” Will dutifully parroted back, despite the fact that he really didn’t care about the money. Maybe he could find another charity to donate to or something.

Draco nodded, satisfied, and then let Will go so they could enter the office.

There were three people in there already. Jack was there too, looking angry. Granted, that might have just been his face. Draco greeted everyone verbally while Will nodded awkwardly, and then he sat down to watch the chaos unfold.

“I don’t understand why this is necessary,” Jack jumped in to start with. “Will has been working with us for months now without complaint.”

“Mr. Graham wasn’t certain then how much of a toll this would take on him,” Draco replied coldly. Jack Crawford had not made a good impression. “And from all we’ve discussed, he was rather under the implication that he would assist on the Minnesota Shrike case and then go back to teaching.”

“Will came on the Stammets case when I asked,” Jack countered. “I didn’t drag him there.”

“I like taking cases,” Will interjected. “and maybe I didn’t put my foot down soon enough, but this has cut into my class time. I’m not actually an agent, Jack.”

“It says here you were cleared for return to active duty,” one of the others in the room remarked, reading a file.

“My client was never an FBI agent,” Draco retorted. “He was active on a police force many years ago, but he was rejected when he applied to the FBI. So that clearance is null and void, seeing as it’s based on a fallacy. Not to mention his so called ‘return’ has only given him a temporary agent identification, and not even full reinstatement status. I will not have my client rejected as a proper agent, with all the pay and protection that entitles him to, only for this institution to then work him like an agent without even protecting him properly.”

That shut the agents up. Will fiddled with his glasses to hide his smirk.

Draco, sensing he now had control of the field, cracked his knuckles and leaned in. “Let’s talk terms, shall we?”

It was all a bit of a blur from there, really. Will zoned out and let Draco do what he did best. They only really needed Will’s input on one point anyway, when he heard the argument of class times.

“Jack has canceled my classes on no authority but his own, no judgement but his own, twice now. I’m a teacher, first and foremost. No one should be able to cancel except me, and I shouldn’t have to let the education of your future agents suffer because there’s a crime scene that I can study the photos of later.”

“Agent Crawford canceled your classes?” one of the HR people asked with a dubiously raised brow. Will met the agent’s eye and spoke calmly. “He canceled all of them this week for a case that was
Sector Seven’s jurisdiction.”

“We didn’t know that at the time,” Jack protested, although the bite had faded and he simply sounded tired.

The agent pursed his lips. “I see.”

Other than that, Will wasn’t needed for anything more than to sign where Draco told him to. He didn’t bother reading it over - there was no way Draco would have allowed him to sign if it wasn’t exactly what the man had been aiming for and as much as they might disagree on some things, Draco honestly did have Will’s best interests at heart.

Waiting outside for the blond to finish up, Will wasn’t surprised to find himself facing Jack. He decided to cut to the chase, speaking before the other man could. “I’m sleepwalking, Jack,” Will revealed, “I still have nightmares about Hobbs, I don’t feel well, and I have a thousand issues tied up in children who weren’t adequately prepared going into bad situations and never coming out of them.” Will let out a heavy sigh that grated at the edges of his throat, almost like gargling gravel. “I want to help, but I can’t go at this pace. I’ll break,” he admitted softly.

However much he reminded Will of the man, Jack wasn’t Dumbledore. If this was going to work, Will had to give Jack something in order to show the man that he was trying here and not just hiding at the slightest provocation.

They were quiet after that, just two tired men coming to the only compromise they could. It was only moments, though it felt longer, before Draco came out and headed down the hall, chatting about some restaurant in the area he’d heard of and was dying to try. Will followed him like the good friend that he was, already resigning himself to an awkward afternoon. No way was he dressed up enough for whatever place had caught the Slytherin’s interest.

He wasn’t, as it turned out, but neither was Draco. Most of the people in the small restaurant were dressed like it was dinner, not lunch, in three piece suits and obviously expensive dresses. Will shrugged off the attention that didn’t even seem to bother Draco, following the blond to a table near the back when someone called out his name.

“Hannibal?” Will asked, turning.

Hannibal walked over to join them, looking bemused. “William, what a pleasant surprise. Dr. Hannibal Lecter,” he introduced, holding a hand out to Draco.

“The psychiatrist himself,” Draco replied, shaking the offered hand. “Draco Malfoy, the lawyer. Would you like to join us for lunch?”

Will had a sudden prospect of impending doom. “Draco,” he weakly protested, rubbing his face with one hand and knocking his glasses askew.

“Oh please Will,” Draco waved a dismissive hand at him, “like I’m not going to interrogate the only therapist you’ve actually talked to.”

“I profess to find myself curious as well,” Hannibal added. “If it is no bother to you, Will, I would love to join you both.”
Will fixed his glasses and rolled his eyes. “Yeah, sure, whatever. Can we just eat?”

They got seated quickly after that, Draco admiring Hannibal’s cufflinks and a talk about some fashion thing going right over Will’s head as he looked the menu over. Hannibal seemed rather surprised by the ease with which Will ordered a ridiculously overpriced sandwich.

Will shrugged. “Draco spent several years scandalizing the memory of his father by eating at the most expensive places he could find in tattered shirts and jeans. He dragged me along for the ride.”

“Oh please like you didn’t enjoy it,” Draco retorted. “Besides, you would have eaten mac and cheese forever if I hadn’t intervened.”

Will raised an eyebrow.

Draco snorted and swirled his wine. “You can so afford it, Lord Black.”

Hannibal’s left eyebrow rose by a millimeter.

Will sighed and fiddled with his napkin. “My godfather was small time nobility.” He kicked Draco in the shin before the blond could add anything.

“My father was a count, a title which passed to me,” Hannibal replied easily, one secret for another in this strange information quid pro quo they had going, “though it doesn’t require much of me.”

Will was ready to reply when another, less welcome voice interrupted.

“Mr. Graham, how lucky to find you.”

Will scowled but flashed his first two fingers horizontally at Draco in a sign to stand down. “Agent Miller,” he replied tersely. “I assume you tracked me down for a reason.”

Miller at least had the decency not to attempt to convince him it had been a chance meeting. “We’ve hit a stall in our investigation,” the man rather predictably stated. “I’d like you to come in.”

“No.”

Agent Miller’s brows furrowed.

Will raised one eyebrow at him. It wasn’t as impressive as Draco’s, but Will had perfected his own version over the years of war. “Need I repeat myself, Agent?”

Miller seemed taken aback by his tone, but opened his mouth to speak when another man appeared and grabbed his arm. “I’m so sorry about this, Mr. Graham,” the other agent stated. “We’ll leave you to your lunch. Come on, Miller, let’s go.”

“But!” Miller tried to protest as his partner dragged him off.

“Don’t make me tell the chief you’re harassing veterans again, Miller,” the other agent threatened as they left.

Will sighed and turned back to face the table properly, slumping in his seat. He took his glasses off and fiddled with them, cleaning them just to have something to do. Draco took over conversation then, and Hannibal graciously followed, the two of them letting Will sit and listen quietly. Their words washed over him in an easy rise and fall.

Although when their food came, Draco kept an eye out to make sure he ate. So Will ate, despite not
being in the mood for food. He really didn’t fancy another confrontation, which Draco would start if he had to.

Hannibal looked sharply at them during the silent interaction, but thankfully let it alone. He seemed content to allow Will to dictate how much social interaction he was going to have on any given day. So Will was allowed to spend lunch in silence, and even avoid goodbyes as Draco thanked Hannibal for the afternoon and said he’d drive Will home. Hannibal had only told Will to get some rest and left it at that.

They were halfway to Wolf Trap when Draco spoke. “I approve.”

Will rolled his eyes. “I can finally breathe easy,” he retorted just before dropping off to sleep.

The next few days were a bit more stressful as Will prepared for the outing Alana had finally given the go-ahead for, although it was nothing compared to the morning Abigail was set to arrive. So he did what he usually did when panicking over something relatively simple but actually a huge step for him - he called Luna.

Luna, thankfully, went through all the steps with him. “The house is clean, yes?”

“Yeah,” Will replied absently, going over everything in his head again. “Wall’s repaired, beds in place…”

“No underwear lying around?”

Will had to laugh at that. “No, no underwear.”

“Then relax, William. Your house is a peaceful thing, surprisingly void of wrackspurts. She’ll find rest there.”

Will had to swallow against the sudden lump in his throat. Luna always did know exactly what to say to settle him. “Thanks, Luna.”

“Always. Relax, lightning bug - it’ll be fine. Now hang up and give the new family my love.”

Will laughed as the line went dead, shaking his head a little at the odd phrasing. Though, as he thought about it, watching Hannibal’s sleek bentley pull up the drive, it rather did seem like he was preparing for his family to come home after a long time away.

The dogs were certainly thrilled, and Will couldn’t help but to smile at the absolute shock on Abigail’s face when she was swamped by the pack. Laughter reached his ears as Will went to corral them all. “Come on guys,” he directed, tsking at them, “let her breathe a little.”

Abigail beamed up at him from her spot on the ground, Buster planted firmly in her lap and glowing under her attention. “How many dogs do you have?”

“Seven,” Will replied, patting Winston as he sat by Will and the others went dashing about the car, excited by the commotion.

“Seven?” Abigail repeated, finally lifting Buster off and onto the ground. “Dad wouldn’t even let me have one!”

“Perks of being an adult,” Will replied as he gave the teen a hand up. “My uncle never would have
allowed it either. He barely tolerated my owl.”

Alana and Hannibal looked at him oddly for that (which, to be fair, an owl wasn’t exactly a normal pet) but simply continued gathering bags from the trunk. Will went to help them, easily taking the rest of the supplies and letting the dogs run about the yard as they shuffled everything into the house.

“Bedroom’s upstairs,” Will stated, plopping a cooler down on his kitchen table. “I’ve got some old waders laid out on the bed, if they don’t fit let me know and I’ll find something else.”

Abigail nodded and dashed up the stairs, an amused Alana following more sedately behind her. Will watched them go with a smile.

“Thank you for doing this, Will,” Hannibal spoke from behind him.

Will turned with a raised eyebrow, not voicing his question.

Hannibal gave him a small smile. “I’ve not seen Abigail this lively before. It seems you knew exactly what was needed.” His gaze was soft and warm, and Will felt distinctly undeserving of a look so full of... well, fondness, if not love.

Will shrugged, hiding a bit by relocating various things from the cooler into the fridge. “Abigail deserves some time off. We all do,” he added softly.

Hannibal made a soft humming noise, but ultimately let that statement go. Unpacking was easy, and with two sets of hands accomplished swiftly. Soon Will was throwing on his own waders, adjusting the straps on Abigail’s and ensuring her vest was snug enough to keep her warm, and leading a troop of dogs down to the river.

“Do you make all your own lures?” Abigail asked as they walked, her hands full of rods.

“Store bought ones just don’t work the same,” Will said in reply. Hannibal and Alana were following behind chatting about something or other, the weather was warm for the season, and the air was crisp. He thought it might have been the closest he’d come to being at peace in a long while. “And it’s something to do,” he admitted, “fills up a few hours.”

Abigail scoffed. “You could find another hobby,” she suggested. “Learn to play that piano you have.”

“Music doesn’t often seem appealing when you wake up with screams behind your ears,” Will replied. Abigail went quiet at that, and Will put an awkward hand on her shoulder to show that it was alright. He’d said it for her benefit, after all - it might help her in the years to come the way it had helped him.

Fishing did see that tension drain out of Abigail entirely, though, just as Will had thought it would. She was a quick study, taking little time to get down threading the bait and the motion of the cast. “Last thing in fishing properly,” Will instructed as he took a step back to give her some space, “is to name your lure after someone you cherish. If that person cherished you, so the superstition goes, you will catch a fish.”

Abigail, all smiles and carefree in a way Will hadn’t ever seen before, turned back to look at him. “And what did you name this one?”

Will knew he was blushing, and he reached up to scratch at the back of his neck. “Well, I still hadn’t ironed out any emotions, and I was worried, and you were still in a coma when I made this lure and -”
“It’s me, isn’t it,” Abigail asked with a slight smile on her lips. She was laughing at him, but that was easier to take than her scorn.

Will smiled sheepishly and nodded.

Abigail turned away, paused a moment, and cast with a near perfect swing. And it was telling, in a way that made Will’s heart swell in his chest until his ribs felt too small to contain it, that only a few minutes later Abigail was fighting to keep her grip and crying with delight, “Will!”

Will stepped up close, planting his feet and wrapping around her to grasp the rod as well. “Easy now,” he instructed. “Easy, we’ve got all the time in the world. Just reel it in now, you got it.” Leaning on his solid support, Abigail reeled in her catch. When it, predictably, went a little wide on the swing out of the water, Will reached out and snagged it. “Two pound bass,” he proclaimed, “Nice. Let’s put this one in the cooler, huh?”

Abigail just beamed at him like all was right in the world. It was the look Teddy had spotted when he’d caught his first fish, and Will knew he’d likely had the same look when he’d done the same. Some things were just universal.

That included photos, apparently. Hannibal had a camera out and ready as they reached the shore. “I believe it is traditional to record the first catch, is it not?” he asked with a slight smile.

Will nodded, his chest warm. He only felt slightly like a fool as Hannibal snapped a photo of him and Abigail holding her first fish as Alana watched. Not even her psychiatrist face could dampen the mood, and soon Will was following sedately behind Abigail as the girl nearly bounced her way back into the river.

Hannibal’s heart felt too full as he watched Will and Abigail prepare a new line and begin the task of filling the cooler Will had brought along. Abigail was laughing, carefree for the first time since Hannibal had known her, and probably long before that. They looked like family, and Hannibal felt deeply privileged to be a part of it.

“Doesn’t this worry you?”

When Hannibal turned to Alana, he noticed she was furrowing her brow in worry. Hannibal thought a moment before settling on a reply. “I must profess I’m uncertain what you mean, Alana.”

Alana sighed. “Abigail was deeply attached to her parents, and now she seems to be replacing that attachment with Will. I can only worry she isn’t healing so much as repressing.”

“Repression can be a healthy thing, on occasion,” Hannibal gently reminded her. “Abigail is strong, but there is only so much a child full of so much love can take. I told you before that being mired in her trauma was perhaps doing more harm than good. If little visits such as these ease her heart and help her feel safe enough to truly confront her demons, how harmful can it be?”

Hannibal watched the interplay of thoughts on Alana’s face as she stared out to the river, watching. Slowly, the doubt and fear were replaced with something like resignation, but tinged with a slight hope. “A safety net,” Alana finally murmured, “to catch her when she finally has that breakdown.”

“Abigail is still in survival mode,” Hannibal conceded with a nod. “But Will won’t allow himself to let her down. She’s in capable hands.”

Alana sighed. “I hope you’re right.”
A bark of laughter caught their attention. It was Will, head thrown back and laughing with abandon. Hannibal’s breath caught in his throat - he’d never seen Will in such obvious joy before. The man was more radiant than ever, and Hannibal captured the sound of his laugh to keep in a crystal decanter in the library of his mind palace. He would need to make a room all for Will, at this rate.

Alana sat in as much shock as he, and finally a smile bloomed. “Maybe this will be good for both of them,” she stated softly as hope won out.

Hannibal smiled, even as he tried to calm his heart and push back the emotions he couldn’t begin to sort out for later examination. “I dare say it will.”

That problem laid to rest, Hannibal began conversing with Alana on the latest article in *Psychiatry Weekly* on the new use of phototherapy as a potential treatment for anxiety disorders. The afternoon passed easily enough, sun warm as dogs barked and their pile of fish steadily grew larger. It was such a scene of domestic bliss Hannibal had to store the image for safekeeping in one of the farther back, more personal rooms of his mind palace. He’d need the reference in order to sketch it out later.

Chapter End Notes

So I had actually planned to go through the whole case but then I was like - wait a sec. Moldy-Voldy is magical, no way would they let muggles handle this case, what am I thinking? So you've got a chap of relationship development. Which, honestly, is necessary for getting my people where I want them to go considering I want murder family and not S2 bullshit.

Also, it's a slightly indulgent chapter full of happy fluffy fishing lessons. Who doesn't love that? Srsly bro XD

We're getting closer to real plot, I swear. I know this feels like the long way round but... well... I started out to write a neat idea and somehow it morphed into this monster. I'm writing bout 4 chaps ahead of posting (I'm on ep. 8, lol) and have now hit the word count of The Sorcerer's Stone - if only writing my real books was this easy! X'D
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

A wild Gideon appears! And as usual, our boys go from discussing murder to talking metaphors as a stand-in for feelings.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! So as you might have figured out, we got the Must Move Now apartment. Moving sucks, wedding was great, and now we have wifi again, yay! Now it's simply back to the job-hunting grind.

So here's the next chap, full of actual plot along with emotional shit. And the introduction of Gideon and Chilton, two of my favorite side characters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will sighed as he reclined on the couch with a whiskey in hand. The dogs were all nestled in and ready for sleep, Abigail resting from more activity than she’d seen in months with Alana a silent guard, if the light seen up the stairs was any indication.

“Thanks again for dinner,” Will remarked as Hannibal took the chair across from him with his own glass.

Hannibal smiled back. “Thank you for the fish. And the excellent drink.” The man had changed into striped pajama bottoms and a warm looking red sweater. It was strange, to see the man so open and casual. It seemed almost too intimate for their relationship.

Will shrugged back in reply. He found himself absently rubbing his left arm, right where a wand holster had spent so many years resting. He hadn’t worn it since the night he’d lost the ability to use it, so he hadn’t expected to miss it. It had charms to hide it and protect it from attack and elements, so when Will had taken Abigail aside after they’d changed out of the waders to give her her wand, he’d given her the holster too. So she’d never have to be parted from her weapon again, he’d informed her.

He hadn’t held it in ten years. He couldn’t stop touching the places it had once resided.

“Are you feeling well, William?” Hannibal questioned softly.

Will didn’t stop blinking at the ceiling, but he thought about the question.

“It’s been a long time since this house has held such joy,” Will finally answered. “Family gatherings... we usually have those at the Burrow - Ron’s house. They only seem to come here when something’s gone wrong. People never visit to spread laughter on the corners.”

“You seem a man who values his space,” Hannibal reminded him. “Perhaps you simply need tell
people they are invited.”

Will hummed to show he’d heard, and thought. Eventually, Hannibal finished his drink and bid a soft goodnight. It was odd to have his psychiatrist in his bed, but as the only other option was the couch Will had insisted.

So Will reclined on the couch, sitting sentry over his house on the field, watching the shadows chase each other upon the ceiling and listening to the sounds of a world asleep.

Will was sitting at the kitchen table and watching through the window as his dogs ran about when Hannibal joined him with two cups of coffee. The man had insisted on bringing beans and a french press and Will hadn’t exactly protested. He nodded his thanks.

Hannibal sipped at his own cup for a moment before speaking. “Since you seem rather aware I will assume you didn’t sleep last night.”

Will shot Hannibal a wry smile, which was all the confirmation needed.

As they were the only two awake at the moment, Hannibal continued with a question instead of letting the matter drop. “May I inquire as to why you felt the need to stand watch?”

Ah, so he’d noticed. Will sighed and stared into his coffee cup. When he spoke, the sound felt almost separate from himself. “There are twenty-three different ways to take this house. My friends put up some contingencies for just such a thing but...” Will trailed off, removed his right hand from around his cup to touch the bare space on his left arm where the halter had once sat, in another lifetime. “I can’t protect you like I used to.”

Will jumped slightly as he felt Hannibal’s hand cover his own. Slightly ashamed of himself, Will met the man’s eyes for one, fleeting moment. Hannibal was overflowing with sincerity and tender affection, and Will didn’t know what to do with that, so he looked away.

“In the unlikely event that such a thing would become necessary, William,” Hannibal spoke softly, but with an iron conviction, “know that I too would do all I could to protect Abigail - and to protect you in turn.”

Startled, Will looked Hannibal in the eye again. The man was serious, but why? He’d called Will friend, certainly, but in Will’s experience that wasn’t enough for anyone to be willing to protect him. His other friends would, with their lives, but those were battle-fire friendships forged in flame and cemented in blood. Hannibal didn’t have that reasoning, so why...?

Abigail wandered down the stairs then, yawning as she greeted them, and the moment was lost. Hannibal removed his hand and stood to get her a cup of coffee as Abigail sat in the chair next to Will. Will startled as he felt Abigail’s weight lean against him. She looked to him then, waiting for permission, and Will gave a shaky smile and nodded.

Abigail’s smile was worth it, however. Soon her weight settled more comfortably against him, and Will’s heart swelled as her head found rest on his shoulder. He should probably tell Hermione more about Abigail, so that she could be welcomed to the clan properly. And maybe... maybe Will should inquire as to the process of getting a goddaughter. Perhaps. If Abigail didn’t mind.

Will caught Hannibal staring, and offered a tentative smile. Hannibal smiled back, soft and small but true, and in that moment Will knew the man felt the same stirrings that Will himself did - family.
... Perhaps he should also think of getting a referral, if the twinge in his heart meant what he thought it did. Will really didn’t want to think of how awkward therapy was going to be if he developed honest-to-Merlin feelings for Hannibal.

Hannibal placed a cup of coffee in front of Abigail, who thanked him with a sleepy mumble, and then turned away to collect himself by busying himself in the kitchen. Omelettes, from the look of things. Will watched as he let the warmth of this blossoming thing sink into the marrow of his bones and carve itself into the floors of his lonely house. It was nice, and despite any misgivings Will found himself wishing he could hold it forever.

Naturally, life didn’t work that way.

Abigail did have to go sometime in the early afternoon, hugging Will fiercely before departing. Alana seemed warmer towards the relationship and thanked him for the weekend with genuine feeling. Soon, they were all packed and driving away, leaving Will with the dogs and the memory of warmth. He’d have to see if they could have another outing soon - he missed having Abigail and Hannibal home with him already.

Like everything in his life, the problems all started ramping up at once. It was only a week before the official end of the war (they’d spent years cleaning up the remnants of the Death Eaters, less prone to throw in the towel after their lord had already once risen from the grave, but the day Will had killed Voldemort was deemed the end by politicians until it had become recorded as history) when Will was requested to visit a crime scene. A rumoured Ripper killing. In a hospital for the criminally insane.

The Tuesday before the visit, Will fidgeted in his seat and asked Hannibal in a slightly trembling tone, “I can’t - no one can lock me up without your approval, since you’re my psychiatrist, right?”

Hannibal blinked at him. “No,” he answered cautiously. He’d been nothing but courteous and professional as usual, despite the fact Will had seen him in his pajamas just a few nights ago, and it was oddly comforting. Made asking the question easier, and made him more inclined to believe Hannibal’s answer. “Not in a psychiatric ward, anyway, not unless you prove a danger to yourself or others.”

Will nodded, though his relief was small.

Hannibal noticed (he always did) and tilted his head slightly to the left before inquiring, “Might I ask what brought this up?”

Why did Hannibal always tilt his head to the left, Will wondered absently. His mind was awash in nerves not yet blown into panic, his thoughts hard to catch and corral as they sprinted off in every direction. It took a moment to find the explanation. “Jack wants me to view a scene in the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane,” Will stated, voice flat. “We go tomorrow, before my classes, and I -” Will cut himself off with a grimace.

Hannibal looked sympathetic. “Frederick Chilton is a colleague of mine,” he stated, the tone implying how unfortunate he found that fact although Hannibal remained too polite to say it aloud. “But you are my patient, Will. What time is your first class?”

“Two-thirty,” Will answered.

Hannibal nodded. “Call me before then, use the emergency number so I will receive it even if I am
with another patient. If you haven’t called by that time, I will come and fetch you.” Hannibal stated
that as if it were solid fact, and Will’s relief was so powerful he’d have fallen to his knees were he
not already seated. His twitching and fidgety legs fell still as Hannibal continued, “Call me at any
time on that same number if you feel the need to - no matter what reason.”

Will stared at his now-limp hand, unable to look at Hannibal in his embarrassed gratitude. “I can call
your normal number - I shouldn’t interrupt your patients for something that isn’t actually an
emergency.”

“Will,” Hannibal’s tone was slightly chiding, “you are entering the very place you fear most, to enter
the headspace you fear will see you locked up, all under the eye of someone as opportunistic as
Chilton. I believe that most certainly qualifies as an emergency.”

Will blushed. It probably went all the way down his neck. Great. Way to keep a cool head in front of
your crus - uh, psychiatrist, Graham.

Still, it did calm his nerves. Slightly.

Somewhat.

Alright, so Will was just as nervous pulling up to the building as he would have been without
Hannibal’s promise of rescue. He did get out of the car though, and even managed to listen when
Jack stated, “Thanks to Freddy Lounds we have an unconfirmed story running around that the
Chesapeake Ripper is already in custody.”

“Un...confirmed?” Will asked slowly, words speeding up with his nervousness, “am I confirming?”
There was a nasty taste in his mouth as Will turned to face the doors. “Fact checker for Freddy
Lounds.”

“You’re fact checking for me,” Jack corrected. He paused, then, looking Will over. “Are you okay?”

The fingers of Will’s wand hand were twitching, so it was probably obvious how not okay he was.
“I always feel a little nervous going into these places,” he admitted blandly.

“Why’s that?” Jack started walking up the steps, and Will followed.

“Afraid they won’t let me out.”

“Yeah, well, I won’t leave you here,” Jack unenthusiastically threw over his shoulder. It instilled
great confidence.

“Yeah, not today.” Will couldn’t help the sense of gallows humor - it was how he dealt with fear -
rudeness and inappropriate humor. Jack wouldn’t leave him today because they were hunting his
white whale. Next time was anyone’s guess, however. It always was.

Meeting Frederick Chilton, Will could see why Hannibal disliked him. Opportunistic was too kind a
word for a man so... oily.

“Dr. Bloom just called me about you Mr. Graham,” Chilton proclaimed as he shook their hands. “Or
is it Dr. Graham?”

“I’m not a doctor,” Will replied flatly. He hadn’t had the patience to sit through seven more years of
school just for some silly prefix. You only needed a bachelors for the FBI, so that’s all he’d gotten.
“You’re not FBI either, that’s a temporary identification,” Chilton was quick to point out.

Why was everyone so insistent on pointing that out like it was an insult? “I’m a teacher at the academy,” Will retorted, proud of his job even if it seemed everyone else saw it as a personal failing.

“Ah!” Chilton smiled, “a teacher.” He turned then, to the ridiculous stuffed high-back chairs meant to imply luxury and power. “Please, gentlemen, take a seat.” Naturally, Chilton perched in his office chair in front of them and clasped his hands on the desk.

Jack thanked him. Will couldn’t stomach the taste of those words and barely managed a nod. He was just glad he had his gun on him - it would cause more problems than it’d be worth if he actually used it, but at least he had the comfort of knowing he would be able to shoot his way out if it came to that.

Jack got right to business. “Dr. Chilton we’re going to need to see the crime scene while it’s still relatively undisturbed.”

“I assure you for something so disturbing it is quite undisturbed,” Chilton stated blithely.

Will didn’t want to talk to this man, but he needed one thing cleared up. “Why was a nurse left alone with a prisoner in a high-security psychiatric hospital?”

Chilton looked at him, and at least tried to appear somewhat sorry. “For the two years since he was brought here, Gideon behaved perfectly, and gave every appearance of cooperating with attempts at therapy. As dictated by our present administrator, security around him was slightly... relaxed.”

Sloppy. Unacceptably sloppy - the kind that would have gotten him stuck on latrine duty for the rest of the war, had it happened in his ranks. Will did his best not to look at the man directly and fought to keep his face blank.

“I cannot help feeling responsible myself for what happened,” Chilton stated, but the words rang hollow in the air. Especially as Chilton leaned forward towards Jack and pointed at Will as he continued, “He sat directly across from me and I had no idea what he was hiding. And now one of our staff is dead.”

Will couldn’t help but to be a smartass back. “He did kill his wife and child - you might have suspected he’d want to taste that again.”

Jack cut in before a fight could brew. “I understand, Doctor,” he stated, drawing Chilton’s attention, “Mr. Graham’s going to need to see the crime scene with as much privacy as you can provide.”

Ugh, Will hoped this didn’t go where he thought it was going to go.

Chilton turned back to him instantly, his curiosity practically oozing out of his skin. “Oh yes that thing you do.” His smile was wide and, yep, opportunistic definitely fit. Will met his gaze head on and refused to back down. “You’re quite the subject of conversation in psychiatric circles Mr. Graham.”

Will spoke slow and measured, did his best to rein himself in as the world went colder at the edges. “Am I?”

“Uh, yes,” and Chilton sounded slightly nervous. Good. “A unique cocktail of personality disorders and neuroses that make you a highly skilled profiler.”

Will took a deep breath.
Jack butted in. “He’s not here to be analysed.”

“Maybe he should be,” Chilton fired back with a smile. “We’re woefully short on information as to your kind of thing.”

Will cut Chilton off by standing. “I’m here to solve a murder, Dr. Chilton, not to improve your social standing among the peers of academia. I’d like to see the crime scene now.”

Chilton stood as well, visibly bristling. “Certainly, another time perhaps. Right this way.”

Ugh, the man never gave up, did he?

Chilton began giving them the details as he led them down ridiculous brick horror-movie corridors. “So Gideon was restrained?” Jack asked.


Jack made a thoughtful noise that showed how little he thought of that.

Chilton prattled on, seemingly unaware of the disdain for his ‘thorough security.’ “He concealed a fork tine in the palm of his hand, used it to pick the lock.”

“Where is he now?” Will had to ask. Why the hell Gideon had been allowed a metal fork was a question he probably didn’t want the answer to.

“In his cell.” Chilton looked at them both, saw their lack of confidence in him, and moved on. “You’ll note the removal of organs, and the abdominal mutilations are all consistent with the Chesapeake Ripper.”

Chilton stopped before a metal barred door and looked to Jack, who was still unimpressed. “So is the brutalization of corpses, but that doesn’t change the fact that the Ripper’s still out there.”

“Jack,” Chilton insisted softly, clearly so far up the creek he believed his own bullshit, “what I’m about to show you suggests otherwise.”

Finally, Chilton opened the door. He headed through first, and Jack shared a disbelieving look with Will before they both followed. “Dr. Chilton consulted on the case when we failed to catch the ripper after his last series of murders,” Jack explained with a slightly exasperated tone.

“You asked him?” Will had to ask.

Jack shrugged, as if he couldn’t believe they had either.

Chilton let them go into the room first, watching as they took in the scene. Which, okay, it was definitely suspicious. The nurse was impaled with various medical implements, all holding her corpse off the ground. Her eyes had been plucked out, and it looked vaguely reminiscent of the Wound Man. But, hadn’t the Ripper done that before?

“The reason you failed and kept failing to catch the Chesapeake Ripper,” Chilton spoke from the doorway, “was I already had him.”

Will grimaced. This was going to be fun.

Will jerked back to himself only to blink away tears. He breathed heavily in attempt to calm his
mind, pushing back the thoughts of war that were always so readily available this time of year. He breathed, and blinked, and focused on the purely muggle medical equipment in order to ground him. Jack, thankfully, gave him room and time, waiting to speak until Will gathered himself enough to put his glasses back on and ask, “Far as we know it’s been over two years since the Chesapeake Ripper killed?”

“That’s correct,” Jack answered as he took a couple of steps into the room. Oddly enough, his solid presence was actually helping.

Will swallowed and nodded. He had to take another deep breath and do a quick scan of the room just to be sure there was nothing amiss. “When was Gideon admitted?”

“Almost two years ago,” Jack answered. His countenance was almost deflated, depressed and guilt-ridden. The emotions were muted but there, ready to spring forth with a bit of prompting.

Will wondered who he’d lost.

In the end, they’d deemed it a possibility, and agreed upon a later date to conduct interviews. Will got out of the building mainly by hiding behind Jack, and called Hannibal as soon as he had been dropped back at his own car.

“Will, are you alright?” Hannibal asked.

“More or less,” Will replied, the phantom feeling of bursting eyes lingering on his thumbs. “It was... much worse than usual.”

“Did Chilton try very hard to keep you there?”

“He wants to study me,” Will replied, torn between groaning in frustration or screaming in rage. “Put me under a fucking microscope and see what makes me so damn special.”

Hannibal sighed. “I had thought he might. If he gets to be too overbearing please, let me know.”

“I may have to,” Will replied. “I have to go back there.”

Hannibal made a soft noise of interest.

“Interviews,” Will replied, “Chilton thinks - oh, shit,” Will’s train of thought slammed to a halt as he remembered something important. “You’re not with a patient, are you?”

“I am,” Hannibal admitted, “though I left the room as I answered.”

“Shit, sorry, I’ll let you go back to work. Sorry.”

Hannibal’s voice sounded warm. “I’m glad you made it out alright. If you are certain you’re fine, we can continue this conversation at our session on Friday.”

“Yeah I’m,” Will swallowed, trapping the lie between his teeth before it could be voiced. He took a deep breath and admitted the truth. “I’m not okay. This case is going to suck, and the timing is shitty, and I might be a mess this next week. Or two.” Better to ensure Hannibal was prepared for the worst.

“If it’s not too forward,” Hannibal stated, sounding nearly cautious, “Perhaps I could treat you to dinner after your classes this Friday. Our appointment could happen at the usual time, or spread out during the evening, whichever you prefer. I believe it could be helpful.”

Will remembered the warmth of his house as he’d listened to Abigail and Alana chatter on to a
soundtrack of pots and pans clanking about as Hannibal cooked. It was everything a home should be, and so far removed from war that it had been easy to forget that the anniversary was coming up. Maybe it would be good for him.

Finally, Will softly answered, “We’ll see.”

Hannibal took it as graciously as he took everything else. “Very well, I shall endeavour to convince you at a later time. Have a good day, William.”

“Bye Hannibal,” Will replied. With a sigh, he hung up and leaned his head back for a moment. Deep breaths, Graham, he reminded himself, you can do this.

Newly centered and violently denying any and all reminiscing, Will exited his car and made his way to his first class.

The second time Will had to meet Chilton, he at least had Alana to run interference. She dealt with the pleasantries of the staff and listened politely to Chilton’s prattle about… mail, or something. Will had stopped listening.

Until they started talking murder, that is. Will almost always tuned back into conversations once death came into it. Probably said something about him. “Murdering his wife was impulsive,” Will interjected. “The Chesapeake Ripper is methodical, meticulous - thus why he’s so hard to catch.”

“Was,” Chilton corrected, tone serious despite his smile. “Was, so hard to catch.”

Wow, he really believed his own bullshit. Will wanted to shoot him, slimy little social climber.

Will looked away without acknowledging that, and Chilton turned back to Alana. “Will this be a joint effort or are you doing separate interviews?”

“Separate,” Alana answered. “Compare and contrast.”

“I know you’re anxious to get on with it,” Chilton stated, although of course he couldn’t let them go without talking some more, sweet Merlin. “You have talked to Gideon before, for some length of time.”

Will turned his attention to Alana, intrigued. Well, mainly worried. Some prisoners fixated, and Alana was pretty and kind enough to cause even the most sensible of people to remember her with absurd fondness.

“Well I saw him mainly in court,” Alana replied. “I wrote an article about him in the Journal of Criminal Psychology.” Alana’s eyes flitted up to Will for a moment, as if to show him that she was in no danger.

“He is very familiar with you,” Chilton stated as he stood and yep, Will was now officially worried. “He’s given you a lot of thought.”

“You had sessions with him?” Will had to ask.

“Yes, two.” Alana looked back to him, reassuring and confident that she was fine. “A couple of years ago when he was first institutionalized.”

Right, because that made Will’s worry vanish entirely. He barely suppressed the urge to sigh
dramatically - this was all turning into such a bad idea in so many ways.

“I’ve read your notes, of course,” Chilton added as he flipped through some papers on his desk, apparently unable to not remain an integral part of the conversation. “They were more or less helpful, as I conducted my own interviews with Dr. Gideon over the years,” Chilton finished with a smug smile that made Will want to crush the man under his shoe.

Alana handled it better, though her polite smile basically froze on her face. “Well I’m glad I was helpful,” she stated in a pleasantly flat voice.

Because it was either be a little shit or scream, Will added, “More or less.”

Hey, if Alana wasn’t going to take the shot, Will would do it for her. Considering the true smile she gave him, the gesture had been appreciated.

Alana went first, and Will spent a very awkward twenty minutes staring out the window as Chilton did his best to pry the secrets of his trade out of him. When Alana returned, Will picked up his coat and turned to look Chilton in the eye as he answered the man’s latest question of what his secret was with. “Demonic possession has the side effect of reading minds. I wouldn’t recommend it as a recreational activity.”

Alana’s laughter followed him out the door.

Which was good, considering this place scared him. And boy, did it give him the chills to see men looming from where he could so easily be himself. Will reminded himself that Hannibal wouldn’t let them lock him up here - the man had promised - and set himself into interrogation mode. It wasn’t something he’d had much use for after the war, but it was a mindset not easily forgotten. Even if it meant Will was willing to do some things that general society frowned upon.

Gideon was… confusing. The man thought he was the Ripper, but his emotions and actions made it seem as if he were desperately trying to prove it. The man oscillated between certain and confused, conflicting emotions and motivations existing as if they were one and a truly impressive ability to hold dizzying conversations full of a self-justification that seemed to exist only to convince himself. Or because someone else had been trying to convince him.

Will… found himself slightly liking the man. He was quick-witted with the kind of dry humour Will appreciated. The conversation hadn’t been half bad, except for the headache it left him with. The one that just kept growing as the week went on.

Will stood aside as the forensics team argued and bickered, watched while Jack tried not to bend under the weight of Miriam Lass (he’d finally caved asked Beverly, who told Will the whole sordid story), and felt like he was speaking into a void as Will tried to tell them that this was plagiarism, and to watch out for the coming storm. It just felt wrong. This man wasn’t the Ripper, despite the facts that made it seem possible, and the real Ripper was sure to let everyone know just how wrong they were to ever suspect Gideon. It was all going to go downhill from here, and no one was willing to listen.

Will was so, so tired of being Cassandra.

Will had canceled his dinner with Hannibal (and on second thought his appointment too, which Hannibal let him get away with despite it being not quite a full twenty-four hours) after Jack’s midnight contact from beyond the grave. If Miriam Lass was even dead. What might have turned
into a nice day was now mainly filled with standing around awkwardly and hoping Zeller didn’t provoke Jack into actually making good on those threats. Will really wasn’t in the mood to separate a fight, and having to deal with his wife’s cancer had pushed Jack far too close to his breaking point.

For once, Will empathized greatly with Jack. This week had been stressful enough for the both of them without all this bullshit thrown into the mix.

So Will piped up in hopes of getting them back on track and maybe getting one small problem out of the way before it blew into a larger problem. “Well at least now we know for certain that Gideon isn’t the Ripper because the call didn’t come from the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane.”

“That I would have been able to trace,” Beverly added, clearly on the same page and ready to sweep that fun bit of their week under the rug. Will absently wondered if she’d be adverse to him joining her post-friday drinking.

He’d need it, after this. Cautiously, Will took a step forward and asked, “Jack, are you certain it was a recording?”

Jack looked at him like he’d lost his mind.

“Jack,” Will replied flatly. “You said it yourself - there’s no body.” Will was disinclined to believe anyone was dead without seeing the corpse, preferably with the head chopped off and set on fire. He’d hidden that way himself once, after all.

Jack’s reaction was probably more guilt than anything. “Miriam Lass is dead!” To think otherwise would be a fate much worse - held captive by the ripper and suffering any number of untold horrors. Will understood, he did, some griefs were simply too much to be borne, but Jack was ruling out a rather important detail as he protested and refused to hear otherwise. “The Chesapeake Ripper is making it very clear that someone is plagiarizing his work!”

And then Zeller piped up. Morgana’s saggy tits.

“It was two forty-six in the morning Jack,” Zeller spoke with a hint of his usual infuriating swagger. “You’re in a deep sleep, you’re roused, you’re disoriented, might not even know you’re still asleep.”

Thankfully, instead of bloodshed Jack’s look just turned hard and determined as he softly replied with the conviction that had led good men into bad wars, “I know when I’m awake.”

He told them to keep looking until they found something, and then left.

Beverly slumped in her chair and proclaimed, “Well, I’m drinking tonight. Who’s in?”

“Me,” Will replied to the slight shock of the others, rubbing his hands over his face. “I’ll bring the whiskey.”

At least Jack was certain of his sleeping status - it must be nice, Will mused. He couldn’t seem to tell anymore. He hadn’t been sleeping well, true, but he really felt it after his last class, sitting at his desk and trying to rub away the urge to just lay down on the floor and sleep in the hope that it would make his head stop aching.

Hooves.

Will looked up, noticed his stag stepping through the doorway. It was solid, real, and groaning as if in pained warning - a herald of tragedy yet to come. Will wondered what it was warning him of.
It walked closer, closer, a ringing in his ears, in the wind, tossed its head once and-

“Will?”

Will blinked. The stag was gone, replaced with Alana and Jack. Were they what it had been warning against?

Alana only teased him a little, and gently at that. “You looked like you were dreaming.”

“I was thinking of something else,” Will replied. There was the peculiar sensation of a bad plan being birthed in the air above him.

“Well here’s something for you to think about,” Jack interjected, pausing to lean on Will’s desk until he was closer. Alana followed, making the moment intimate, secretive. Will leaned back in his chair, trying to avoid the feel of late-night tactics laid in desperation. “We have a direct way of communicating with the Chesapeake Ripper, and we’d like to see if we can push him.”

Will jerked his head slightly. He didn’t like where this was going. “Push him towards what?”

“We might be able to influence him to become visible,” Alana explained.

“If we can enrage him,” Jack added.

Oh no. “Push him to what Jack?” Will asked, mouth twitching into the form of a scoff without ever producing the sound. “Focus himself on Gideon? He’s already focused on him as his adversary. Don’t fool around.”

“Gideon is just a tabloid rumor right now,” Jack stated, clearly convinced of his plan, “we need to make him truth.”

Will went still. “You’re going to push the Ripper into killing someone just to prove he isn’t in a hospital for the criminally insane.”

Jack was unrelenting. “I have to push, Will.”

Suddenly, it all made far too much sense. Will leaned forward then, voice soft and level despite the deep edge his anger gave it. “Are you thinking about getting into bed with Freddie Lounds?”

“You yourself know it’s the best way to bait the Chesapeake Ripper,” Jack replied.

No. “No,” Will stood up, breaking forth from their conspiratorial bubble. “Absolutely not.”

“This is the best opportunity we’ve had in a long time Will,” Jack cajoled. It was obvious he thought Will’s objection was due to his personal disgust for Lounds.

Yes, he hated the woman, but that wasn’t what this was about. “Best opportunity to prompt a murder, sure,” Will fired right back. “The Ripper reads that trash and whatever you put in there is going to provoke him - you’re intentionally poking the beast in hopes that rage will make him sloppy enough to, what, leave a hair lying around?” Will grabbed his bag, snagged his laptop, and looked Jack solidly in the eye. “Whatever blood comes of this is on your head, Jack. I will have no part of it.”

Will left then, uncaring of the protests and calls for Will to return. He was wiping his hands clean of this one. He found Beverly in the halls closer to the main door and asked, “Is a sleepover acceptable? Because I am going to need to not worry about driving.”
Beverly took one look at him and nodded. “It’s just you and me Graham cracker. I’ll make hangover hash if you buy the booze.”

“Deal,” Will agreed happily. With a loud sigh, he pinched his nose.

“Do I want to know?” Beverly cautiously broached the topic.

Will let go of his nose and told her anyway. Best she was warned. “Jack is going to use Freddie Lounds to bait the Ripper.”

Beverly blinked at him, and then started walking. “Yep. All the booze. Hope you brought your fat wallet.”

Beverly’s apartment was warm and comfortable, with an old couch she’d probably stolen from a friend when they’d decided to throw it out. It was a really ugly grey, but that only made Will like it more. It was the kind of place Will imagined he would have, if living in the city had been possible with seven dogs used to open air.

They were several glasses of whiskey and a bottle of wine into the night, and sitting on the floor leaning against the couch instead of sitting on it properly, for whatever reason. Will was pretty sure they’d hit drunk already.

Beverly obviously knew it too, because she commented, “If Jack calls in the morning before we get over the hangover he’s gonna be so pissed.”

Will hummed. “Disappointed would be my guess. He’s too full of sorrow for rage - ready to spill over by now I imagine.”

Beverly looked at him, and asked, “I heard his wife’s sick but... is it that bad?”

“Stage four lung cancer,” Will answered. He furrowed his brows and looked at his empty hands. “Does it hurt less, I wonder?”

Beverly made a noise of inquiry.

Will explained. “Knowing it’s coming, being able to prepare - I wonder if it hurts less than suddenly losing your wife in an attack.” Will blinked at his ring finger, where gold had never sat. “Then again, it probably hurts worse - he at least can call her wife.”

There was a soft hand on his shoulder. “Will?”

Will leaned more fully against the couch and drew his knees up to his chest. “Despite everything - despite war and it’s nature - I knew I wanted to marry her. I was going to ask when-” Will cut himself off with a shudder, screams filling his head and that awful, demonic laughter.

There was a bottle being pressed into his hand, and Will took gulps of whiskey to force himself to focus on the burn erupting in his chest.

Beverly waited him out. Will finished his story. “I held her as she choked on her own blood.”

It was silent a moment, and then Beverly queried, “Would you like a subject change?”

Will could only nod.
Beverly, bless her, was kind. “Did anyone ever tell you about Benny?”

Will shook his head.

“Benny,” Bev explained, grabbing another bottle of wine and settling into a lounging position, “was this intern that Jimmy could not stop crushing on. I mean, full-on, unsubtle, ridiculous crushing. In the most not-cool way possible. So one day—”

Will settled in and listened to the whole debacle of Jimmy pursuing this intern until he’d caught the kid’s attention, and then had to get rid of said attention when he’d discovered the intern’s rather overblown foot fetish. He’d have to get Bev a really nice bottle of something in thanks for chasing away the demons of his past.

On second thought, maybe Will should buy her a plant. Ugh. His head.

The two of them woke on their own at roughly the same time, so Will didn’t have a repeat of last time to feel sorry about. Beverly let Will just lie like a landed fish on the couch as she made coffee and quietly brought pans out to start cooking. Soon, Will had very strong coffee and a bowl of... something with potatoes, meat, something that might possibly be cheese, and grease. Whatever. It tasted good.

Breakfast was quiet, right up until the point where Beverly stated, “I remember what you said, last night. I’ll keep it to myself, but I just wanted you to know that I’m here for you.”

Will spent a minute figuring out what she was talking about, and then blushed to his roots. Wow, he really had gotten maudlin drunk last night, hadn’t he? He managed to mumble a “thanks” into the rim of his coffee mug.

They stayed quiet, plying themselves with grease and coffee until they felt marginally like human beings, and then Beverly dragged Will to sit on the couch and watch some stupid crime show with her.

Will raised an eyebrow.

“It was the only thing on in the hospital when I had bronchitis, and now I’m hooked,” Beverly stated, pointing a warning finger at him. “Don’t make fun.”

Will put a hand to his chest and raised his eyebrows in his best innocent expression, as if to say “who, me?”

Beverly narrowed her eyes. “Don’t give me that face Graham - I know you’re a little shit under all that flannel.”

Will laughed and gave in easily, settling in to watch horrible approximations of what they did for a living. He started snarking the lack of paperwork, and Beverly joined in.

Then, an hour later, Jack called.

Joy.

Sitting in Jack’s house, his bedroom no less, and listening to the man’s emotions ramp up was not
how Will had wanted to spend his Saturday afternoon. He just sat against a side table and did his best to listen. His head still throbbed slightly, and he couldn’t stop his thoughts from occasionally spiraling back into the war. He was just... tired.

Jack had run that stupid story, and now he was dealing with the consequences. A blond hair on his wife’s pillow, the fingerprint of Miriam Lass on his phone, and still nothing solid to use on the Ripper, despite how visible he was.

“She’s dead,” Jack protested harshly despite all of the evidence, another moment away from screaming. “She wasn’t here.”

Will decided to intervene. “Jack.”

Despite how soft his voice had been, how lacking in any kind of energy, Jack turned his focus on Will immediately.

Will tried to phrase it in such a way that would allow Jack his grief-born illusion. “Did Miriam Lass know where you lived?”

“If she wanted to know,” Jack replied tersely, “she was smart enough to find out.”

Very helpful, that. Will sighed. “She could have told the Chesapeake Ripper before he killed her,” Will stated. Steeling himself, Will then asked the question he wasn’t sure he wanted to know the answer to. “Did you know, you were sending her after him?”

“I sent her after information,” was the firm answer. The taste of Jack’s emotions rang true - information with which to catch the Ripper, but only information all the same. She was supposed to have gotten away safe.

Will sighed. “Whoever made that phone call thinks you were close to Miriam Lass, and,” Will swallowed, made himself look at Jack, “feel responsible for her death.”

That was true enough. Guilt leaked from Jack so steadily it practically poured out of the man like rain. He truly regretted whatever push he’d given the trainee that had sent her running right into the arms of the Ripper. It turned a hunt into an obsession, the burning kind of need that never truly went away.

So, not like Dumbledore. Not really. Will could breathe easier around Jack now, he was only slightly ashamed to admit. It was nice to know all the same.

Jack only kept them there a few minutes more, for once letting them go after they’d double-checked things and not insisting on a third sweep. Or, well, let them go back to Quantico in order to go over all of their data again. It consisted mainly of Will sitting and playing solitaire as the computers ran, occasionally chatting with an equally subdued Beverly. Jack was storming around somewhere too, until the next call came.

Will knew they weren’t going to find anything even as they walked towards the observatory. It was too convenient, a number being left behind. He felt drained, sapped of all energy, and so the severed arm didn’t really even phase him (he’d seen much worse presents before). The note was slightly more disturbing, considering Beverly had compared him to Lass no more than a moment earlier and Jack liked to ask Will that same question, presumably one he had asked Miriam Lass as well. However, he didn’t have the energy to truly worry about that at the moment.

The days just kept getting longer.
Hannibal had the perfect opportunity to figure out who was truly at fault for Gideon believing he was the Ripper. He hadn’t even had to suggest it himself - Alana had come to him asking for help wheedling the information out of Chilton and Hannibal had, of course, magnanimously complied.

It was always so nice when his manipulations weren’t needed.

Chilton was already celebrating a success, not yet having heard of the true Chesapeake Ripper proving him wrong with no more than an arm and a note, toasting the Ripper and the lucrative success having such a shiny toy would bring him.

Serving tongue gave Hannibal the ability to inform Chilton of how badly he wished to eat the man’s own tongue - tastefully disguised as a joke - and served as quite a good dinner as theories and discussion abounded.

“I see three distinct possibilities,” Alana stated at the end of the main course. “Gideon is the Chesapeake Ripper. Or he just thinks he is. Or he knows he isn’t.”

Chilton reacted with his usual stubbornness, face closing off as he insisted, “He is. He knows he is, and so do I.”

Hannibal chimed in with his own suspicions. “Did you discuss the Chesapeake Ripper’s crimes with Dr. Gideon before he murdered the night nurse?”

Chilton was acting better than he usually did, to the man’s credit. “Mm-hmm,” he replied, voice low and conspiratorial, “when I began to suspect what he was.” Chilton shrugged, a ‘what can you do’ gesture. “Fearing he might have been exposed may have... er, spurred him into action.”

Hannibal had all the answers he needed. Alana wasn’t finished, however. “Is it possible you inadvertently planted the suggestion in Gideon’s mind that he was the Ripper?”

“No,” Alana fired back with carefully veiled sarcasm, “I said inadvertently.”

Ah, Hannibal did so enjoy Alana’s company. This was turning into quite the show indeed.

Chilton let out a small laugh that showed how nervous he was. Alana must have hit the matter on the mark. “Psychic driving is unethical.”

Time for devil’s advocate - his favorite role. Hannibal interjected, “But reasonable in certain circumstances.”

Both his guests turned confused gazes on him.

Hannibal shrugged minutely. “It might have been useful to remind Gideon that he was the Ripper, if he had repressed those memories. However,” Hannibal continued, getting no confession from Chilton, “he seems to have come to that awareness all on his own.”

Chilton was trying to save his blunder, then, asking Alana to handle the interview to see if Gideon had been unethically manipulated. A good move, considering Alana had already promised Gideon she would help him find out, but judging by the stone look on her face Alana wasn’t buying Chilton’s innocent act.
She always had been one of Hannibal’s brighter students.

Hannibal was about to ask Chilton to help him with dessert in order to gain a solid confession of his own - and perhaps insert a veiled warning - when his phone rang. As it was the one tied to his office, Hannibal decided to take it. “Forgive me,” Hannibal excused himself and stood to leave the room. He disliked taking calls during dinner, but as it was work-related his guests would have to deal with it. Once in the kitchen, he answered the unknown number. “Dr. Lecter speaking.”

“Good evening Dr. Lecter, this is Draco Malfoy. I apologize for the interruption.”

Hannibal paused, noting the worry in the man’s tone. “Is everything alright, Mr. Malfoy?”

There was a heavy sigh. “Will hasn’t answered his phone. This weekend marks the end of some terrorist attacks we were all caught up in, and we’re just a little worried about him, considering how hard work has been. I wondered if you were with him.”

“Not at the moment,” Hannibal replied, mulling over that piece of information. “I shall find out and call you back.”

“Thank you, Dr. Lecter,” Malfoy’s voice was clear with relief. “I owe you one.”

“Will is my friend as well,” Hannibal objected gently, “think nothing of it. I shall call you in another two hours.”

Malfoy agreed, and they hung up. Hannibal returned to the dining room. “Apologies, but I’ve been called away by a patient.”

Both Chilton and Alana were understanding, being themselves psychiatrists. “Of course Hannibal,” Alana stated gently as she stood. “I hope everything goes alright. Thank you for dinner.”

“You know my schedule,” Chilton replied happily. “A bit less hectic than yours now, I’d say.”

“I’m not certain I’d say that,” Hannibal retorted, “although your hours are decidedly more regular.”

Chilton laughed, and Hannibal grabbed his coat as he saw his two guests out. He was right behind them, driving to Wolf Trap and hoping Will wasn’t so dull as to make an attempt on his life. Especially when Hannibal was still trying to discern his feelings about the man.

There was a light on at Will’s house, which was a good sign. The lack of answer to his knockings less so. Hannibal used his borrowed key to enter, and quickly found Will huddled on the floor in front of the fireplace, buried under his dogs.

Hannibal repressed the urge to sigh. Instead, he walked over and shooed dogs away until he could kneel in front of the other man. “Will.”

Will blinked and looked up at him. He was sweating more than usual, glassy-eyed. “Hannibal?”

“Your friends called me,” Hannibal explained, “they’re very worried.” Slowly, Hannibal felt Will’s forehead with the back of his hand. “You’ve a fever, which probably isn’t helping. May I draw you a bath?”

Will hummed as he leaned into Hannibal’s touch. The trust in that gesture touched Hannibal to the core. “...‘Kay.”
Hannibal helped Will to his feet, and then propelled the man up the stairs. Will followed with little prompting, docile and quiet. It was... oddly disquieting. Will was a man full of life and fire, storms contained by iron will. To witness him so subdued seemed an incorrect state.

Hannibal drew a bath, warm but not too hot for a fever, and helped Will to undress. He paused once he’d gotten Will’s shirt off, noticing not only how well-sculpted the man’s chest was, but also the surprisingly large number of old, mostly faded scars he had.

Terrorist attacks indeed - those looked like torture wounds. He wondered if it was why Will wore a shirt to bed despite his frequent night sweats. Hannibal shoved those thoughts aside for another day, and helped Will into the tub. Once the man was seated, Hannibal turned to fold the clothes and place them on the counter before turning back to observe Will. The heat from the water was turning his skin slightly red, making a few lines on his arms stand out more than they usually did.

How many scars did Will Graham have? And who put them there?

“Would you like assistance?” Hannibal questioned, noting that Will hadn’t made any motions towards the soap.

Will blinked at him slowly. “Your voice is nice.”

Hannibal couldn’t help the wry smile that broke out at that. His chest was filled with a strangely tender affection. Making a decision to ignore that fact, Hannibal reached for the soap.

“Aromatherapy might prove itself useful to you, William. It’s a historically interesting therapy - lavender, for instance. It was used by the ancient Egyptians in burials, as they believed it to purify the soul.”

Will closed his eyes with a hum and soon fell into a light sleep as Hannibal talked. Smiling at the depths of trust that revealed, Hannibal finished washing Will before gently drying him off, taking note of each and every scar he could find. The ones on his arms were the most faded and healed, as if particular attention had been paid to them. It would make sense, if Will was trying to distance himself from his former life (which fleeing from England to America certainly suggested). There was a peculiar bit that looked vaguely like writing on his left hand, but the most vicious were upon his back, with a couple of particularly bad ones racing along his thigh.

Hannibal decided to put the matter away for the morning. He dressed Will for bed, and carried him down the stairs to his own bed, where he’d be most comfortable. After he’d gotten the man settled, Hannibal gave into the urge to smooth Will’s curls back from his forehead.

With the still-flushed skin exposed, Hannibal paused. Another scar?

It looked, faintly, barely there and most often hidden by Will’s untameable hair, like a lightning bolt.

Someone had carved into his Will.

The rage was sudden and all encompassing. It took Hannibal by surprise and he stood there, locked still and silent, while his mind clamored for someone to rend limb from limb.

He would get Will’s past out of him, sooner or later. And when he did, someone was going to suffer.

It took Hannibal thirty minutes to calm down, and even then he had to busy himself by making that phone call to Mr. Malfoy - simply to give himself something to do - before Hannibal could truly declare himself anywhere close to calm.

Making an impulsive decision, Hannibal picked up an interesting looking book and settled down in a
chair by the bed to watch over Will as he dreamed.

Perhaps there were more to his emotions than Hannibal had initially thought.

A high, strained laugh. A pitched scream.

Will looked around and saw naught but the forest where he’d died. He was walking - walking to what, he didn’t know. His chest ached with the old burn.

Harry Potter, the trees whispered with every step deeper - damning. Come to die.

The wind carried those familiar words, until naught but the echo of die swirled about him, leaping and whirling round to rest a crown of briar upon his head.

Harry-
-Come to-
-Potter-
-die-
-to die-
-Harry Potter-
-to die-
-Potter-
-Come-
-die-
-Come to die -

“Come to me,” a new voice interrupted, smooth as silk and dark as pitch.

Will looked up, watching in fear and awe as a horned god the color of nightmare took cautious steps towards him. It’s ribs shown through in strained contrast, the fingers long and clawed. Antlers sprung from it’s head, crowning this creature in all the darkness it’s demonic station awarded it.

Those black eyes stared right into his soul, but Will felt no fear. These eyes held souls - they were nothing like their crimson snakely counterparts. Will had naught to fear of this being, which cradled his head in taloned hands with greatest care, nothing save that which he was already becoming.

“Mine.” the being proclaimed, leaning down to lick blood off where it had fallen to Will’s cheek. It felt like benediction.

And it smelled like... bacon?

Will blinked into wakefulness, wincing a bit at the dull throbbing of his head. The dream was gone, yet the smell remained. He was also tucked safely in his own bed, which was odd, because he’d
fallen asleep in the tub. Hadn’t he?

Will turned his head enough to see the barest part of Hannibal, bustling about Will’s kitchen in his favorite pastime.

Hannibal had come out of concern (at the prompting of Hermione or Draco, no doubt), had bathed Will, and then bothered to put him in his own bed down in the living room - rather than the one upstairs - and was now cooking him breakfast.

Will hid his face a moment, willing the blush to go away. It had been... a long time, since anyone had taken care of him. A long, long time.

Eventually, slowly, Will dragged himself out of bed, one of his softer blankets draped over his shoulders like a cloak. Considering he’d spent a decade in a world where cloaks were actually considered fashionable, he only felt a little silly as he ventured into the kitchen.

Hannibal looked over almost immediately, smiling slightly at the sight of him. “Good morning, Will.”

Will mumbled something that might have been a return greeting. Hannibal’s smile only turned kinder, and he made sure Will was settled in a chair before giving him coffee. Will drank it more slowly than he otherwise might, mind occupied with the quiet stirring in the air.

Hannibal was... soft. Kinder with Will than with almost anyone else, from what he’d seen of the man’s social interactions. And here he was, once again, bustling about the kitchen and feeding Will for no other reason than Will had needed him.

Was this just being friendly? Or, did Hannibal also....

A plate clattered in front of him, startling Will out of his thoughts. He jerked his head up to see Hannibal’s vaguely apologetic expression. “Apologies,” he stated, “breakfast is ready.”


“My duty as your friend,” Hannibal replied easily, sitting down with his own breakfast.

“Pretty sure you went above and beyond,” Will replied. “Could’a left me upstairs.”

Hannibal shrugged slightly. “You were not that heavy. Perhaps I should feed you more often.”

Will obligingly took a bite of his eggs, turning over the ease of that shrug. Yeah, he’d probably lost a couple pounds, but there wasn’t the slightest hint of tension or soreness in the man at all. Which suggested Hannibal’d had no problem dragging Will’s dead weight down the stairs, which weren’t as wide as they probably should be.

Huh.

“Do you wish to talk now, or at our session on Tuesday?” Hannibal questioned.

Will grimaced. “Tuesday,” he answered. He only felt slightly like a coward. Yet Hannibal nodded, and let it die.

Only to take up a worse line of questioning. “May I ask how long you’ve held those scars, Will?”

Will sighed and ducked his head, staring into the depths of his coffee cup. “Some longer than
others,” he finally revealed. “I got most in the attacks.”

Hannibal - slowly and gently, giving Will time to move away if he so chose - grasped Will’s right arm and turned it over. “This?”

“Fossil collapsed,” Will replied, not knowing how to explain a basilisk without violating the Statute of Secrecy. “Got stabbed with a tooth. Twelve.”

Hannibal moved to Will’s left hand, caressing the skin on the back. “This?”

The words were blurred and faded - so much so you couldn’t see them unless the light was right. He’d only gone through eight treatments to accomplish that. He hadn’t wanted the toad’s mark on him any longer. “Teacher. Fifteen. I must not tell lies.”

Hannibal paused and looked to his forehead. Will flinched, and the man narrowed his eyes before dropping them, and the matter entirely. Hannibal didn’t let go of his hand, but he did move to eat his breakfast in silence.

Will did the same. Felt his heart swell uncomfortably in his chest.

Perhaps... perhaps he should put in an application. Maybe he wanted to tell Hannibal the truth, fully and completely.

It was an odd thought.

Chapter End Notes

So, Hannibal obviously saw the article that Jack went ahead and had Freddie write, and since Jack probably came busting in trying to get information on his wife (maybe less blatantly, since Hannibal doesn't talk to Jack about Will since Will's a real, paying patient) he went after him with Miriam. If you've got any questions as to things in the episode and if they happened or not here, just lemme know and I'll do my best to clarify.
Monday morning came as it always did, no matter the personal breakdowns of the weekend. Another day, another class. This week was about current, uncaught killers. High-profile ones from the last thirty years. It was always one of the students’ favorite weeks.

Will felt today’s class was slightly distasteful, considering the new information, but he couldn’t find a way to shift the schedule without putting them even further behind. Besides, it might be good for them to hear about something which hit a little closer to home.

“The Chesapeake Ripper kills in sounders of three,” Will stated, pacing a bit as he clicked through the relevant slides. “He did his first victims in nine days. Annapolis, Essex, Baltimore. He didn’t kill again for eighteen months and then there was another sounder of three in as many days,” couldn’t say the Ripper was lazy, “all of them in Baltimore.” Will reached his desk again and turned around to face his students, not returning to his pacing. This was slightly more important information. “I use the term “sounders” because it refers to a small group of pigs. That’s how he sees his victims - not as people, not as prey.” Will shrugged. “Pigs.”

Honestly, it made the Ripper easier to take than many other killers. At least the Ripper wasn’t indulging in hate crimes.

“Eleven months after the sixth victim there was a seventh. Two days later, the eighth is killed in his workshop,” Will stated as he turned to view the picture. “Every tool on the pegboard where they hung was used against him and, as with previous murders, organs were removed.” Will turned back to the class again, not commenting on the drawing of the wound man he’d clicked onto the projector screen. They should be able to figure that much out for themselves by now. “The removal of organs and abdominal mutilations means someone with anatomical or surgical know-how. Despite the usual correlations, that does not always mean the perp is a surgeon. There...” Will noticed another presence and turned, “is a distinctive brutality...”

Jack Crawford was standing in his doorway. His shoulders were slumped, but his back firm.

Here to punish himself.
Will forced himself to finish the lecture. He understood all about standing vigil for the dead you’d led to death.

He put the photo of Miriam Lass on the screen, catching eyes with Jack for a moment before speaking. “An FBI trainee named Miriam Lass was investigating private medical records of all the known victims when she disappeared. She’s believed to be the Ripper’s ninth but no trace was found of her until recently, when her severed arm was discovered. Almost two years later.” Will looked at Jack again, this part as much for him as for the students. “And only because he wanted it to be.”

Jack took a fortifying breath, and Will moved his attention back to his students. “True to his established pattern, the Chesapeake Ripper remains consistently theatrical.”

Much like this class was becoming, with the added drama of Jack watching in self-flagellation.

Ugh. Will wanted to go back to bed and it wasn’t even three.

The charity concert was a well-deserved treat. The soprano they’d gotten to sing the aria *Piangero la sorte mia* had been simply sublime. And the networking afterwards always made Hannibal feel more like himself. A necessary thing, considering his recent indecision with the issue of one William James Graham.

Komeda, naturally, hadn’t taken very long to corner him. “It’s been too long since you’ve properly cooked for us, Hannibal,” she chided.

Hannibal replied in the only way he could. “Come over and I will cook for you.”

“I said properly,” Komeda retorted, “means dinner and a show. Have you seen him cook?” Komeda demanded of the others standing near, turning to them for a moment. “It’s an entire performance. He used to throw such exquisite dinner parties.”

Hannibal paused while taking a sip of his champagne. Unless he was mistaken, Franklin was decidedly making his way over while attempting to make the movement seem casual.

Hannibal turned his attention back to Komeda just as she challenged, “You heard me. *Used* to.”

Hannibal had to smile at her - Komeda had always been one of his favorites. “And I will again, once inspiration strikes. You cannot force a feast,” Hannibal explained, turning slightly to insure Mr. and Mrs. Wiggins felt included in the discussion. “A feast must present itself.”

Komeda would have none of it. “It’s a dinner party, not a unicorn.”

“Oh but the feast is life,” Hannibal rejoined, “you put the life in your belly and you live.”

A small laugh was all that was afforded to them, before the man at his side could be ignored no longer. “I believe this young man is trying to get your attention,” Komeda remarked.

Hannibal gave a constrained smile and finally acknowledged Franklin, who was nearly preening with the attention. “Hello.”

“Hi,” Franklin greeted excitedly. “It’s so good to see you.” They shook hands before Franklin turned to the rail-thin man standing beside him with a disbelieving yet amused air. “This is my friend Tobias.”
“Good evening,” Hannibal greeted. The man’s eyes were dark and oddly intense, yet his handshake was polite and firm.

“How do you two know each other?” Komeda asked.

Franklin looked to him with hope in his eyes. Hannibal took joy in crushing it. “There should remain some mystery to my life outside the opera.”

Komeda accepted this easily, and valiantly kept her face from falling when Franklin leaned forward and proclaimed, “I’m one of his patients.”

Hannibal held back a sigh, tucking his lips in minutely. Deciding to ignore Franklin for the moment, Hannibal turned to Tobias. “Did you enjoy the performance?”

“I did,” Franklin interjected rudely. “I loved it. Every minute.”

Tobias smiled at his friend in an almost teasing manner as he revealed, “His eyes kept wandering. More interested in you than what was happening on stage.”

“Oh don’t say too much,” Hannibal countered, seeing his way out and grabbing it. “You must leave something for us to discuss next week. Franklin,” he gave a better smile this time as he offered his hand in clear dismissal, “good to see you. Tobias.”

Tobias shook his hand cordially, but there was something about his eyes that made Hannibal think of knives. A question to ponder later.

Once they had left, Hannibal turned back to the group. “Who’s hungry?”

Komeda giggled. “Only if it’s a feast, Hannibal. Promise me you’ll have one soon.”

Hannibal thought of Will trusting himself to Hannibal’s care. Will, covered in blood yet not shaking - firm, resolute, and still as a statue. Will, laughing with abandon as he taught Abigail how to fish. Hannibal smiled at Komeda. “The moment may be soon,” Hannibal declared. “When inspiration strikes you will be the first to know.”

Perhaps it had been too long since he’d held a proper feast.

Will had determined he was going to catch up on his sleep for once. Which of course meant that Jack would drag him out of bed that night. He’d only gotten a phone call informing him to get dressed before the man had shown up and all but hauled Will into his car.

Will tried to rub some sense of awareness back to himself, after Jack had been kind enough to stop at a gas station and allow Will to down three large cups of coffee. The cursing Will had greeted him with might have had some hand in that decision - the fact that Will was less than kind until he’d gotten several cups down was already making the rounds in the BAU rumor mill.

Jack had also thankfully waited until they were down the road and Will halfway through his fourth cup to start the conversation. “The victim was found in a hotel room bathtub. There were abdominal mutilations and organ removal at the scene.”

Will was too tired to scoff. “Sounds more like an urban legend than the Chesapeake Ripper, no?”

Jack didn’t acknowledge that. “I’ve had the room sealed. You’ll get it fresh.”
“Fresh as a daisy?” Will couldn’t help but to ask.

Jack just sighed. “Fresh enough for you to tell me whether or not it’s the Ripper. Then you can go back to class.”

Will laughed. “You don’t want me in a classroom. You want me to wrap my head so tight around the Ripper I won’t go back to class until he’s caught.”

Jack just shrugged. “Your bad luck that you’re the best, pal.”

“I isn’t it just?” Will’s smile held far too many teeth, and if Jack were looking he might have been disconcerted by the feralness held there.

That was always Will’s luck.

But Will moved on, his last lecture still fresh in his head. Seemed it had been an omen. “Expecting a couple more bodies to drop after this one?”

“If it’s the Ripper, yes.”

“Don’t let the Ripper stir you up,” Will warned Jack. He maintained eye contact as the man looked at him, wanting to impart the importance of the situation. He kept looking even as Jack looked away, countenance subdued. “The reason he left you Miriam Lass’ arm is so he could poke you with it,” Will explained harshly.

Jack seemed to be taking this harder than Will had initially thought, considering his next question was, “Why not the rest of her?”

So Will gave him the truth. “His other victims he wanted to humiliate in death like-like a public dissection. She was different.” It was a small comfort, but it was all Will had.

“He was probably impressed that she was able to find him,” Jack replied. He took a deep breath. “He may be starting another cycle, Will.”

Will rolled his eyes. “The Ripper contacted you directly. If he was killing again he wouldn’t be subtle about it he’d just pick up the phone!” Oh no. Will turned to look at Jack again, suddenly suspicious. “Any more phone calls Jack?”

“No, no,” Jack was quick to reassure him. “But look if this is the Ripper, there’ll be at least two more bodies and then nothing for months, maybe a year. We’ll have a window of opportunity to catch him and then that window will close. The last time the window closed,” Jack stated, voice growing heavy with sorrow, and rage, “I lost the Ripper and I lost Miriam Lass. I don’t intend to do that again.”

Well, that sounded good.

Will sighed and downed the last of his coffee.

The crime scene was immediately off-putting to the theory that this could be the Ripper. There was a fucking trail of blood and flesh for Merlin’s sake! Nothing artful there. And the air screamed of sorrow and panic - nothing someone like the Ripper would feel.

Will wasn’t certain if he was disappointed or not. He’d never experienced a Ripper scene first-hand - he was sure it would be spectacular. Though that wasn’t exactly something he’d willingly tell anyone.

Jack started barking orders as soon as he hit the room. Business as normal. “Anyone touch the
body?"

“For once local police behaved themselves,” Zeller stated.

“It’s fairly evident the man’s dead, just by looking at him,” Jimmy interjected.

Beverly, once again, broke in with her humor and cheer like a blast of fresh air. “I touched the body. A lot going on with that body,” she added as she stood up. “Surgery was performed and then un-performed.”

“Surgery was un-performed with bare hands, sutures clawed open,” Zeller added. When Jack turned to stare at him, he hesitantly offered, “I - ah - I also... did a little bit of touching.”

If it’d been a Ripper killing Will might have been angry that the scene wasn’t pure. Since he was pretty sure this wasn’t one, however, he didn’t care.

“Pieces of him were torn off from the bed to the bathroom like breadcrumbs,” Jimmy stated. And then they piled into the rather spacious bathroom. It was an oddly upscale hotel room.

“Surgery wasn’t performed here,” Will commented, sitting on the clean rim of the tub. “There’d be a lot more blood.”

Beverly spoke up. “If he’s moving his victims, he could be performing the mutilations in the same transport.”

Jimmy continued that train of thought, but Will’s attention was caught by the cold hand in his. There was skin under the nails. “He tore open his own sutures.”

“Wasn’t to get to his kidney,” Beverly stated. “The Ripper already took it with him. Or her,” she added.

Jimmy voiced Will’s belief that the Ripper was a male, and Jack asked something and hearts? Will let it all fade as he crouched by the tub. Thankfully, Jack noticed that Will was already heading for the pendulum and herded everyone out.

Sometimes it was nice to work with the man. He at least could tell when Will was putting his empathy to use.

The recreation was filled with panic, and a need to help. A desperate need to help - to not let the man die.

It was also full of his stag, which had never happened before. But Will was going to ignore that for now.

“Jack!” he called, taking care of the more immediate problem.

The door opened.

“This wasn’t brutal,” he stated. “The killer wasn’t killing he was trying to save his life.” Will finally turned to face Jack. “The Ripper ever do that?”

Of course, his opinion was not popular.

“It’s the Chesapeake Ripper,” Zeller insisted.
“It’s not the Ripper,” Will stated for the tenth time.

“There are too many similarities,” Zeller pressed.

“There aren’t enough.” Will was sitting on the toilet and just managing to not hold his head in his hands. This was not how he’d wanted to spend his morning.

Zeller was affronted, and started ticking off his fingers. “Knife wounds are cuts, not stabs. Anatomical knowledge, dissection skills, mutilation, organs removed, victim clothed, on display. We got twenty-two signature components all attributable to the same killer.”

Will scoffed. “Only cuts are the ones that lead to the heart and kidney. A traumatized heart isn’t a mutilation. A bathtub isn’t exactly on display. There aren’t even twenty-two possible signature components.” Not wanting to hear anymore idiocy, Will stood and walked over to the door only to shut it in Zeller’s face. He ignored the indignant silence to return to his seat.

“Are you sure?” Jack asked, still hovering over the body like a vulture.

Will sighed. “The Chesapeake Ripper left a victim in a church pew using his tongue as a page marker in the bible he was holding.” Will shook his head. “This isn’t that - isn’t even close. This is a medical student, or a trainee, or someone trying to make an extra buck in a back-alley surgery and it went bad. Actively, bad,” he added, in the face of Jack’s confusion.

The man had wanted it to be the Ripper. Oddly enough, Will understood. And not because of his empathy.

So he tried to comfort Jack. “We’ll catch the Ripper. Eventually.”

“Yeah well I want to catch him now,” Jack retorted as he crouched next to the tub. “When I do, you’re not gonna get a chance to shoot him, cuz I’m gonna do that.”

Shit.

“You can’t just jack up the law and get underneath it, Jack,” Will warned.

“Can’t I?” Jack replied in challenge, bouncing on his heels to turn and look at Will.

Will looked right back at him, all the gravity of personal experience in his words. “Not without becoming just like him.”

Jack looked away for a moment, sighed, and then moved on. Kind of. “Tell me how you see the Ripper, Will.”

Will blinked, focusing on the patterns of dried blood as he took his time replying. His voice was just shy of being dead, too full of personal connotations to truly claim such a tone. “I see him, as one of those... pitiful things sometimes born in hospitals. They feed it, keep it warm, but they don’t put it on the machines. They let it die. Only,” Will added with a cruel twist of his lips, “he doesn’t die. He looks normal - and nobody can tell what he is. No one can hear the music that lurks in the back of his smile. That siren song of blood and decay, for the simple pleasure in death.”

_A kindred spirit_, is what he doesn’t say. _Someone just like me. Only they’ve let the beast out, instead of locking it in a cage._

Something he could never say, no matter how much he occasionally longed to do just that.
Hannibal found himself nearly fleeing from an awkward session with Franklin (if the man continued to stalk him to different places as he had the opera and apparently his favorite cheese shop, he’d have to refer the man) to his own session with Bedelia. She remarked on his “person-suit” and Hannibal found himself letting her further past the human veil than usual.

“I have, for the first time in many years, found myself with a unique opportunity,” Hannibal revealed. “I met a man who shares many things in common with me - certain trains of thought and a proclivity towards the morbid. While we are not truly similar, he has the ability to understand me, completely.”

“And this frightens you,” Bedelia stated calmly.

Hannibal inclined his head slightly.

“It is natural, to fear someone climbing the walls we have built to protect ourselves,” Bedelia counseled. “It is also natural to want to see if someone is clever enough to scale them.”

Hannibal took a deep breath and pursed his lips. He needed to figure this out, and Bedelia had always been a refreshing point of view in the past. Perhaps it could help. “It is more than that. For the first time, I find myself entertaining the thought of having a family again.”

Bedelia raised an eyebrow. “And how does that make you feel?”

“Anxious,” is what he said. Better words were nervous and scared - the last family he’d had, he’d lost to snow and violence. Granted, it had been many years since that cold winter. He was no longer a boy, but a predator. He’d be able to protect them should something happen again.

Bedelia raised an eyebrow at him. “Anxiousness conveys excitement or anticipation. Though few use it in that way anymore, the adjective implies a positive desire for the subject.”

Hannibal had to nod consent to her wisdom. It appeared that no matter his misgivings, he truly did want this to come to pass.

Look at that, bringing it up had helped. Odd. Now Hannibal just had to decide what he wanted to do about it.

The session ended easily, with a shift to other topics, and it wasn’t long before Hannibal was back in his office and faced with the very man he’d been discussing. “You’ve been drinking,” Will observed as he removed his jacket.

“I had a glass of wine with my last appointment, yes,” Hannibal replied.

Will raised an eyebrow. “Drinking with a patient?”

“She was drinking with a patient,” Hannibal corrected. “I have an unconventional psychiatrist.”

Will made one of his awkward hand gestures before sitting. “Well, we have that in common.”

“Considering the sensitivity of the topic we will be discussing, would you care for a glass?” Hannibal asked. They’d already crossed so many boundaries, one more wouldn’t hurt, even if it was ‘on the clock’ so to speak.
Will sighed and rubbed a hand over his face. “Yes please.”

Hannibal stood and went to the cabinet, gathering another glass.

Will tried to deflect from the oncoming conversation. “How long have you been seeing a psychiatrist?”

“Since I chose to be a psychiatrist,” Hannibal answered. There would be no harm in putting the matter off for a while longer. Besides, Hannibal thought as he handed Will a glass of rose, he had a certain other topic he wanted to ensure was discussed.

However, Hannibal reasoned as he took a longer look at Will, there would always be time to suggest that the Ripper might just be a group of organ harvesters. Will, dark bags under his eyes and faintly twitching as he nervously looked away and took a drink of his wine, was far more important in this moment. Not to mention that this conversation would likely be more enlightening than any he’d had before about the man’s past.

And so Hannibal let the choice be Will’s. “Do you wish to talk of something else today, William?”

Will looked at him then, confused and tired. Hannibal wondered if he was sleeping any better.

“If you don’t feel up to talking about the attacks today, we can speak of something else,” Hannibal stated. He casually shrugged and offered, “The possibility of the Chesapeake Ripper being a cover for organ harvesters, if you’d prefer.”

Will let out an aggravated sigh. “It isn’t the same guy. I’m already having this fight at work and I don’t -” Will set his glass down. Rubbed a hand over his face. “No, no let’s have the planned conversation. What we can have of it, anyway.”

Hannibal frowned. “More classified information?”

Will grabbed his glass and leaned back in his seat, resting the wine glass on his knee. “There is a subset of the British Parliament that has placed a Statute of Secrecy on the whole thing. Suffice to say, they weren’t terrorist attacks. Not in the normal way, at least.”

Hannibal tilted his head slightly and thought back on the many conversations they’d had. Will’s easy confessions of his enjoyment of killing others, the fact someone had sent him false visual stimuli, his tense shoulders, the scars of torture littering his torso, the implications that he might have had a gun pulled on him by children before, the federal agent who referred to him as a veteran, calling his class ‘battle tactics’...

“The attacks, were they more of a war?” Hannibal asked.

Will’s sharp grin told him he’d guessed correctly.

Hannibal drew his brows down slightly. “Literally or metaphorically?”

“Literally,” Will answered. And then he shrugged, as if he hadn’t just completely changed Hannibal’s view of him. “Two cult factions went all-out against each other - surely you can see what bad press that would be. Not to mention the cults weren’t especially well known.”

“Thus the gag order,” Hannibal surmised. He blinked, trying to realign his concept of who William James Graham was. “The attacks ended in ’97, did they not?”

Will fiddled with his glass. “The war didn’t finish until the winter of ‘99.”
Hannibal pursed his lips and did the math. “You were a child soldier.”

Will shrugged. “More adolescent than child but...”

Hannibal took a fortifying drink of his wine. It certainly explained why Will was holding up so well under the illness. As fascinating as it was to watch, Hannibal now found himself slightly uneasy with the idea of letting it continue.

Thoughts to be pursued at another time.

“Is there anything I can do to help, Will?” Hannibal asked. He nearly surprised himself with how soft and gentle the words were when they fell into the air.

Will was surprised too, given the way he startled slightly - shifting nervously in his seat and darting his eyes about in a bid to look anywhere but at Hannibal. “Um...” the man replied, wetting those lovely lips before taking a large gulp of his wine. “If - if you could just, um, just keep - ” Will stopped. Bit his lip.

“Keep what, Will?” Hannibal prompted.

Will refused to look at him, even as his face flushed a brilliant bright red. “Keep being my friend.”

Hannibal smiled with more warmth than he’d let anyone see in decades. “Of course, dear Will,” he replied. “If there is anything else I may do, please, just say the word.”

Will fiddled with his glass before taking another drink.

Hannibal let the silence rest a moment before seeing if he could get what he really wanted. “Is there perhaps a way to get an exception to this silence order?” Will looked up at him, and Hannibal held his gaze. “Since I am your psychiatrist?”

Will bit his lip. He held it there a moment, before releasing it to give his submission. “I’ll put in an application to let you in on the secret tomorrow. Just,” Will looked away, mouth downturned. “Don’t hate me, afterwards.”

“I can sincerely tell you, Will,” Hannibal interjected, “that I could never hate you.”

Will didn’t seem to know how to reply to that, and so they sat in silence for the little time they had left. Once Will had finished his wine, they parted ways.

Hannibal hoped the application process went quickly. He wanted to know everything about the war that had apparently given Will Graham the darkness he housed inside.

Hannibal thought of what to do about the encephalitis as he drove to his own home. He still wanted to see if it would uncap the storm of that darkness, although so far it only seemed to be weakening Will himself. There was no lashing out of darker urges or flares of temper veering towards bloodshed. Instead there was a strange vulnerability that simply felt... wrong. It was actually distressing to see. When Will went quiet, overcome with the effects of his illness and weary, Hannibal found himself compelled to end the experiment and get the man well once more.

Perhaps... perhaps he would let things progress only until there was a good opportunity to set himself up as the reason behind the encephalitis’ discovery. Will did seem to have an urge to save others - perhaps that also extended to a wish for a savior of his own.

It seemed the best option. The illness hadn’t uncapped Will’s darker tendencies as he’d thought it
If anything, it only seemed to be driving them down farther. The work for the FBI would have been enough to bring that darkness more fully into the light, without the stress and strain the illness was obviously putting on Will, who seemed too tired to ever act on such things. Ending the unsatisfactory experiment would also set Hannibal himself as a trusted friend in Will’s mind. If he chose to pursue the idea of making a family with Will and Abigail (which could only enhance his cover and decrease the chance of suspicion being placed upon him, as bachelors were always more suspect than family men) it would also set Hannibal into a closer relationship with Will, one more apt for a shared guardianship.

Yes, Hannibal decided, it was best he hadn’t gotten around to planting human remains in Will’s fishing lures. This was a much more rewarding plan, despite the higher risk.

And now, to celebrate with a feast. There was much to be done.

Will was happy he hadn’t had to go to the crime scene of the next victim, even if he did long to see a Ripper kill as it was meant to be seen. He was still feeling under the weather, and he wasn’t certain if he’d be able to adequately hide his delight.

Besides, he was sleeping poorly enough as it was.

Zeller was certainly taking this as confirmation that the first man had been a Ripper kill. “Not only did the Ripper take his kidney but he also took his heart, which is what he tried to do in the hotel but was interrupted before he could paint his picture.”

“The Ripper wasn’t painting a picture in the hotel,” Will stated once again. He was beginning to feel like a broken record.

“You still think,” Zeller criticized, “that he was ripping out a heart to save a life?”

Will just answered simply, because he didn’t feel like getting into this argument again. “Yes.”

Beverly, thank Merlin for her, interrupted. “The Ripper painted this picture for sure. In big, broad strokes.” She handed him a photo of the scene.

Will looked at the shot of the man sitting across from himself in a school bus and knew this was definitely the Ripper. Twitching slightly, Will decided to see where the stupid organ harvester theory Freddie Lounds had started, Zeller seemed to believe in, and Hannibal had mentioned would lead them. “Could both victim’s organs have been harvested for transplant?”

Beverly scoffed. Her initial reaction made Will feel better about his own, identical reaction. “Subtle variation on waking up in a tub of ice missing a kidney,” she joked.

Price perked up. “I love a good urban legend. You could put the organs on a ventilator long enough to coordinate the donation.”

“At the hotel,” Zeller added, putting more fuel in the train, “the victim’s abdominal aorta and the inferior vena cava - ” he paused, looked at Will, and put it in easier terms, “that’s like the kidney’s in-and-out for blood - were entirely removed.”

Beverly explained it better. “They’re like USB cables. You keep them intact for an easy reconnect.”

Will hated that this was panning out, but ran with it anyway, just in case. You didn’t dismiss something just because you didn’t like it, after all. Not if you didn’t want it coming back to bite you
in the ass. “Were Mr. Caldwell’s heart and kidney disconnected for easy reconnect?”

Zeller was the one who answered, probably glad to have his preferred theory being taken seriously.
“Yeah.”

Will sighed and scrunched his brows together, trying to think. Was there actually something to this?
“Other Ripper victims - organs and USB cables missing?”

“It’s inconclusive due to the degree of mutilation but, yes,” Zeller stated with a tone of victory, “that is how the Ripper rips.”

Evidence said it was possible. Will’s gut said no.

Beverly at least seemed to share his doubts. “Two different killers, same agenda?”

Jimmy pointed his pen as he asked, “Is the organ harvester disguising his work as the crimes of a serial killer, or is the serial killer disguising his crimes as the work of an organ harvester?”

It was the latter, Will was sure. His grip on the photo was light, nearly a caress, as he proclaimed, “The Chesapeake Ripper wants to perform. Every brutal choice has elegance,” Will looked down at the photo and did his best to not let himself break out into a smile. He made himself look away before finishing his statement. “Grace. His mutilations hide the true nature of his crimes.”

“What is that nature?” Beverly asked.

Will sighed and rubbed a hand over his face. He only managed to knock his glasses askew. “I don’t know.”

“The harvesting of organs for sale,” Zeller interjected.

“Not that,” Will replied, righting his glasses. “I’m pretty sure it’s worse than that.”

Hannibal was preparing what vegetables could be prepared in advance, and had Alana with him to help. She was always a welcome help in the kitchen, and he wanted to see how she appreciated his latest experiment. “A compromise,” he announced, retrieving it from the fridge. “Beer brewed in a wine barrel. For two years. Bottled it myself.”

Alana took one taste and informed him, “A cabernet sauvignon wine barrel.”

Hannibal smiled, charmed. “I love your palette.”

“I love your beer,” Alana replied as they both returned to their respective stations. Hannibal wondered if she would still think that if she knew exactly who was in the beer. “I taste oak. I taste - what else do I taste in here.”

“I will only answer that yes or no,” Hannibal replied.

Alana paused, the light air shifting to something else. “Maybe you’ll answer another question yes or no.”

Hannibal looked up from his tomato roses, waiting.

Alana asked, “Will hasn’t been by to see Abigail recently. Is he okay?”
“No,” Hannibal answered. “But, I believe it won’t take long for him to get back on his feet. Once this Ripper business is over with.”

Alana sighed, a horrible frown marring her features. “I’m glad Will’s lawyer made a good deal for him but I still don’t like it.”

“The fact that Will consults, or the fact that Jack Crawford is his boss?” Hannibal inquired, curious. Alana’s dislike for Jack and his methods was no secret.

“Both,” Alana answered, and then she stared into her beer. “Mostly Jack. He’s obsessed with the Ripper and is grooming Will to catch him.”

“I sincerely hope he does,” Hannibal stated, looking at his work. “But rest assured - if Jack pushes too hard, Will will push back.”

Alana paused, looking at him with furrowed brows. “And if he doesn’t?”

Hannibal looked up and caught her eye. He didn’t allow the monster to shine forth, but he did allow some of the fierceness out. “Then I will.”

Alana nodded, appeased, and went back to chopping. “If you could mention to Will that Abigail misses him, I’d appreciate it.”

“I shall do so at our next appointment,” Hannibal promised.

The bodies just kept dropping. At an almost alarming rate. It was actually kind of impressive. Will tried to stay out of the way for most of the stuff. Four bodies lay out under cold, sterile sheets as Price told Jack what they had. “They’re all missing different organs. Before, we were looking at waiting lists for a heart or a kidney. Now we’re looking at hearts, kidneys, livers, stomachs, pancreases, lungs. This guy,” Price gestured to lucky mutilated corpse number two, “he’s missing a spleen. A spleen!” he repeated in disbelief. “Who the hell gets a spleen transplant?”

The long hours on this case was apparently getting to everyone else, too. Will was almost glad he wasn’t alone in feeling overwhelmed.

Although, something was odd. Will gestured to their latest body and asked, “Intestines were the only organ missing from this body?”

“Yes,” Zeller replied, “so we’re either looking for someone with short bowels or,” Zeller paused, thinking, and then must have decided to just go for it because he shrugged and stated, “or the Ripper’s making sausage.”

Oh no. Oh, no, seriously, no - not another fucking cannibal. Will looked at all of the bodies and mentally went over Price’s list of missing organs. All ones you could eat. Except maybe a spleen. Will didn’t know if you could eat a spleen but if you could grind it up or melt it into soup it was probably possible.

As Price and Zeller bickered over China and agreements and tone, Will wondered if his personal experiences with cannibalism was why he thought of it as a legitimate potential much faster than anyone else. They all seemed to think anything else was likely, and Will had learned while on the force to stop suggesting it during the early days of an investigation. Maybe it was all relative to how much exposure you had to cannibalism. After all, Will’s coworkers probably hadn’t ever eaten people like he had.
There hadn’t always been a lot of food during the war, but there had been plenty of Death Eaters.

Jack’s voice cut into the bickering. “Ok! How many killers?”

Will blinked, realizing belatedly that Jack was talking to him. “Two.”

“You confident one of them is the Chesapeake Ripper?”

“At least one of them, yep,” Will agreed. He didn’t feel like he had all the pieces to this puzzle, and so he wasn’t going to say anything more than that was a definite. He also chose to keep the cannibalism theory to himself, for now. Jack already looked like he was ready to beat someone to death - no reason to give the man any more stress.

Or himself, for that matter. He was just so tired.

More tired than he thought, apparently, considering Hannibal woke him up - or brought him into awareness, whichever - in his classroom that evening.

Will snapped out of... something about Abigail and trees, had she called him Dad?

“I have a twenty-four hour cancellation policy,” Hannibal stated as he came closer. He seemed... worried.

Will blinked. “Wha-what time is it?”

“Nearly nine o’clock,” Hannibal informed him, coming to a stop beside the table.

Will took his glasses off and rubbed both hands over his face. “Merlin, I’m sorry.”

“No apology necessary.” Hannibal’s voice was warm, and Will wondered why. Hannibal was a man who thrived on politeness and social structures, so it really didn’t make sense why he was almost always willing to forgive Will for breaking those rules.

Will shook those thoughts out of his head. “Must’ve fallen asleep.” Wait... Will looked to Hannibal, squinting at his blurry figure. “Was I sleepwalking?”

“Your eyes were open, but you were not present,” Hannibal informed him.

Will sighed as he put his glasses back on. “Shit. Felt as if I was asleep. Need to stop sleeping altogether. Best way to avoid bad dreams.”

Hannibal looked like he thought that was a terrible idea (which it was, Will knew that) but his eye was caught by the crime scene photos spread out on the table. “Well,” he stated candidly, “I can see why you have bad dreams.”

Will stood up with a gesture that turned into knocking his hand on the table a few times. “What do you see, Doctor?”

Hannibal stood slightly straighter, took in a fortifying breath (why? What was he fortifying himself for?) before stepping closer. “Sum up the Ripper in so many words?”

“Choose them wisely,” Will warned, voice darker than usual.

“Oh, I always do,” Hannibal replied. He still sounded off. Distracted. Perhaps worried. “Words are living things, they have personality,” Hannibal began shifting photos, his words slow as if he was still thinking of what to say. It was weird, normally Hannibal knew exactly what to say, probably at
least a sentence in advance. Maybe he was tired. “Point of view, agenda.”

Will smiled at the words anyway, as he leaned on the table close to Hannibal. Maybe they were slow because Hannibal had picked them from Will’s own brain. “They’re pack hunters,” Will agreed. Times like these reminded him how lucky Will was to have Hannibal - the man thought just like him. Will had never connected to someone as easily and quickly as he had Hannibal - not without the help of mountain trolls.

“Displaying one’s enemy after death has it’s appeal in many cultures,” Hannibal stated. He wouldn’t look at Will as he spoke, but it still sound almost like he was fishing for something.

“These aren’t the Ripper’s enemies,” Will corrected, “these are pests that he’s swatted.”

Hannibal paused a moment. “Their reward for their cruelty.”

Will scoffed. “Mutilations aren’t post-mortem; he doesn’t have a problem with cruelty. Their reward is for undignified behavior. These dissections are to disgrace them. It’s - it’s a public shaming.”

Hannibal spoke with heavy words, something about them ringing with truth and... something that wasn’t quite sorrow. Maybe fate. “Takes their organs away because, in his mind, they don’t deserve them.” Hannibal turned to look at him, that same strange weight from his words evident in his face.

Will... hadn’t thought of that before. Now that it was pointed out, it made perfect sense. He looked Hannibal in the eye for a charged moment, reading mystery but nothing behind it on the man’s face, and this time Hannibal was the first to look away.

Will took the chance to study Hannibal. Something was off. Was Hannibal okay?

Hannibal furrowed his brows and grabbed the photo of Lass’ arm. “What’s this?”

Will sighed. “It’s Jack Crawford’s trainee. She’s not like the other victims. The Ripper had no reason to humiliate Miriam Lass.”

Hannibal looked at him again, whatever had been previously on his face hidden away now. “It looks like he’s humiliating someone.”

“Jack,” Will answered.

Hannibal must have developed a personal distaste for Jack, considering the just-too interested tone as he asked, “Did it work?”

Will scoffed. “I’d say it worked really well.”

Hannibal nodded, and put the picture down. “Walk me through the case,” he requested. And so Will did.

They were still at it (Hannibal’s need for order making them arrange the photos in correlating piles instead of Will’s chaotic sprawl) when Jack strode in, Beverly hot on his tail. “Will, there you are!”

Some tiny ridiculous part of Will noticed with glee that he and Hannibal had looked up at the same time.

“And Dr. Lecter, what a surprise.” Jack didn’t sound surprised, but moved on before Will could ask what the hell he meant by that. “We have a lead.”

Will perked up.
Jack was smiling, entirely too pleased, and even rocked on his heels as he asked, “Would you care to uh, help us catch the Ripper?”

Will looked at Hannibal, who seemed to freeze for a moment. His smile was as polite as ever, but he looked almost alarmed - maybe panicked. Even his words were slightly tight as he replied, “How could I refuse?”

Will didn’t really know what was going on, but he figured he wasn’t going to like it.

Beverly leaned around the front passenger seat and updated them on how she’d found the murder vehicle on the ride over. To conclude, she held out her fist with a cheery, “Bump it, Graham!”

Will smiled and gave the requested fist bump. “Good job, Bev.”

She beamed in triumph, and Will hoped it could really be this easy.

The man at the warehouse didn’t seem to think so. “That ambulance isn’t in rotation, hasn’t even been out of the shed,” he informed them as he led them to the requested ambulance at a brisk pace.

“Surveillance footage says it has been,” Jack countered.

The man checked his list again. Will was once again thankful for people who weren’t so dazzled by the FBI badge that they forgot to be thorough. “Nobody’s signed her out. My road sheet’s got her down for repairs.”

“Who signed her in for repairs,” Jack questioned.

“Devon Silvestri,” the man answered, “he’s one of our part-time drivers.”

“Does he want to be a doctor?” Will interrupted, getting Jack’s attention.

“He’s taking the MCAT’s,” was the expected answer. Followed by shock and an empty space. “It was there this morning.”

“It was there this morning,” Jack repeated with fake amusement. “Well. Is Mr. Silvestri working today?”

“He’s not on the schedule.”

Beverly spoke up. “Is there GPS on that ambulance?” At the director’s confirming sound, she continued, “Encrypted messaging or remote tracking?”

The man shook his head. “We can’t afford that kind of hardware. We use consumer grade.”

Instead of looking put out like most would, Beverly seemed nearly gleeful. “Digital truck systems.”

“Yeah.”

“Jack,” Beverly called, regaining their boss’ attention, “if the ambulance radio is on, I can use a DF sweep to find it.”

Jack nodded at her, looking like a hunter who’d just found some tracks. “Good.”

Will hoped Beverly had a raise coming her way. And then found himself confused by the almost awkward way Hannibal leaned in closer to him and stated, “This is very educational.” The man still seemed nervous, and Will just couldn’t put his finger on why.
Unless the doctor was simply scared. He’d gone with Will to the Hobbs residence, but they hadn’t actually expected any violence then. Not to mention the Chesapeake Ripper was in a whole other league. Maybe that was the reason - not everyone was as used to life and death situations as Will was. Learning that the possibility of such situations frightened normal people had been really confusing, his first few years on the police force.

So Will decided to help put Hannibal at ease and remained by his side, trying to physically show that he was there to protect Hannibal.

It turned into real protection when they pulled up with the swat team to surround the found ambulance. Will remained planted in front of Hannibal, not allowing him to move far from the car and prepared to shield him if need be.

Until Jack hollered, of course. “Dr. Lecter!”

Hannibal took one look at Will before jogging over, Will on his heels.

“I need you to assess the situation here, Doctor,” Jack ordered.

Will watched as Hannibal climbed in and took a quick, clinical look at the man on the gurney. “He was removing his kidney,” Hannibal stated. “Poorly.” He took a breath, and his hand twitched slightly before he turned and said, “I can stop the bleeding.”

“Do it,” Jack ordered.

Will stepped closer.

Hannibal stripped his coat, rolled up his sleeves and put on gloves with a speed and ease probably born of his days in the ER. He showed no hesitation, no second guessing as he inserted his hand into the man’s side. It was a matter of seconds before Hannibal told Jack that he had it.

“Mr. Silvestri,” Jack stated roughly, aiming his beloved over-dramatic shotgun, “put your hands behind your head and exit the vehicle slowly.”

As Silvestri exited the ambulance and the SWAT team closed ranks around him, Will stepped closer to the ambulance, as if drawn by fate. The air was heavy, swirling with alarm and something inside Will told him to look away before it was too late even as his eyes were drawn to the details with the feeling of inevitability.

Hannibal was slightly tense, but it wasn’t aimed at the surgery - 

- his shrug was without tension from lugging dead weight down narrow stairs -
- even though it should have been, considering how long -
- eighteen months, all of them in baltimore -

- it had been since he’d practiced medicine.

Hannibal looked up, then, catching his gaze for one horrifying moment. Something in that gaze was frightened, but not of the possibility of receiving violence from the Ripper. Then Hannibal looked away, as if he were startled prey trying not to draw attention.

*Organ removal means someone with anatomical or surgical know-how.*

*I am very careful what I put into my body -

- Ripper's making sausage -

- end up preparing most meals myself.*
Takes their organs because they don’t deserve them -

- That’s how he sees his victims. Pigs.

Killing must feel good to God too, -

- You and I are just alike -

- he does it all the time -

- Did you feel a spring of zest -

- and are we not created in his image? -

- You will.

Hannibal Lecter was the Chesapeake Ripper. He hadn’t been nervous about the possibility of violence, he’d been afraid of being found out.

Well.

Shit.

Will sat on this revelation, not saying a word as the paramedics came and took over for Hannibal and they all were allowed to go home. He ignored it throughout the next day, trying desperately to unsee what he’d seen - to no avail. Once seen secrets could never be hidden away again.

He was still trying to convince himself he was wrong the next night, when he showed up before Hannibal’s dinner party (Ripper’s making sausage) considering his revelation, he wasn’t attending.

He did notice that was certainly heart on a plate, however. Even as Hannibal went on about sow’s blood being sweet. Will wondered if was really from a cow, or if Hannibal was enjoying insulting the woman who’d been part of the Ripper’s latest sounder.

Hannibal stirred some pot of something or other and asked, “Are you sure you can’t stay?”

Will tried to hide his grimace, even as he did his best to dodge cooks. “Uh, I don’t think I would be good company.” Which, honestly, was true enough.

“I disagree.”

Will looked up, startled. Hannibal... was entirely sincere. Was Hannibal honestly friends with him?

“But,” Hannibal changed the subject fairly quickly, “before you go what became of Mr. Silvestri’s donor?”

The answer felt awkward in light of recent revelations, so Will’s words came out gentle and flat. “You saved his life.”

Hannibal seemed slightly amused at that. “Been a long time since I used a scalpel on anything but a pencil.”

Unlikely, considering the ease with which he’d used it the night before. But still... Will tilted his head and asked, “Why’d you stop being a surgeon?”

“I killed someone,” Hannibal answered with ease. “Or, more accurately I couldn’t save someone, but
it felt like killing them.”

A disappointing event, not enough control over life and death to satisfy. It was actually a fairly common thing, being dissatisfied with how out of control surgery really was, even among psychopaths. Will nodded and did his best to move on, hating the fact that Hannibal hadn’t yet said anything to disprove Will’s suspicion. “You were an emergency room surgeon, it has to happen from time to time.”

“It happened one time too many,” Hannibal replied as he strained something. “I transferred my passion for anatomy into the culinary arts. I fix minds instead of bodies,” Hannibal placed the bowl on the counter, leaning in to state, “and no one’s died as a result of my therapy.”

Nope, Hannibal Lecter was definitely the Chesapeake Ripper.

Will gave an aborted laugh and smile at the sheer audacity Hannibal had to so blatantly out himself. The man must have thought himself so clever. Will wondered how often he used puns to proclaim his cannibal proclivities.

Ugh, this was all far too much. “I have to go,” Will said, placing the wine bottle on the counter. Then he decided to get in a little revenge of his own. “I have a date with the Chesapeake Ripper.”

Hannibal looked a little too interested in the way he worded that. Just something else for Will to consider. Hannibal didn’t remark on it, however, saying instead, “Or, is that rippers?”

Will sighed, somehow unable to believe Hannibal was even now trying to push him into believing that shit theory. It would take attention away from Hannibal, but it was still a shit theory that hadn’t really held up to the investigation. “Devon Silvestri was harvesting organs, but not with the Ripper. There’s no connection between them.”

“Jack must be devastated,” Hannibal commented, still staring at his work.

So, Will decided to shock him. “I imagine he is.”

Hannibal looked up at that, meeting Will’s eyes. Will gave an awkward smile to confirm that he wasn’t devastated - not about the case closing on the Ripper once again, anyway. As to the other thing, well...

“Enjoy the wine,” Will offered, and left. He had his own bottle to get back to. He placed his hands in his pockets for the walk, feeling the stone that was currently burning with anticipation of use.

Will wondered why the stone still worked for him, during his long drive home. Magic was something he had no access to anymore. Not like he used to. Perhaps it was like floo powder, in that you didn’t have to have magic in order to use it. Maybe it was the fact that Will owned all three Hallows, no matter his current lack of magic. Maybe it was simply that powerful of an artifact.

Whatever the reason, when Will sat down with a glass of whiskey and turned the stone three times, the stone worked as it always had. He didn’t use it much, but there were just some things he couldn’t talk about with anyone else.

“Hello Harry.”

Will smiled. “Hey Remus.”

“So,” Remus stated, walking over to sit on the bed next to him, “I assume you’ve called me because
Will guiltily downed his drink. He refilled it from the bottle he’d relocated to the bedside table for exactly that reason.

“Not even Sirius?” Remus asked. “We’ve all seen, Will. Once Sirius saw how interested you were in this new psychiatrist he looked into him.”

Will sighed and dropped his head into his hands. “So he is the Ripper.”

Remus’ silence was damning enough.

They sat in that silence a moment, and then Will found the courage to ask. “How do I do this, Remus?”

“I think, Harry, there is one question you need to consider, but haven’t yet,” Remus replied gently. “Does he make you happy?”

Will blinked up at Remus, confused. “What?”

Remus’ smile was just as gentle as it had always been. “You can argue morality and right and wrong and duty all day, but in the end only one question matters. Does he make you happy?”

Will furrowed his brows. “What’s that got to do with anything?”

Remus shrugged. “It’s how Tonks got me to stop being an idiot and see past Moony long enough to accept that we could have a relationship.” He smiled off into the distance, face full of love. “She said - despite everything, every argument I made - she said that I was the one who made her happy.”

Will blinked. He hadn’t thought his crush had been that obvious. Apparently he was wrong.

Remus kindly didn’t point that out. “I know werewolf and cannibalistic serial killer are two entirely different things, but I think the same principle applies here.”

Will let out a frustrated whine. “How, Remus? How? I’m in law enforcement!”

“You’re a teacher,” Remus corrected, “and a consultant, nothing more. Besides,” he added, ghostly hand resting on Will’s shoulder with none of the weight of true flesh, “You saved the world, Harry. You died. I think you’ve sacrificed enough to fate - you deserve to be happy. Sod any fool who dares to say otherwise.”

Will shocked himself with a teary hiccup, and chased it down with more whiskey. Remus looked like he wanted to hug him. Since that was impossible, he used words instead. “If it means anything, we all approve. Hannibal already takes good care of you - if he makes you happy, it’s all we could ask for.”

Will finally let Remus go, dropping the stone, mind a whirl.

He loved Hannibal. He loved the Chesapeake Ripper. Hannibal might feel something back. He wasn’t being condemned for it by Remus - nor his parents or Sirius, if Remus was to be believed.

He was in love with Hannibal Lecter.

What the hell was he going to do now?
"Inconclusive due to mutilations = how the Ripper rips" is not sound logic, Zeller! Inconclusive means it's possible, not fact!

And here we have our huge revelation, and the beginning of our cannon divergence. Hannibal has decided he's not going to frame Will (he doesn't have to shatter this one in order to bring the darkness out - it's already there, ready and waiting) although our idiot cannibal hasn't figured out that he's in love just yet. Considering it took the idiot until a good way through S2 to figure that out in cannon I figure he's still very in character here.

Yes Remus still calls Will Harry. I tried to switch it around but it just sounded weird. As for the parental approval... Will's had one extremely harsh life. He hasn't had a love interest since Ginny, and here comes this suave rich man who'll treasure Will as he deserves to be treasured. The folks aren't thrilled, to be sure, but there's no doubting that Hannibal makes Will happy, and I figure death realigns certain ideologies. Besides, Lily has so totes adopted Mischa in the afterlife.

Thanks for sticking with it y'all! Seriously, the love for this fic has blown me away, you guys are the best!

Next time: our silly cannibal finally gets a clue!
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Hannibal finally figures out why he can't bring himself to follow through on his original plan for Will Graham. The universe laughs at him for taking so long.

Chapter Notes

Here we are! Throat-cellos at last! Huge revelation number 2 coming right up!

(On that note, it's interesting to sit back and realize what disdain you hold for Tobias not because of general murdering, but because his tableau was almost sloppy and overdramatic and really just trying too hard and not letting the art flow for what it was and realizing - well, I might have a slight problem.)

Also, a lot of people have asked me about Will's seeming inability to do magic so I thought I'd address it here. Will and magic have a very complicated relationship, and as it's a big plot point later I refuse to spoil anything. Just know that we're getting closer to having all those answers. Like, two chapters away from some big answers (and the reveal of magic to our favorite cannibal) and maybe five chapters away from fully explaining everything. Patience sucks, I know, but we're getting there guys, I swear.

Special thanks to AGlassRoseNeverFades for the idea of Will stating his name as Harry when doing his grounding exercise! It was such a cool idea and it works great! Lots of love, friend!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Will was laid out on the floor, surrounded by dogs and motor pieces. He was doing, in essence, what he’d been doing all week.

Ignoring the problem.

Healthy? Probably not. But honestly, like there was anything healthy about the entire situatio-

Will’s head shot up. He could hear... something. A wounded cry, most likely an animal.

Will put down the screwdriver and grabbed his wrench. He threw his jacket on as he walked out the door. He wandered into the fields around his house, searching even as the animal howled in pain once more, but there was nothing.

No tracks. No sign.

Only an echo.

Will rubbed his eyes with one hand and went back inside. Maybe he should take a nap.
He tried to ignore feathered form he could catch only in the peripherals of his vision - the stag standing guard just beyond his window pane.

A new month, a new corpse. Will just hoped he was up to it. He felt... disjoined, recently. In a way he hadn’t since fifth year. At times it seemed almost as if he wandered through a waking dream. He hoped he wasn’t - since the start of the sleepwalking Will had been increasingly worried that he might be doing just that. Although the corpse was a little tame for his dreams, so he probably wasn’t sleeping.

“Victim is Douglas Wilson,” Jack debriefed as they walked onto the stage. “Member of the Baltimore Metropolitan Orchestra’s brass section. A trombone player. He was killed shortly after his last performance - blunt force trauma to the back of the head.”

Will walked a slow circle round the corpse. The hooks holding back the throat were... odd. Unnecessary, really. Would have been more frightening a scene without it. All they seemed to do was draw attention to the facts of what happened - opened by the throat and played. Almost as if this were someone trying too hard.

“His killer brought him here to put on a show,” Will commented, circling round to stand by Beverly. “Seems a little heavy handed, doesn’t it?”

Beverly smiled a little. “Center stage with a spotlight - our killer definitely has attention issues.”

Will smiled back at her. Grimaced. Dug his aspirin bottle out of his pocket.

“Will,” Jack interrupted, “is it just me or is it getting easier for you to look?”

“It seems a little easier,” Will replied. He swallowed two pills dry. “Doesn’t mean it is. Just means the walls are thinner.”

“Walls?” Jack pressed. At least he was actually listening.

“Yeah,” Will replied breathlessly as he gave a wry smile. “The walls between me and the killers. I should probably wait a week before seeing another tableau.”

“Just a week?” Beverly interrupted. Her sharp look was filled with concern.

“At least,” Will amended, giving her what he hoped was a reassuring smile.

Jack didn’t seem terribly happy, but he was giving Will the space he needed. “Shake it off for today, keep looking. Keep me updated and say no if you need to. Let us know when you’re ready.” With that, Jack left. Beverly followed behind, pausing briefly to give Will’s shoulder a strong squeeze.

Will waited until they were halfway up the auditorium, and then took a deep breath. As the pendulum swung, music began to play. It was a song he recognized. He already knew it.

Intimately.

Beverly had plopped Will on a spare chair soon as they’d gotten back to the lab. The man hadn’t protested, which worried her. He wasn’t looking too good. Will just sat, quietly there, as the rest of them went about sharing the results of their analysis.
“Played him like a fiddle,” Jimmy joked.

“Along with rosin powder, we found sodium carbonate, sulfur dioxide, lye, and olive oil in the wounds,” Beverly stated, turning back slightly to Will. He wasn’t back to himself yet, but he nodded.

“What’s the deal with the olive oil?” Brian asked, just as confused as the rest of them.

“Sure wasn’t making a salad,” Jimmy remarked.

“He removed anything non-muscular or fatty from around the vocal folds,” Brian reported, pointing as they all leaned in for a closer look. “The chords themselves were treated with a sulphur dioxide solution.”

Will blinked, and turned his head to face them. “Made them easier to play.” He looked at the corpse then, something dark in his eyes and hard in his voice as he nearly growled out, “Had to open you up to get a decent sound out of you.”

Brian looked shocked and almost scared, and Beverly exchanged a look with Jimmy. Something was wrong.

Beverly decided to try and steer the conversation away from the moment. “You pick it up and can’t play it, he’ll put you down and play you.”

Will stood and joined them, Jimmy shifting slightly to give him room. “This takes a... steady hand. A confidence - he’s killed before.”

“Like this?” Brian asked.

“No,” Will denied, “not like this.” His voice was flat and ominous as he said, “This is a skilled musician trying a new instrument.”

Will took in a shaky breath. The smile he gave her wasn’t reassuring in the slightest. “No,” he answered with a slight laugh. “No I - I’m not uh...” Will’s upper lip moved, briefly baring his teeth as he searched for words.

“What can I do?” Beverly asked.
“I need grounding,” Will revealed easily enough. He must have been worse off than Beverly thought. “Something to hold on to - an anchor.”

Beverly nodded, and removed her hand. “Right,” she proclaimed, taking off her gloves. “You call Hannibal. I’m driving, and you’re gonna listen to my music whether you like it or not, Graham. You got that?”

Will nodded, relief evident in the slope of his shoulders. Beverly made quick work of changing out of her lab gear as Will called Hannibal to make an emergency appointment, and didn’t protest as Beverly shuffled him out the door.

“What else can I do?” Beverly asked as they buckled in and started the long drive.

“Talk,” Will requested.

She could do that. “I can’t play this shit in the office, you know that?” Beverly remarked as she turned on her favorite CD. “Brian and Jimmy get all huffy and puffy about ‘that stupid poser punk’ and it just makes me want to punch them in their shiny teeth. What’s wrong with Fall Out Boy, huh? They’re a great band! And don’t go telling me I’m too old to like them - they’re not some middle school craze that sensible people grow out of, no matter what my aunt says!”

Will leaned back and watched her with rapt attention as Beverly went on one of her favorite rants. Beverly was just thankful she was a big talker anyways - might’ve strained something otherwise.

She kept up the dialogue as she escorted Will into Hannibal’s office, and stayed with him as he sat in the waiting room chair until the door opened. Hannibal came out instead of inviting Will in, kneeling next to the man and taking his head in his hands.

It was remarkably gentle, the way Hannibal held Will. His voice was softer than Beverly had ever heard before as he called, “William. Are you with me?”

Will looked into Hannibal’s eyes fearlessly for a long moment. Then, he sighed and closed his eyes in relief. “Hannibal,” he breathed, leaning forward until they rested forehead against forehead. Will took a deep breath that spoke of the ease he now felt.

Hannibal simply smiled and leaned into the unconventional touch. It was subtle, but Beverly caught the movement nonetheless.

Oh wow. Beverly hoped Will got a good referral, because damn. Those two idiots needed to date.

Hannibal was glad he had some proper British tea on hand. He didn’t know Will’s preferences in that regard, but one could almost never go wrong with a nice Earl Grey.

“Drink this,” Hannibal instructed, handing the plain white tea cup to Will.

Will sniffed it first, and his face softened in pleasant surprise. “Thank you,” Will stated, before slowly taking a sip, savoring it in a way Hannibal was trying to teach him to do with wine (to no avail). Hannibal left Will there, safely ensconced in his office chair and drinking tea, to walk over to where Beverly stood watch.

“What is the case?” Hannibal questioned.

Beverly shrugged. “Member of the Baltimore Orchestra opened up by the throat and played like a
Beverly shrugged again. “Yeah I know - little weird, even for us.”

“Not necessarily,” Hannibal commented easily. “Among the first musical instruments were flutes carved from human bone.”

“This murder was a performance,” Will interjected from his seat.

Hannibal looked to Beverly, who nodded. “Center stage with a spotlight - all this killer’s missing is a sign that says ‘notice me’,,” she added with a wry grin.

Beverly’s humor was refreshing - Hannibal could see why Will cherished her friendship.

Hannibal wandered back to his curio, preparing a cup of tea for Beverly as well as the electric kettle whistled. “Every life is a piece of music,” Hannibal commented. “Like music, we are finite events. Unique arrangements - sometimes harmonious, sometimes dissonant.”

“Sometimes not worth hearing again,” Will stated firmly.

Hannibal let that comment pass without acknowledgement. “He’s a poet and a psychopath,” he stated instead, crossing the room once more with a now-full cup of tea.

“Craftsman too,” Beverly added. She took the offered cup with a grateful smile before continuing, “He shrunk and tanned the vocal chords.”

Hannibal paused. “Was there olive oil?”

Beverly gave him a sharp, assessing look. Miss Katz, it seemed, was not to be underestimated. “Yeah, there was.”

“Whatever sound he was trying to produce, it was an authentic one,” Hannibal informed her. “Olive oil hasn’t been used in the production of catgut for over a century. It was said,” Hannibal added, returning to the curio once more - a rather nice oolong sounded perfect for the moment, “to increase the life of the strings and create a sweeter, more melodic sound.”

“No,” Will interjected harshly. “No I hear what he was playing behind my eyes when I close them and it’s -” Will took a heavy breath, “it’s -”

Hannibal turned to face his full attention on Will. “Will,” he called, “I’m going to give you a grounding exercise. To help anchor you in the present. First, state your name.”

Will put the teacup down. Removed his glasses. “My name is Ha - Will Graham.” Will looked up, squinting.

Hannibal wondered about that slip - a tiny blip, really, one that might not have been a slip at all. It could have been a rough breath, or it could have been another name. Was Will truly so gone that he was losing sight of himself? Was the encephalitis destroying his identity, rather than setting the darker side of it free?

Hannibal tried to ignore how uneasy that thought made him feel.

Hannibal gave a quick look to the clock. “And now the time. It is currently four fifty-nine.”
“It’s four fifty-nine,” Will repeated, pausing to wait on instructions.

“Finally, location,” Hannibal finished.

Will nodded, “and I’m in Baltimore, Maryland.”

“Alana told me you haven’t been by to see Abigail recently,” Hannibal said, moving the conversation from blood and death to life and family in attempts to draw Will out of his illness.

Will blinked at him, confused. “I... no, I haven’t, have I?” Will gave another sigh and rubbed his face again. “I don’t think visiting her would be a good idea, though.”

“Visiting Abigail, seeing one of those who you’ve saved and reaffirming the bonds you have would be good for you,” Hannibal commented. “Why do you wish to remain away?”

Will darted a look to Beverly, who took the hint. “I should get back to work,” she declared, putting her cup of tea down on the nearest surface. “Call me if you need a ride back to your car, Will.”

“Thanks Bev,” Will called as the woman left. Hannibal would have to invite her to dinner - she was evidently very good to Will.

Once the door had closed, Hannibal made an educated guess. “Do you fear the killer in your head will harm Abigail as her father did?”

“Hobbs is proving harder to shake than any of the others,” Will confessed quietly. “It’s him I see most often - he was in the audience. Applauded when I drew the bow over that throat.”

Hannibal blinked. “You relive the crime so completely?”

Will met his eyes, blue hardened into steel and yet cracking at their very foundations. “Always.”

Hannibal... couldn’t decide if he wanted Will to quit consulting immediately, or if he wanted to kill the first person who stepped into his path, in order to share the moment with Will. Will hadn’t seen any of his recent killings beyond photos. He’d kill as many as needed until Will did.

For now, he simply focused on getting Will grounded enough to send home. He longed to herd the man into his guest room once again, but Will had been adamant that he’d be fine.

It was still on Hannibal’s mind the next day, although for once Franklin managed to distract him from that. “Do you remember when I said that Tobias was saying very dark things?” Franklin chose as his question to start the session with.

“I made note of it,” Hannibal replied, sitting down and setting his notebook within reach.

“Well he said that he wanted to cut someone’s throat and play it like a violin,” Franklin stated in a rush, voice firm in his fear.

He certainly had Hannibal’s full attention now.

“They found a guy whose throat was cut and played like a violin!” Franklin was, for perhaps the first time in the history of their sessions, worried with solid reasoning behind it.

Mrs. Katz had said all the corpse had needed was a “notice me” sign. Hannibal repressed the urge to sigh. “So you think Tobias killed that man at the symphony?”

“I don’t know!” Franklin protested with a wave of his hands and the look of a man who did know,
no matter how much he didn’t want to. Franklin took a breath to gather himself, and then asked, “If I do, do I have to report it?”

“Do you have a reason not to?” Hannibal asked. If Franklin brought it up to the authorities, perhaps this could all be taken care of without his direct interference.

“What if I’m wrong?” Franklin offered, as if that were reason enough.

Hannibal paused slightly before countering. “What if you’re right?”

“I’m always wrong!” Franklin retorted. Hannibal looked away as the man sighed once again. “I don’t know. Why would he say something like that to me?”

Hannibal was beginning to suspect. It felt like a complication he didn’t need. “Why do you think?”

Franklin’s face fell as he gave the answer both of them already knew. “Because he knows I’d tell you.”

Neurotic he might be, but Franklin was capable of moments of startling insight.

And so, feeling that he should act before this all got out of hand, Hannibal visited Mr. Tobias Budge at his Baltimore string shop.

The visit had been interesting, dinner less so. Tobias was indeed all but flashing a neon sign above his head - wanting to kill federal agents before disappearing? Reckless. Extremely reckless. Not to mention sadly pedestrian. Hannibal could appreciate the skill it took to supply a shop even partially with strings made from human gut, but there was no true artistry to this man’s vision.

Even discounting all of that there was the fact that Tobias knew about Hannibal’s own proclivities. Despite paltry reassurances that he wouldn’t inform anyone of what he’d seen, it still made him a liability.

At least the reveal had made the night more interesting.

The man was unable to keep his back to Hannibal, which showed his fear even as he stated, “I could use a friend. Someone who can understand me. Who thinks like I do and can see the world and the people in it the way I do.”

“I know exactly how you feel,” Hannibal replied. But he thought of Will Graham - of a perfect, clean headshot and steady hands holding a bleeding child firm. Of the darkness lurking under words and the beautiful pureness of a fevered forehead pressing closer into his palm.

Hannibal already had what he needed. “But I don’t want to be your friend.”

“Then why did you invite me here for dinner?” Tobias asked, voice dead and tone curious. The man was still constructing his person suit. “It wasn’t just to restring your harpsichord.”

Hannibal finished placing the new glass he’d gotten for Tobias, and did the man the honor of looking him in the eye. “I was going to kill you,” he stated blandly - a pure, simple fact.

Tobias froze a moment before looking at his plate.

“I didn’t poison you, Tobias,” Hannibal assured him. “I wouldn’t do that to the food.”
Time froze, two killers waiting for the moment to strike.

The doorbell rang.

Tobias raised an eyebrow. “Expecting someone?”

They could hear the door open, and Hannibal wanted to sigh in frustration. “No.” He waited a moment more before turning and heading for the door.

To his surprise, Alana stood in his entry hall, Will Graham’s trembling form clutched tightly to her. “Hannibal!” she cried with urgency. “I’m sorry to barge in like this, but I didn’t know what to do!”

Hannibal blinked, entirely taken aback. “What’s the matter?” he questioned, rapidly shifting mental gears to focus on this new problem. Hopefully, Tobias had taken the smart route and fled instead of attempting an ambush.

Will was shaking and shivering beneath Alana’s coat, fresh tear tracks on his face and eyes darting about in panic.

“I went to his house to talk to him about Abigail,” Alana stated, “maybe see if he was feeling unwell and I found him tearing his chimney apart.”

“Sarah’s still in there,” Will muttered as he turned, apparently trying to break away. “Have to get her out - she’ll burn - she’ll burn -”

Hannibal reached forward to grab Will just as the man broke free of Alana’s hold. “Will,” he called, firm and resolute, grounding. “Will, remember out exercise.”

Will blinked once, staring vacantly at Hannibal’s decor. “My name is Harry - no,” he shook his head, “No I will - I will - I’ve got to get to Sarah, she needs me, she’s burning-”

“Look at me, Will,” Hannibal ordered, voice turned harsh by the dread suddenly pooling in his gut. He hadn’t felt this way since that cold winter, so many years ago.

Will had called himself a different name. It was now apparent that if left unchecked, the encephalitis would take Will from him. Letting the illness continue was unacceptable.

Glazed over, disbelieving eyes fixed an unfocused stare on his face.

Hannibal gentled his volume and tried a different approach. “Sarah is well, Will. She’s alright.”

“But she’s burning,” Will protested. His voice was high and reedy, cracking slightly. It indicated that he’d been screaming at some point in the near past.

Hannibal wondered if Will had in truth known a child named Sarah whom had burned alive. What horrors from the war haunted him even now? So Hannibal lied to assuage those worries. “She has suffered some damage, yes, but she will recover, Will.” Hannibal dragged Will closer to himself, holding the trembling man close. “She’ll be alright, Will. You got to her in time.”

Will’s strength left him all at once. Hannibal and Alana darted in to catch him as the man’s knees buckled. They thankfully managed to keep him from hitting the floor. Will seemed unable to care, however, as he tucked his head into Hannibal’s chest and began to sob - huge, shaking sobs that wracked his body and left him shivering.

Hannibal met Alana’s worried eyes and hoped once again that Tobias Budge had left. “Help me get
him into the study.”

Together they maneuvered Will down the hall. Hannibal kept an ear out for Tobias, but heard nothing. Once Will had been settled on the couch Hannibal handed him off to Alana and excused himself to go collect some water.

The dining room was empty when he arrived, back door open and a light smattering of snow on the carpet. Good. One problem taken care of, for the moment. Now, to see to Will.

Hannibal returned with water, some aspirin, and a blanket. He set two on the end table, and then drew Will out of Alana’s arms and into his own. Will borrowed into him, and Hannibal couldn’t help the desire to keep him there, wrapped and warm and safe. Hannibal tucked the blanket around Will and then began to rock slightly, carding his hand through Will’s sweaty curls in order to comfort him.

After several moments, Hannibal tried again. “Will,” he stated gently, “I want you to try our grounding exercise once more. What is your name?”

“My name’s Harr- shit, sorry,” Will breathed out harshly. “Will. My name is Will Graham.”

“The time is eleven twenty-eight,” Hannibal stated, “and you are in Baltimore, Maryland.”

Silence reigned for a moment, until Will sighed. “She’s dead,” Will admitted into Hannibal’s collar bone. “I know she’s dead - Sarah’s been dead for years. Why could I hear her?”

“You’ve been under a great amount of stress,” Hannibal replied, “the barriers in your skull weakened. Your trauma must have dug up old memories.”

Will sniffed and burrowed closer. His shaky voice was muffled by Hannibal’s suit, but he heard it all the same. “I feel unstable.”

Hannibal looked at Alana, who seemed out of her depth. This was the opportune moment to set his plan in motion. “Sleepwalking,” Hannibal listed, as if deep in thought, “auditory and visual hallucinations, night sweats, headaches, fever…”

A spark of hope lit Alana’s dark eyes. “It could be medical,” she stated. “Do you think... maybe a brain scan?”

“I will call the best neurosurgeon I know in the morning,” Hannibal stated. “We’ll figure this out, Will.”

Will just nodded and pressed closer. Eventually, he fell asleep.

Alana wiped her eyes. “I guess this is why he hasn’t been to see Abigail.”

Hannibal made no move to let Will’s sleeping form go. He could hear the cold wind howling, and was attempting to anchor himself in the current time. Odd, how Will could bring about things Hannibal hadn’t needed to worry about in years.

Alana looked to him then, a worried friend searching for guidance. “You do think it could be medical, don’t you?”

“Only one way to find out,” Hannibal replied. “Will has been feverish more often than not, so it seems likely to be a biological ailment. I only hope we catch it in time.” With a sigh, Hannibal shifted Will to ensure a firmer grip and shakily stood. “Let me put Will to bed, and then we’ll share a drink. A colleague of mine was called away during dinner, so I have dessert for two.”
Alana nodded, and followed Hannibal in order to open doors and turn down the sheets. Once he’d stripped Will down to shirt and boxers and tucked him in, Hannibal couldn’t resist brushing Will’s curls back once again. He might have done more, but Alana was watching. And so he turned aside, and prepared dessert for Alana.

Now for the matter of Tobias Budge. “Are you at all involved in Will’s current case?” Hannibal asked.

Alana shook her head.

Hannibal nodded. “If you will excuse me a moment then, I need to make a call to Jack.”

Alana sat on a kitchen stool with her dessert and waited patiently as Hannibal called Jack and informed him of Franklin’s earlier comments.

“I’ll have Will interview him tomorrow,” Jack stated.

Hannibal frowned. “Will is possibly very sick, Jack,” he interjected. “I don’t think you should send him out at all.”

“I’ll have him there in an advisory position only,” Jack assured him, “He’ll have police protection too. Thanks for the tip, Doctor Lecter.”

Hannibal opened his mouth to protest once more, but Jack hung up on him.

Jack would go well in a curry dish - something heavy and spicy and nearly overbearing.

Hannibal took a deep breath and returned to the kitchen. He bypassed Alana and went straight for the brandy. He poured himself a double, and then another for Alana as well. She thanked him with a shaky smile, half her dessert already consumed. Hannibal noticed that fact with a small smile. “Feel free to eat mine as well - I find I am no longer hungry.”

Alana shook her head. “No, no you should eat it. Especially if you didn’t finish dinner. I’m trying to get a better hold on my stress eating anyway.”

Hannibal nodded. Then he grabbed another stool and joined her at the counter. He mostly poked at his portion, but did eat. The strength of his own reaction was what mainly troubled him - Will seemed to bring out extremes in him, true, but he had not felt such fear since the day he’d lost Mischa. It was... troubling.

“Do you ever feel like you need to take a long break?” Alana asked suddenly.

Hannibal looked at her then. The lines around her eyes were tight, and her frown was deeper than usual. “Are you alright, Alana?”

Alana sighed. “All the trouble with Abigail - I thought she’d be farther along in her therapy than she is, but she’s always best after Will’s visited. And now Will...”

Hannibal took Alana’s hand in his own in a slightly impulsive show of comfort. “Will is going to be fine, Alana,” he assured her. He wouldn’t allow for anything else. “As for Abigail, perhaps I could visit more often? I have some time...” Hannibal drifted off, thinking of his schedule.

Alana sighed and removed her hand from his in order to rub them over her face tiredly. “You might have been right,” Alana admitted. “Perhaps she’d do best outside of the facility. But I don’t want to do that with this recent upheaval waiting to set back all the progress she’s already made.”
Hannibal nodded. “Once Will is on the road to recovery we’ll ask Abigail what she wants to do. For now, we can only wait and see how things unfold.”

Alana took a deep, fortifying breath and nodded. She finished her food and drink, and Hannibal saw her settled in his other guest room before turning in himself. As he turned down the covers, he heard footsteps.

Was Tobias reckless enough to return?

Hannibal crept down the stairs, tense and prepared for a fight. If it weren’t for the awkward questions that would arise, he’d welcome it. A fight would be just the thing to remove this tension.

Hannibal followed the sounds downstairs only to find Will in his study, standing before the fireplace and slightly swaying. Hannibal forced the tension out in a harsh breath before going to him. “William,” he called gently. “Come back to bed.”

Will’s eyes were blank, the man not present. Possibly asleep. But he didn’t startle at the hand Hannibal laid on his shoulder, nor did he protest when Hannibal gently tugged him away from the mantel. “Come along, Will,” Hannibal gentled, “come back to bed. We’ll get you settled again shortly, and then we’ll get you an appointment in the morning. Come along.”

Will followed Hannibal’s lead up the stairs and back into the guest room Hannibal had put him in originally. There was no protest as Hannibal tucked him in, and soon Will’s eyes had closed once again - body agreeing to remain still in the sleep Will had not awoken from.

With a sigh, Hannibal pulled up a chair and settled in for a long night.

Will awoke to the smell of breakfast - bread toasting, probably. Which was strange, seeing as he was in bed. Had Ron come over?

Will blinked open his eyes to note the decor that, while familiar, was decidedly not his.

So. Hannibal’s house. Huh.

Will couldn’t quite remember why he was at Hannibal’s place, but he figured the memories would return soon enough. For now, he tripped out of bed (narrowly avoiding braining himself on the bedside table) and threw on the pajama pants laid out on the chair by the bed. So clad, Will stumbled down the stairs and into the kitchen, where Hannibal was.

Alana, too. She brightened at the sight of him and called out a greeting. “Good morning, Will. How are you feeling?”

Will scowled at her. “Don’ fuck’n talk, not mornin’ yet, bloody hell bleeding bastards always wantin’ ta fuckin’ chat.”

Hannibal turned to stare disapprovingly at him. “Perhaps you should cease speaking until you’ve woken up,” the man cautioned. Will glared at him, but wandered over to take the cup of coffee the man offered. In doing so he tripped slightly, ending up with his head on Hannibal’s chest and one of the man’s hands on his arm to steady him. “Are you alright, William?” Hannibal asked.

Will grunted. It was a really comfortable spot. There was a warm mug placed into his hands, and Will soon found himself led over to a stool. He obediently sat and started in on his coffee.
Ah, coffee.

Will finished his cup and made to stand, only to find his mug whisked away and refilled before he could fully finish the motion. Will blinked at the mug, and then at Hannibal. The man’s face was blurry (shit, he’d forgotten his glasses again) but the small smile was clear all the same.

Ah fuck, there went the blush. *Way to make your Merlin-damned crush exceedingly fucking obvious, Graham,* Will chided himself. Hoping to hide it, he ducked his head and busied himself with chugging the new coffee.

Hannibal and Alana chatted a bit to themselves as Will tried to wake up. After Will had drunk four cups of coffee and been led to the table the reason why he was at Hannibal’s house finally returned to him.

“Shit,” Will cursed, dropping his silverware. Alana and Hannibal turned to look at him - curiosity and worry sharp and swirling above their heads - but Will avoided them by dropping his head into his recently vacated hands. “Shit,” he repeated. “Merlin, I’m so, so sorr-”

“Don’t you dare apologize Will,” Alana interrupted sharply. “Not for that. If I hadn’t come by you might still be stuck in the past - I’m glad I was there to get you help.”

“Alana is correct,” Hannibal added, calm and unyielding. “Never apologize for needing our help, William.”

Will took a deep breath and bit back the instinctual urge to apologize for being a bother.

“It is, perhaps, a fortuitous event,” Hannibal continued - he didn’t seem bothered at all by the way Will dropped his hands to stare at Hannibal’s blurry face in shock, “as last night has shown that these symptoms might perhaps have basis in a physical ailment.”

Will blinked with the force of the sudden hope blooming deep under his breastbone. “.... Really?”

Hannibal made a motion Will assumed was a nod. “As soon as the office opens, I’ll be setting you an appointment with the best neurosurgeon I know.” There was a hand on his, suddenly, causing Will to jump slightly. “We’ll get this figured out Will, I promise.”

Will... didn’t really know what to do, so he just grabbed onto that hand and clutched it. Hannibal gave his hand a squeeze and made no move to withdraw, so they just sat there, holding hands and eating breakfast.

A breakfast which held no meat. Hannibal Lecter - the Chesapeake Ripper, who got his kicks feeding people to people - had pointedly made a simple breakfast without meat because Will’s hallucination had been about watching someone else burn to death.

The safehouse had been under attack. The floo network shutdown worked, but the timing was wrong. And then the south wall had collapsed, and Sarah was stuck in the chimney, and with the battle raging on and falling debris they hadn’t been able to get her out in time. She’d died in the the field they’d apparated to from pain and the smoke in her lungs.

If Will had been harbouring any doubts, they were gone now. He was in love with Hannibal Lecter, and he wanted to pursue a relationship with him. Now to tell him, although Will figured he should probably save that for after they figured out what was wrong with him. Just in case.

Breakfast was finished in silence, and then Alana spoke up. “Thank you for everything, Hannibal. Will, if you want to get dressed I’ll take you to Quantico with me - I’ve got a guest lecture there this
morning.”

Will nodded and awkwardly released his grasp on Hannibal’s hand. “Just let me know when the appointment is,” he requested, staring at Hannibal’s left shoulder, “I’ll clear my schedule.”

Hannibal nodded. “Of course. In the meantime, please call if you need anything. And if you think it best someone stay with you I hope you know my door is always open.”

Will fought the heat he could feel in his face as he nodded. He then went upstairs to change, idly wishing he could cast a cleaning charm on his clothes. It hadn’t been the first time he’d worn the same thing more than one day in a row, and it probably wouldn’t be the last. Didn’t really bug him until the third day.

Hannibal was on the phone when he came down, but the man still saw them to the door like the gentleman he was. The silence in the car was only slightly awkward as Alana pulled out onto the road. Feeling slightly uncharacteristic today, Will decided to broach the silence. “You’ve avoided being in a room alone with me essentially since I met you.” It probably wasn’t the best of openers, but Will was curious. “I mean, you were smooth about it.”

Alana shot him a look he couldn’t quite decipher. “Evidently not smooth enough.”

“And now you make house calls?” Will continued. “Did you really come over just because I haven’t been by to see Abigail?”

Alana was silent a long moment, gathering her thoughts. Will gave her all the time she needed. Alana found her words as she merged onto the highway. “There was a picture of you I had, and it was ruling my decisions on how to interact with you. More and more, however, I find that picture to be flawed in places. Circumstance and actions that don’t quite measure up to my predictions of you. It means I’ve been treating you unfairly, and I wanted to apologize for that.”

Will sighed and rubbed the back of his neck. “My childhood wasn’t the easiest,” Will decided to reveal. “I got caught up in some political turmoil as a teen, and on top of all that I’ve got this shitty empathy.” Will huffed a laugh and smiled a wry smile full of dry humor. “I seem more unstable than I really am, Alana. I just don’t have the patience to fake social graces like most people.” He knew exactly what he longed to do, and just how morally unacceptable that was. He understood the consequences of giving into the desires of the beast he kept under lock and key. It amused him greatly that Will knew he wasn’t crazy, but the rest of the world would never see it that way.

“I think I’ve come to understand that,” Alana stated softly. “Seeing you with Abigail... it’s like watching an entirely different person.”

“I’m less gruff with people I care about,” Will admitted. He shrugged. “Most of the time, anyway.”

“Either way, I owe you an apology,” Alana stated, voice firm and steady. “I misjudged you, Will, and it’s come in the way of our relationship - I’m sorry.”

Will readjusted his glasses for lack of anything else to do. “It’s fine, Alana. But I have to inform you that I don’t return your crush on me.”

Alana winced slightly, but she laughed soon after. “Evidently I’m even less smooth than I thought.”

Will shrugged. “Empathy - not the fun party trick everyone seems to think it is. Friends?”

Alana turned to smile at him. “Friends.”
Will wasn’t entirely sure how he’d gone from grading papers in his office to tagging along for a suspect’s interview, but Jack had said he didn’t trust Agent Palmer to handle the interview with any tact. Will wasn’t sure why that meant he was Jack’s pick to keep the interview in line (given that Will didn’t really have any tact either) but he’d somehow managed to finish all of his grading and was bored. Besides, it had apparently been Hannibal’s tip and Will wanted to see this case finished already so he could maybe take a break from consulting until after they knew if he was sick or just plain crazy.

Will had paused at the bottom of the string shop when he heard a cry.

Agent Palmer, an older caucasian who judging by the set of his shoulders was set in his ways and definitely disapproved of getting saddled with Will, turned back and raised an eyebrow. “What’s wrong now, Graham?”

Will blinked, gaze set on an alley. “Didn’t you hear that?”

Agent Palmer looked around before spreading his hands and asking in his slight Boston drawl, “Hear what?”

“Stay here,” Will ordered, already moving, hand going for his gun, “don’t go in there without me!”

There was a crash of bricks and a high-pitched shriek. “Help!”

He bolted across the street, curious when the police escort didn’t follow him. Lack of professionalism aside, Will didn’t have time to wonder about that. He narrowly avoided an ambulance in his mad dash across the street (talk about irony) and darted into the alley ready for anything.

Only nothing was there. No sign of an explosion. No blood. No marks of scuffle or struggle. Just vacant stone decorated with undisturbed grime.

.... Had it been another hallucination?

Will gave the area one more thorough sweep before sighing. He put his gun away. Rubbed his hands over his face. Considered the pounding of his skull and took out his aspirin bottle, swallowing two dry. It was nearly empty - he’d have to buy another soon.

With another sigh, Will headed back to the string shop. The outside was empty, which meant Agent Palmer had taken the cops in to start the interview without him. Will didn’t have the energy to be annoyed, so he just went in and prepared for his joining in to be awkward.

The front was empty. Completely empty.

“Officers?” Will asked, feeling cold pricks of unease settle beneath his fingernails.

The door to the left was ajar. Will took his gun back out and walked to it. He stood by the door frame and nudged the door open with his foot.

One of the officers was lying half on the rug, a metal implement through his neck.

Will crouched by the body to take a pulse even as he called it in. “I need ERT at Chordophone Strings, downtown Baltimore. Officer down.”

Nope, dead.
Will got up and went for the other closed door. Likely the assailant was still in the building.

So, naturally, the door led to a basement. Of course.

Creepy basement, full of jars stuffed with intestines and clamps hanging on the walls and guts in various steps of being stretched into strings. One of the officers was bleeding out in the corner by the jars, the shiny black shoes of Agent Palmer peeked out from beneath a room partition like those found in hospitals, and Will suppressed a sigh.

Murder basement. Seriously. He needed a vacation.

Movement!

Will turned and raised his gun, only to find a flash of silver much closer to his face than it should have been. Will grunted and got his hands up, thankful he had as the wire cut into him and the warm body suddenly against his back did his best to strangle him.

Will took a deep breath and forced his hands up and closer in to his body. He braced himself and hoped he didn’t get himself doing this. It was going to suck enough without adding head injury to it.

The wire cut deeper, and Will fired the gun.

The bang instantly muffled as his hearing went haywire, a high-pitched tone echoing all around.

Will turned as soon as he was released and launched himself towards the figure moving away from him. It was too far to tackle, so he aimed and fired. One hit the man in the shoulder, but the others sailed past without damage. Fucking hell - Will hated firing when his hearing had been thrown out of whack.

Will pulled himself up the stairs by sheer force of will, and got to the door too late. There was no sign of which way their suspect had fled, so Will simply sat where he was and tried to see if he could catch the sound of approaching sirens.

Hannibal felt... oddly twitchy. Jack had left him a voice message earlier to let him know that Will would be interviewing Tobias Budge soon. Jack also promised to let him know how it went. Hannibal would normally relish pitting Will against Budge but with Will’s illness so progressed it simply made him worried. Which was, in and of itself, worrisome. Hannibal had come to terms with the fact that he valued Will but to what end he wasn’t yet certain.

Franklin wasn’t helping, although Hannibal did take a certain glee in the man’s anger. “Nine,” Franklin proclaimed, holding up the aforementioned number of fingers. “Nine times. I can count on two hands the number of times I’ve been dumped by a psychiatrist.”

Hannibal was professional enough not to let the glee show on his face (though if rumors were true Dr. Mortimer hadn’t been able to do the same). “I’m sorry, Franklin,” Hannibal told him in a low, even tone, “but I think you should see another doctor.”

Franklin scoffed. “You’re giving me a referral?”

“Yes, I am,” Hannibal answered simply.

Franklin’s voice rose, though the anger had mostly fled. “You were a referral!”
Hannibal straightened and spoke firmly, hoping to get his point across. “I am also part of the problem. You focus too much on your therapist, and not enough on your therapy.”

Franklin shook his head slightly. Took a breath. Rationalizing. “You lost respect for me because I wouldn’t report Tobias, didn’t you?”

The door opened, catching both of their attention even before a voice interrupted, “Report Tobias for what?”

Hannibal clamped down on the void that came screaming up inside of him. Now wasn’t the time.

Franklin stood as the door closed, Hannibal standing as well. “Tobias?” Franklin asked, concerned.

“I came to say goodbye Franklin.” Tobias walked closer, coat over one arm. There was blood trickling down one ear and staining his right shoulder, fairly recent by the scent of it.

If nothing else, Will hadn’t gone down easily.

Franklin began to move towards his friend. “What do you mean goodbye?” The man then noticed the obvious. “Oh.. my god. Oh my god - is that your blood?”

Tobias held his head up higher. “I’ve just killed three men.”

The void came screaming back, but Hannibal shoved it down with promises of blood.

Tobias Budge would not leave this office while he still held breath.

“The police came to question me about the murder,” Tobias continued.

Franklin was actually holding onto his panic remarkably well. “Okay,” he remarked, “you have to give yourself up right now.”

Hannibal spared a moment to look at Franklin, wondering if the man’s sense of self-preservation was truly so horrid.

Franklin took steps forward as he rehashed some generic motivational mumbo-jumbo. “This plane is going down. Let it have a controlled descent. We can get you back up in air again. There’s rehabilitation for everyone.”

Now that was immensely naive - all that awaited Tobias if he survived this was multiple life sentences, if the man’s “catgut” was truly what Hannibal suspected it to be.

Time to end this, and get some revenge by stealing a pleasure away from the man. “Franklin,” Hannibal broke in firmly, “I want you to leave now.”

“Stay right where you are, Franklin,” Tobias butted in harshly.

Oh, look at that. The man was angry. Good.

Franklin kept talking, and Hannibal spared a moment to wonder if Franklin was projecting slightly, as it was obviously evident that Tobias didn’t regret his action in the slightest. He let it go on a moment before sighing and moving in to take the pleasure of killing Franklin away from Tobias.

The man fell with a loud thud, and Hannibal met Tobias’ enraged stare with a blithely pleasant one of his own.
When Tobias spoke, his voice was like gravel. “I was looking forward to that.”

Hannibal tilted his head slightly. “I saved you the trouble.”

Fully enraged now, Tobias dropped his coat to reveal a section of metal wire weighted on both ends.

Well. That was a complication. Hannibal did his best to dodge the wire as Tobias swung it at him. He needed to take a bit of a beating in order for his claims to be unquestioned, but that could leave far more damage than might be safe.

They moved backwards through the room, Hannibal dodging swings of wire. One dodge left him open. A foot was in his gut, then, the blow not as harsh as it could have been. Hannibal leapt back and shoved the ladder at Tobias. The man dodged. They were back to the dance.

Tobias moved with more grace - the controlled movements of fighting learned in a studio. Hannibal felt like an old predator next to him, more open and jerky from long years learning to fight from the cruelties of children and the harshness of the streets.

Tobias swung again. Hannibal blocked, only to find his wrist wrapped in metal. It hurt as much as he’d thought, the thin wire cutting into his skin as they played a deadly tug of war. Hannibal launched himself forward. The two spun, trading blows. Tobias grabbed something, and Hannibal blocked the glass end table with his elbow. A mighty shattering glass. The block of another punch. Hannibal headbutted Tobias hard. Taking the man’s dazed moment, Hannibal threw the man gut-first into his desk.

Tobias turned around with the letter opener too late. Hannibal was already flying through the air, tackling Tobias over the desk and onto the ground.

Tobias recovered first, laying a solid kick against Hannibal’s head. He then swung the letter opener, brandishing it like a sword. Hannibal dodged the first two swipes. The third struck true - a firm stab in his upper leg.

Hannibal fought the pain as Tobias then hauled him onto the desk, one hand at Hannibal’s throat and the other attempting to stab him.

Hannibal kept the opener away with one hand, scooting along the desk by pushing his legs against Tobias’ until he could grab the scalpel laying upon some books. Weapon in hand, Hannibal lashed out. He caught Tobias in the arm, causing the man to cry out and release the letter opener. Hannibal shoved the man off and punched the wound he’d just made. Standing, Hannibal pressed his advantage for all of a moment before Tobias caught him in the chin with an open palm. Another kick to the gut had him stumbling back.

Hannibal delivered a few hits of his own. Took a few more hits. They moved, two predators trading blows as they moved about the space. It continued until Hannibal felt the ladder at his back.

Tobias stalked forward, victory in his eyes.

Tobias lunged, and Hannibal jumped out of the way. When the man’s punch went through the gap in the ladder, Hannibal grabbed the arm and yanked until he could hear the sharp crack of bones dislocating.

He held on as Tobias screamed, just to insure the break was solid. Also for a bit of his own pleasure.

He’d taken enough hits to be believable. Time to end this.
Tobias staggered free of the ladder and took another wild strike at him, right arm dangling limply at his side.

Hannibal struck. One solid blow to the throat. Quick as a viper.

Tobias fell to the floor, coughing and gagging.

Hannibal wandered back to the stag statue, getting out his pocket square in order to make certain there were no fingerprints. It would look like it had simply fallen on the man, the blow luckily killing him.

Ah, such sweet revenge.

Hannibal put all of the void’s rage into the final blow, slamming the heavy statue into Tobias’ head with a meaty thunk. He then chucked the statue down next to Tobias - now deceased. Staggering slightly, Hannibal used the fabric to hide his prints as he tipped the table the statue had rested on over. Then it was a simple matter of returning his pocket square to its pocket and calling the police.

In short order the police gave way to FBI agents, who were crawling all over his space. Hannibal sat in his office chair with a medkit on the desk next to him. He’d shooed away the paramedics and simply held a wad of gauze against the stab wound in his leg to stop the bleeding.

It... wasn’t hard at all, to keep up the charade of a shell-shocked man. Hannibal simply let the void take hold. He felt... nearly dead. It was a chasm that hadn’t opened in decades - not since Mischa. He’d forced himself to speak earlier, but it’d taken strength he hadn’t needed in many years. Only reminding himself of the self-preservation needed in this had gotten the words past his throat.

He had miscalculated. The guilt stung, and the despair weighted his bones. The void was quiet, and yet it screamed.

Hannibal looked up in time to notice Jack arriving. The void welled up again only for the impossible to happen.

Will Graham walked in behind Jack, taking the scene in before immediately looking up and locking eyes with him.

In that moment, his whole world realigned and came together once again. On it’s heels was revelation - Hannibal Lecter was in love with Will Graham. He’d been a fool not to see it before now. The relief was too great to chastise himself for long, however.

Will walked quickly to his side, eyes roving to take in every cut and hurt, and Hannibal found words spewing forth, released to the air before he even realized what he was saying. “I was worried you were dead.”

Will nodded gently at him. “Me too,” he revealed. And then Will reached over him to grab the medical kit, setting it down on the floor in front of Hannibal. He knelt, then, putting himself at Hannibal’s feet. “Haven’t even treated yourself, you idiot,” Will remarked too gently for any true rebuke.

Hannibal’s heart swelled as Will opened the kit, and then Jack butted in. “Tobias Budge killed two Baltimore police officers and one FBI agent,” he said.

Will shot him a scathing glare. “Jack.”

Jack ignored him. “Nearly killed an FBI special agent. And after all of that, his first stop is here -
your office.”

Hannibal took a deep breath as he stared at the body bag that held Franklin - the image of an almost overwhelmed man. He swallowed before saying, “He came to kill my patient.”

“Your patient,” Jack stated blandly. “That’s who Budge was serenading?”

Hannibal shook his head slightly. “I don’t know. Franklin knew more than he was telling me he - he told Mr. Budge that he didn’t have to kill anymore.” Hannibal swallowed past a manufactured lump in his throat. Took in a shaky breath. “And then he broke Franklin’s neck, and then he attacked me.”

Jack looked back at him, face drawn. “You killed him?”

Hannibal looked towards the window. Took another breath. Moved his mouth as if he couldn’t find words. Finally, nodded.

Will drew Hannibal’s attention by moving his hand. He held some scissors, and raised his eyebrows in a question. Hannibal nodded, and Will cut away the fabric around the wound. “Franklin might have been involved,” Will theorized aloud.

Hannibal gave a wry smile at the irony of his next words. “I thought this was a simple matter of poor choice in friends.”

“This doesn’t feel simple to me,” Jack commented.

Will set the scissors down and began to clean the wound. “It doesn’t always feel simple, Jack,” he remarked. “Sometimes the simplest crimes on paper feel like the most complicated. Especially where friends are concerned.”

Odd words, but Jack backed away. Hannibal looked to Will, still kneeling at his feet and gently cleaning his wound. They were quiet a moment, and then Hannibal commented in a voice softer than he’d thought possible, “You don’t have to do that.”

“You won’t let a professional do it,” Will commented. “It may not be that bad, but it’s deep. You’ve had a long day, so please,” here, Will looked up. Those impossibly green eyes met his, and Hannibal found he couldn’t deny this man anything. “Let me.”

Hannibal nodded, suddenly needing to swallow.

Will turned his attention back to the wound. He finished cleaning it, and then began to stitch it shut.

“You’ve done this before,” Hannibal remarked.

“Few times,” Will replied. “They won’t be pretty, but they’ll hold.”

“Anything delivered by your hand will more than suffice,” Hannibal stated, to his own embarrassment.

Will caught his eyes again and smiled - soft and tender and, perhaps, full of love.

He was in love with Will Graham, the man who could understand monsters. Was it possible that, perhaps, Will could see the monster in him and yet still love him back?

It would take some careful planning, but maybe Hannibal could bring this new longing to reality.

Will stitched him up, bandaged the area, and then stood. “I’ll take you home - we can take care of the
rest of those wounds there.” He held out his hand.

Hannibal accepted the help in getting to his feet, and gave Will the keys to his car without protest. Will drove him home, saw to his wounds. Will even went so far as to prepare a simple stew for dinner, at home in Hannibal’s kitchen if not at ease.

Will broke the silence as he added the cooked meat (thank goodness Hannibal had actual beef on hand for Will to cook with - cooking human was very, very different). “I don’t cook often. I don’t have the love of it you do. You went without at some point as a child, didn’t you?”

Hannibal nodded at Will’s back, but the man continued without seeking confirmation. “Me too. Withholding food was a favored punishment. Even when I did eat, I could never eat what the others did. I actually can cook quite a lot of things - fairly well, too. I’ve just never associated cooking with love, like everyone else. Cooking was a chore. Just one more thing I had to do for my aunt and uncle - one more thing that would get me punished if I did it wrong.”

Will turned to look at him then as he set the stew. He gave a wry smile. “Since I could reach the stove - with the aid of a stool.”

If Hannibal wasn’t so tired, he’d start planning to track these relatives down and slaughter them.

Will shrugged, seemingly unconcerned. “But it does come in handy, every now and then. Means I can help you out, so it isn’t all that bad.”

Hannibal... didn’t know what to say to that. His heart felt ready to burst.

Too many revelations in one day. He was exhausted.

Will chattered on a bit through dinner, talking about classes and his students in order to give Hannibal enough of something to focus on so that he didn’t fall asleep in his stew. They ate, and then Will helped Hannibal change and get into bed. The profiler paused then. “I’ll be in the guest room, then,” Will stated slightly awkwardly, his brow drawn with stress. “If you need anything-”

“Stay,” Hannibal interrupted, beating back the void once more.

Will bit his lip. “Are you certain?”

“I thought you dead,” Hannibal stated. He didn’t care that he was repeating himself. “Please, stay.”

Will looked relieved even as he nodded. He stripped down to boxers and undershirt quickly, and then crawled into bed with Hannibal. Hannibal reached out and snagged Will’s wrist, fingers laid upon his pulse.

Will smiled at him and nodded at the unasked question. With a deep sigh, Will fell into sleep.

Hannibal stayed up a while, watching. Eventually, he too was lulled into sleep, comforted by the steady rise and fall of Will’s chest and the even pulse beneath his hand.

Chapter End Notes
Beverly Katz getting shit for loving Fall Out Boy is a headcannon that will not be shaken.

Will, in the show, cares about animals far more than people. However, I just couldn't see this Will running out on an interview because of a possibly injured animal (especially with Tobias giving off creeper vibes and two policemen at his back and therefore under his protection) so I changed it. The war gave Will's brain a lot of traumatic things to work with. Besides, this version was way more cruel and I am but a sadist at heart. I find a character for every fandom and go 'oh my soft, fluffy, precious puppy - let's hurt it!' The goal is always the soft blankets and hugs and comfort, but I usually want some serious hurt before we get there - the more emotionally traumatizing the better (you don't wanna know what I'm writing for Charles Xavier, poor bby).

And yeah, I think basically the whole fandom agrees that that moment is when Hannibal fell in love with Will Graham (though it took him far too long to figure that out) so we're just throwing cannon out the window now, because who the fuck knows what Hannibal's plan was supposed to be/accomplish. I don't think HE knew by the end of it, and partway through Will's incarceration it changes and - ugh - it's way too convoluted and confusing and yeah, that's not happening.

We are now fully divergent, baby >:D
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Will freaks out some more, but then figures out he's not just going crazy. So everything turns out okay, right?
..... Right?

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! Sorry this is so late, I've been trying to keep a chapter in reserve just in case something big happened which kept me from writing so I'd have something to post but damn, Ch. 13 is killing me! Ugh. Also, job hunting is the worst.

So yeah, here ya go, Ch. 12. Hopefully I can force Ch. 13 to be done soon and post that one quick. Imma try, but I make no promises.

Hannibal woke slowly, warm and comfortable with a weight on his chest. It was nice, and it had happened before, so Hannibal allowed himself to enjoy the slow morning. Which is why it took him so long to notice that unlike with other sexual encounters he and the person sharing his bed were both clothed. Odd.

Hannibal turned his head and finally opened his eyes, only for his breath to stutter to a stop. Will Graham was sprawled atop his chest, legs tangled up in his own and arms holding on as if Hannibal would somehow escape if he loosened his grip. His curls lay every which way - wild and untameable. Hannibal’s hand twitched with the desire to soothe them, run his hands through them until they were appeased enough to lie somewhat flat. He wondered if Will would tilt his head into the gesture. If he would enjoy it, or simply tolerate it. Whether he would bare it in silence or close his eyes and hum with pleasure.

Hannibal gave a large sigh as he berated himself for not realizing he’d been falling in love with this man much, much sooner than he had. He prided himself on his introspection and self-awareness - that he’d not only missed but actively did his best to rationalize such attraction was a glaring oversight.

Shared guardianship indeed - Hannibal hadn’t felt this stupid since Lady Murasaki rejected his (admittedly rather terrible) advances.

At the movement of Hannibal’s chest Will stirred with a grumble. Will burrowed further into him, and Hannibal gave into temptation to smooth out the lines on that pale brow with gentle fingers. Will hummed and relaxed, grip loosening and shoulders slumping.

Hannibal couldn’t control the softness that gentled his gaze. “Come now, William, we should eat soon. Neither of us managed much food yesterday.”
Will mumbled something against him - the blurred motion of lips tickling Hannibal’s skin.

“Will,” Hannibal tried again, heart feeling so full he almost feared it would burst. “Breakfast.”

Will groaned, gaining some semblance of awareness.

With an indulgent smile, Hannibal moved Will until he could disentangle himself. Hannibal got out of bed and put on a sweater before turning to tackle the problem of a sleepy Will Graham. Thankfully Will got to his feet without too much protest, and Hannibal led the half-asleep profiler downstairs, setting him in the large stuffed chair with a blanket thrown about him. Hannibal got the coffee started first, and then pulled out the eggs. A protein scramble was what the morning called for, he thought. An echo of their first meal together - fitting for the place that fate had led them to.

Once the coffee was finished Hannibal took a large mug over to Will. Will slowly gained coherency as the sausage browned, waking enough to flush a brilliant red as Hannibal put a plate in front of him on the little table by the chair. He dug a folding chair out of a closet and joined Will - the small end table just wide enough for both their plates if he relocated the bowl of fruit to the island.

“You should probably think about buying a real table,” Will remarked, almost offhandedly.

Hannibal chuckled. “Indeed. I must confess, I never had much use for one until these last few months. Perhaps that is how I shall spend my time this week.”

Will put his fork down and tilted his head slightly, studying Hannibal with a thoughtful gaze.

“You’re stepping back from psychiatric work.”

Hannibal nodded. “I can hardly help others in a space so filled with trauma - not yet, at any rate. A few days away will bring acceptance and perspective.”

Will blinked slowly - thoughtful. “Take a week off,” Will advised, words seeming slow due to their measured nature. “After that, reassess. If you need more time, take it. If you’re fine, take things slowly.”

Hannibal repressed the urge to snort - he may need to keep up appearances for purposes of not coming under suspicion, but he was hardly traumatized. “I was a surgeon, Will - I am no stranger to death, even death dealt by my own hands.”

“Even so,” Will countered, “this kind of violence is drastically different than any you’ve seen in the ER. Take a week, Hannibal, if only for my peace of mind.”

Hannibal pursed his lips and thought. A week would probably be best for throwing off suspicion, even if it felt like a blow to his pride to claim that he was affected in ways he was not. At that thought Hannibal sighed and let go of the matter - he would not be one of those lesser killers who all but threw themselves into cells with their overconfidence. “Very well. Would you like for me to refer you during this time, William?”

Will’s blush returned, positively endearing - it reached the tips of his ears. “I should probably get a referral considering how we woke up. Not very ethical - I could get you in a lot of trouble.”

Yes, but Hannibal was loathe to have this discussion right now. “Indeed, but I fear leaving you in another’s hands long term with your doctor’s appointment being so soon.”

Will perked up. “When is it?”

“Five days from now,” Hannibal replied, “at four in the afternoon. Forgive me, I’d meant to call and
inform you of the details yesterday afternoon, but...” Hannibal trailed off.

Will nodded, understanding. He ate his breakfast in silence for a moment, obviously contemplating something, before he looked at Hannibal again. “How about we wait until the test results to make that decision, yeah?”

Hannibal nodded - that would give him plenty of time to research a good substitute and to approach them about taking on a patient as unique as Will. It would also give him more ample time to plan out how he was going to go about ensuring Will Graham fell in love with him in return.

Will, never much of one for words in the mornings, slipped back into silence as he ate. Hannibal was content to let him. Yet when Will paused, forkful brought halfway to his mouth, Hannibal broached the silence. “Is there something wrong?”

Will blinked at his food, then blinked at him. For a brief moment, Hannibal wondered if the man had figured it out. “Is this what we first ate in the hotel room?”

Hannibal gave a soft chuckle. “Indeed. It seemed fitting, and by some stroke of fate I had all of the ingredients on hand.”

Will rolled his eyes. “I’m sure you’ve got every ingredient you could ever need stocked at any moment,” he countered. His shoulders rounded more, however, echoing the softness at the corners of his mouth. Those green eyes glittered with emotion that Hannibal dared not name, and he knew his gift was not only seen, but accepted.

Perhaps his task would be easier than expected.

Will left the door open for the dogs while he flipped through the mail. Junk got thrown in one pile on the table, important things another-

There was a letter from the Bureau of Magical Secrecy. Will put the rest of the mail down as he looked at the seal on the back of the letter. It was certainly official - no forgeries here.

Will tore the seal open with his fingernail as he crossed to his favorite chair in the livingroom. He perched on the edge of it while removing the documents.

*Mr. Graham, this letter is to inform you that your Reveal and Indoctrination Application has been accepted and is currently in processing for further review. After a short investigation, a panel will judge the application and either approve or reject it. This process may take up to three months, after which...*

Will skimmed the appeals procedure and registering rules if it did pass. He was surprised to note that there was currently another application filed to tell Hannibal. He wondered if Abigail had sent one in.

There was no going back now - he could only hope that Hannibal would be able to accept him if the application was approved.

Will leaned back in his seat as he answered his now-ringing phone. “Hello?” he greeted, still distracted by the papers in his hands.

“Hey Will!” Teddy’s voice greeted back, cheery and open. “What’s up?”
Will smiled - it’d been awhile since he’d last talked to his godson. “Work’s been a little exciting since Christmas,” Will answered. “How about you?”

“I’m thinking of applying to some schools in America,” Teddy replied evenly, almost sounding cautious. “They’ve got a couple colleges where you can earn your magical and muggle degree at the same time and I just - it sounds really cool,” Teddy finished lamely.

“It’s fine to apply to fully muggle colleges if you want to,” Will reassured the boy. Anti-muggle feelings had come a long way after the war, but that still didn’t always translate to true progress. “Guessing you wanna base here?”

“I’d love to have you,” Will answered easily. “When you getting here?”

“Uh,” Teddy paused. “Three days?” his voice squeaked slightly on the end.

Will just laughed - honestly, the boy was sometimes far too much like he and Ron had been. “It’s fine. I’ll be at work, but I’ll get a car to fetch you if you don’t mind being stuck with me a bit.”

“Are you kidding?” Teddy exclaimed, full of teenage excitement, “You work for the FBI! Course I don’t mind!”

Will smiled before he remembered his appointment and frowned. “You’ve got good timing - I may need you to house sit.”

“Big case coming up?” Teddy asked. His tone was just shy of excitement - he could probably hear the caution in Will’s own voice.

“I’ve got a doctors appointment soon,” Will answered, reminding himself to call Hermione. “I’m not sure how that’s going to go.”

“Do you need anything?”

Will shook his head. “I’ll arrange things with Hermione if needed. You just focus on school, yeah? It’s probably nothing they can’t fix.” That was, if it was actually physical and not simply Will’s mind finally collapsing in on itself.

“You’re sure it’s no problem?” Teddy queried, voice soft with concern. “I can stay with a friend if I need to.”


Will smiled through the clench of his heart. “No problem, cub. When’s graduation again?”

“Few months out - Easter break is this week, which is why I’ve got the tours planned.”

Will nodded. “Good, that should give you some time. And you’re always welcome here if you do decide to go to an American college.”

“Even over the summer?” was the obvious next question.
“Every weekend and every break,” Will told him honestly. “Been awhile since you lived with me, cub.”

Andromeda had been inundated with reporters and vultures all attempting to gain the scoop on the child whose parents had famously died fighting the war. A couple months after Will had fled to America she’d asked him for a reprieve. She and little Teddy had lived with him through the academy and part of his time on the force. They did eventually go back to Britain (mainly so Teddy could attend his parent’s alma mater) but Will had told both of them that his door was always open if they needed it again. And Andromeda had come barging back the moment Hermione let her know that Will had been stabbed. Teddy was thankfully at school for most of that, but Andromeda had been invaluable while Will recovered.

Will wondered if Teddy would like to meet Abigail, and if Hannibal would like him. If Hannibal stuck around, that was.


Will smiled. “Anytime.”

“How is - aw shit.” Teddy groaned. His next words were slightly muffled, likely directed towards someone else. “Yeah, dude, I remember, geez! Thanks for the reminder but get off.”

Will laughed. “I’ll let you get back to school. See you Wednesday, cub.”

“Bye Will,” Teddy replied, hanging up while addressing his friend.

Will stared at his phone a moment before shaking his head. He’d arrange the car at work tomorrow, for now he needed to update Hermione.

Will hadn’t actually planned on helping with any cases this week but, well, Jack had said it was a totem pole and Will was far too interested for his own good. It turned out to be completely worth it, even if Will had gained another headache on the drive down. He popped two aspirin and headed closer.

The beach was pristine in the near spring - cold and crisp and slightly frosted over from old snows. The sky was cloudy and grey yet the sea was practically still. The whole area seemed to stand waiting with bated breath, judging the work displayed.

A great totem pole of bodies. Will had to wander, compulsion clear in the itching beneath his blood, taking it in from every side. It was a magnificent piece - limbs wrapped tight round the tree trunk that formed the support. The eldest corpse sat at the base, hollow eyes black with warning as another skull laid at it’s feet. Skeletal hands were clasped together, as if in prayer, while slightly above limbs reached out into the void like a mimicry of the hindu gods. Everywhere there were faces - watching, crying, damning. Those which still held skin had rope draped across their eyes - as blind to their desecrator as they were to their killer. All save the top, resting with uncovered eyes above a layer of bloody, grasping hands.

Will had thought it might have been a monument to the Old Ones, but no - this was a monument the killer had wrought to honor himself.

Will walked around the base as Price and Zeller referenced jigsaw puzzles.

“The headpiece appears to be the only recent victim,” Jack informed him, trailing along in Will’s
wake. “The others are years, even decades old. And we know that seven of the bodies were buried out here.” Jack gestured to the rather obvious holes in the sand.

“Whoever dug them up knew exactly where they were buried,” Will stated, noting the clean lines and the lack of disturbed sand save for the exact lines of the graves.

“I guess it wasn’t enough for him to kill them once, he had to come back and defile his victims.” Jack sighed.

Will shook his head. “These graves weren’t desecrated. They were exposed - to wind and sea and the eyes of the gods themselves.”

Jack looked at Will, and then looked back to the monument.

Will wasn’t certain he wanted to use his empathy on this one, but then Jack was clearing the scene and it was right there and he closed his eyes, let the pendulum swing and opened them to see - Hannibal’s office.

Will blinked again, but the view didn’t change. He could remember the recreation, but this was Hannibal’s office, not a beach in West Virginia! How had he gotten here? What happ -

“Will?”

Will spun around, and there stood Hannibal with his coat over one arm. He looked like he was leaving.

Will’s mouth opened, but what he said was, “I thought you were taking the week off?”

Hannibal blinked at him. “I was locking up after the cleaners. I wasn’t expecting you, Will.”

Will nodded, and found himself unable to stop. Oh, he was trembling.

Hannibal’s brows furrowed. “Will?”

“.... I don’t know how I got here,” Will managed to state.

Hannibal walked past him to look out the window. “Well,” he stated, “your car is outside, so we can assume you drove.”

“No, no,” Will’s hands began to shake even more. His voice followed suit, cracking at the end of his sentences. “I was on a beach in Grafton, West Virginia, I blinked and then I was in your waiting room. Like I was waking up, but I wasn’t asleep!”

Hannibal dropped his coat on a chair and walked over, taking Will’s hands in his own. He was warm. Or was Will cold? “Grafton is three-and-a-half hours from here. You lost time.”

Will stared at his hands, tightly clasped in Hannibal’s larger ones. For hands that had ended so many lives they were gentle with him. Will felt cradled in their grasp - safe. “Is it a tumor?”

“Perhaps,” Hannibal replied. “It could be a great many things. No matter what it is, I will be right beside you.”

Will nodded, biting his lip to hide how relieved that statement made him. Or how scared he was that Hannibal might leave if it weren’t a physical ailment.

“However,” Hannibal said firmly, “I must ask that you no longer go on cases for Jack Crawford. I
don’t want to risk you losing time and hurting yourself.”

Or someone else. It was unsaid, but heard all too clearly. Will nodded. His spit felt heavy and thick as he swallowed it down.

Hannibal sighed. “Come,” he ordered, “let’s get some food in you.”

Will had to laugh. “That’s your answer to everything, isn’t it?”

“Food is life,” Hannibal stated with an easy shrug. “It is also a comfort.”

Will followed the man to his car, not protesting when Hannibal drove them both. He wasn’t certain he wanted to ever touch his car again - had he been unaware while driving? Or aware and just unable to remember it? What if he’d hurt someone? He might’ve -

Hannibal reached out and squeezed Will’s knee. Will took a deep breath and focused on the pressure, just shy of pain. It kept him grounded.

Will hoped the brain scan showed something. He wasn’t sure how much longer he’d be able to function like this. Even if Hannibal was willing to anchor him twenty-four/seven, Will would never be brave enough to ask. He was already too scared of losing Hannibal.

Will hoped something broke soon. For better or worse. If it didn’t, Will was certain the next thing that broke would be him.

Will found Jack after his classes this time, instead of the other way around. The man was going over files in his office and greeted Will with a nod and a quick, “Hey.”

Will nodded back and rubbed his thumb along his fingers to keep his wand hand from twitching as he walked over to stand behind the chair in front of Jack’s desk. “Do I…” Will grimaced and forced the rest of the sentence out. “Do I need to apologize for anything I might have done yesterday?”

Jack paused, putting his whole attention on Will. “Do you feel that you need to apologize?”

Will bit his lip. Shrugged. “I don’t know,” he finally said. When in doubt, truth was usually the best option. At least, it was when there was no war. “I don’t remember.”

Jack put the file down. “You don’t remember.”

Will’s mouth pulled up in what was probably not a reassuring smile. “I lost time,” Will stated. “I’ve got a brain scan scheduled this week, but until we know what’s wrong I can’t go to anymore crime scenes.”

Jack slowly leaned back in his chair - it was like a whole-body sigh. “You’re worse off than you’ve been telling me.”

Will shrugged. “I’m not... good, with accepting I’m not alright.” That was probably a gross understatement, but Jack didn’t need to know that. He also didn’t need to know the bitterness with which Will remembered his attempts to inform Jack that looking was bad for him. Best to focus on the current moment and not get into a screaming match. “But this is getting to the point I can’t ignore it anymore.”

Jack sighed, but he nodded. “Alright. No more crime scene visits. Do you need to stop
Will shook his head. “No, I’ll do some more work on this case. May have to renegotiate after I get the test results.”

Jack’s shoulders slumped, but at least he knew this was something he shouldn’t push. Honestly, Will had been expecting more of a push, but he guessed lost time was enough of a warning flag that Jack simply stated, “Alright. You tell me if it gets to be too much.”

Will nodded, and then left. He arranged a car to pick up Teddy at the airport on Wednesday, and then he wandered down to the labs in order to see what help he could be.

“Hey Graham cracker!” Beverly greeted. “Come to join us in playing seventeen pick up?”

“There are seventeen bodies?” Will asked in reply.

“Yes,” Jimmy stated, walking to the corpse nearest Will. “Meet our freshest one - Joel Summers.” Zeller joined them, pulling back the sheet on their corpse as Jimmy continued. “Forty years old, runs a cell phone store in Knoxville, Tennessee. Or did. Been missing for three days.”

“Single stab wound to the heart,” Zeller added, “other injuries were post-mortem. Broken bones, dislocated hips, shoulders.”

“This one was special to him somehow,” Will stated. “Held a place of honor. What about the others?”

“Seven bodies from unmarked graves found at the crime scene,” Jimmy answered. “Earth from the body parts matches the grave sites.”

Will frowned. “No,” he countered slowly. “No, they’re all murders.”

Zeller raised an eyebrow. “There’s no method to connect them.”

“There’s nothing to connect them,” Will countered, “yet the fact that they are all on the totem pole means they are all connected. He went to the trouble of gathering these specific people, after all.”

“Could have grabbed any corpses from the closest gravesites,” Beverly interjected. “No crimes attributed to any of them. Accidental deaths.”

Will nodded. “The method of death didn’t matter as much as the simple fact that these people died.”

“So we’re looking for a ghost,” Zeller added in his usual sardonic tone. He didn’t sound too thrilled at the fact.

“He enjoyed being invisible,” Jimmy stated. “So, why the obvious monument?”

Will shrugged. “Whatever our answer, I’m sure it has something to do with Joel Summers. He feels different than the others.” With a grimace, Will remembered the last thing he had on his to do list for the day. “Beverly, can I ask you for a favor?”
Beverly blinked in slight surprise, but nodded. “Shoot.”

“My godson is visiting on his break,” Will stated, ignoring the curious looks Zeller and Jimmy shot his way. “He’s coming here after his flight, and I just wanted to ask if you’d keep an eye on him.”

Something must have shown on his face, because Beverly looked cautious. “Need a second pair of eyes cuz he’s a troublemaker like you?” she joked.

Will gave that smile again. If it looked anything like it felt, it was an awful attempt. “I don’t remember a period of three hours from yesterday,” he revealed. “So it’s more a caution against me than anything.”

Beverly’s eyes widened, and Jimmy made a choked sound. “Tell me you’re going to the doctor,” he asked.

Will nodded. “I’ve got an appointment, and I let Jack know. I just...” Will made some odd half-aborted gesture with his left hand.

Beverly nodded. “I’ll keep an eye on the mini-Graham.”

“Thanks.” Will sighed. “Let me know if I can help, but I don’t think I’m going to be able to contribute much to this case.”

“Don’t tax yourself,” Jimmy stated warmly. “We’ll be fine. You just focus on... whatever’s happening.”

Will nodded, took one look at Zeller’s face - fear, disgust, oh god he’s really going crazy isn’t he? How long until he snaps, will he kill anyone when he does? - and left. There was a sick feeling in his gut. It hadn’t been the first time someone had thought that, and it wouldn’t be the last. He and Zeller had never gotten along, but he’d thought they’d worked together long enough to at least trust each other.

Will hid his face in his hands and concentrated on breathing deeply. Once he felt calmer, he busied himself with grading.

Tuesday dawned with some cleaning in the morning and more classes taught. He was taking a day to discuss their current case - why someone who revelled in being unseen would suddenly thrust himself into the light was a good question for his students to ponder. He was nearing the end of the lecture when he was interrupted.

“Will?” Alana called from the doorway. “If you’re rehearsing I don’t want to interrupt.”

Will blinked at her. Looked at the seats - empty. Not a student to be seen.

Well shit.

Will reminded himself that he’d get answers Thursday. “No,” he replied, choosing to hide this current bout of lost time, or memory lapse, or whatever it was from Alana. “Come in, it’s fine.”

“I thought you might be having a hard time, so I brought someone to help cheer you up,” Alana stated as she walked in.

Abigail walked in behind her.
“Abigail,” Will stated in surprise. His shock was quickly overcome by a smile as he stood. “Sorry I haven’t been by.”

Abigail hugged him in greeting. “It’s okay, Alana told me some of what’s going on.” She pulled away with a frown. “You’ll tell me how the test goes, right?”

“Course I will,” Will promised.

“We thought we’d catch you after classes, grab a coffee,” Alana said. “Just let me make sure Jack isn’t lurking around.”

She left, and Will turned to Abigail. “Jack still suspects you, then?” The man’s instinct was hard to shake.

Abigail bit her lip and nodded. Her voice was small as she stated, “Everyone does.”

Will put his hands on her shoulders (so small and thin, slumped downwards with a weight she didn’t deserve, far too reminiscent of his own at that age) and lowered his voice. “You can tell them, if you want. You won’t go to jail for it - I promise I won’t let that happen. You only did what you had to do.”

Abigail’s eyebrows drew down in pain. “I can’t, Will.”

Will opened his mouth to counter. Paused. Took note of the tense set of her face, the tick of the vein in her throat. “He cursed you into silence.”

Abigail’s face lost all tension in her relief. She nodded.

Will sighed. “I’ll call the best curse breaker I know. If we need to, we’ll get the case moved to Sector Seven’s jurisdiction. We’ll get you out of this, Abigail,” Will stated firmly. “I promise.”

Abigail hugged him tightly.

“Coast is clear,” Alana stated as she returned. From the depth of her sigh Will guessed she’d taken a while to ensure that simply so Abigail and Will could have a moment alone. Apparently she really had decided he was good for Abigail.

“Let’s get going then, yeah?” Will offered, pulling back to look at Abigail.

Abigail nodded, and the three of them left. The cafe Alana chose was nice, and Hobbs didn’t make an appearance the whole afternoon. Will was relieved - he hadn’t wanted to stay away from Abigail, but he’d wanted her safe more. Today, at least, it seemed to be fine. And it had been just what he’d needed.

Will pulled Alana aside before she and Abigail left. “Thank you, Alana.”

Alana smiled at him, soft and sweet. “You’re welcome. Let me know how Thursday goes.”

Will nodded and watched Alana get into the car and drive off, Abigail waving at him from the passenger seat.

Will waved back with a smile, feeling better than he had in days.

Will stood in front of the diagram the next day, trying to help the team piece together what little they
had. “The display was built in Grafton for a reason,” he said. “Totem poles commemorate special events. They tell the story of a life. If Joel Summers,” Will stated, pointing, “is his finale,” Will trailed his finger down to the bottom of the diagram, “then this lowest body on the pole will be our killer’s beginning. His first.”

“Fletcher Marshall,” Beverly informed him. “Murdered in 1973 - beaten to death in Grafton. His grave was robbed five days ago.”

“No one convicted of killing him?” Will asked.

“Not yet,” Jimmy answered.

“So our guy got away with it forty years ago,” Will started.

“So he kept on going,” Zeller finished.

“Wicked,” a new voice interrupted.

Will turned around with a smile. “Teddy,” he greeted, “good to see you made it alright. Flight okay?” he asked as he walked towards his godson for a hug. He was thankful he wasn’t wearing gloves or a dirty apron.

“I found him arguing with an agent in the hall outside your office,” Hannibal mentioned as he joined them. “I convinced the man I’d look after him. I didn’t know your godson was visiting, Will.”

Will blinked. “Sorry, must have forgot.” Will turned to the team to make introductions. “Ted this is the team - Beverly Katz, Jimmy Price, and Brian Zeller. Best forensic workers I know. Guys this is my godson, Teddy Lupin.”

Beverly smiled brightly, a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. “Come on over here, Teddy Graham,” she beckoned, “best seat in the house.”

Teddy grumbled, “You’re not the first person to call me that.”

Beverly just laughed. “That’s exactly what Will said when I called him Graham cracker.”

Will shared a smile with Hannibal, who looked decidedly amused. Hannibal let the moment last a beat, and then he nodded at the diagram. “This is your latest case?”

“Yep,” Will replied, popping the ‘p’. “Joel Summers, our latest victim, and Fletcher Marshall, our first.” Will pointed out the two, and picked up his last train of thought where it had left off. “There will be a connection between the two, something that ties them together enough for them to gain the most important positions of the totem.”

Will looked back to see if Hannibal had any thoughts when he caught a flash of green out of the corner of his eye. Faster than he’d had to move in years, Will snatched Teddy from his journey to the stool Beverly had grabbed and yanked the boy behind him.

Teddy went easily while the others all jumped. Will backed Ted up until he could grab a heavy looking tool off the nearest autopsy table, keeping his eyes on the green snake worming it’s way nearer. “Everybody back!” he hollered.
"Don’t fear, hatchlingss," Nagini hissed, worming closer, "I only want a tasssste."

Will didn’t reply, readying his weapon.

Teddy’s arms wrapped around him, hands resting on the front of his shoulders. His godson rested his weight against Will, head on his shoulder, and spoke softly. “It’s okay, Will, there’s no danger here.”

“Nagini -” Will protested.

“Nagini’s dead,” Teddy stated. His voice was gentle and lilting slightly at the end of phrases. “Neville killed Nagini the snake. She cannot eat me. I am in no danger, godfather. There is no threat. It’s all in your head.”

Will kept his eyes on the snake as Teddy repeated those last three sentences over and over, soft and sure. Teddy never sounded like that when he was truly panicked or in danger, and Nagini made no move to attack - just undulated back and forth, hissing. She wasn’t going after any of the others either, so Will finally found the courage to risk a quick look at Hannibal.

He’d expected a bite, but only received a small shake of Hannibal’s head. Which bit worse than any snake, honestly.

Will dropped the tool back on the table (didn’t want to risk hitting Teddy’s foot) and rubbed his hands over his face. “Shit.”

Teddy stopped speaking then but held on, offering comfort. Will rubbed at his face and breathed, focusing on the pinch of driving his glasses into his brow.

Finally, he looked up. “Hannibal,” he stated firmly, “I need to have that brain scan today.”

Hannibal nodded. “I will drive you.”

“I’m coming,” Teddy proclaimed, letting Will go. “I’ll even call Aunt Hermione when we get there so you don’t have to.”

Will nodded, and looked to the other three. “Sorry,” he stated.

Beverly took her gloves off. “Which hospital? I’ll follow.”


Beverly nodded, and Hannibal left. Will followed, Teddy behind him. After a moment, the teen took his hand. “You didn’t say it was this bad,” Teddy accused.

“I didn’t want to worry any of you,” Will replied softly. “Thought it was just stress, for a while. Then it didn’t go away...”

Teddy was staring at his feet, and his voice was small when he spoke. “Tell me you’re gonna be okay.”

Will couldn’t promise that, couldn’t even promise it was a physical problem, so he gave Teddy’s hand a squeeze. He sat with Teddy in the back of Hannibal’s car and listened as Hannibal explained the situation on the phone and argued to gain a shorter wait. They made it to the facility, and Will tried to calm down as he sat in the waiting room. Teddy called Hermione, who then demanded to talk to him, and Will winced at the strangled sound he made in lieu of a greeting.
“You’re going to be okay, Will,” Hermione stated firmly. “This is a physical ailment, and they’ll find what it is.”

She always could read him like an open book. “What if it isn’t?” Will asked quietly.

“It is,” Hermione repeated. “You never broke like that Will, not once during the whole war. You’re too strong to break now. This is something physical, and you’re going to get through this.”

Will found he could breathe easier. Hermione had never lied to him - not about things like this. “Thanks, ‘Mione.”

“You call me when you get the test results, and we’ll see when I need to come over.”

Of course Hermione wasn’t going to let him do this on his own - Will didn’t know why he’d ever feared she might. “Rodger that,” he replied, only slightly joking.

“Good,” Hermione replied sternly, in full battle planning mode. “Now stop freaking out and hand the phone back to Teddy.”

Will did as asked. Beverly joined them then, plopping down in the seat beside him with a book of crosswords in her hand. “Hannibal working his mojo?” she questioned.

Will snorted a laugh. “Yeah, he’s talking to the head nurse now.”

Beverly nodded. “At least he’s using his powers for good.” She held up the book. “I’m shit at these,” she proclaimed, “so you’re gonna help me, Graham cracker.”

Will smiled and nodded. It was an obvious diversion tactic, but sometimes those worked the best. They worked on a few puzzles together before Hannibal came back. “Will,” he called, “It seems another patient unexpectedly cancelled. Dr. Sutcliffe has agreed to move your appointment up.”

Will nodded. He gave the pen back to Beverly, gave Teddy a small smile, and then rose to follow Hannibal. They went up several floors and to an office, where a balding scholarly man met them with a wide smile. “Dr. Lecter,” he greeted, “Mr. Graham. Come in, please.” He seemed very friendly, even held the door for them. “You’re in very good hands, Mr. Graham,” Dr. Sutcliffe remarked cheerily as they all entered. “Dr. Lecter here is one of the sanest men I know.”

Sutcliffe clasped Hannibal on the shoulder briefly. Hannibal smiled back at him and replied, “I would agree.”

The two shared an amused smile and then made their way to the desk. Will wondered if Sutcliffe would still think so if he knew who Hannibal’s butcher was. He took his own seat as he studied this new doctor. Sutcliffe seemed an academic man, but there was something in his face to suggest he was very kind. In Will’s experience it was often difficult to find people with an academic interest in the body who also held to ethics not out of obligation, but of true morality.

“Dr. Sutcliffe and I were residents together at Hopkins,” Hannibal stated, removing his coat.

“Another life ago,” Sutcliffe remarked as he took his seat. He then did something Will hadn’t really seen before - he teased Hannibal. “Back when you weren’t afraid to get your hands a little dirty.”

“I was always drawn to how the mind works,” Hannibal countered as he sat. “I found it much more dynamic than how the brain works.”

“The projected image is more interesting than the projector,” Sutcliffe acknowledged easily before
“Until, of course, the projector breaks down.”

Hannibal nodded his defeat with a smile. Will relaxed slightly - Sutcliffe seemed a good man in addition to being good at his job and having Hannibal’s respect. He should be alright.

Sutcliffe turned his attention to him and leaned back in his chair as they got down to business. “So, Will, these headaches. When did they begin in earnest?”

“Two to three months ago,” Will answered. “They were getting more frequent before that, when I started taking cases in November.”

Sutcliffe nodded. “And the hallucinations?”

“I had one shortly after the first case,” Will answered. “A few scattered ones after - I didn’t realize how frequent they were getting until it suddenly registered that I wasn’t actually dreaming.”

Sutcliffe’s eyebrows furrowed, and he looked to Hannibal.

Hannibal answered the unasked question. “Will was able to tell he was experiencing visual hallucinations until two months ago. After that he was uncertain, and he gained auditory hallucinations which he could never discern as hallucinations until afterwards.”

Sutcliffe nodded. “Dr. Lecter says you run high fevers, started sleepwalking three months ago, and have recently experienced lost time?”

Will swallowed. Nodded.

Sutcliffe fiddled with his glasses a moment, and then leaned forward to hand Will a pad and pen. “There’s one tool to help determine if it’s physical. Could you draw a clock for me? Any time will do.”

Will didn’t know what that would help with, but he did it anyway. The look on Sutcliffe’s face as he handed it back was alarming. “What’s wrong?” Will asked.

“Your clock is uneven,” Hannibal stated. “Spacial distortion, which narrows the field of illness down but proves that this is certainly a physical ailment.”

Will slumped further in his chair in relief.

Sutcliffe nodded and stood. “They’re ready in room six for the MRI - we’ll get to the bottom of this Mr. Graham, I promise.”

Will nodded, and didn’t shove away Hannibal’s hand when the man helped him stand.

Hannibal watched as Will put in the earplugs and awkwardly lay down. He looked highly uncomfortable. “It could be encephalitis,” Hannibal mentioned.

Sutcliffe put his reading glasses on. “That’s your pre-diagnosis?”

“Yes,” Hannibal answered. He’d had a script prepared in the early stages of this plan - one to manipulate Sutcliffe into keeping quiet. He found it amusing that although they began the same way, Hannibal was bringing this conversation to a much different end.

“Based on?” Sutcliffe asked.
“I believe I could smell it,” Hannibal answered.

Sutcliffe gave a slight scoff. “So your sense of smell has gone from calling out a nurse’s perfume to diagnosing autoimmune disease.”

Hannibal gave the man a slight smile. “Two days ago, when Will came to me after having lost time I noticed a very specific scent.”

“And what exactly,” Sutcliffe asked, crossing his arms, still slightly disbelieving “does encephalitis smell like?”

Hannibal joined him in leaning against the back wall. “It has heat - a fevered sweetness. I’d smelled something similar before but I had thought it was simply an odd aftershave. I should have been able to tell sooner.”

Sutcliffe paused at that admission of guilt, and the whole atmosphere changed. “Even being able to smell cancer doesn’t mean you can know everything just by sniffing a person,” Sutcliffe comforted. “He’s here now, we’ve got a good lead on what it is. We’ll get him treated.”

Hannibal took a breath and nodded - the image of a man attempting not to look as affected as he was. It was sad how close to truth the projected image was.

Sutcliffe paused again and studied him more closely. “I’ve never seen you this worried about a patient before.”

Hannibal gave a wry smile with a huff of laughter. “I’m afraid I’ve been remiss in my duty as a doctor - I should have referred Will weeks ago.”

“Because you don’t think you can help him?” Sutcliffe’s face was full of honest worry for his old friend, no matter how long it had been since they’d last been able to have more than a short conversation.

“Because I’m afraid I’ve fallen in love with him,” Hannibal admitted, turning to face Sutcliffe.

Sutcliffe had always been kind, and a better man than Hannibal deserved as one to call friend. He was like Alana, in many ways. He would have taken the bait had Hannibal tempted him with scientific study, but he would have lasted perhaps a whole week before his morals compelled him to tell Will about the encephalitis. It didn’t mean Hannibal wouldn’t kill him - in the abandoned plan or in the future - but his loss would be a sad thing indeed.

Sutcliffe proved it once again, merely clasping Hannibal’s shoulder briefly before stating, “He’ll be okay. And I just met a lovely girl at some convention last weekend - new to therapy, but brilliant in her approach. I’ll get you a copy of her business card. I was meaning to send it to you anyway.”

Hannibal nodded - he respected Sutcliffe’s judgement, and his own search was proving rather irritating. At the moment the best candidate was Bedelia, but that sounded like a potentially terrible idea.

Hannibal used his phone to look up the woman Sutcliffe recommended after Sutcliffe had found her in his contacts while they both waited for the test to finish. Once the scans were in, Sutcliffe had to huff in disbelief. “You were right,” Sutcliffe called. “The entire right hemisphere of his brain is inflamed. It’s anti-NMDA receptor encephalitis. Thank god we caught it - his symptoms are only going to get worse.”

“Can you treat him at this facility?” Hannibal asked. “Will has an empathy disorder and I’m worried
“We can take care of it here, yes,” Sutcliffe replied. “I’ll see about getting him a private room during treatment. Do you want to bring Will in here? He was looking a little rough during the procedure.”

Hannibal nodded. He went to fetch a once-again dressed Will, who looked up at him with such fear Hannibal wondered how he’d ever thought he could lie to him. “It’s encephalitis,” Hannibal found himself blurting without any pretense of tact.

Will’s knees buckled, and Hannibal rushed to catch him. Will clutched tightly to his shirt, burying his head in Hannibal’s chest. He started to sob.

Hannibal led him over to a nearby chair. Once Will was seated, Hannibal knelt by his side so Will could cling, murmuring all the while. “It’s an inflammation of the brain - Sutcliffe is arranging your treatment right now. You’re going to be alright, Will.”

It took a while, but Will did manage to stop crying. Hannibal pulled out his pocket square and let Will clean his face as best he could. Then, the two of them made their way back to the viewing room. Sutcliffe explained the diagnosis and treatment procedure, although Hannibal wasn’t entirely certain how much information Will was retaining at the moment.

“Is Monday good for coming in to begin treatment?” Sutcliffe finally asked.

Will nodded. “That’s fine. You don’t need me sooner?”

“Arranging the treatment doses is going to take awhile,” Sutcliffe explained. “Monday is the earliest I can do. We’ll give you something to help with the pain until then.”

Will nodded and thanked him. They finalized the paperwork, received the prescription, and then went back to the waiting room.

Teddy noticed them first and jumped up. “Will!”

Will hugged the teen back. “I’m okay, cub,” he stated calmly. “Gonna be in Monday for treatment. Apparently my brain is on fire.”

Beverly punched him in the shoulder. “Not funny Graham.”

“Not a joke,” Will countered.

“Holy shit,” Beverly replied, eyes wide. “ Seriously?”

“It is entirely treatable,” Hannibal interjected. “However, I will be staying with Will until he begins treatment.”

“You better call Aunt ‘Mione,” Teddy stated.

Will groaned, but nodded. Hannibal surmised that he might finally get to meet Mrs. Hermione Granger. He was looking forward to it.

Will sighed as he sat down in his office. He’d talked to the dean, apologizing but getting a substitute for his classes while he was in the hospital. He’d talked to HR to let them know he wouldn’t be consulting for the foreseeable future - at least until he was healthy, maybe not ever. He’d called Hermione (who would be arriving tomorrow morning) and arranged a sitter for the dogs when
Teddy did his college tours and eventually went back to school. He’d called Bill about whatever curse was on Abigail. He’d called Abigail and told her about Bill and about the encephalitis. Everyone of importance had been notified, and now he simply had to wait for Hannibal to come pick him up (he’d been forbidden from driving along with just about everything else).

Beverly knocked on his open door. “Hey Will,” she greeted. “How you doing?”

“Tired,” Will replied. “My head still hurts but they gave me a better painkiller so it’s not so bad.”

Beverly nodded. “Not to say everything’s about work, but you probably want to know how this last one ends, don’t you?”

“Please,” Will replied with an embarrassed smile. “I hate unfinished puzzles.”

“Me too,” Beverly replied. “Lawrence Wells was questioned twice about the death of Fletcher Marshall in 1973. He and his wife, Eleanor Marshall, who died in a car accident but wasn’t on the totem pole, had a son. Joel was adopted by the Summers, but DNA said his father wasn’t Fletcher Marshall.”

Will blinked. “Is Lawrence Wells a match?”

“Got it in one,” Beverly replied.

“Did Lawrence Wells and Eleanor Marshall have an affair?” Will asked.

“Not sure,” Beverly answered slowly. “What’cha thinkin’?”

“I’m thinking, Wells believed Eleanor was having Fletcher’s child instead of his own,” Will explained, “and sought revenge for that slight. This totem pole is a monument of his success - a resume, or last words. In trying to secure his legacy he killed it.”

Beverly nodded. “I’ll tell Jack - he’s questioning the guy later this afternoon. Is there anything you like when you’re stuck in the hospital?”

Will blinked at her.

“I’m gonna be visiting anyway,” Beverly stated, “Might as well bring things to make it easier on you with me.”

“You don’t have to,” Will protested. Beverly’s face set, and Will knew there would be no dissuading her. “But if you must, I get bored easily.”

“Time-fillers, got it.”

Will smiled. “Thanks, Bev.”

Beverly smiled back and reached over to ruffle his hair. “No prob Graham - you get better quick now, yeah?”

Will scowled and tried to fix whatever damage she’d done - his hair was a careful balance between messy and acceptably unruly. “Yeah, yeah - get out of here Bev.”

Beverly laughed but left, passing Hannibal on her way out.

Hannibal smiled. “I see you and Mrs. Katz are still good friends.”
Will smiled slowly, still a little mystified that it had happened. ‘Yeah, Bev’s great.’

Hannibal nodded before gesturing through the door. ‘Shall we?’

Will grabbed his bags and followed. Most people would be angry at needing a babysitter, but Will was glad that Hannibal had declared he would stay with Will until treatment began. Honestly he was just thrilled to finally have an answer. He wasn’t going insane - it was just a disease. And this disease could be treated.

It was almost impossible to believe, but somehow it was true - everything was going to be alright from here on out.

Chapter End Notes

Why yes, that last line does make me break out into hysterical, maniacal laughter. Why do you ask?

As for Jack's behavior here vs. cannon - Will's already proved that he has a spine and will put his foot down when needed (even if he needs to call in his lawyer to ensure he sees it through) so Jack's a little more aware that he can't manipulate Will like he wants to. Besides, there's a large difference between 'he's getting weird and I'm officially concerned, fix it Hannibal' and 'the man has admitted to a significant chunk of lost time'. That's kind of a huge warning flag to be waving about, and Jack knows Will wouldn't bring it up unless he was deadly serious. So yeah, Jack's going to listen to Will and back off for once. Doesn't mean he won't be an asshole once Will's fixed but for now, at least, he's not gonna be a jerk.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Various characters hang out at Will's bedside while he trips balls on his way to health and sanity.

Chapter Notes

Forgive typos, I literally cannot stare at this chapter any more. Fuck. I see now why people tend to skip over Will's recovery period. Fucking shit chapter. It's finished and most of the transitions aren't horribly abrupt. Fuck it.

Mrs. Hermione Granger, it appeared, was nothing less than a force of nature. Large hair barely tamed in a bun, wearing functional jeans and a striped blouse, she looked far less intimidating than her actions showed her to be. "William James Graham!" were her first words upon arrival, loud and accusatorial. "You're sick and you have perfectly healthy guests, why are you answering the door? Sit!"

Will laughed. "Alright 'Mione, Merlin! It's my brain that's on fire, not my legs!" he protested as the shorter woman marched him back to the couch.

Once Will was seated again, Hermione leaned closer and stated softly, "I told you it wasn't mental - you are far stronger than you think you are, Will."

Will’s answering smile was tender and wobbly, and Hannibal returned to the kitchen in order to give the two a moment of privacy. Soon enough, however, he was joined by Mrs. Granger.

“We haven’t been properly introduced,” she greeted with a smile and an outstretched hand. “I’m Hermione Granger.”

“Hannibal Lecter,” Hannibal replied, lifting his sauce covered hands. “Forgive me for not returning the handshake - I’m marinating the beef for tonight’s dinner.”

Hermione waved a hand to show she took no offence. “Glad to see someone’s feeding him. I would have taken over that duty but I will gladly let you do it - cooking is not one of my gifts,” she added with a laugh. It soon tapered off, however, bowing under the shadow of the current situation. There was a solemn fierceness on her face - something heavy set upon her brow that made Hannibal think, for one strange instant, of how Cleopatra must have looked before finalizing the decision to undertake her war upon Rome. “Am I correct in assuming you’re the psychiatrist Will owes his life too?”

Hannibal ducked his head, feeling a strange sense of shame at the fact that he had planned to let it get so much worse than he had in reality. It was an experience he hadn’t accounted for. “I should have caught it earlier.”
“You caught it when no one else did,” Hermione retorted, steel in her voice as if to battle off the failure and self-blame Hannibal’s tone had implied. “House Weasley owes you a debt, Hannibal Lecter, for this service you have rendered to our brother in blood.”

Peculiarly, Hannibal felt the hair of his arms stand on end.

Trying to shake off the feel of something settling under his skin, Hannibal gave Hermione a small smile as he transferred the meat to the fridge so it would not spoil. “It is unnecessary, Mrs. Granger - Will is my friend as well.”

Hermione gave him a long assessing look. With a snort, she nodded. “Call me Hermione. Now, if you don’t mind I had a few questions about Greenberg’s theory of the causes for Anti-NMDA Receptor Encephalitis - oh!” Hermione blushed slightly, flustered suddenly. “If you’ve read it, of course - I have a bad habit of assuming people know what I’m talking about.”

Hannibal couldn’t help but to feel charmed. “I happen to be familiar with the theory. Ask away.”

And so they spent a pleasant afternoon discussing the disease that plagued the man dozing in fits and spurts on the couch. Hermione showed no shock at the violent way he’d jerk awake, nor the number of times they were required to change out the towels Will was sleeping on. She did have a tendency to watch Hannibal’s interactions with Will very closely but Hannibal believed it was more a matter of determining if she approved of how Hannibal treated Will than any true suspicion.

Hannibal won her over after dinner, when a sleepy Will only protested taking his pills for a moment before giving in. “I don’t like how they make me feel,” Will stated with a frown.

Hannibal only had to tilt his head round towards Will with a slightly raised eyebrow.

Will sighed. “I know, I know.” He held out his hand and took the proffered pills without further protest. A thing which had Hermione’s eyebrows raise in surprise.

Will leaned back towards the other end of the couch, whole body moving slowly as if it were giving a large sigh. He stared at a spot on the ceiling, drifting.

As the drugs took effect, Hannibal gently gathered Will’s legs and stretched them out on the couch - in doing so, he rested the man’s feet and calves upon his own legs. “Sleep, dear Will,” Hannibal gently ordered. “I will keep the monsters away.”

Will blinked languid eyes. After a moment, they no longer opened. It wasn’t long after that the sounds of sleep began to fill the house.

“Will really trusts you,” Hermione stated, voice soft in the quiet of a late winter twilight.

“I am proud to have earned it,” Hannibal answered, just as gentle. His hand still rested lightly midway up Will’s calf.

Hermione studied him a moment more. “Are you giving him a referral?”

She was very sharp, this Hermione Granger. Although Hannibal supposed he was no longer being subtle, now that he’d figured out what he wanted. “As soon as I can find someone suitable for him.”

Hermione nodded, accepting the answer. Hannibal hoped all of Will’s family were so accepting. It would make things easier on Will if so, which was best, because Hannibal wasn’t going to give the man up for anything.
Saturday dawned with Teddy at a college tour and Hannibal taking time to set up what he needed before he resumed his practice on Tuesday. That left Will and Hermione alone for the first time since she’d visited. “I’m going to need to return home Sunday,” Hermione stated. “We’ll all take rotations visiting you, but Draco and I will be busy these next few months.”

Will made a noise of inquiry. His pills made him a little fuzzy and light-headed, but he was present enough at the moment and he wanted to know.

Hermione’s face set in a serious tone. “The Wizarding World is contemplating coming out.”

Will blinked. “Didn’t Draco say the ICW contemplates that every thirty years or so?”

Hermione shook her head. “It isn’t rumors, this time - the American Secretary of Magic proposed it in the last ICW meeting. The Minister of France seconded the motion, along with Japan, Canada, Brazil, and Uganda.”

Will sat up straighter. Blinking again. “It’s coming to a vote?”

“With seven in favor right out of the gate,” Hermione confirmed, “and eight others vocally giving their support.” Hermione sat back with a heavy sigh. “The muggle world has changed so much in the last twenty years alone - the Ministry is already having trouble keeping up with accidental exposures due to security cameras and online conspiracy sites - you can’t obliviate a computer! Who knows how hard hiding will be in another ten years? No,” Hermione shook her head, an exasperated huff sounding with the motion, “better we come out on our own terms.”

“Control the battle you cannot avoid,” Will murmured. It had been one of Ron’s favorite sayings during the war, and the philosophy served him well as an Auror.

“I don’t mean to worry you,” Hermione stated gently. She moved to sit closer to Will, pressing her shoulder against his as a solid support. For a while there it had been the only embrace he was willing to accept. “I just wanted you to be prepared, especially since you’ll be in the hospital while the majority of these talks take place.”

Will recognized the implication in those words. “You think I’ll get cornered for a statement.”

“You would hold the largest sway,” Hermione told him bluntly. “You were the leader of the last great war - one which was fought over essentially this very issue. They won’t be able to resist.”

Will slumped until his head rested upon Hermione’s shoulder. “Thanks, ‘Mione.”

Hermione nodded. No more words were needed - they knew each other too well for that. Will now had too much to contemplate. And here he’d thought he’d be bored during his stay in the hospital. Fortunately for him, Will knew the smartest witch of his generation.

Perhaps a few more words were needed after all. “Do you really think it for the best?”

Hermione hummed. “I think the problems of separation are not yet at the point where they can’t be overcome.”

Will nodded. The time when they reached that point was coming soon, then; the point where war was inevitable. He had much to think on.

Hermione, however, distracted him easily with a sly statement. “So, you never mentioned your
Will buried his face in her hair. His reply came out slightly muffled. “I really like him, ‘Mione.”

“He likes you too.” She sounded serious. Hermione, bless her, wasn’t laughing at him. Or if she was laughing at him, she was hiding it well.

“Really?” Will asked.

“Mmm-hmm,” Hermione confirmed. “It’s written all over his face every time he looks at you. Which is funny, considering he’s so walled off otherwise.”

“Like breaking into Gringotts,” Will confirmed.

They shared a giggle at that, considering how absurdly easy breaking into Gringotts had been in reality. It was only getting out which had been a problem, and even that had been solved by a sickly dragon.

“You should go for it,” Hermione stated.

Will paused. “I’m uh... I’m pretty sure he’s a serial killer, Hermione.”

Hermione shrugged. “If that bugged you would you have fallen for him?”

Will bit his lip. Shook his head. To his shame, it was no secret among the inner DA that Will was so broken. Hermione in particular had no illusions about what Will had really done on his road trip with Draco after the war.

Perhaps it showed how broken they all were, that Hermione merely nodded at this revelation. “He’s good for you, Will. I don’t really care so long as he never harms you or our family.”

Will rested more of his weight upon Hermione, slumping even further than before in his relief. To come to terms with it himself was one thing - to gain the support of his family quite another. He would have revealed which killer Hannibal was, but it was better for them all if the ignorance they might one day claim was true.

Especially if the Wizarding World walked into the light of day. There were only so many ways to fool veritaserum.

“I’m going to invite him to Christmas,” Hermione proclaimed. “So you better get your shit together before then, Graham.”

Will couldn’t help himself - he laughed.

Hannibal had called all of his returning patients and set up schedules with them, but that could have just as easily been done from home. No, the real reason he had left Will this saturday afternoon was to see if Dr. Sutcliffe’s recommendation, a Dr. Mirabelle Haban, would be a worthy referral for Will.

From the office itself, it seemed a likely chance. Hannibal admired the simple, yet warm design of the waiting room. The color pallet was a very subdued Tuscan which made the modest office seem truly inviting.

Right on time, the door opened and a young woman walked out to greet him. She was professionally dressed in much more muted colors than himself or Alana, presenting a firm and trustworthy image.
The crispness of her suit was only made more evident by the lovely bronze of her skin and the warm
goodness of her smile. “Dr. Lecter, how nice to meet you.” She shook his hand with a solid grip, and
to ask, “Would you prefer to talk here or to go elsewhere? There’s a coffee shop right down the
road with a divine espresso.”

“Would you feel more comfortable there, Dr. Haban?” Hannibal queried.

Dr. Haban laughed - a musical sound despite the obvious nerves. “I must confess it feels weird
talking to someone so established in my field in the same office I see patients,” she admitted. “Would
you mind if we relocated? My treat, naturally.”

“Not at all,” Hannibal replied. “And please, let it be my treat - I am the one who asked to see you,
after all.”

“We can argue semantics later,” Dr. Haban replied easily, grabbing her coat. Locking up the office
took a moment, and then they shared a useless conversation about the weather as they made their
way to the coffee shop. Dr. Haban waited until they were settled at a table to address the reason for
their meeting. “So, you’ve got an interesting patient?”

Hannibal nodded. He absently noted that he was stirring his drink rather aimlessly. Will Graham was
a lack of control that should bother him - oddly enough, it really didn’t.

“What is he neuro-atypical?” Dr. Haban asked over the rim of her cup, showing how perceptive she was.
“What spectrum or otherwise?”

Hannibal pressed his lips together slightly before answering. “He has an empathy disorder beyond
anything I’ve ever seen.”

Instead of drooling like most psychiatrists at the prospect of such a find, Dr. Haban winced. “Oh no.
Is this patient the Will Graham I’ve heard about?”

Hannibal inclined his head.

Dr. Haban put her drink down with a grimace. “So we have an empath living in the most violent of
minds. You certainly don’t do things by halves, do you Dr. Lecter?”

“You see why finding a referral has been difficult for me,” Hannibal commented lightly.

Dark eyes focused on his. “Forgive my bluntness but I need to know. Is the referral because you fear
him?”

Hannibal tilted his head to the left. “Would you reject him as a patient if I did?”

“I would need to take a different tactic from the start,” Dr. Haban rejected that theory, “if the last
therapist he had ran screaming from a little difficulty.”

Hannibal was still a moment, and then he smiled. She had bite, this one, despite her age and the short
time she’d had an open practice. It took guts or stupidity to insinuate such against a man as
established as himself, and Hannibal doubted the latter was the cause. “Good. You’ll need that spine
-nor matter my fondness for Will he can be a difficult patient at times.”

Dr. Haban’s mouth fell open. It was quite amusing. “You mean to refer him because you - you -” Dr.
Haban twirled a strand of dark hair round her finger and bit her lip as she visibly attempted to find a
way to state the obvious without offence.
“I have found myself in the unexpected position of having romantic inclinations towards my patient,” Hannibal finished for her.

Dr. Haban laughed. “Well, I’m sure he’s quite something, then. I prefer to enter therapy with as few assumptions as possible so I won’t ask anything more about him. What questions do you have for me?”

Yes, this one was sharp. Hannibal made a mental note to thank Dr. Sutcliffe with dinner for this introduction - Dr. Haban was already proving herself to be a wonderful choice.

When Monday arrived, Will showered and dressed as if in a dream. He wandered into the living room, sight caught by the innocent-looking brown duffle sitting by the door. Hermione had packed it for him, needing to take physical action against a foe she couldn’t fight. Will couldn’t fight this, either - not like he was used to. There was no spell he could cast, no item to destroy. It was down to his simple ability to survive.

Will guessed it was a good thing he excelled at that.

Teddy grabbed the bag and turned to him with a smile. “Come on Will, let’s get going huh?”

Will nodded, numbly, and followed Teddy out. He paused with his hand on the open door of Hannibal’s elegant Bentley. There was a feel of finality. From here on, things were going to be different.

“Will?”

Will turned. Hannibal was there, sleeves rolled down but jacket still missing. His whole focus was on Will.

“Is everything alright, Will?” Hannibal inquired.

Will paused a beat, and then smiled.

“It will be,” he answered. He got into the car and shut the door.

Hannibal stood outside a moment more before he, too, got in. The ride to the hospital was quiet. Eventually, Hannibal reached over and took Will’s hand. “Everything will be alright, Will,” Hannibal promised. “I shall be there every moment I am able.”

Will blushed, keenly aware of Teddy trying to be inconspicuous in the backseat. He moved his mouth, but no words would come. He settled on squeezing Hannibal’s hand once.

Will didn’t know what would happen next, but Hannibal’s hand remained warm and steady in his grip. And Hannibal remained with him, watching over him as he got hooked to the iv that would administer the drugs he needed to heal. They made Will woozy, caused the room to tilt and shadows to linger. Hannibal took his hand again and explained.

“The symptoms will happen in reverse as the drugs take effect,” Hannibal stated. “You may seem to get worse, but that is only a momentary thing, Will. You’re strong - you’ll get through this.”

Will gripped that hand harder.

Hannibal did leave, once, but after a few hours he returned. Will awoke to his return, and the scent of
warm broth. He made a inquisitive noise in the back of his throat before he found words. “Smells
delicious.”

Hannibal turned to him with a small smile. “Silkie chicken in a broth. A black-boned bird prized in
China for its medicinal values since the seventh century. Wolfberries, ginseng, ginger, red dates, and
star anise round the flavor out and help to promote healing.”

Will blinked. “… You made me chicken soup.”

Hannibal moved to look at him, pausing his motions of putting the bowls on the rolling hospital tray.
He was quiet a moment before replying with a simple, “Yes.”

Will huffed out a laugh. “Sorry. Did I oversimplify?”

“How are you feeling, Will?” Hannibal asked as he moved the tray over so Will could eat.

“Gloopy,” Will answered. “I’ll try not to spill.”

“I’m certain you’ll succeed,” Hannibal teased gently. For all his words of confidence, he watched
Will eat for a few minutes before leaning back into the chair he’d pulled over. Another glance to note
that Will needed no help, and Hannibal began to eat himself.

Will found himself breaking the silence, speaking in fragments between careful sips of soup. “I
haven’t been in a hospital since I got stabbed.”

Hannibal paused, spoon still held in the air. “Have you many experiences with hospitals?”

“No,” Will answered. His tongue was heavy and slow. It felt weird. “Not until school. Madame
Pomfrey said she liked me, but wished I wouldn’t visit so much. We had tents in the war but it’s
never quite the same. No real nurses there either - not for a long time.”

Hannibal frowned. “You had to heal yourselves as well?”

Will nodded. He blinked, staring at the shadows just beyond Hannibal’s shoulder. It wasn’t in
avoidance of Hannibal’s firm gaze. He was keeping a watchful eye on something that could become
a threat.

Hannibal pursed his lip in indecision. Eventually, the man’s curiosity won out. “Dare I ask where the
adults were?”

Will’s eyes turned to meet his. He wasn’t certain he wanted to know what he looked like, though the
slight crease at the corners of Hannibal’s eyes told him it was probably bad. “Dead, usually. Dead or
useless. I was born to the fight - everyone else could have been spared had we any competent
adults.”
proclaimed his profession with pride. With this confession, however, it made perfect sense. “Thus why you teach - you wish to prepare others in the way you were never allowed.”

Will gave a clicked snort. “I was prepared to die - I want my students prepared to live.”

Hannibal tilted his head the barest of increments, studying. There was a slope to Will’s shoulders that seemed far too heavy and knowing. It was... troublesome. What loaded revelations hid in the shadows of that statements? Had Will’s younger years truly been so sacrificial as they suddenly seemed?

For once in his life, Hannibal found himself lacking the desire to ask. It was a mystery he feared the answer to. So he let the moment go - allowed it to fade away despite the fact another might never arise again. Instead, he spoke of lighter things. “Your students are very fortunate. I hear they greatly miss you.”

“They may have to retake the whole class, considering how often I’ve been gone this semester,” Will stated. “They’re not going to miss me much after they hear that.”

“Can they not find another to teach while you are sick?” Hannibal inquired.

“There aren’t many teachers in my field at the level I am,” Will answered. “So it could be hard, substituting so late in the year without the class’ overall education suffering.”

Hannibal nodded. “I am certain they will enjoy the reprieve from a difficult class with all of their other finals to worry about.”

“Some will,” Will acknowledged with a small smile. “Some will bemoan having to retake it, and some will be thrilled at the opportunity to do it over and do it right. Like ‘Mione.”

“She seemed a very studious woman,” Hannibal agreed.

“She was crazy,” Will countered. “She feared expulsion more than death. We used to tease her about it, considering she was top of our class. Smartest -” whatever Hermione was the smartest of, Hannibal didn’t hear. Will’s words became unintelligible as they were taken over by a yawn.

Hannibal smiled and stood to clear away the tray. “I shall leave you to your rest, Will.”

Will mumbled out something, but offered no true protest as Hannibal helped lay him back down. Will’s eyes closed, and his breathing evened out. Hannibal tucked the sheets close around him, taking care with Will in a way he never had with any of his former patients. The small, dark room felt peaceful and calm as Hannibal packed away the bowls. He returned the rolling tray to it’s position at the end of Will’s bed. Carefully placed the bowl of soup into his insulated carrying bag. Large hands were cautious as they zipped up the bag, doing their best to make as little sound as possible. Finally, Hannibal walked to the doorway.

“I’ll return in the morning, my dear,” Hannibal whispered back into the dark, watching the rise and fall of Will’s chest. It was steady - comforting.

With a smile, Hannibal left.

Will awoke to find Ron in his room, flipping through a newspaper. “Th’fuck?”

Ron raised an eyebrow at him. “Did you seriously doubt Hermione about the guard duty roster?”
Will tried to blink the sleep from his eyes. It just made the flecks of crud fall in greater number.

Ron rolled his eyes. “I got first draw, since I was coming up on vacation time anyway. Nev will be by in a few days for a weekend - he’s got school to deal with so that’s all he can spare. Draco should be down for a couple of days, but that’ll be it since he and ‘Mione are busy keeping the ministry from falling into hysterics.”

Will finally managed to speak. “Good to see you, mate.”

“Good to see you too - let’s not do this in a hospital next time, yeah?” “No promises,” Will mumbled.

“Holy shit you are a brit, aren’t you?” Beverly suddenly interjected, standing in the doorway with a gleeful look on her face.

“He can only escape the accent when he isn’t drugged out of his head,” Ron replied.

Will grumbled at him, but couldn’t find the strength needed for any real insult.

Both of his friends ignored him, the traitors.

“I’m Beverly,” Bev introduced, crossing over. “Work friend - forensics.”

“Ron Weasley,” Ron replied, shaking the offered hand. “Met Will in school, been family ever since.”

“So how many of you guys are we going to meet?” Beverly asked as she sat down. She leaned forwards over the table, obviously curious.

“Fair few I’d imagine,” Ron replied. “We’ve got a rotation - Will doesn’t do well alone in a hospital.”

“I don’ need a fuckin’ babysitter,” Will grumbled.

“Shawn’s,” Ron replied simply.

Will scowled. “Don’ prove a goddamn thing.”

“Only when Hannibal isn’t around,” Beverly stated like the evil woman she was.

Ron raised an eyebrow. “Hannibal? The psychiatrist?”

“Not for much longer, if you know what I mean.” Beverly wiggled her eyebrows.

“Evil,” Will accused. “I’m not that obvious.”

Beverly laughed. “You so are, Graham cracker. You two are practically a walking billboard.”

“Oh yeah,” Ron interjected, “Hermione told me about that. Hope you embarrass Teddy, mate - it’s good for a growing boy.”

Will rolled his eyes and focused on the nurse that entered. She asked him questions, fiddled with his medicine drip, and then left with the parting fact that she’d return at lunch.

Will watched Ron and Beverly chat as he dozed, ensuring the shadows didn’t get any closer to the
two than they already were. The blood running down the walls wasn’t too bad yet, but that could change at any minute. “Caution,” Will mumbled before he closed his eyes and sleep overtook him again. It was alright to sleep - Ron would understand. Ron would watch.

Beverly looked at Ron in confusion. The other man sighed and shook his head. “Hermione said he’d be experiencing hallucinations - figured he’d see something and immediately warn me to be on my guard.”

“Were you with him?” Beverly asked, suddenly unable to stop her curiosity. “During the bombings?”

Ron nodded. “The whole group was. Me, my wife, Draco, Nev - we were on the train back from boarding school. Bastards hit King’s Cross,” Ron turned to look at her, “it’d be like hitting Grand Central, I understand.”

Beverly winced.

Ron just shrugged. “It was a long time ago. Still, it helps all of us to know one of the others is around when we’re feeling vulnerable.”

“Let me know how I can help,” Beverly stated. “Will’s a good friend, and I’m a pro at coffee runs.”

Ron laughed. “Will do. Although I prefer tea when off duty.”

“You a cop?” Beverly questioned.

“Detective, back in Britain,” Ron replied. “Which makes me the butt of jokes at the office, having a wife in politics and a lawyer for a friend. Not to mention two teachers and the head editor of a newspaper!”

“You guys sure are an eclectic group,” Beverly noted. “That’s cool though - most of my friends are also in forensics or they’re so far removed they have no idea what I do.”

Ron nodded with a laugh. “They all wanna know if it’s like a cop show - how many car chases am I in on an average week?”

“Always wanting to hear about how you tackled someone,” Beverly agreed, “never about the reams of paperwork you get to fill out every week.”

“Ugh, reports.” Ron gave a comedic shiver.

Will’s voice interrupted their laughter, soft and curious and slow. “Don’t the antlers hurt?”

Ron blinked at him. Beverly was the one to reply, just as soft. “No more than your iv hurts, Will. Don’t worry your pretty head, Graham cracker.”

Will blinked at her. Every move he made was slow - like he was trying to imitate molasses. “But my head isn’t connected anymore.”

“Sure looks connected to me,” Beverly retorted. She made a show of looking him over. “Nope, all limbs attached and accounted for.”

Will made some sort of non-committal noise and fell back into sleep.
Ron watched her for a moment. “You’re handling this well.”

Beverly shrugged. “Will’s always been a little weird. This isn’t that new - at least we can say with certainty he isn’t going nuts.” Her phone beeped then, and Beverly opened it up to find a text containing only a location. Jack wasn’t one to mince words. “Whelp, duty calls,” Beverly stated, standing and swinging her bag over her shoulder. “Nice to meet you, Ron.”

“Likewise,” Ron called out after her.

Beverly spent a moment while she walked out to her car to be thankful that Will had some people able to sit around and watch him without work getting in the way. It made it easier for her to push all of that aside and focus on the next crime scene.

Jack had to stand outside Will’s room a moment, gathering his courage. From everything he’d been able to find out about the disease, it was quite possibly his fault that Will was in such a state. It was at least probably his fault that it’d taken Will so long to figure out that something was actually wrong with him.

He’d seen Will getting worse, but after the revised contract Will had seemed to even out. It wasn’t normal - Will would never be normal - but it’d been the best alternative. And now it was evident that Jack had been wrong.

He didn’t like being wrong. The last time he’d been wrong, he’d lost Miriam Lass.

Jack just hoped the image of Will sick and in a hospital bed wouldn’t bring any more nightmares. He’d had enough of that when the Ripper had taunted him.

Steeling his courage, Jack entered the room.

Will was sleeping, and Jack took a moment to be thankful for that. He looked much better, actually, and his skin wasn’t the grey pallor Jack had been fearing - no matter how ridiculous a thought it was.

“You Jack Crawford?” a voice asked.

Jack turned to the table, where two men sat playing cards. “Yes,” he answered. With a sigh, he took an educated guess. “Friends of Will’s?”

“Detective Weasley,” the red haired man introduced. He waved at his companion. “That’s Professor Longbottom. We’ve heard a bit about you, Agent Crawford.”

“I bet you have,” Jack couldn’t help but to reply. He let the urge to fight go with another heavy sigh. “I didn’t know it was this bad.”

“No,” Longbottom remarked, “you were just content to manipulate a man who only wanted to help. Despite Will telling you when he couldn’t handle it anymore. You just couldn’t listen till a lawyer forced you to back off.”

The man looked at Jack then, something hard and unbending in his eyes as he firmly proclaimed, “You keep manipulating Will like that, and they’ll never find your body.”

Jack... wasn’t inclined to doubt him. There was something about the man which told Jack he’d meant the words without bragging. Still... Jack raised an eyebrow at the man before giving a pointed look to the self-proclaimed detective also sitting at the table.
Detective Weasley shrugged. “I’m off duty.”

Jack sighed again.

“Jack?” Will asked, apparently waking up. “There a case?”

It was... probably what he deserved, that Will assumed Jack wouldn’t see him unless he needed the man working. Jack shook his head and tried to ignore the sudden sour feeling in his gut. “No, just came to check up on you. We are able to function without you, you know.”

Will mumbled something that sounded suspiciously like ‘could have fooled me’.

The sour feeling intensified. Jack ignored it. “How you holding up, Will?”

Glazed over eyes stared at Jack’s hairline. Will looked better than he’d thought, but the man was shaky and a little pale. It was disconcerting, but nothing more so than the lack of focus in those eyes - eyes that had always been sharp and firm.

“They only scream sometimes,” Will replied. He blinked. Tilted his head. His eyes met Jack’s head on for a moment before he furrowed his brows and asked, “Did you break Lawrence Wells?”

Jack snorted and felt the corner of his mouth twitch up. “Man made the totem pole so he could live on unforgotten - and apparently jail was a better option than the retirement home he could afford. Told him Eleanore chose to raise his son as Fletcher Marshal’s kid - that he killed his legacy by killing his son. Man’s not exactly smug anymore.”

“Good,” Will replied. “Bastard deserved it.”

Jack nodded. “Enough work,” he declared, moving to sit on the chair next to the bed. “Hannibal, Alana, and I are taking care of your dogs.”

Will perked up, just like he’d thought he would. “Are they doing okay?”

“They miss you,” Jack answered. “Winston most of all - can’t get the dog to budge from your bed for more than a minute. If you don’t get better soon, I’ll have to smuggle him in here.”

Will smiled softly. “Thanks, Jack.”

Jack nodded. He waited to see if Will would say more, but the man soon drifted off to sleep.

Jack sat there a bit longer. Made himself look at the man whose life he could have so easily ruined. What if Will had hurt someone? What if a killer had gotten away, or grabbed him?

Will hadn’t broken because of the job, just as Jack had known he wouldn’t. But that didn’t mean the job wasn’t dangerous for Will.

He was able to sit beside a recovering Will - he hadn’t been that lucky with Miriam Lass.

Jack finally sighed and stood up again. They still had an active case, and Jack needed to get back to the lab. With a nod to the other men, Jack left.

Ron sighed and stood up. “Well, I’m going to see if I can find any real bloody tea around here. You want some?”
Neville snorted. “Good luck with that, you’ll need it.”

Ron waved him off and left, cracking his back as he did so.

Neville turned back to the table. It looked liked Will wouldn’t be up for a bit, so he got out some grading and set in to work.

A while later, a chuckle was heard. “The wonders of teaching.”

Neville looked up blearily, staring at Will for a moment before rubbing his eyes. Ron still wasn’t back, but the light had changed. “Merlin, what time is it?”

“Nearly dinner,” Will replied. “Ron just stepped out to get you two something.”

Neville grimaced and cracked his neck. At least he hadn’t been out of it without another, more aware person around to keep a lookout for long.

“Rough school year?” Will asked.

Neville sighed. “You have no idea. I swear they’ve upped the crazy this year. The fourth years are completely unruly, the seventh years are more panicked than they have any reason to be, and we’ve had more hallway duels than quidditch injuries!”

Will raised an eyebrow at him. “I take it you’re stressed?”

“Just a bit,” Neville admitted sheepishly. He stared at the iv stand and suddenly felt silly. “Not as much as you must have been, though.”

Will shrugged. “I’m fine.”

Neville didn’t believe that for one moment. Despite ‘fine’ being Will’s favorite word, Neville still wasn’t convinced the man actually knew what it meant. He decided to ignore it for the moment. “Still, you’ve had a much more hectic year than me.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” Will remarked. When Neville just stared at him in confusion, Will expanded, “I haven’t had to deal with any teenagers just hitting puberty.”

Neville laughed. “Well, I’ll give you that. It never gets easier. I - ” Neville broke off what he’d been about to say to face the opening door. A man he didn’t know stood there - tall, broad shouldered, slant of his eyes suggesting mixed heritage giving a chance of potentially unknown magic capabilities, width of his stance suggested a command position. Neville casually readied his wand arm by his side.

Will sighed. “Hey Johnson. Guess I should be glad it’s you, huh?”

The stranger shrugged good-naturedly. “No one would shut up about it, so I ran the only interference I could. Everybody’s just dying to know what you think of the political debate of the year.”

Neville glanced to Will, who scratched the lower right side of his neck with his left pointer finger: at ease. Neville sat back down, but he didn’t pick his grading up again.

Johnson stepped in far enough to close the door, but walked no further. He nodded his head towards Neville. “Professor Longbottom. I’m Agent Johnson, Will’s caseworker.”

“Are the press going to follow you to him?” Neville asked.
“No,” Johnson answered, putting his hands in his pockets. “We’ll release his answer as a press statement - should keep the vultures off his back.”

“I believe my stance in the war should make it clear what I think,” Will stated.

They both waited in silence a moment, but Will didn’t look like he had anything else to say.

Finally, Agent Johnson nodded. “Got it. That’ll be fun. You want them to make up their own damn minds then?”

Will nodded.

“Sounds good,” Johnson replied. “Love when I get to curse at the press. I’ll get outta your hair now. Just popped in while visiting my cousin, should keep anyone from finding you. Let me know if they do.” Johnson nodded to Will, nodded to Neville, and then left.

“Man of few words,” Neville stated. “I can see why you like him.”

Will nodded absently, staring at the far corner of the room. “Tell me about your classes?” The sentence was quiet, the light ending making it a request. So Neville sat on the bed by Will and launched into every rant he had about the last year. As he did so, he took Will’s hand in his own to ground him.

Grading could wait until he flooed back to Hogwarts - Will needed him more right now.

Alana wasn’t certain how to feel. Will wasn’t going insane, which was wonderful. As much as it hurt to see him in the hospital, pale and constantly latched to an iv, it was far better than the alternative. Will was a dear friend, and despite knowing Will didn’t return her feelings her own crush was proving harder to shake than she had initially thought.

She was determined to visit when she could. The doctors had warned her Will would appear to get worse before he got better, and the way the man would trail off to stare at things only he could see reinforced that. She kept his godson (hadn’t that been a surprise!) and old friends company, getting to know them. She helped add to the ‘pile of occupancy’, as Beverly had called it, and watched over Will. Alana had determined as soon as she’d heard the diagnosis to look out for Will during his recovery, and she would.

Which was why she confronted Hannibal in the hall.

“Hannibal,” Alana greeted shortly.

Hannibal blinked at her. “Is something the matter, Alana?”

“Of course there’s something wrong,” Alana replied harshly. “I’ve heard some drastic rumors, Hannibal, and I hope you’ll tell me they aren’t true.”

Hannibal’s eyes lightened in understanding, and he nodded his head slightly. “My referral of Will has already made the circuit, then.”

“How could you?” Alana demanded. There was a burning rage in her chest that she hadn’t known the likes of in years. “Will is suffering from a terrible sickness, and you refer him? Will needs you more than ever right now, Hannibal! This is the worst time to do something like that, it could set him back months! Will needs an anchor, not a coward!”
Hannibal had apparently been content to let her rant, but at that his face turned to stone. When he spoke, his voice was low with a thread of darkness she’d never heard before. “I am not abandoning him, Alana.”

“You referred him to a woman who’s had her degree for two years!” Alana countered loudly.

“Oh good,” was the sudden interruption. Alana and Hannibal both turned to see Will standing near in his plaid robe and slippers, gripping his iv stand as he blinked at them. With that same dreamy voice, musical with the heavy influences of the natural accent he was too sick to cover up, Will finished his statement. “I needed a referral, since I’m in love with Hannibal.”

Alana’s jaw fell open.

Hannibal’s voice sounded like it’d been strangled on the way up. Which was absurd. “Are you certain of this, Will?”

“Pretty sure,” Will replied. He looked to the left. Took a step in that direction.

Teddy, just behind him, put a gentle hand on Will’s free elbow. “It’s time to head back, pops.”

Will turned his blurry stare on Teddy. “But Susan went that way.”

“Neville’s with her,” Teddy replied easily. “She’ll be fine - she’s guarded, Will. Come back to bed.”

“Susan’s safe?” Will asked.

“Yeah,” Teddy replied, gently guiding the man back towards his room. “She’s safe. Come on, now, let’s go look at that puzzle book Bev gave us, huh?”

Alana watched the two shuffle out of sight, and then turned to Hannibal.

“I am not abandoning Will,” Hannibal told her again, voice softer. “I vetted Dr. Haban myself - she’ll be good for Will. And I cannot be objective any longer.”

“You -” Alana tried to make a coherent sentence, “- he...” Her face was burning. She’d laid into Hannibal when he was only doing what he should. She’d just screamed at her mentor for abandoning her friend, when he was in truth doing what was needed to start a relationship with the man she had a crush on.

Unable to face her embarrassment at the facts of the situation, Alana blurted out an apology and nearly ran from the hall.

Hannibal couldn’t help but to chuckle. He liked Alana, so he was glad her confusion and apparent embarrassment banked the fires of his rage at her accusation. He would so hate to kill her.

Besides, her confrontation had given Hannibal a lovely confession. Smiling, Hannibal headed for Will’s room. He found the man there, Teddy just getting him back into bed. With a gesture the teen stood back and let Hannibal take over the task of tucking Will in. “I did not wish to task you overmuch during your stay, and so I did not mention it,” Hannibal remarked. “Dr. Haban is new to psychiatry, yes, but I trust her with your care.”

Will smiled up at him, sleepy and sloppy with all the drugs in his system. “S’ok. I trust you.”

Hannibal’s heart clenched. “I should like to court you, when you are released.”
“Court me now,” Will demanded. “I’m really, really in love with you, Hannibal.”

Hannibal chuckled slightly. “As you will, William.” Hannibal bent down and sealed the promise by laying a gentle kiss to Will’s brow. Will sighed in content. “Sleep, dear Will.”

Will mumbled something but closed his eyes. Soon, he was asleep.

Hannibal walked over to the table where he’d set his bag. “I’ve brought some lunch, if you would like to join me?”

Teddy nodded. “Thanks. The food here is shi--uh, gross.”

“Indeed,” Hannibal commented, appreciative of the young man’s attempts to curb his cursing when around Hannibal. “Your flight back to Britain is tonight?”

“Yeah,” Teddy answered as he took the other seat. “School starts back up tomorrow, and I gotta go back to studying.” The teen let out a melodramatic groan. “I don’t wanna take my tests.”

“I am certain you will do well,” Hannibal assured the boy, giving him a full plate. “From what I have seen you are a very studious young man.”

“Thanks,” Teddy replied shyly. It was nice to see he’d gained some of Will’s mannerisms. “So what’re we eating today?”

“Roasted quail on a bed of asparagus and arugula,” Hannibal announced. “Forgive me - I would have prepared something fancier, but Will has shown a preference towards simpler foods while sick.”

Teddy snorted. “Yeah, he goes through mac and cheese like crazy when he’s got a cold. He’ll only eat homemade chicken soup though, and since Gramma Molly couldn’t fly it to him he’d stick with other things.”

Hannibal smiled, remembering Will’s pleasure when Hannibal had visited him that first night. “I might have noticed.”

Teddy snickered into his greens. “I’m so glad you two worked this out while I was still here - I’m gonna tease him forever.”

Hannibal held no doubt of that. He rather looked forward to it himself. Will was ever so lovely whilst flustered. “You’ve spent quite some time with Will, then.”

“Mmm-hmm,” Teddy nodded. “My parents died when I was a baby, and Grandma was having trouble adjusting so we moved in with Will when he moved to America.”

“My apologies,” Hannibal demurred.

Teddy shrugged an awkward shoulder. “Will had kinda the same situation, and he made sure I was better off. I’ve been really lucky - I know I have.”

Hannibal was impressed by the maturity of that statement. “I don’t doubt it.” Hannibal sipped at his tea - he’d wanted something soothing, but it was too early for wine. “You’ve toured many colleges. Have you decided what you would like to study?”

“Not really,” Teddy shrugged. “I was thinking something in science.”

“Are you thinking of a medicinal or chemical focus?” Hannibal asked.
“Maybe forensics?” Teddy shrugged. “I don’t know - I’ll figure that out when I get there. I’ll probably start out biochem though. Hey!” Teddy perked up. “You were a doctor, weren’t you? Can you tell me about it?”

Hannibal nodded, and proceeded to answer any question he could about the medical profession. It was always nice to see a bright young person interested in his field of study.

Abigail watched Will sleep during periodic breaks in her reading. It was no less than he’d done for her, after all. Although her stay in the hospital hadn’t been quite so... dramatic.

Will sometimes woke silently. Sometimes with odd statements or questions. But other times, he awoke in screams. Those times usually required several nurses and his friend to sedate him - whatever Will Graham faced in his nightmares, it sent him immediately into battle mode.

“Y’okay?”

Abigail looked over to find Will’s face drawn with worry. “Sorry,” she replied, “I’m fine. You shouldn’t be worrying about me, anyway.”

Will just blinked at her. “You’ve been biting your nails.”

Abigail looked down. Will was right.


Abigail looked back up. Will had shifted to make enough room for her. “You’re sick,” she tried to protest, already standing.

“I wouldn’t have offered if it bothered me,” Will retorted. He opened his arms as Abigail put down her book and walked over to crawl in beside him. She laid in the space next to him, her head on his shoulder and Will’s arm wrapped around her. “I’m going to be all right, Abigail,” Will whispered into her hair.

Abigail’s hands tightened on his shirt reflexively. “I already lost my dad,” she whispered. “I don’t want to lose you too.”

“You’re not gonna lose me,” Will stated firmly, conviction in his voice. “All the Death Eaters in Europe couldn’t kill me - there’s no way I’m losing to a fever.”

“Give me that.”

There was a squawk from outside the door. Will and Abigail looked up to see two red heads of hair, one holding a camera away from the other one. Will groaned and dropped his head back down as Freddie Lounds’ voice reached them. “That’s my camera! You have no right to take that from me!”

“You’re taking unsolicited pictures of my best friend,” Ron retorted. “You got a problem with me confiscating your camera, you can take it up with Interpol. Here’s my card - you can rant to my boss all you want while I take you to security.”

More squawking was heard, and the two figures walked away. Abigail raised an eyebrow at Will. “She really does stalk you, doesn’t she?”

Will shrugged.
“Doesn’t she have anything better to report on?” Abigail asked as she laid back down.

“Nothing drives as many hits as a crazy man catching bad guys,” Will stated blandly.

“You’re not crazy,” Abigail protested.

“Oh I’m a little crazy,” Will countered easily. “Just not the kind of crazy she thinks I am.”

Abigail huffed and hugged him tighter for a moment. “You’re not crazy - you’re just neuro-atypical.”

Will chuckled. “I see you’ve been reading Hannibal’s books.”

“They’re interesting,” Abigail stated. “It’s nice to understand why the doctors ask certain things.”

“Good for understanding what the right answers are, too,” Will replied blithely.

Abigail went quiet, despite the fact that it was obvious Will wasn’t judging her for it. Eventually, the male red head returned.

“You weren’t kidding, mate,” he stated as he pulled up a chair. “That bint’s got big ones and no sense. And you must be Abigail,” he greeted, “I’m Ron Weasley - nice to meet you.”

Abigail sat up sharply even as her mouth dropped open. No. Way. “W-Weasley?” she asked. Then she jumped slightly and shook the offered hand. “Sorry, I’m Abigail. Which you knew - I mean - I - um...”

Ron, thankfully, just laughed at her. “No worries kid. Chill out, huh? I’m no one here.”

“Not for much longer,” Will stated.

Abigail turned to look at him.

Will quirked one side of his mouth up as he looked at her, but Abigail wouldn’t have called it a smile. “They might be coming out,” he stated softly.

Abigail’s mouth dropped open again. That was... huge. It would change everything - everyone would know about magic, she wouldn’t have to keep it a secret! She could - she could -

Abigail swallowed. “I could tell people what my father did to me.”

Will’s expression turned into a real smile, and he nodded.

“Bill’s got to finish up his latest contract,” Ron stated, “but he’ll head over as soon as that’s done to take care of that for you.”

Abigail turned to look at him, swallowing past the lump in her throat. “Thank you.”

Ron gave her a soft smile. “It’s our pleasure. Really.” Ron leaned back and crossed his legs. “So, which school did you go to here?”

“Ilvermorny,” Abigail replied. “I wanted to go to the Northwest Academy but Dad wouldn’t hear it.”

Ron rolled his eyes. “Proud purebloods - I get it. ‘Mione and I want our kids to go to Hogwarts but that’s just because we loved it so much.”

Abigail nodded, slightly awed. She had so many questions, wanted to ask him all about the most
famous school in Britain, but at that moment Hannibal walked in.

Abigail blushed, remembering her position. Hannibal, however, simply smiled at her and Will. His eyes were more tender than she’d ever seen them before. “Good afternoon Abigail, Ron,” Hannibal greeted with nods. His smile turned even more gentle as he addressed the last among them, “Will.”


“Would you mind setting the table, Abigail?” Hannibal asked.

“Sure,” Abigail replied. She carefully got off the bed, not wanting to jostle Will, and quickly walked over to Hannibal. She snatched a quick hug from him before taking the bag and heading over to the table. She did sneak a glance to watch Hannibal approach Will. He helped Will to sit up, and then pulled back the covers with all the tenderness of a man in love.

They really are in love, Abigail noted, watching Hannibal help Will get to his feet and into his robe.

Abigail smiled to herself as she set out all the food, Ron having moved the table and guest chairs around so they could all be seated. Hannibal got Will settled in the nicest chair and then took the seat next to him. Abigail sat across from Will, letting Ron have the other spot beside Will, and was momentarily overcome.

Hannibal had taken Will’s hand, and the two were gazing at each other as if nothing else existed. It was a picture of family Abigail had thought forever gone, and her heart pulsed with sorrow. Then, both men turned to look at her, eyes no less loving than they’d been before, and her heart felt like it might break.

“Am I intruding?” Ron asked, “Or do I get a lovey-dovey look too?”

Will turned an amused face on his friend. “Hermione would smack you upside the head, you know.”

Ron just grinned back cheerfully. “Good thing she isn’t here then, innit? Now we gonna eat or not, Will?”

Will laughed. It was the lightest he’d sounded in days, and echoed the feelings in Abigail’s own chest.

She’d thought she’d never find family again, after what her father had stolen from her. It seemed she’d been wrong.

Ron was happy for the break from work, despite it meaning he got to watch his oldest friend hallucinate in a hospital. It was good to step away, every now and then. It also gave him a chance to investigate the people Will was with now.

For once, it seemed like they could breathe easy. Will had managed to find good people.

Good people who look way too stressed, Ron mused. Beverly was chewing her lip while frowning at some files. Ron watched her for all of five minutes before he sighed and grabbed the file. “Come on,” he said, standing. “Let’s take this where we won’t wake Will.”

Beverly followed him outside the hospital room and leaned against the doorframe. “You able to help on these cases?”
Ron nodded absently, flipping through the file. “Interpol. Technically I’m on vacation but I can help. Walk me through it.”

Beverly let loose a giant sigh. “Beth LeBeau was found dead in her house, jaw split open like someone had tried to peel back her face. Tissue from the scene belongs to Georgia Madchen, Beth’s childhood friend. Georgia’s Mom told us she had Cotard’s syndrome. Hannibal said she won’t recognize faces, that something in them doesn’t register as real. Even her own mother would be a stranger.”

Ron winced. “So she likely didn’t mean to kill LeBeau.”

Beverly nodded, and the heavy slope of her shoulders made more sense. “Just wanted to find her friend.”

Ron thought a moment. There should be enough of a tissue sample in the lab that he could do a quick tracking charm - find the poor girl before she killed anyone else, get her some help.

It was what Will would do, no matter how sick the man was.

“Allright,” Ron stated. “Once Draco gets here for his shift I’ll join you in the labs. You got some time?”

Beverly nodded. “You think you can help?”

“Won’t know till I try,” Ron replied with an easy shrug. “But let’s not discuss it in the room - Will’s just going to try and solve the case despite his flaming brain.”

Beverly winced. “Yeah, sounds like him. Guy really doesn’t know when to quit.”

Ron couldn’t help the snort that overtook him. When Beverly gave him a look, Ron drawled, “You have no idea.”

Beverly’s mouth drew up in a wicked grin. “Well, since we can’t discuss the case maybe we can pass a few hours exchanging blackmail.”

Ron felt himself answering that grin with an evil one of his own. “That sounds like a plan to me.”

Yes, Ron liked Will’s current friends.

Will woke up slowly. It was happening more and more, which Dr. Sutcliffe was taking as a good sign. Will was apparently past the hallucinations stage, so after he got through the fevers and increased headaches he should be cleared to go home.

Will was looking forward to that - it had been a long month.

He took a deep breath and opened his eyes. Draco was sitting in a chair next to the bed, casually dressed for once and fast asleep. Will could catch a glimpse of silver chain from under the collar of Draco’s grey t-shirt and Will’s heart beat once in painful sympathy. Draco didn’t look quite comfortable, slumped over with his chin on his chest, but Will knew the man wasn’t likely getting much sleep and decided to let him be. The silence was comfortable. No visions, no antlers, no screams. He’d never known beige walls could be so comforting.

Will didn’t know how long they’d laid there in quiet before a nurse came in. Draco was awake
instantly, and Will gave a small shake of his head to let the man know there wasn’t a threat.

Draco nodded but sat up properly and stretched anyway, popping his neck with a truly terrible crack.

Will was cordial to the nurse (the drugs made him too woozy for his usual early-morning vitriol, plus they helped him sit up which was always better so he tried to be nice) but was instantly happier the moment she left and Hannibal came in. Even if he was pretty sure the look on his face was beyond sappy.

Hannibal simply smiled back, that tiny gentleness in the corner of his mouth all for him and the softness in maroon eyes that was never directed at anyone else. “Good morning, Will. How are you feeling today?”

“I haven’t heard or seen anything in three whole days,” Will replied.

“That’s good.” Hannibal then nodded to Draco. “It’s good to see you again, Mr. Malfoy.”

Draco waved back. “I was gonna find coffee. Do you want anything?”

“No, thank you,” Hannibal inclined his head. “I did have some paperwork for the referral with me if you would like to go over that when you return.”

Draco sighed as he stood up. “Work, work, work. The things I do for you, Graham.”

“Shove off Malfoy,” Will replied lightly. “You love me and you know it.”

“You’re lucky I have a weakness for pretty things,” Draco shot in passing over his shoulder. Will stuck his tongue out at the man as he left.

Will caught Hannibal’s gaze and immediately felt childish. He blushed and looked away, embarrassed.

Hannibal gracefully ignored the lapse of maturity. “I think you will like Dr. Haban. She shows great promise. I look forward to seeing where her career leads her.”

“You’re letting me see her,” Will commented. His head felt fuzzy again. “Must be good.”

Hannibal went curiously still. “What do you mean by that?”

“Possessive, of course,” Will replied. Was he slurring his words again? “S’okay, I like it.” Will frowned. “Stop bein’ a statue and come here.”

Hannibal blinked back into life, stepping close and putting a hand to Will’s forehead. “It seems you’re feverish again.”

Will didn’t feel all that feverish, but he let Hannibal have his delusions. Besides, the touch was nice. Will hummed and leaned into it, hoping Hannibal would get the hint.

With a distinct air of bemusement, Hannibal carded his fingers through Will’s hair. Will smiled and closed his eyes, leaning into it. They stayed that way for a moment or two, until Draco hailed his return with a snort.

“Ron was right - you two are disgusting,” he commented.

Will frowned at him. “Like you and Astoria were any better.”
Draco raised a pale eyebrow. “Astoria and I were getting revenge on our families by rubbing the contract in their faces. If we had to be married, they had to suffer.”

Will felt like rolling his eyes, but he wasn’t quite certain if he’d get them back again. “You’re weird.”

“You’re weird,” Draco countered, because they were both all of five. Draco then looked to Hannibal and stated in a much nicer tone, “Sorry, we’re right arseholes to each other most of the time - mornings are worse. I can look at those papers anytime before tomorrow at noon.”

Will blinked. “Flying out so soon?”

Draco shrugged as he took a seat at the table, large coffee in hand. “Things are crazy with the government right now, and as usual I’m stuck in the center. No rest for the wicked, and all that.”

Will couldn’t help the smile. “Thanks for coming.”

Draco rolled his eyes, evidently he was confident they’d return as summoned. “Of course I came. Bloody insecure prat.”

Hannibal moved away in order to remove papers from his bag. He then sat at the table with Draco to go over them, and Will smiled as he watched two of his precious people both fretting over him in their own ways.

It was nice to feel so loved.

Draco ruined the image by pulling out a pair of bifocals. Will laughed.

Draco bristled. “Oi! Shut up, Mr.-Blind-As-A-Fucking-Bat!”

“You’re old, Draco!” Will replied, unable to stop his mirth.

“I’m no older than you are, you wanker!” Draco replied bitterly. “Shut it!”

Will kept laughing.

Draco groaned and plopped his head on the table, muttering about not being caffeinated enough to deal with moronic Gryffindors.

Hannibal was watching the both of them with a smile wider than people normally saw, though. Will liked how it looked on him. Wondered if he could get the man to smile widely enough to show off his teeth.

Best not do it while in the hospital - Will wasn’t certain if he could keep himself from jumping the man’s bones at the sight.

While Will tried to control his libido, Draco looked over more paperwork. “You got the work needed for Will to sign on as one of Dr. Haban’s patients too?”

Hannibal nodded, the motion heavy with smugness. “Being so established in my field is often accompanied with liberties not often gifted to others.”

“And the more you use them and don’t abuse them, the more people are willing to let you get away with,” Draco remarked absently, flipping pages. “Are payments negotiable if she does a good job and Will wants to pay her more?”

“Dr. Haban may not agree, but that is always an option,” Hannibal answered.
Draco nodded and took off his glasses. He stared at Hannibal a moment, the air between them weighted. “It all looks in order but I need to know one thing - do you think she’ll be good for Will?”

“If I did not have the up-most faith in Dr. Haban I wouldn’t have bothered with the referral,” Hannibal replied easily. There was something vaguely frosty in his tone, but Will could tell the man was doing his best not to take offense.

Draco nodded once more. “Right.” He stood, bringing over the papers, a clipboard, and pen.

“They pass?” Will asked. It was meant to be cheeky, but the words came out too slow for it to have been a successful tone.

Draco rolled his eyes again. “Like I’d hand you something that didn’t. We don’t all have abysmal standards, Graham.”

As Will took the items in order to start signing, Draco gave a side-eyed glance to Hannibal and amended, “Well, in matters of paperwork and legality, at least.”

Will blushed, but was too pleased to sputter like Draco had likely assumed he would.

Hannibal’s smooth voice filled the room as he remarked, “In that matter I believe I have undoubtedly received the better end.”

Draco twitched.

Will laughed. “I’m quite aware you love my arse, but I know you couldn’t resist.”

Hannibal raised his left brow by a scant amount.

Will shook his head, signing the first line he needed to. “You’re not as subtle as you think you are.”

“I would apologize,” Hannibal said, “but that would be disingenuous.”

“How long did it take you to notice?” Draco asked, curious.

Will shrugged and admitted, “Everything’s clearer in hindsight.”

Hannibal looked far too amused, but Draco groaned. “Mother Morgana, get me out of here.”

A whole day later Draco looked up, bag in hand, as the door opened to admit Susan. “You’re a lifesaver,” Draco proclaimed, quickly kissing her on one cheek in both greeting and farewell.

“Hey Snipe,” Will called out.

Draco paused in the doorway, looking back.

“Make ‘em bleed,” Will ordered.

Draco’s smirk would have sent his aunt running for the hills. “Rodger that.”

Susan chuckled as she pulled over a chair. “How you doing, golden boy?”

Will smiled back. “Better. A lot better. I almost feel like myself again.”

Susan smirked. “Good - that means we get to tease you about falling for your psychiatrist now,
right?"

Will groaned. “Ron told on me,” he guessed.

Susan laughed. “You better believe it - Neville’s not answering questions since it’s nearly exams so Hannah’s waiting on my report.”

“Traitors, all of you,” Will grumbled. Sighing, he resigned himself to it. “How is Hannah, by the way? I didn’t see her at Christmas.”

“It was a bad few weeks, so we stayed home,” Susan explained. “She’s doing much better now though. The potion regimen our new healer has her on is helping immensely with the pain.”

“Good.” Will nodded. Long ago he’d felt bad about getting out of the war so much more functionally than Hannah. Up until the woman had hauled herself up on her new crutches when he’d hidden in her hospital room from the new emotional chaos of his world to stare him right in the face and tell him to stop that line of thought - she’d take shattered legs over the thorny thicket his brain had turned into any day. Unable to disagree, Will had stopped feeling guilty over her plight.

“She’s releasing a new book soon, too,” Susan added. “Right in time for a potential worldwide audience.”

“How Slytherin of her,” Will remarked. “Flower shop going well?”

Susan smiled and nodded. “Better than your job, I bet.” She sobered and placed a hand over his. “Draco mentioned he had to step in. Legally.”

Will looked away and shrugged, slightly ashamed.

“Will,” Susan called, voice as gentle as the squeeze she gave his hand. “We will always be in your debt, but no matter what fate once said you aren’t actually required to save us all.”

Will swallowed. It physically hurt to drag his eyes to meet her gaze, but Susan of all people deserved the truth. “It feels good to hunt again.”

Susan’s eyes were eclipsed by a dark shadow for naught but a beat a time, but it was enough to call forth recognition in Will’s answering darkness.

There was a very good reason why Susan had opened a flower shop in Hogsmead instead of following in her Aunt’s footsteps like her younger self had dreamed.

“You’re leashing yourself?” she asked, quiet as embers.

Will nodded. “Three scene visits a month - everything else tucked away in a lab. I try not to chase with feet.”

Susan nodded. She gripped his hand harshly in support for a moment before letting it go. “Call me if I need to sit on you,” she ordered, and then she changed the subject. “I finally got around to reading that book you lent me a few years back. What the hell, Will?”

Will chuckled. “I warned you.”

“You said it was weird,” Susan accused. “That wasn’t weird, that was a fucking trip.”

“Like you and Lee Jordan,” Will retorted.
Susan blushed. “Neville had told me but I thought he was having me on.”

Will blinked. “What? He’s handsome, he doesn’t want strings any more than I do - don’t you dare laugh at me Will Graham!”

“Fair’s fair,” Will taunted with a smirk. “Fairly steady for a casual fling, isn’t it?”

Susan snatched a spare pillow and threw it at him. Will laughed and guessed he should be thankful it hadn’t been a book.

He expected to dodge more items, but Susan paused. With a heavy sigh, she revealed, “It’s good. Really good. And he understands that Hannah has my heart and he’ll never see romance from me.”

Will nodded. Surprising as the news had been, he’d thought it’d be a good match up. Good to know things were working out.

“And your man?” Susan asked. “Is he capable of understanding...” she trailed off, vaguely motioning with one hand.

Will found himself smiling, oddly enough. “His darkness was searching for someone who could understand it when it met mine.” Hannibal didn’t yet know just how entrenched in that darkness Will was, but he was certain it was only a matter of time.

“Good.” Her nod was sharp compared to the gentleness of her voice. “I’m glad, Will - you deserve to be happy. More than any of us.”

Will shrugged off the statement and launched into another topic. He didn’t entirely agree with her, but he couldn’t help the giddy feeling in his chest.

He still wasn’t sure if Hannibal would accept him or not, once he told the man the truth, but for the first time in a long time Will thought he might just get the chance to be truly happy.

Now if only he could get out of this damned hospital and get on with it.

Hannibal had offered to stay with him the night he was released, but Will declined. He’d been around people for nearly two months - it was nice to see his friends and reassuring to know they were on guard but Will missed his solitude. Hannibal understood, and so after reassuring his dogs that he was indeed home Will was able to stand in the middle of his house undisturbed and breathe in the quiet.

This was his sanctuary - it had been for years. Will wanted to breathe in the stillness for as long as he could. Soon enough, the strength of these walls would be tested. From within and without, challenges would come.

Draco had called the night before, updating Will on the situation. They were another few weeks away from deciding the matter, but for the first time in years it seemed as if those pushing for a reveal were in the majority.

Will wanted to gather what peace he could - he was sure it wouldn’t last.

His mind was finally clear - they were standing in the eye of the storm.
I couldn't bring myself to call Hermione Mrs. Weasley - I just couldn't. So it stayed Granger. Besides, it would totally be like Hermione to make a name for herself in the Ministry and rub her muggleborn name in their faces while being a boss ass bitch.

Jack was an interesting view to write from, but I liked doing it. He's a hard character to get right but I'm pretty pleased with the results so far.

I love Madchen and Will's connection (it's one of the most beautiful things in S1) but there is literally no way to have that happen here without screwing things up to a beyond ridiculous level. So Ron went and tracked her down, and they got her taken care of. Hannibal has no need to incinerate her so she's at the hospital, getting better. I had to ensure she was going to be alright, so I made Ron do it. Ron is a high-enough ranking auror that he has pull on an international scale so he's able to flash an Interpol badge and most people are either ignorant enough that he gets away with it or just don't give a shit.

Also yes, encephalitis apparently does have all the symptoms go backwards while getting better, oddly enough. So it's hard to tell when the medicine is working. Also it's caused by tumors in 57% of women but only 9% of men. Strange disease, but really interesting reading.

Sorry for the shit chapter. Hoped you liked the cameos. Look forward to some big reveals soon. Please don't shoot the author for the bad puns. It's no worse than the actual show writers have done.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

When the wizarding world decides to get it's head out of it's ass, Will finds himself having to debrief Hannibal and Abigail on the coming situation for their own protection. After all - the wizarding world would never be able to keep it's promises to him. He'd always known that.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys! I'm not dead! *sheepish wave*

I could blame the lateness of this chapter on the new job finally shifting me to full time and the attempts to arrange holiday things and the mad hunt for furniture that will fit in my shoebox apartment the way my roommate and I want it too (failed that - building shit myself it is) but to be honest those aren't the real reasons.

I fell into the Hartwin hole. Sucked me right down. I looked into it because I was curious and planned on seeing the movies soon and one fic turned into eight pages of fics and then a month later I looked up and went 'shit.' Then I had to write this damned thing, and write it well and correctly, because you guys deserve all of that and more for being so wonderful and patient with me. Plus you deserve it for that outpouring of love after the last chapter, which was lovely and confusing after how hard that thing was to write and how much I hated it at the end. So yes, this is for you all my darlings. The Big Reveal is here. Or, one of them.

Timeline help because this episode takes place in the dead of winter in the show and now that I've been looking for a timeline I'm frustrated by the lack of coherency and permanent-winter everything after the angel-maker has in season 1. So in this fic it's the first couple of weeks of August, FBI academy is just starting the semester, Will was in the hospital 3 and 1/2 months. Ish.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will was home, he had his dogs back, he was healthy and sane (for a certain definition of sanity) and everything was back to being how he wanted it to be.

Which, naturally, meant he was currently stuck in the one place he didn’t want to be.

Dr. Mirabelle Haban was a short woman with a spine of steel - a thin rapier, Will decided. Pretty, embellished and giving off the implication that it was only worn for ceremonial engagements, but kept in killing shape. Her office was warm and neutral, looking to put people at ease. It was somehow more personable than Hannibal’s office, including knickknacks that didn’t scream of high-art morbid pretension. She had a little painted clay wizard, for Merlin’s sa -

There, on the brim of the wizard’s hat, was a tiny golden snitch.
Will’s eyes immediately darted back to the suit-clad woman who Hannibal trusted to be his therapist. She raised an eyebrow back at him, challenging, clearly having noticed his gaze.

Screw it - subtly had never been one of his strong suits. “Muggle-born or squib?”

“Squib,” Dr. Haban replied candidly. “Let me guess - British?”

“Yeah,” Will replied. “How are we doing this?”

“At the desk or in the chairs, whichever you feel most comfortable with,” Dr. Haban mentioned with a wave. “And should I call you Mr. Graham or Will?”

“Will is fine,” he answered, taking the chair in front of the desk. The office wasn’t as large as Hannibal’s, and the business-like nature of sitting in front of the desk helped settle something in him.

“Feel free to call me Mirabelle, if it doesn’t weird you out,” Dr. Haban replied seemingly absent-mindedly as she rifled through papers on her desk. “You mind if I take notes?”

“No,” Will said, even though he kind of did. Hannibal not taking them had been really nice. But he didn’t feel she was out to study him, so...

There was an old photo on the right side of the desk. Worn, faded, but obviously well-loved, it showed an older teen with Mirabelle’s stark features and a mischievous nature hidden in the corner of her smile. The edges of the photo looked like Will’s scrapbook photos did - rough from fingers, stained with old tears. “Who’s the girl?”

Mirabelle paused, pen in hand. A small, pained smile arrived. “My sister,” she answered softly. There was pride in her voice - pride as unmistakable as her grief. “She never let me believe what my dad told me about being a squib.”

Will knows that look. He has seen it in the mirror. The words are out of his mouth before he knew what they would be. “She died for you.”

Mirabelle nodded once. Searching eyes turn on him. She, too, must recognize something in his gaze, for she asks, “Someone died for you, then?”

Will’s smile cracks into being - a brittle, bitter thing. “Whole damn country of them.”

“You fought in the Second Rising,” Mirabelle surmised. She evidently interpreted his silence for the answer it was and looked him squarely in the eye with a strength few civilians have. “The only person who could even begin to claim that every one of those deaths were for him would be Harry Potter, and you’re certainly not...”

Will had flinched. Mirabelle had certainly caught it. It was, however, nonetheless amusing to see her pen fall just as fast as her jaw.

“No. No way.”

Will shrugged one shoulder, uncomfortable.

After a few more minutes of Mirabelle staring at him and Will awkwardly darting his eyes about to study all the distracting shit on her desk, Mirabelle finally found her voice. “I am going to have an inappropriately sized glass of whiskey when I get home.”

Will couldn’t help but to laugh. “Feel free to hand me off if you need to.”
“No, no,” Mirabelle flapped her left hand around. “I’ll be fine. I’m only playing therapist to the man everyone will want a piece of if the community comes out.”

Will hadn’t heard it phrased that way before. It was much more subtle. “Draco can draw up something with more protection if you need him to.”

“Thank you, but no.” Mirabelle straightened up, the steel in her eyes coming to a sharp point. “I’m sorry for the moment of shock - I’ll address the first issue now.” Mirabelle’s hands went to her collar, which she started unbuttoning. “I’m not stripping,” she assured him, before pulling her shirt aside far enough to show the scar on her neck.

It was huge, thick - skirted her jugular and trailed off across her shoulder.

Will winced, his side throbbing in sympathy. “Strong cutting curse,” he observed.

Mirabelle nodded. “My father was never happy to have a shameful blot on the family tree - less so that my sister refused to pretend that I didn’t exist even in polite company. I got out with just this when we ran away only because she shielded me with her own body.”

Will blinked. He could imagine it all too well without the aid of his empathy. A silhouette of agony, framed in crimson.

“I don’t let it cripple me,” Mirabelle pressed on - unrelenting. The true strike of a practiced swordsman who’s found a weak point. “Because I know that to do so would dishonor her memory.” Mirabelle found and caught Will’s eyes, her own a brick wall forcing him to hold. “Those people who you think died for you - and I’ll be generous and say maybe even a fourth of them actually did - damn well thought you were worth it. Are you going to waste what they wanted you to have so badly they valued it above their own lives?”

Sirius, smile bitter but soft. Always arguing with anyone who would hear. Always doing his best to grab Harry and hold him close - give him a home. Screaming matches with Mrs. Weasley because he thought Harry deserved to know what he needed to in order to survive the war.

Sirius, rushing to the ministry with only the knowledge that Harry might need him.

Will swallowed back the bile in his throat. “I don’t think I would have turned into this if Sirius hadn’t died.”

Mirabelle cocked her head to one side, a thoughtful eyebrow raised. “Do you really think he’d care that much about who you became?”

_Pup, if you hadn’t needed me I would have been out taking revenge on the world myself._

Those words were always with him, though silent in the back of his head. Will had spent one night halfway through his road trip outrageously drunk and ended up calling Sirius’ ghost to beg forgiveness. The man’s answer had not been expected, but it had been exactly what he’d needed.

Will, grudgingly, acknowledged that Mirabelle might have had a point.

It must have shown on his face, because Mirabelle nodded. “Unless you’ve got something else you think takes precedence, I think we should start there. Life is going to be so much easier when you don’t feel guilty for breathing - you’ll see.”
Hannibal couldn’t help but to admire the woman he’d referred Will to as Will recounted his first day of therapy over the phone. “I take it things went well, then?”

Will gave a wry laugh. “It was probably the most efficient session I’ve ever had.”

Hannibal tried not to feel hurt at that - he hadn’t actually been out to help Will with his problems, after all. Manipulation towards a desired outcome and true help were entirely different things after all. “I’m glad we could find you a good fit.”

“Yeah,” Will replied, “especially since I’m pretty sure most of our sessions just turned into work talk and flirting.”

Hannibal paused.

Eventually, Will’s worried voice popped up. “Hannibal?”

“Apologies,” Hannibal replied, forcing himself back into motion. “I wasn’t aware I had been that obvious.”

“It took me a while to read you, so you’re probably safe,” Will replied. Hannibal briefly wondered if the man was soothing his pride. “Is your dinner soon?”

Hannibal checked the clock. “Indeed. Am I still welcome tomorrow?”

“Always,” Will replied. “Have a good night, Hannibal.”

“Goodnight, darling Will,” Hannibal returned. It still made him happy to be able to say that freely. He truly was becoming a sap in his old age, wasn’t he?

Well, at least he hadn’t fallen too far from his norm, Hannibal mused, looking at the plate of ‘lamb’ he was serving his guest.

Hannibal wondered how long it would be before Will could join him in that knowledge.

The doorbell rang right on time.

“Good evening, Dr. Chilton.”

Will sighed. “Why am I here, Jack?”

Jack gave him a raised eyebrow and gestured to the nearby decorated tree. Organs were hanging off it like ornaments, with bows of veins tied around them. It was actually pretty impressive.

Will didn’t bother to shrug but did give Jack a raised brow of his own. “Gideon escaped and probably wants to find the Ripper, coupled with a side of revenge. Still not understanding why you called me, Jack.”

“I want you to see if you can tell where he’s heading,” Jack replied. His voice and emotions were controlled, for now, but firm and unbending.

Tough cauldron for Jack - Will didn’t feel like bending today, either.

“You’ve spent almost four months doing your job without me, Jack. I’m sure you can continue that. I’ve only been out a week.”
Oh look - that vein in Jack’s neck was pronounced. Although, interestingly enough, the pronunciation was softened by the flash of guilt in his eyes. “Then why the hell did you show up?”

“I had to give Bev her book back,” Will replied blithely, walking over to do just that. “Should I put this on your car or...?”

“Just throw it in my bag,” Beverly replied, gesturing with a gloved hand. “Thanks, Will. How’s the head?”

“Not on fire,” Will replied. “I’m sleeping again.”

“Oh yeah?” Beverly raised an eyebrow at him, but it was coupled with a teasing smile. “How’s that feel?”

Will scrunched his nose up in some form of face. “Weird.”

Beverly laughed.

“I’ll pop by later in the week,” Will told her. He then turned to Jack. “You should think about Gideon’s probability for wanting revenge more than meeting the Ripper.” And the he left.

Ah, Will thought as he ignored the sounds and awareness of Jack’s angry twitching, it was nice to feel like himself again.

Even better to go visit Chilton with Alana. It was always so nice to watch Alana’s anger blossom into being. She didn’t get angry often, but it was a righteous fury Will hadn’t seen in a very long time and was looking forward to witnessing again.

Also, deepening his friendship with the woman now that he wasn’t drugged out of his head was nice, too.

“You look better,” Alana told him as she drove to the BSHCI. “You feeling rested enough for the new semester?”

“It’s just teaching,” Will replied. “If I can do that while my brain’s on fire I can certainly do it now.”

Alana, thankfully, just laughed. “Alright. But just know that you can call me to take a class or two if you’re feeling strained.”

Will nodded. Her willingness to believe him was a nice change of pace. They talked about the coming year, as Alana had a small class of her own this time, instead of merely a few guest lectures, and just generally enjoyed themselves until they arrived at the hospital.

The sudden shift in Alana from gentle woman to vengeful spirit about to chew someone up was really quite lovely to see.

Chilton didn’t help his own case. “I suppose this is my fault, too.” He turned from sitting sideways at his desk to head-on, facing them.

Will walked further into the office, Alana trailing him. “You did dodge a bullet,” he remarked. “Gideon’s escape foregoes a trial and the very public humiliation that would have gone with it.”

“And now you are hosting a private one,” Chilton countered. His attempt to verbally spar just made Will want to laugh. Oh, this poor man watching his dreams of fame crumble before him. Chilton kept talking. “Next you’ll be accusing me of arranging his escape.”
“No one’s making that accusation,” Alana clarified.

Will mentally added, *if only because we don’t believe you’d be capable of pulling that off.*

“If we’re tossing around the blame, Dr. Bloom, you’re due your fair share,” Chilton said with a smug tone. “You planted the idea that I was unethically manipulating Gideon.”

Alana bit back. “Well according to Gideon, you *were.*”

“After you told him I was. You thought I was manipulating him?” Chilton asked with a laugh. “He was manipulating you.”

“You were pushing him,” Alana retorted.

“He gave me informed consent to treat him.”

Yeah, Will doubted that statement was as dubious manipulation free as Chilton implied it was.

Chilton looked at his hands as he continued. “Said that he was... grateful for my help in understanding who he is.”

“Yeah, I doubt that,” Will interjected. “What exactly was he grateful for? The change in scenery?”

Chilton puffed up like a damn bird - shoulders raising in offense. “I helped him understand that he was not insane when he killed his wife. Killing her drove him insane.”

Will rolled his eyes.

“I did not convince Gideon that he was a serial killer,” Chilton insisted again, standing in order to better stare Will down. Or try to, anyway. “I just reminded him of the fact.”

“Gideon is not the Chesapeake Ripper,” Will replied forcefully, finding himself offended on Hannibal’s behalf. “Although he might have thought he was under your care, Doctor.” Will spit the last word out with all the derision he could muster.

Alana could probably sense this was one step away from a fight. “Whether he is or he isn’t doesn’t really matter right now,” she interrupted. “If he thinks he is or if he’s confused on that issue he *will* kill again.”

“I hope he does not. I mean,” Chilton added condescendingly, “for your sake.”

Will felt his forehead raise in confusion as Alana gaped.

Chilton looked at the ceiling in a mockery of concern as he stated, “Cannot imagine how you would sleep with that on your shoulders.”

And there went Alana. She actually got extremely close to screaming. “How did you sleep when Gideon killed your nurse?”

Will stepped between the two of them, putting his hand on Alana’s shoulder in comfort. As much as he was enjoying this, it would probably not be wise to let Alana haul off and slug the man.

“What does Gideon *want?*” Will asked plainly as Alana let out a deep, scornful breath of anger.

Chilton sat down and continued the attempt to protect his narrative. “The last thing Abel Gideon said to me is that he intends to tell everyone that he *is* the Chesapeake Ripper.”
Will didn’t hide the scoff. “Considering he was suing you for putting that thought there, Dr. Chilton, I don’t believe you.” Without the courtesy of a goodbye, Will left, dragging Alana with him. Once back in the car he asked her, “You think the FBI might be curious to see how Chilton’s really handling the institution they depend on to hold their worst cases?”

Alana’s face was shocked, thoughtful, and then slowly, terribly gleeful. “There have been a number of suspicious events happening this year, haven’t there?”

Will smiled back, and Alana’s good spirits returned. She practically sang the whole way back to Quantico.

Will finished setting up for his classes, which mainly consisted of assuring the Dean that yes, he would be there to teach an acceptable majority of the time. The lesson plan didn’t often change, besides those few flex days he had worked into the schedule for the purpose of discussing new killers and cases. Or whatever he thought the students needed more time on.

Will thought a moment about the fact that Draco’s last text had said he thought the vote might actually pass, and mentally shrugged before changing the schedule to put a few more of those days in. The students would likely all need plenty of time to come to grips with the new world opened at their fingertips, and Will wasn’t about to let them run off to confront a now open Wizarding World without any preparation.

Will looked over his lesson plans a second time. Then a third time. And then he dithered around and played angry birds on his phone (one of the nephews had put it on there as a prank, and Will had just never taken it off). Finally, when he felt enough time had passed, Will went to the labs.

Jack pounced almost immediately. “So good of you to join us, Will.”

“I’ve got classes to prepare for,” Will retorted. “If I’m going to do my job properly I’m going to have to actually make my consulting second in importance - the students come first.”

Jack subsided, probably not really believing him. That was alright - Will would ensure the man didn’t push him around this time.

Beverly, fantastic Beverly shot him a smile before going right back to arguing with Zeller about scrambling brains not counting as a real lobotomy.

Scrambled brains. Well. Alright then.

Will spared a moment to wonder why he got all the weird ones.

Jack let them run on a minute before interjecting, “Why remove all of the other organs from the bodies and leave them intact, and just scramble the brain?”

Will answered. “It’s what they did to him. Chilton, every psychiatrist and PhD candidate who attempted any kind of therapy - pushed and prodded, administered tests to tell him who he was and who he wasn’t.”

Jack sighed, and once again they were on the same sad page. “We’re going to need to send out protective details, aren’t we?”

“Most likely,” Will answered.
“All right,” Jack accepted the responsibility well. “I want a list of of every therapist, every doctor, any kind of psychiatric professional that worked with or talked to Dr. Gideon.”

Will blinked. His mouth spoke words as his brain ran ahead, pathways and possibilities and contingencies. “Alana Bloom will be on that list.” Will caught Beverly’s eye. “Call me if you need any help, or email me, but I’ll be largely unavailable until Gideon’s caught.”

Beverly nodded. “Go take care of our girl - don’t worry about this part.”

Will nodded back in thanks and left. He took out his phone as he did so, calling the first number on his list.

Hannibal picked up. “Is everything alright, Will?” He sounded worried, which made sense considering this was his emergencies only line.

Will honestly couldn’t care - this was important. “Did you ever visit Abel Gideon in a psychiatric capacity?”

“No, I did not,” Hannibal replied. “I don’t believe I really knew of him until he thought he was the Ripper. Why?”

“He’s going after his past psychiatrists,” Will stated. “I’m going to be with Alana until he’s brought in - wanted to make sure you were safe and I didn’t have to guard you too.”

He could practically hear Hannibal’s smile. “I am perfectly capable of protecting myself, Will, but thank you. Go to Alana - I’ll bring something by her house later tonight, shall I?”

“That’d be great,” Will admitted. “It’ll be me, Alana, and two to three cops. I’ll text you the number when I know - I know you’re going to insist on feeding everyone.”

“Of course,” Hannibal replied. “I must get back to my patient - I’ll see you tonight, Will.”

“Bye.” Will hung up and let out a large sigh of relief. Thank Merlin he didn’t have to protect Hannibal too - that might have been a little much on his psyche so soon after being released from the hospital.

Will knocked on the open door to Alana’s office. “Getting settled in alright?”

Alana smiled up at him. “Yes - it’s going to be strange coming here every day.”

Will huffed a small laugh. “What, like you haven’t basically been doing that for the past year?”


“Abel Gideon is going after the psychiatrists who treated him,” Will replied. “The bodies down in the lab had their brains literally scrambled. So you’re getting me and a protective detail until he’s caught.”

Alana, gently strong woman that she was, only took a moment to process that before nodding. She shuffled some papers around before - head down, not looking at him - she asked, “They’re going to kill Gideon, aren’t they?”

Will drew on every inch of the authority he’d had during the war to comfort her. “Whatever happens to Gideon has nothing to do with you.”
Alana finally looked up at him. “Gideon can’t be completely responsible for his actions if he was subjected to an outside influence.”

“Gideon may not know who he is at the moment but that isn’t why he’s doing this,” Will countered. “This is revenge, Alana - plain and simple. Gideon wants to strike back at those who hurt him. You may have told him he was being manipulated, but how he deals with that reality is on him, not you.”

Alana didn’t look convinced, but it seemed she was wavering.

“I’ve seen revenge, Alana,” Will told her, softly. “I know what it does to people. I’ve watched friends fall apart in their longing for it - I’ve looked in the mirror and seen myself after months of searching for my own. The actions one takes in deciding to pursue revenge are that person’s choice and responsibility alone - no matter the circumstances.”

“But I’m the one who told him he wasn’t in a state of mind to know who he was,” Alana softly stated.

“You,” Will retorted, “saw a victim and gave him the power to change that. What he chooses to do with that power is beyond your control and not your fault.”

“Which doesn’t mean it isn’t my responsibility,” Alana shot back.

Will nodded. “So we help the investigation and do what we can. But responsibility and fault are two different things.” Something his new therapist had begun to drill into his head in a way that he hadn’t really understood before.

He missed the word games with Hannibal, but there was no denying Mirabelle’s approach was getting better results.

Alana nodded and looked like she’d be faster at learning that lesson than he himself had been. Will was glad - Alana deserved better than this. “So you’ve taken it upon yourself to accompany the protection detail, hm?”

Will snorted. “Like I’d trust anyone else with your well-being.”

Alana shot him an unimpressed look. “This is their job, Will.”

“And they do it well, but people, even agents, can let their guard down too easily,” Will shot back. He thought a moment and then amended, “Unless they’ve been in the military - those ones are better.”

Alana gave him a long, assessing look. “I hadn’t known you’d been in the armed service,” she stated slowly.

Will shrugged. If that piece of information helped her develop a better picture of him, then he’d gladly give it to her. “It’s classified.”

Alana’s frown deepened, but she didn’t protest when Will had her walk with him to drop by his office so he could pack up before accompanying her to meet her protection detail.

That night, after dinner had been handed out and devoured and everyone seen to and full, Hannibal took Will aside in the kitchen and cupped his face in two large, calloused hands. “How are you fairing, William?”
Will sighed and let himself lean into Hannibal. For a serial killer, Hannibal took the utmost care in curving his body to welcome Will’s weight. “The stress isn’t nice, but it’s familiar. I’m handling it.”

“You will speak with Dr. Haban about this, won’t you?” Hannibal implored. “And though our relationship is no longer professional, you are always free to lean on me as well.”

Will gave a small smile. “Of course, Hannibal.”

There was no telling if this new spark between them would survive the unveiling of Will’s past. He would hold tight as long as he could.

Something of his desperation must have shown on his face, for Hannibal chose that moment to lean in and press reassurance to his lips. It was soft, gentle, yielding - tender in a way most wouldn’t believe a man like Hannibal to be capable of, nor of a man like Will to deserve.

When Hannibal pulled away, his eyes were gentle with a terrible love. His thumb took greater care than necessary as it glided soothingly on Will’s cheek. “Whatever you fear, my love, we will confront it in time.”

“That time may be nearer than you think.” Will’s voice was little more than whisper, so frightened was he to lose this precious, terrifying thing.

“I shall sharpen my knives,” Hannibal replied with a ballsy courage. He was lucky Will already knew about the source of his meat.

“Do you two need any help?” Alana called politely from around the corner. She probably didn’t want to walk in on anything.

“We’re fine, thank you,” Hannibal called back.

Alana walked in then, giving them a once-over - presumably looking for reassurance that they hadn’t been getting freaky in her kitchen. “I turned down the bed in the guest room, will you be needing a place too, Hannibal?”

Hannibal shook his head. “I have patients early in the morning, so I believe I’ll return home. Thank you for the offer, Alana.”

She nodded, and saw Hannibal to the door. She kindly averted her eyes as Hannibal gave Will a goodbye kiss - surprising and sweet, just the sort of thing Will had never thought he’d live long enough to get.

Too soon Hannibal was gone, and the air between Alana and Will got a little bit awkward. The fact of her crush loomed, and Will fidgeted with his glasses while attempting to think of something to say.

“I wasn’t certain what to think, at first,” Alana softly admitted, “but you two are good together.”

Will felt his face heat up like a bonfire. “We haven’t been together long,” he mumbled in half-hearted protest.

“I think you two were intimate for longer than you realize,” Alana replied thoughtfully.

Will didn’t respond - she was probably right.

Alana, graciously, let it go. “Come on - I’ll show you the guest room.”
Will had been right about Alana and her sense of responsibility, so unfortunately he found himself stuck in the lab after class almost every day for the first week. The columbian necktie was interesting, as was the fact that Freddie Lounds was now apparently Gideon’s hostage. Will couldn’t help but hope it would inspire the woman to lay off or, dare he hope, go into a different career.

Then the second corpse hit, and Will barely resisted rolling his eyes.

Alana looked like this case was getting to her. Her face was strained as she identified the latest body. “Dr. Carson Nahn. He’s the psychiatric attending at Western General.” Alana paused for a fortifying breath. “He interviewed Dr. Gideon for the same psychopathy survey I participated in two years ago.”

“Total frenectomy,” Zeller reported as Jack’s face scrunched inwards in concentration. “Webbing under the tongue, the connective tissue into the throat is cut free and pulled through for the... desired effect.”

Jack walked closer. “Still no word from Dr. Chilton?”

“He hasn’t answered his phone since yesterday,” Alana replied. “Didn’t show up to work today.”

*Good riddance,* Will couldn’t help but to think. He didn’t voice that opinion as he added, “If Gideon wants to lure the ripper then he’s going to offer up the man who disrespected both of their identities.”

Good riddance, Will couldn’t help but to think. He didn’t voice that opinion as he added, “If Gideon wants to lure the ripper then he’s going to offer up the man who disrespected both of their identities.”

Jack sighed before gesturing to the corpses. “Every detail of Dr. Carruthers’ murder, as described meticulously in Freddie Lounds’ article, has been faithfully reproduced except,” Jack reached forward to grab the sheet, “for one.” He flipped back the sheet, revealing a missing arm.

Wow. Hannibal really wasn’t in the mood for subtlety, was he?

*Did we have a date or something this interfered with?* Will wondered. *Maybe he was just planning to ask me on one?*

Will had to stare at them in disbelief as Jack and Zeller explained that Freddie hadn’t written anything about the latest corpse. “That’s because Gideon didn’t kill this man - the ripper did.”

Jack crossed his arms.

Will raised one eyebrow at him, incredulous. “Come on Jack - where’s the last place you saw a severed arm?”

Jack reflected Will’s incredulity right back at him. “You think the ripper’s trying to tell us where to find Gideon.”

“Gideon has Freddie Lounds,” Will replied. “The ripper’s not going to risk exposure just to avenge his ego. Us catching Gideon is the next best thing.”

Jack’s sigh was more of a controlled blast of angry dragon’s breath, but he did storm out to arrange a rescue. Will took one look at Alana’s drawn face and nodded. “Let’s go,” he told her, and she followed without protest. Will took her to one of the small coffee nooks on campus (couldn’t take her outside the grounds without a full protective detail) and soon had her sitting in a defensible corner with a soothing cup of tea.

Alana stared into her cup with that same look, and Will figured it was time for a reversal of their
normal roles.

“Why wasn’t it me,” Will softly started. Alana jerked her head up to stare at him in shock. “That’s what you’re thinking now. ‘Why wasn’t it me?’ Then you’ll start feeling guilty for having a protection detail while Dr. Nahn’s didn’t get to him in time. You’ll list reasons why that might be, and feel guilty for being that much more important in the eyes of the FBI.”

Alana frowned at him a moment before venturing, “You sound like you know.”

Will gave a grimace of a smile and wished this wasn’t a dry campus. If the vote went through he’d have to get used to everyone knowing - might as well start by telling his friends. “I was a high-profile target of a... let’s call them a cult faction. People died for me, Alana, all the damn time. If anyone understands survivor's guilt it’s me.”

Alana reached out to take his hand. “Part of that classified thing you never speak about?”

Will nodded. Despite not being overly fond of touch, he squeezed her hand in support. “I get it, Alana. And if you need someone to remind you it’s not your fault, or simply breath with you and understand, just let me know.”

Alana noded, but didn’t release his hand. So they finished their tea in silence, and then Will accompanied the protection detail back to Alana’s house. It had been quieter without Hannibal, and Will missed him, but the time with Alana was turning out to be really good for their friendship. They even joked and laughed through dinner, interrupted only by Will’s phone.

“Sorry,” he excused himself, stepping into the hall and picking up. “Who’s hurt?”

“No one,” Hermione immediately assured him. Her voice was strained, however.

Will was very concerned, now. “Mione? What’s going on?”

Hermione was silent a while. Then, she spoke. “The vote passed.”

Will blinked, and felt the world stand on end. “...What?”

“It passed, Will. The Wizarding World is coming out.”

Will blinked again. Everything would be different, now. He wasn’t going to be able to hide - he might lose everything he’d gained - but if it kept more dark lords from rising....

The sound of glass shattering interrupted his thoughts. “Call you back,” Will barked before dropping the call and running for the kitchen.

Alana was backing away, Gideon in front of her with a strange look. He was saying something, but Will didn’t waste focus on figuring out what. He simply aimed.

Gideon went down in a stream of blood.

Alana rushed towards him. When she was close enough Will latched a hand out and snagged Alana’s arm, dragging her behind him while keeping the gun level in his other hand.

“Is he - did you -” Alana’s usual gift for words seemed to leave her.

“No,” Will answered as the agents stationed in the house joined them, “he’ll live.” Will had deliberately not taken the headshot considering how troubled Alana had been earlier over the prospect of Gideon’s death. No need to traumatize the woman any more than she’d already be.
The agents got Gideon contained while calling the cops. Will looked after Alana as they waited, her hand fisted in the sleeve of his shirt. She remained hiding behind him until a bound Gideon was taken from the room. The head of the protection detail, Chad, walked over to them. “What happened?”

“I stepped out to take a call,” Will reported. “Heard the glass break and ran back in - Gideon was advancing. So I shot him in the shoulder, at which point Agents Barry and Lance came in. Good reaction time, although I don’t know why Alana was alone in front of a window.”

“Agent Dominic only went to grab someone so he could take his break,” Alana answered. “I told him I’d be fine - there was no reason to think I wouldn’t be.”

Chad nodded. “Alright then. The oddest thing is why he showed up here at all - last report I got was the team assigned the case had tracked him to an observatory.”

“I’d like to know that too.” Will couldn’t help the steel in his tone - he had a long history of not being forgiving on matters of poor communication during hostile situations. “If they hadn’t found him there we should have received word - it’s been long enough since they headed out.”

“I’ll call someone,” Chad agreed. He then turned to Alana, countenance softening. “We’ll stay the night at least, Ms. Bloom. Maybe the week, if it helps bring you some peace of mind.”

“No need to waste resources on me,” Alana demurred. “I’ll find a therapist. And a better home security system.” With a deep breath, she shook herself out of her shock. “Let me make up the guest room for your shifts.”

Will grabbed his phone out of his pocket and went with her. He fired off the first text to Hermione - Threat neutralized, situation stable. Will call soon - and a second to Hannibal, informing him of what had just happened. He kept alert, just in case, and noticed Alana’s wary glances at the window.

“You get used to it,” he informed her.

Alana gave him a shaky smile. “I’ve seen enough cases to know what I’ll be in for,” she replied. “I’ll do some therapy and be alright in time.”

“Feel free to call me at any point,” Will offered.

Alana shot him a gentle smile that seemed odd, considering. “You know Will, I was never frightened. Not really. Somehow I knew it would be okay with you there.”

Will laughed at that. “I see my reputation precedes me.”

Nonetheless, he helped her finish getting the room ready and then changed as Alana went to prepare for bed. He found Chad, who reported that Jack had found Freddie Lounds and an organ-less Frederick Chilton at the observatory, and then went up to Alana’s room.

The look she gave him despite being curled up in bed when he merely plopped in a chair by her bed was one he remembered far too well.

“First few nights are the hardest,” Will reasoned. “You should at least sleep easy tonight.”

“Thank you,” Alana stated, and turned to face the window before relaxing.

When she was sleeping, Will called Hermione back.
“Status?” Hermione demanded.

“All quiet,” Will reported. “What about the decision?”

“The Wizarding World is coming out,” Hermione dutifully explained. “We’re now debating on how to roll it out, although we’ve actually already discussed most of that too. Right now they’re fighting over who’s going to lead the charge - first face is going to have a lot of publicity, after all. Those with applications to inform muggles will likely get permission to tell those people before the official reveal, however, so it isn’t as much of a shock.”

“Individual basis or community?” Will inquired.

“People can reveal themselves as they wish, just in case they don’t think it’s safe,” Hermione stated. Then she paused. “Will... I don’t know how long you’ll have.”

Will snorted. “Given the current minister? I’ll be lucky to get three months before he caves and the world knows about me.”

“Draco and I will do damage control,” Hermione informed him. “We’ll start it early, even. And all of us have our DA coins - if you need us, you call us.”

“Promise,” Will replied. “And you guys call me in if you need me, understand? I’m not putting any of you through anything you don’t have to do just for some privacy.” Then he sighed. “I’m on sentry tonight - I’ll call you back tomorrow, yeah?”

“Okay Will, be safe.”

“You too.” Will hung up, then, and settled back in his chair for a long night.

“How do you feel, knowing the community has decided to reveal itself?” Mirabelle asked in their next session.

Will fiddled with his glasses. “Scared,” he admitted.

Mirabelle read him like a textbook - she really was good at her job. “Frightened of losing everything you’ve gained?”

Will shrugged. “The most talked-of topic is going to be the Second Rising. And everyone is going to wonder where Harry Potter is. Being found is inevitable.”

“And you think that revelation will drive away your friends,” Mirabelle replied. She raised a skeptical eyebrow at him. “You do realize that most of your friends hunt serial killers for a living, right?”

“People don’t always make sense,” Will retorted. “They’ll see me differently, after this.”

“Maybe things that didn’t make sense before will once they know,” was Mirabelle’s soft reply. “They may find themselves no longer frightened of you, once they learn you grew up in a war. Things they thought were warning signs explained as reasonable symptoms of PTSD.”

Will gave her a questioning look.

She shrugged. “I read weird things - especially when all the bigwigs at conferences spend hours debating trash tabloids.”
Will couldn’t help the wry smile.

But nothing would curb his fear. He had some deep-seated abandonment issues. Mirabelle was turning out to be the best therapist he’d ever had, but he’d only been seeing her for a few weeks now. The churning in his gut wasn’t going to evaporate magically.

Especially considering the task he had to complete.

Will was going to tell Hannibal and Abigail everything, right from the start. If this budding family had any chance of surviving the coming storm they needed to be prepared. And Will had long ago vowed to never, ever send unprepared soldiers into battle. Not if he could help it.

He told the old crew of this, during the long conference call they held. They were laying plans and contingencies and reassuring themselves that this wouldn’t get the best of them.

Nothing else had managed to tear these last survivors to pieces - opening up to the muggle world would not defeat them. They wouldn’t let it.

“Muggles getting killed by wizards is going to be the worst kind of publicity,” Draco cautioned.

“Don’t care,” Will interjected, harsh and cold. “I’m not losing anyone to the conflicts this will bring - most of you will be highly visible figures and you will defend yourselves as needed. Am I understood?”

It spoke to how much they hadn’t been able to leave behind after the war, that his former DA simply agreed to his order just as easily now as they had in the midst of battle.

At the end of the conference call, Hermione informed them that in two days the announcement for those with applications to tell muggles would be informed they were allowed to tell them before the larger reveal.

Will hung up and looked at the bottle of whiskey on his desk with a sour feeling in his gut.

It was time to stop hiding.

Hannibal wasn’t entirely certain for the reasoning behind Abigail’s sudden insistence that he take her home for the weekend, but he was happy enough to do so. Especially once he saw the joy on her face.

“The greatest thing just happened, Hannibal!” Abigail greeted him, beaming as if to put the sun to shame. “We’ve got to visit Will!”

“We must, must we?” Hannibal gently teased. “Is Will aware of this?”

“I called him,” Abigail dismissed the courtesy with a wave. “Come on, Hannibal!”

Well, this was certainly going to be a more interesting day than Hannibal had presumed. “What has you so excited, Abigail?”

“I can’t tell you yet,” Abigail answered. “I need to wait for Will. Oh yeah! He said not to worry about dinner - he got takeout.”

Hannibal couldn’t help the slight grimace at that, but he supposed he could handle it for one night. Whatever had Abigail so joyous was obviously important. He could almost feel her anticipation.
crawling along his skin.

“I put in an application ages ago,” Abigail stated as they drove to Wolf Trap, apparently unable to contain herself. “It usually takes longer than this, but with the vote passing - oh! I’m so excited, Hannibal, I’ve been waiting to share this with you for months!”

“I’m glad you could trust me with your secrets,” Hannibal stated, suspicious.

“Of course I can,” Abigail retorted. “It’s the government that was being stupid.”

Did this have something to do with all the classified areas of Will’s file? He’d also mentioned an application, but that was Britain, and Abigail was American....

What on earth was going on?

_Well_, Hannibal surmised, pulling up to Will’s house, _I guess I’m about to find out._

Abigail bounded out of the car, skipping up the steps as Hannibal followed sedately behind. He reached her after Abigail finished knocking, and they could hear the distant sound of dogs barking. When the door opened, Abigail unleashed the full depth of her joy. “Will! Did you hear? We can tell -”

Hannibal had to surmise that Abigail had finally taken a look at Will, given how quickly her sentence died. The man’s face was stone, his eyes haunted by ghosts which refused to be named.

Will faced them with a look in his eyes Hannibal had only seen in dreams. It was a far more chilling sight than he’d imagined it would be. “Come on - there’s something I need to tell you both.” He turned away, heading back inside.

Abigail caught Hannibal’s eye, her exuberance and cheer vanishing into a subtle twitch that betrayed her worry. Hannibal gave her a concerned glance of his own, and then gestured for her to go ahead. The atmosphere would never be rid of the heavy cloud intruding on them if they allowed the growing fear to turn them away.

Besides, Will deserved better than cowardice.

Inside, Will met them with two glasses of whiskey. There was rather more than usually advisable in each. “You’ll need it,” he said as they took them. “And I’m not going to give you guys more than that.” Will grabbed the near-full bottle off the side table with a possessive grip, whistled at the dogs, and led them all to the back door.

The dogs ran about, cheerful and happy in direct counterpoint to the moods of their human watchers, and Will sat on the back porch as he opened the bottle. Abigail sat near him and then looked up at Hannibal. “You might want to sit, before we start,” she advised.

Hannibal felt the stirrings of worry turn sour in his gut, and sat on Will’s other side. If only to get them to explain that much faster.

Will’s jaw clenched only once before he opened his mouth, and spoke. “First, you need to know that there is a world existing alongside yours, hidden.” Will turned to Abigail. “Would you do the honors?”

Abigail smiled, though the tense air still hanging about showed itself in the tremble at the right corner of her lip. Her hands, however, were steady as they reached into her sleeve and slid free a - a long stick. Grasping it oddly, delicate in position yet firm in muscle and heft, she tapped the stick upon
one of the dog toys on the porch. And turned it into a frog.

Hannibal very nearly dropped his glass.

Abigail pointer her - her *wand*, dear Lord, at the new frog and stated, “*Wingardium Leviosa.*” The frog began to croak and flail as it floated in the air, moving in sync with the motions of Abigail’s wand.

“Magic is real,” Will surmised in his mastery of dry wit. “Quit playing with the frog, Abigail.”

Abigail gave a sheepish grin and turned the frog back into a dog toy. She and Will both turned to Hannibal. Abigail’s face was a maring contradiction of hope and fear. Will’s was without emotion, the absence of which made all the more alarming than any boldly-expressed aspect of fear.


Contrary to expectation, Will’s face darkened with all the sudden rage of summer storms. “That’s what I need to tell you both about.” He turned to face the yard again, refusing to look at them. His fingers ran long, whimsical trails along the neck of the whiskey bottle. “The Wizarding World is coming out, revealing itself to the rest of the world, but there’s baggage there. Baggage you need to know about before the coming media storm. This is going to be a long talk, so just let me know if you need a moment.”

Will was silent, for a time. And then he spoke whispers, soft truth slithering out into the growing dark. “Some of this will be familiar to you, Abigail, but the European Wizarding World has spent decades locked in a war of blood. It began, perhaps ironically, with a love potion. Merope Gaunt, last of the Gaunt line, fell in love with a muggle - a man without magic. He couldn’t stand her, so she brewed a love potion to catch his affections. The idiot then took him off it once she was pregnant, thinking that he surely must have come to truly love her. A delusion of the highest grandeur. He fucked off, she died in childbirth, and Tom Marvolo Riddle Jr. spent the next eleven years of his life in an orphanage.”

Abigail gasped, hands flying to cover her mouth.

Calling the look Will gave Abigail a grin would have been a lie. There was no warmth, no humor - rather containing an absence of anything which should be used to define such an expression. “Yeah - Voldemort was a half-blood. Which is a ridiculous thing you should know about,” Will informed Hannibal, turning hard eyes on him - crimson glinting off burnt steel, “because it could very well mean you life. The magical community is small. Those who can trace their lineage back for generations with only wizards in their line are called purebloods. Those of pureblood and muggle - non-magical - or non-pureblood wizard parentage are half-bloods, and wizards from muggle families are known as muggle-born.”

Hannibal grimaced. That strange sour stone in his gut had returned. “Racist aristocracy?” he guessed.

Will nodded. “Magic should stay in magic families, muggleborns referred to as mudbloods - really ridiculous stuff that has way too much bearing on our tale.” Will sighed and looked back at the yard. His eyes looked beyond it, though, his shoulders hunched under the burden of his tale. “Riddle grew up bullied. Twisted. Some say a person conceived under a love potion is incapable of love - I think that’s shit. Some people are just born wrong. Dead things which breathe and never stop. Keep existing. But even that does little to explain the creature which called himself Voldemort. He came straight from the pits of hell - the closest a breathing being has ever come to being the embodiment of pure, unfiltered evil.”
Will took a large gulp of whiskey straight from the bottle, not even reacting to the burn. “When Riddle went to Hogwarts - Britain’s magic school - he bought into the pureblood agenda. Charmed his way into the upper class. Gathered followers for a purging of the lines - a purification of the world. And he found a magic darker than any other: Horcruxes. The splitting of your soul through premeditated murder, taking that split half and binding it to an object. Thus,” Will gestured grandly, whiskey sloshing in the bottle, “rendering yourself effectively immortal. Unless someone finds and destroys them.”

Will grew quiet a long moment. Neither Hannibal nor Abigail dared break the silence. They waited, breath oddly faint, until Will’s tale crept into the air once more. “No one knew about this. And war erupted. Riddle, calling himself the Dark Lord Voldemort, gained cult followers, bestowed them the title of his Death Eaters, and set about attempting to conquer the Wizarding World. They wanted to force Wizarding Pureblood superiority by killing all muggles, muggleborns, and anyone who didn’t agree with them. “Blood traitors”. Albus Dumbledore, famous for defeating the last Dark Wizard, headed the Order of the Phoenix in fighting against him.”

Will’s hands tightened on the bottle, but his desire was interrupted by a soft whine. Will broke from whatever dark place had captured him to smile at Winston and gather the loyal companion to his lap, accepting the comfort so freely offered. Comfort Hannibal himself and Abigail wished to give, yet had no clue how to go about doing so. This was obviously not an easy topic.

Drawing strength from the simplistic love of his dog, Will began his tale anew. “Now we get into things not a lot of people know. In 1980 Dumbledore was interviewing Sybil Trelawney for a position teaching divination at Hogwarts when she gave a prophecy - one of the only two true prophecies the old bint ever uttered. Severus Snape happened to be in the pub Dumbledore was holding his the interviews in, and caught part of the prophecy. Which he duly reported back to his master Voldemort. Do you know the prophecy, Abigail?” Will queried, looking to her.

Abigail’s skin was nearly the same parlour it had been when she bled out on the floor of her father’s kitchen. Her voice strained, but the words were heard. “We were told there was one, but no one knows what it said.”

Will raised an eyebrow. “I’m impressed - thought it would have been common knowledge by now, considering everyone’s obsession with their Chosen One.” The words were sneered with a derision bordering on violence. Will reined himself back from blood with a breath and a sigh. When he next spoke, his words fell heavy like the hollow space left in the wake of a gong.

“The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches / Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies / And the Dark Lord shall mark him as his equal, but he shall have power the Dark Lord knows not / and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives / The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies.”

Will took a long drink of whiskey, this time.

“Harry Potter was born in July.” Abigail’s whisper was nearly strangled.

Will let loose a laugh that made Hannibal shiver - mirth dragged through jagged ends of thrice-broken glass. “Two boys fit the specifications of the prophecy - Neville Longbottom and Harry Potter. Voldemort sent Bellatrix Lestrange after the Longbottoms because they were purebloods, and went after the half-blood himself, viewing him as the larger threat.

“Lily and James Potter were hidden under Fidelus, but Sirius Black knew everyone would expect him to be their Secret Keeper, seeing as his loyalty to James was common knowledge. They were
uncertain of Remus Lupin’s loyalties - he was off on assignment anyway - and so they made Peter Pettigrew the Secret Keeper in an attempt for more protection. Everyone would be looking to Sirius, after all, and so no one would expect the quietest of the four friends.”

Will scowled. His hands shook. His voice carried siren songs of blood in every note. “The bastard was a traitor - rat sold them out in fear of his own miserable existence. On October 31, 1981 Voldemort attacked and killed the Potters. “But Severus Snape loved Lily Potter - had loved her since they were children - and once he’s known of the plan had begged Voldemort to spare her. So Riddle offered Lily a chance to move aside. She refused, and died protecting her son. She must have cast some sort of blood ritual in advance for just that situation - insurance should the worst befall them, which unfortunately showed itself necessary - because when Voldemort turned the Killing Curse on the baby it rebounded, killing him instead.”

Will took a deep breath as if begging the universe for courage and strength, and ran a hand through his hair. Lifted his bangs upwards, baring his forehead. “The only mark left on Harry Potter, the one person in the history of the world to survive the Killing Curse, was a lightning bolt scar.”

Abigail looked like she was going to faint, and Hannibal didn’t feel much better. That sour stone had frozen over, and the chill was steadily invading the rest of his blood.

“Will,” Abigail choked out as tears gathered in her eyes. Shaking, she reached for him. Will took one look at her and transformed from a dark herald of damnation to the caring father Abigail always brought out in him. “Hey,” he gentled, soft and warm despite the chilling words he intended for comfort. “It’s okay, Abigail. Everything’s alright. I lived, didn’t I?”

Suddenly certain, Hannibal spoke. “I am not going to like the rest of this story, am I?”

Will snorted darkly. “No one likes this story.”

With slow, grand strokes, Will laid bare the story of his life. A brief overview of a childhood in the abusive hands of the Dursleys. His introduction to the Wizarding World - the wonder and joy of it all shortly eclipsed by a dread for his very life. A fight against Voldemort, whom no one could even refer to by name - “To be fair, he’d cast a taboo on his name in the first war which drew the Death Eaters to anyone who said it. So I understand - it was bloody horrific in the Second Rising.” - and whom any competent adult should have faced off against instead of leaving a child to handle it.

It didn’t get better from there. As they moved inside, Will shutting the door behind his dogs before absently moving to the abandoned dinner, he talked of ancient snakes and possessed diaries. “The horcrux,” Abigail had guessed.

Will had given her a bitter smile and replied, “One of them.”

It got no better, leaving Hannibal to put aside the food he’d merely picked at. Killers let loose from jail that were innocent, betrayals and hurts released and a headmaster with political clout who seemed incapable of using it. Tournaments and torture and resurrections, a summer abandoned and slandered - the government’s own brand of torture. Hallucinations and dreams, abandonment from the one person who had been best able to help.

A band of teenagers left to fight terrorists alone, finally rescued by the adults who should have been there from the start. Hannibal had to hold Will’s broken pieces together for a few minutes as he gathered himself after recounting the death of his only father figure. And then Hannibal had to hold
himself still with an iron will, as Will told them what happened in the aftermath - wanting to torture the woman who had killed Sirius. Wanting to kill the man who had known the damned prophecy all along and led them all to trauma by not telling anyone.

“We were on the train back home when Voldemort decided to take his exposure and run with it,” Will said after another gulp of whiskey. He’d worked his way through a good portion of the bottle. Considering the memories being dragged to the surface Hannibal was impressed that Will hadn’t already drunk the whole thing. “Death Eaters attacked the train. There were so many...”

Will closed his eyes, rested his head on his hand. “Did you know, Draco wears a locket? It belonged to a half-blood raised in the muggle world who’d started her first year. For whatever reason, she and Draco gravitated towards each other. He was teaching her the ropes of pureblood society, since she was in Slytherin. He cared for her deeply. After we’d driven the Death Eaters off, he came to me. He was clutching the corpse of an eleven year old girl in his arms - the chunk of her that was left, anyway - fire in his eyes and vengeance in his snarl. He pledged himself to killing every last one of them - despite the fact that his father was Voldemort’s right hand man.”

Will chuckled, then. The fact that it held genuine mirth simply made it all the more chilling. “All those years hating each other. But he’d been one of the only students on the train to kill a Death Eater, and I saw in him the same pain I was feeling. Taking his offer was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made - Draco made one hell of a lieutenant.”

“Is that when the war started?” Abigail asked.

“In full, yes,” Will answered. “The Death Eaters had attacked while we were in the middle of nowhere - we spent the rest of the day fortifying a makeshift camp and burning the dead. We found a wizarding town after a week and managed to send those who didn’t want to fight home. The village became our base of operations - I was done with waiting around and letting Voldemort move uncontested.”

“You led the war,” Hannibal noted.

Will nodded. “We had to abandon the village, considering the adults wanted to hide us away. We tried to work with the re-banded Order of the Phoenix, we really did, but they were weak.” Will’s face morphed with his hate. His next words were harshly pushed through a sneer, faster and faster in old, simmering rage. “Squeamish. A lot of them had a problem with us killing Death Eaters and Sympathizers - as if the Death Eaters had such morals themselves. As if we had a place to store them. The ministry fell in a month - we were the only resistance, and we sure as hell didn’t have the resources to keep prisoners. Besides, assassinating key members of Voldemort’s Inner Circle was a sound military tactic they were refusing to utilize. Got even better once some muggle survivors taught us how to use firearms - took out the fuckers without ever getting close to their wards. Shit, you should see Draco with a sniper rifle. Bloody brilliant.”

“Could you rely on no one to lead?” Hannibal felt tortured at the thought, the fact of Will leading children to battle evident in the solid way he spoke of tactics. “ Truly?”

“Former Aurors helped a lot,” Will replied with a shrug. For all that he obviously knew it hadn’t been alright, he seemed to accept the fact of it with troubling ease. “Once other countries sent forces, they helped us out too. But the only people not looking to me as the “Chosen One” to save them all from Voldemort once again were those who wanted to lock me away from the war. As If I’d ever been safe - much less a child.”

Will shook his head. Resigned. It felt heavy, as if Will had grown accustomed to it long ago. “Me, Hermione, Ron, Neville, Susan, and Draco were the main leaders of our resistance. People with
experience gave good advice, but they mainly bowed to my position and deferred to my orders. I was famous for defeating Voldemort as a baby, you remember. I guess they all thought if I could do it then, I was their best chance for doing it again. Besides,” and here, Will chuckled darkly, “the main bulk of the resistance were children themselves. Experienced adults who weren’t fucking idiots were in short supply, although we gained more than enough experience ourselves by the end.”

Will fell into silence once more, contemplating his whiskey bottle.

Abigail cautiously asked the next damning question, “How did you find out about the Horcruxes?”

“Dumbledore, may he rot forever,” Will replied, venomous spit in every syllable, “tried to get me to go back to Hogwarts for my sixth year and let the Order handle the war. Considering the cocked up job they did of that when one of their counter strikes got ten of my people killed without even one dead Death Eater - hell, I would’ve settled for a dead sympathizer - to show for it, I told him where to shove it. Eventually, he put on some cursed ring and got killed by Snape near the end of the school year. But Horace Slughorn joined our fight - no one really knows why or how - and was invaluable in the healing tents considering his knowledge of potions. He came to me one night, wringing his hands. He told me a story about my mother, who had been his favorite student. And then he begged me not to judge him, and gave me a memory. The memory of a charming school boy Tom Riddle, who had asked about Horcruxes.”

Will shrugged. “I guess seeing all those injured and dying kids, knowing it wouldn’t stop until Voldemort was dead, weighed on his conscience. So,” Will sighed, “I gave in and talked with Dumbledore before he died. He gave me the ring, and we used the Sword of Gryffindor - made more powerful by the basilisk venom it’d taken in during second year - to destroy it. Then we found a cave and fought to get Slytherin’s locket, which turned out to be a bloody fake.”

Will took another drink. “Sirius’ little brother, Regulus, had figured it out during the first war. He switched the real locket with a fake, told Kreature to destroy the real one, and died in that cave. The infiri got him.”

“Infiri?” Hannibal asked.

“Zombies,” Abigail clarified.

Hannibal was torn between fascination and wishing he’d never known. He finished the last of his own glass.

“So we went back to Grimmauld, found Kreature, and destroyed the locket,” Will continued. He was speaking faster, now, less eloquently. A combination of whiskey and the desire to be done with the conversation.

But... was it because he was tired of the topics already discussed, or in a panicked rush to ensure he actually spoke something worse to come?

Hannibal, for once, found himself dreading the answer.

“We set aside troops to hunt Horcruxes. Luna found Ravenclaw’s lost diadem in Hogwarts. Voldemort always had that blasted snake with him, so we knew that had to be last, and Hermione, Ron, and I broke into Gringotts to steal Hufflepuff’s Cup from Bellatrix’s vault.”

“You managed to rob Gringotts?” Abigail’s question was breathy with wonder. It was a lighter kind than had permeated the rest of the conversation. A refreshing reprieve.

Will laughed, and the true joy in it felt like the first ray of sun. “Yeah, rode a dragon out of there.
Ask me another night and I’ll tell you the full story.”

Abigail nodded, but Will’s mirth didn’t last long. He grew quiet once more, grimly staring at the empty fireplace.

Fearing the worst was yet to come, Hannibal put a hand on the man’s shoulder. “Will?”

Will shuddered, and it was confirmation of all Hannibal dreaded. “After we got the cup, while Luna was grabbing the diadem, Voldemort attacked Hogwarts. So we assembled everyone we could and defended it. There eventually came a break in the siege. I stumbled upon a weird scene. Voldemort was furious, blamed Snape for the fact his new wand wasn’t working like he thought it should. He then had Nagini kill Snape.

“Snape and Nagini left, and I ran in. Snape had been Dumbledore’s spy despite the fact he’d killed the man, so if he had anything to help us I wanted to know. The dying often switch masters before the last breath. He gave me a vial of memories - of my mother, when they were children. The fight that ended their friendship. Going to Dumbledore to beg for my mother’s life once Voldemort decided I was the child of prophecy. Trading his service for her protection. Conversations with Dumbledore, doing his best to heal the damage the cursed ring had done. Dumbledore telling him of Horcruxes. Dumbledore... Dumbledore telling him that the night Voldemort killed my mother, a piece of his soul split and when his next killing curse rebounded, it latched on to the nearest living thing.”

Hannibal distantly felt his hands start to shake.

Will closed his eyes and turned his face to the roof. He kept petting Winston, who had long since come to curl in his lap and offer comfort once more. “And so you’ve raised him as a lamb to slaughter,” Snape said. Dumbledore never denied it. He’d kept me alive, challenged me just enough to teach me to stay alive, all to ensure I would not die until the proper moment. So,” Will opened his eyes, “I did.”

There was a pulse, beneath his hand.

Hannibal blinked down at it, uncertain as to when he’d reached out. Yet that pulse beat steadily in his grip, and that hand remained unconcerned in his grasp. Allowed him to take all the comfort he could stand.

Will’s next words were quietly spoken, but sounded clear in the stillness of the house. “Voldemort called for a cease-fire, called me out personally. I gave my last orders and went to meet him. He killed me, and as I waited in-between, Sirius informed me that I had a choice. The Horcrux was dead, and death would take that as payment. I could return, if I chose. Easy choice, really,” Will stated with a shrug, “My war wasn’t finished.” As if it wasn’t a big deal. As if it wasn’t a decision most men would agonize over. As if there had been no other choice, save the one that no other human would make, when faced with the choice of war or the arms of loved ones long dead.

Hannibal had never before been in more awe of a human being than he was in that moment.

Will continued his tale as if he didn’t understand the enormity of what he’d done. “I woke up to find Narcissa Malfoy checking to see if I had actually died, and she asked me if Draco lived. I told her he did, and she pronounced me dead. Voldemort took my body with him to taunt my troops with it, and my own Inner Circle met him head on. Neville killed Nagini with the Sword of Gryffindor in a truly heroic display, and I leapt to join the battle.

“I faced off with Voldemort, and finally, when the sun set, I had killed him.” Will took another drink.
“And the fucking bastard had resurrected once, so despite there being a body this time the Death Eaters refused to give up. Killed Voldemort in ‘97, spent the next two years defeating the bastards.”

“That’s why the war has two recorded ends,” Abigail surmised.

Will nodded. “Course, I was getting a crash course in my empathy. Since I had a piece of ol’ Snake Face in my head, my brain kept the mirror neurons most kids discard in order to balance the influence I was under. Once the horcrux was gone I had too much empathy and nothing to balance it. That was not a fun time.”

“And now you use it to hunt killers,” Hannibal stated, the sheer enormity of the flaws in his original plan screaming at him.

Will gave him a broken smile. Something else was in it, though, lurking beneath. And Hannibal’s darkness took notice. “Hannibal,” Will stated blandly, “the war broke me. If I had any chance of healing right after I killed Voldemort, it died when I spent years wiping the Death Eaters from the earth. I enjoyed it - there’s a part of me that relishes the crimes I get to live through other hands.”

“Thus the limited hours,” Hannibal surmised. There was a strange feeling burning softly behind his ribs. He believed it might be named hope.

Will’s answering smile, wry and teasing, as if he knew that Hannibal knew better than that, only served to feed the ember further.

The smile died, and he looked to Abigail. “So you see now,” Will remarked. “All I am. If you want me to get myself taken off your list of legal guardians, I’d understand.”

Abigail actually glared at him. “Why would you - no. No, you can’t. Besides,” she added with a dismissive motion that sent her hair swinging over one shoulder, “I’ve adopted you.”

Will blinked. From the shock on his face it was evident he hadn’t expected that. And then a thought crossed his eyes, and his face shuttered into a dark bitterness. “Of course,” he stated in a flat defeat. “Who wouldn’t want Harry fucking Potter in their family?”

Abigail snorted. “What the fuck does Harry Potter have to do with this?” she demanded, brash and unapologetic. “I’m talking about Will Graham.”

Will was entirely taken aback at that. Abigail launched into his arms, and Will held her even as his face cycled from surprise to confusion, disbelief, hope, and a tentative, desperate joy.

The next moments were spent comforting Abigail and assuring her that everything was fine as she did her best to convince Will that she meant what she’d said. Eventually they got her to agree to head to bed.

Abigail came downstairs after changing, and bit her lip before asking, ‘Can I…” she trailed off, embarrassed, blushing, and gestured helplessly at the bed downstairs.

Will let out a heavy sigh. “Just this once, yeah?” he agreed.

Abigail immediately nodded, and settled into bed easily. Eventually, surrounded by dogs, she fell asleep.

Hannibal found it wasn’t so easy. He’d finished putting away all the leftovers and cleaning what little mess they’d made. The emotions Will had brought to the surface were screaming at him. Guilt, for what he’d planned to do to such a man. Awe, that Will had trusted him with this. A strange
compulsion - a desperate sudden need - to prove worthy of such trust.

Hannibal turned, certain that only one thing could settle this sudden debt. “Will - ” Hannibal stopped. Took a breath. Started again. “There’s something I must tell you.”

Will looked at him, head cocked in confusion. Then his brows smoothed from their furrowed state, and he smiled more gently than Hannibal deserved. “Oh, Hannibal. I know.”

Hannibal... wondered if this what the phrase ‘feeling unmoored’ referenced. “How... how long?”

“I’ve known since Silvestri,” Will stated simply, as if it wasn’t an enormous secret with catastrophic consequences. “Your terrible puns just confirmed it.”

Hannibal shifted slightly to the right, before he caught the movement and centered himself again. “Well,” he started, and then simply didn’t have an end to the sentence.

Will came closer, reaching out with a tentative hand. He studiously stared at that hand, not meeting Hannibal’s eyes as he softly inquired, “Is it bad that part of the reason is because of the ripper, and not in spite of it?”

Hannibal reached out to grasp that calloused, seeking hand in his own. “My dear William,” he breathed, “it isn’t in the slightest. But I confess that I am uncertain as to why.”

Will looked in the eyes then, those green depths vulnerable behind the hard stare. “I was eleven when I first killed a man,” Will informed him. “He would have killed me, but I knew the touch of my skin burned him like fire, and I pressed my hands into his face anyway.” Will gulped, and though the muscles around his eyes twitched with the strain, Will remained steadfast in his resolve to keep this connection as he confessed, “I didn’t touch my friends skin to skin the rest of that year - I was too afraid whatever was inside of me would harm them too. But when I went home that summer, I reached out and laid bare hands upon my uncle’s arm.”

Will looked sad, even as he gave a wry smile. “I didn’t heal right, after the war. Not because the wound festered, but because I’d always been this way. I was so disappointed when it didn’t work.”

And Hannibal, for the first time in his life, could see the chance for a true partner - one who understands him not because of some nebulous ability, but because he is the same. Hannibal had never fancied himself a romantic man, but here, staring at his soul’s part, he cannot help but to understand everything that had baffled him before. In a breath Will’s name had left his lips, and Hannibal found himself surging forward to clutch the other man tight to him.

Will grabbed on with no less desperate joy, clinging and letting Hannibal cling, both drawing strength in the sheer rightness of the feeling.

They weren’t alone. Not anymore.

“Just don’t feed people to the kids.” Will’s request was muffled slightly by the shirt.

Hannibal laughed softly, overcome in his joy. “Of course, dear Will.”

The next morning left Will feeling lighter, buoyant. He’d woken up entangled in dogs, a surrogate daughter, and the first lover he’d had since... god, he almost couldn’t remember when. He’d taken several moments to just bask in the feeling - he had a family. They were here. They weren’t going anywhere.
Eventually Hannibal stirred, and he’d spent a long moment simply pressing his lips to the pulse in Will’s neck before extracting himself from the pile. Abigail shifted closer to Will with a sleepy mumble, and he held her while the sounds of breakfast slowly spread to smell.

Abigail got out of bed before Will did, and she let the dogs out and fed them while Hannibal half-carried him to the table. Will didn’t want to leave the happy bubble of his sleepy haze, but there was coffee and eggs and he found himself waking before he’d known he was going to. Breakfast was largely spent in silence, the three of them merely existing in this shared, comfortable space.

Later saw Will puttering around the kitchen, having waved off Hannibal’s offer to help with the dishes. Abigail only watched a moment before she sighed in exasperation. “Honestly, Will - you can use magic, you know? Hannibal knows now.”

Will turned to them, a gentle smile on his face despite the phantom feel of blood-slicked hands and the squish of skin under his nails. “I can’t use magic anymore.”

Abigail froze.

Will quickly spoke to reassure her. “Oh, no - don’t worry Abigail. It’s not something that’ll happen to you. It can’t - no one can steal your magic away.” The only person capable of it, even with that ritual, was dead, after all.


“It left,” Will stated with a shrug.

No need to tell them of the screams that had laid beneath his skin. No reason to admit to the rage and caged, helpless fear - that yawning abyss that had threatened to take all that he was until nothing more than an automaton remained.

He’d told them everything they’d need to prepare them for when the world began searching, crying out in bitter ravings for the savior that had abandoned their flocking bleats. They’d see soon enough that wizarding kind - fickle and despicable and indignantly rooted to their helplessness - had barely been able to survive a year without him.

They knew he had escaped. There was no reason to inform them the price of that survival.

Hannibal would understand. Abigail might not. And call him selfish, but Will wanted to keep every piece of this little family they’d steadily been forming.

Fate owed him at least that much.

**Chapter End Notes**

Let me explain the choice here: Harry Potter had a shit, terrible life that he likely fully believed was his fault somehow. Then a giant comes and tells him 'no! You're special! You're talented! *The Dursleys are wrong.*'

Then, not even a month into this world of wonder and magic and friends, all of that gets tainted. Voldemort. People trying to kill him. The reason his parents died (and a small voice saying see? it was all his fault - he was with the Dursleys because he'd gotten his parents killed) going after him again.
And again. And again. And again.

In cannon, Harry is removed from the war. He spends all of the true substance of it camping. Here, I don't let him get off that easily (fucking cop-out). So there's much more horror, much more trauma.

But even without that, it's a thing that's always nagged at me - how Harry can hold onto that love of magic. Because from the first day he stepped into that world, Voldemort dogged his steps. Death, betrayal, horror and war all trailed in his wake. Of course he met death like the third Peverell brother - he'd worn it like a cloak from the moment he'd been told he was a wizard. The thing that was his wonderful escape from the horrid abuse at home was no more than a cold wall containing a rotting monster who thirsted for his blood.

So, no, Will Graham is NOT OKAY. Take in mind that Unreliable Narrator tag - it is very, very accurate.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

The cat's out of the bag. It's only a matter of time before the dark things follow.

Chapter Notes

Hey! Not dead. Sorry (dodges rotten fruit).

This chapter wasn't as hard as the encephalitis chapter, but it was close. I apparently need to do more planning before I find myself arrived at a large moment. (Also do you know how hard it is to write no-maj instead of muggle consistently? Jeez, why do Americans have to make things so fuckin' different?)

Also I got married. So there's that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal almost couldn’t believe it, still. He’d confessed - Will Graham knew about the source of his meat and yet here the man was, curled up against him in bed like he knew that he’d never have anything to fear from Hannibal as he patiently answered question after question.

Hannibal had, just a few moments earlier, spoken of his sister. He’d gotten her name out, told Will that she was his charge, and his mouth had even opened to explain that which he had never told any living soul when his throat closed up and the words refused to come.

Will just stared at him with soft green eyes and replied in a whisper, “I was going to be married, once. Even now I’m not entirely certain if we would have worked, or if I remain fond of her because of her passing. She bled out in my arms.”

The haunted shadow in Will’s eyes - that phantom of desired revenge long denied - told Hannibal that there was more to the injury than that.

Hannibal had felt comfort, oddly enough, in the fact that the two of them would never truly be able to speak every secret held. His soul was already laid bare, to be read and to read in turn. That would be enough.

It was more than he had ever dared to dream.
Hannibal smiled into the hair of his monstrous love, curled safe and sleeping against his chest, and felt at peace for the first time in decades.

Alana walked down the hall, deep in thought. She wasn’t sure what to do about Abigail. The girl was traumatized in ways she just wouldn’t open up about. Alana had done her best to give the girl a safe space, somewhere to lessen her fears enough to give up those last damaging secrets, whatever they may be.

It wasn’t working.

The only time, Alana thought as she followed sounds of laughter, Abigail fully relaxes is when one of them is here.

She peeked into the room, unable to suppress her smile. Abigail was collapsed forward over her knees, nearly crying with the force of her mirth. Will looked on with that same gentle smile Alana had seen for the past several visits. Will had been coming by more often in the last week and a half, and something about their relationship had visibly changed, shifted. It was like a barrier had been let down, leaving nothing but the openness, trust, and safety that Alana had tried so hard to infuse in this facility.

It worked, with most other girls. Abigail seemed to need it from a person, however, not a building.

Alana was beyond grateful that Abigail had been able to find what she needed in Will.

“Sweet Merlin!” Abigail proclaimed through her laughter. “You didn’t!”

Will shrugged, slightly embarrassed. “Not our best idea, looking back. But it was jump in the freezing lake or wait till the poor thing tired itself out, and who knew when that was going to happen.”

“Freezing lake?” Alana asked, making her presence known. “I hope you’re not trying to teach Abigail your reckless tendencies, Will.”

Will smiled back at her. The interactions between them had become easier, once Alana had stopped treating him as a delicate thing.

“Cautionary tale, I swear,” Will replied in mock-solumness.

Alana shot him a fake disbelieving look. “Cautioning against what?”

“Robbing from goblins and escaping on the back of one of the dragons they use to guard the older vaults,” Will replied with a shrug.

Abigail was sent off into more peals of laughter, and Alana shook her head with a sigh.

She sighed again, later, as she sat at dinner with Hannibal. Will had also been there, which was a bit of a surprise. She hadn’t been expecting him, and she wasn’t exactly happy to have this conversation in front of him. Actually she didn’t want to have this conversation period, but it seemed she needed to. “Hannibal,” Alana started, the seriousness in her tone alerting both Hannibal and Will to the shift in conversation. “Do you remember how you cautioned that the facility might not be the best place for Abigail to heal?”

“I do,” Hannibal replied and he, bless the man, didn’t look smug as he did so.
“I think you were right,” Alana gave in, finally. “But I don’t think it will work unless you or Will take her in.”

Hannibal looked to Will, who had grown serious in the way Alana rarely saw. “We’ll need to discuss that,” Will stated gravely, looking to Hannibal. “I’ll need to get Ron and Bill over here, draw up protections and such. I’m not certain if staying after the announcement will hurt or help... I could just make you both targets.”

Hannibal nodded as if that statement made any sense. “Or your presence could discourage threats. You would know better than I, unfortunately. I’ll leave the decision up to you. I do hope, however, that I can get you to move in with me by the end of the year.”

Alana’s question of “what announcement” was lost at the sight of the brilliant red that overtook Will’s face. She couldn’t help but tease him, and Hannibal decidedly kept the rest of the conversation light and happy.

She’d have to get Will alone sometime, to question him about this “announcement”. Whatever it was, it was obviously worrying him. And anything that worried Will was likely a problem worth planning for.

Beverly was happy that her friendship with Will had held up. They hadn’t gone out drinking since Will’s late-night confession, but he was still in that sappy honeymoon phase with Hannibal so she wasn’t pushing it. She simply barged into his office demanding coffee with pretty predictable regularity.

Will was almost always game, though, and it tended to be one of the bright points of her day. Now that Will’s brain wasn’t cooking itself, he was back to his usual snarky, sarcastic bastard self. She loved it, and their conversations could start to sound down-right antagonistic.

Then one day Will paused, and looked at her with a solemn face, and stated simply, “When the announcement comes out, know you can come to me with any questions. I can answer most of them.”

Beverly raised an eyebrow. “What announcement?”

Will had simply given one of those slightly self-deprecating half-smiles and stated, “Trust me, you’ll know.”

Cryptic, but accurate.

Beverly sat on the floor of her apartment in shock, staring at the older man on the television informing the world calmly that magic was real, and that an entire society of Wizards, Witches, and all manner of Magical Creatures had been existing side by side with the rest of the world, right under their noses.

Through the haze of her shock, Beverly registered one coherent thought:

*I am going to fucking murder you, William James Graham.*

The announcement hit the air on every platform - the President had called notice of an important announcement from the UN, and every radio, television, and web streaming news site had tuned in.
Will was driving to work when Kingsley’s familiar voice startled him. He hadn’t known the old minister was coming out of retirement for this.

“The leaders of various countries have already known a little of this,” Kingsley stated, “but now we are confident enough to come out of the shadows. There exists a community of people containing magic - Witches and Wizards and Magical Creatures - which has lived beside you for decades, hidden and separate. We hid ourselves for fear of the witch hunts of old, which took our loved ones from us as well as destroyed many who held no magic. But we’ve waited, and we’ve watched, and we believe the world is ready to accept us. It is well past time we rejoined the greater world around us.”

Will listened as he carefully navigated the way to work. Many people had done the smart thing and pulled off the road to listen in their shock. A few hadn’t been so smart and crashed - nothing major, from what Will could tell. It wasn’t as much a shock to him, so he continued on his way while listening. Kingsley handled the announcement and ensuing questions tactfully - implying it was trust in the good of humanity that had been the reason for their reveal, and not the knowledge and fear of what would happen if they waited.

Will didn’t feel too bothered by turning off the radio when he got to work. Ignoring the groups of people huddled about in shock, he went about preparing for his first class as usual. The announcement ended by the time of his first class, and Will was pleasantly surprised to note that nearly all of his students made it in. He got through the first five minutes of class alright, and then began to notice the nervous shifting of his students. One raised a hand. When she got tired, another put his hand up, letting her rest. And so it continued, one right after another, so that there was always a hand in the air.

Will finally turned around, too amused to be actually frustrated. “Yes?”

The student currently stuck with hand duty - Brad, if he remembered correctly - took a deep breath and asked the question all of them wanted to know. “What if the killer’s a wizard?”

Will snorted. The class looked shocked. “First of all,” Will answered, “there probably wouldn’t be as much blood. Most wizards prefer the Killing Curse above all when it comes to death, and that has no blood.”

Another student raised her hand. Will nodded at her, and she asked, “What does it look like, professor?”

“You won’t truly be able to know until you see it,” Will stated, trying his best to beat back the memories of far too many still faces. “But it looks almost as if they released one breath, only to forget to take another.”

“How do you know?” someone else asked, not bothering to put their hand in the air.

“I’ve known about the magical community for years now,” Will answered with a candid shrug, downplaying his involvement. “Yes?” he nodded to... Ardelia, he thought.

“How can we apprehend someone who has magic? Can they vanish?”

“It’s called disapparating,” Will answered. “The aurors have been working on a small, radius based anti-apparation ward for a long time - if they figure it out, it’ll likely become standard issue. Although honestly, shooting them in the leg tends to work. Most wizards don’t have shields strong enough to block high-caliber bullets.”
“But what if - ” someone else started, and Will held his hand up with a sigh.

“This is really scaring all of you that much?” Will asked. Heads everywhere nodded. Will sighed again. “Alright. Come to the large auditorium at 7 tonight - bring your friends. I’ll do my best to make this less frightening.”

Of course, Will then had to go to the dean. Who let him have the auditorium with only the small requirement of letting the lecture be open to everyone in the FBI.

Will shrugged at that. “Sure. I’ll see what I can do to get some of Sector Seven in here, teach people a bit more, but I don’t mind answering these questions for now.”

“Truly?” the dean questioned. He had sharp eyes, assessing. “Most would hate being singled out like this - no other wizards in the FBI have stepped up.”

Will stared him right in the eyes, serious as he’d ever been. “I’d like to avoid another war. Besides,” he added with a shrug, “I’m not a wizard.”

_Fucking wizards_, Jack Crawford thought to himself, wedged in between his team and the stair railing. He knew they’d be trouble from the moment the announcement had hit, and as all the questions of what they could do turned into questions of what they could get away with, he’d been proven right.

They were turning out to be trouble in other, more personal ways too. Ways that made the stone of guilt in his gut fall even deeper.

Jack Crawford had always known that Will Graham would be an asset to the FBI. When the man had first applied he’d been sad to hear that he couldn’t pass the psych evals, but was happy to know the man had been taken on as a teacher. He kept his eye on him and had snatched him from his lecture hall the moment he could.

Despite everything - encephalitis included - Jack had never before known just how wrong he’d been to pull Will from his classroom.

As he stood in the largest auditorium the FBI had, Will Graham transformed before Jack’s very eyes. He paced still, but he was alive with the motion, authoritative and blunt. He talked about this new, exposed world of magic like nothing Jack had ever heard him speak of before. Everyone, from seasoned agents to the greenest of recruits, had questions demanding to be heard. Will accepted each and every one, explaining patiently until the one who’d asked was satisfied. When the topic arose, hours into the early morning, Will explained the last Wizarding War not in the broad strokes of the first official report, but in the intimate detailing only those involved could ever speak of war.

Will even discussed movements of the Death Eater faction which until now had been seen as unexplained terrorist attacks. A man standing against the wall outed himself with a scandalized cry of “That’s confidential!”

Will had calmly flipped him the backwards peace-sign and instructed the man to take it up with Hermione Granger.

Jack and Beverly leaned against each other in their shock, now having confirmation that the strange group they’d met during Will’s hospital stay were indeed the decorated heroes of the Second Rising.

Topics turned to tactics and tracking, abilities and probabilities, and the sun was high before Will
finally declared an end.

As people filtered out to find sleep or plan the late start of their workday, Beverly slumped even further against Jack and stated, “I’m gonna kill him.”

Jack simply nodded in response.

“Are you certain you can?” Brian asked, the fear plain on his face.

Jimmy obviously saw it too, and scoffed. “I for one am happy to have him on our team,” he challenged. “How were we going to get through this without him, hmm? Will is, as always, a goldmine of helpful information.”

Jack nodded. “He’s no different than any other veteran, Zeller,” he chastised. “If anything, this shows how much he wants to help people, that he came to our world and pursued law enforcement.” Or it showed the depths of his trauma from the war, to abandon the world that had fostered it so completely. But Jack had too much respect for a fellow soldier to speak of such things among so many listening ears.

Brian still seemed wary, but it looked like the man was thinking instead of just feeling, so Jack let it lie. He’d intervene if it seemed to be bubbling into more.

Will joined them when he could. “Can I borrow the couch in your office, Jack?” His voice was hoarse and beginning to crack. He looked more exhausted than anyone in the room.

“Or we could return home,” Hannibal stated suddenly. The group turned as one, not having noticed his presence. “You should sleep in a real bed, Will,” the man teased with a smile. “You’re getting far too old to sleep on couches.”

Will gave a soft laugh at that. “Well, you’re not wrong. How’d you-?”

“Alana informed me of the event,” Hannibal answered. “I believed you might do well with a warm meal and a good sleep, after.”

Will smiled and proved just how tired he was by leaning into Hannibal, initiating a hug. His words were muffled by Hannibal’s suit jacket, but the confession of, “Merlin - I love you,” was clear.

Hannibal’s face did something - went soft and pliant and open - and Jack suddenly found himself turning around to give the two privacy. “Come, mylimasis,” Hannibal said in reply, “let’s get you home.”

“Mr. Graham!” A voice shouted, harsh and clearly angry. The whole gathered assembly turned to look as officials from Sector Seven, flanked by a team of their own, stormed up the walkway.

In moments, Will Graham transformed once again before Jack’s eyes. Gone was the tired and worn out professor. In his place stood a general - intense and alert in a way that made long-forgotten instincts well up in Jack as he straightened into a military posture himself. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw others he knew held military backgrounds being similarly affected.

“You have been spewing highly classified information!” the suit-clad weasel from Sector Seven was hollering, red blotches smeared under his cheeks.

Will’s voice was firm but calm - placid like the face of a churning lake before the storm. “I was under the impression that the community was coming clean, Agent Maxwell.”
“As previously sanctioned by the International Confederacy of Wizards!” The now named agent hollered. Jack was paying more attention to the men behind him, however, who had stopped to stare at Will, mouths dropping open in shock, and were now gently trying to gain their boss’ attention. “In planned steps, as previously agreed upon! Not this willy-nilly flood of information unsanctioned by -”

“Agent Maxwell,” Will interrupted, cutting the man’s frothing to an abrupt halt without ever raising his voice. “There are young adults here, entrusted to me to teach them the tools they need to survive, and I will see them prepared. I have the clearance to do so.”

“The clearance?” Agent Maxwell sputtered. The agents behind him had given up trying to gain his attention, and were now either watching in mounting horror or glancing away in embarrassment.

*Just what had Will’s role in that war been, Jack wondered, that this is the response of those who recognize his face?*

He had a sinking feeling that he didn’t want to know.

“I know it’s been a long time,” Will interjected, “but surely the years have not made me entirely unrecognizable, Agent Maxwell.”

The agent’s eyes narrowed, and then he paled. The man was moved a step backwards with the force of his recognition, and stammered out a quick apology before fleeing, murmurs of contacting his superiors for advice following in his wake.

Will sighed and rubbed the back of his neck, the commanding air about him gone as suddenly as it had come.

“A warm meal first, I think,” Hannibal commented. Then he nodded in parting to Jack and the others and guided Will out with a gentle hand on the small of the younger man’s back.

Jack was now *certain* he didn’t want to know the answer to his earlier question. It would be easier for all involved if that mystery remained unsolved.

“What the hell was that?” Brian asked.

“That was an officer reminding people of his military status,” Jimmy quietly answered. “I think we have the answer to your question, Brian - Will Graham is not a madman before he snaps. He is a veteran who was improperly socialized in a crucial stage of his development.”

Beverly had a horrified hand over her mouth, yet her words were clear. “Will would have been nineteen at the end of the war.”

“The end of it,” Jack echoed absently, “yes.” Straightening himself, Jack turned to his team. “This changes nothing in our approach - Will Graham is a valuable consultant to our team, and we will afford him the same courtesy and protection as we do every member of the team.”

Even Brian nodded in resolute agreement.

Hannibal had intended for a restful meal and then bed, but Will ended up fielding calls all afternoon. Some he simply directed to his lawyer, others went on for hours. Hannibal had been forced to give Will his meal at the side table in his kitchen. Eventually, he’d given up and gone about his day. It was only when he’d begun the preparations for dinner that Will finally breathed in silence.
Will made certain to move with a quiet noise as he came up behind Hannibal, and then the man’s arms wound about his shoulders - purposefully not hampering Hannibal’s range of motion - and leaned into his back. There was a muffled sentence that Hannibal deciphered to be an apology for ruining their plans.

“Might I ask what took your attention after an already full day?” Hannibal belatedly added, “without mumbling, if you please.”

Will turned his head to the side yet refused to otherwise move. “No one likes a snitch,” he stated, “unless you’re a Quidditch fan. No,” Will let out a long sigh, and his weight pressed further into Hannibal - leaning in. “Draco’s got most of those - not really anything they can do about it. No one wants to go against the Boy-Who-Lived, after all.” The title was spoken with derision and contempt. Given what he’d learned, Hannibal knew it would always sound that way. “I took so long because I was talking with Sector Seven.”

Hannibal couldn’t help the upward turn of his lips, any more than he could stop warm amusement from filling his tone. “Apologizing for Agent Maxwell, were they?”

Will snorted an affirmation.

“I do hope you took them for all they’re worth,” Hannibal commented as he set the stock to boil.

“They’re going to have agents teach some classes for law enforcement,” Will stated. “I got some good people to sign on with the FBI as adjuncts. It’ll help me better prepare the kids.”

Ah yes, Will’s most overwhelming trauma. The sleepless day made more sense now, nevermind that FBI trainees could hardly be classified as children. “After a light dinner it’s straight to bed,” Hannibal instructed. “You’re no good to anyone dead on your feet.”

Will hummed his agreement. “Thank you. It’s been a long time since anyone took care of me. And no one’s done it like you do.”

“It has been a long time since I had the ability to,” Hannibal replied. He was fearless as he added, “thank you.” Will would understand his meaning - his full meaning. It was a novel experience, to be so assured of that.

Will hummed again, soft and content.

A few days after the furor of that plainly amazing FBI lecture, Alana found herself knocking on Will’s door. He opened it, looking sheepish and apologetic. “You couldn’t have warned me?” she asked.

“That would have been illegal,” Will replied. He blinked, and looked her over more carefully. “What was I warning you against?”

“I need a drink,” Alana muttered, shoving her way in past him. She headed straight for his liquor cabinet.

Will joined her with two glasses, and stayed helpfully quiet as she downed the first few fingers quickly. “The announcement causing you troubles?”

Alana sighed. “I’ve got a flood of people who want to hire a therapist - for them or their kids. Half of them are scared out of their minds - oh scary, this man can make sparkles with his wooden stick!”
Will snickered, but it was a dark humor that colored his words. “Those of magic can be terrifying. They haven’t seen the war, and there hasn’t been anyone of the Dark Lord’s talents since his last loyal court’s destruction - thank Merlin - but that doesn’t somehow make magic safe.”

“But some of these idiots are really ridiculous,” Alana countered. “There’s no need to have a panic attack over the possibility of someone growing their flowers with magic and therefore winning the best lawn competition in a suburban housing division.”

Will blinked at her, and then doubled over and laughed.

Good, Alana thought. The rest of her rant might hurt less, now. She let Will gain control of himself again, and spared a moment to mourn the mirth that would certainly flee the man at her next words. “The other half can’t handle the thought that they may not have magic.”

Will’s grip on his glass might have crushed it, if it had been cheap. “Why the bloody hell would anyone want that?” he growled.

And here’s where things get tricky, Alana knew it in her bones. She was treading softly, now. “Didn’t you ever want to be a wizard as a kid?”

“Freakishness was highly frowned upon,” Will dryly muttered, as if that was a normal thing instead of a red flag indicator of serious problems at home. “And yeah - magic, so cool. Until the war starts - and a war will always be starting - always some new upstart wanting to become the next Voldemort. Always nothing but death and destruction and torture hanging about your head. Oh yes,” Will scoffed, “who wouldn’t want that?”

“Will,” Alana licked her lips. “Will, are you a wizard?”

Will deflated in front of her, shoulders curving inwards as he stared at his arms - stared at the faint lines in the crooks of his elbows that most people were too polite to comment on. “I was, once,” he answered. “And very few of the perks made it worth the horror.”

Alana gathered her courage and said it. “Abigail seems very happy. Besides her father, it seems magic has been good to her. Did you ever think, maybe, your views on magic were influenced by the war?”

Will snorted, and refilled his glass. “No. It followed me from birth, and I only escaped when I could no longer feel magic in my veins. I’m cursed, Alana,” Will stated, sure and steady. “Always have been. Don’t try to get me rethinking that - you’re not my therapist.”

“No,” Alana conceded. “But I am your friend. And I see the dark looks you’ve had, as everyone depends on you to guide them in a world they never knew. You wished they’d remained separate, don’t you?”

“This is for the best.” Will sighed. “I’m only caught in the middle because I can never stay out of trouble.”

“Never would have guessed,” Beverly’s voice suddenly rang through the house, smug and sarcastic. Alana and Will both turned to see her standing in the open doorway, pizza boxes and a bottle in hand. “Our little Graham cracker, trouble?”

“I don’t actually try,” Will protested. “It just keeps happening.” He pointed at the bottle. “You here to drink and tell me off too?”

Beverly winked at Alana. “If flowers here already gave it to ya, I’ll just say ditto.”
Will shook his head. “All my friends are assholes.”

“And yet you’re not shocked,” Beverly stated, moving to sit on the couch. “Booze and pizza - the cheap stuff. Can’t let you get used to your boy’s all-fancy fare now, can I?”

“Please,” Will agreed, sitting by her and snatching a slice.

Alana watched them for a minute, watched them snark and sass. She watched their body language, and the words that lay in the silence between them.

'The announcement nearly gave me a heart attack. I’m angry and scared.’

'You’ve nothing to be afraid of - you’re under my protection.’

Lord only knew what Will’s protection was worth. Alana had seen him during the lecture, ramrod straight as he taught with authority things no one else had known. Had watched the men of Sector Seven nearly flee in the wake of his gaze. Kept watching, as Will’s usually kind eyes hardened like emeralds - dark and deep, soulless; the same look as when he faced down Gideon with a gun - as people brought up the subject around him.

Something had happened to Will, in the wizarding world. Something that both made wizards terrified of him, and gave Will a festering hatred of everything they stood for.

Alana wondered what secrets about her friend would come to light, now that this new world was in play. What final ghosts did Will Graham have to expose?

And what were those ghosts, that their reveal would scare him so much?

Alana tried not to think on it as she grabbed a slice of pizza for herself. It would all come out in time, she was sure. And when it did, she hoped Beverly wouldn’t come out the loser in the office betting pool.

If Clarice had through the FBI academy was difficult before, it seemed near impossible now. Magic - actual magic. Her job now included fighting wizards.

Thankfully, Professor Graham was one. Or knew wizards - it wasn’t exactly clear. Some of her classmates swore Professor Graham had to be a wizard, but they’d never seen him use any magic, and he never referred to himself in those terms. Normally that would be enough to persuade her, but something in her gut made Clarice unable to discount the possibility so easily.

Which was why she and her classmates were watching so carefully. They’d always kept an extra eye on Professor Graham - he was just so interesting and mysterious! And then he’d looked bad, and they watched out of worry and concern instead of fascination - but now they had money riding on it. The betting pool was ripe, and everyone wanted to be the one who found irrefutable proof one way or the other.

So they all took note when one of the Sector Seven agents leaned in on the podium before class one day and requested, “My partner doesn’t think he can be taken down by a no-maj.”

Graham raised an eyebrow for a moment before snorting. “You want me to kick his ass?”

“Please,” the man begged with a feral grin. “I’ll get you a bottle of Dragon’s Bane.”

“Goblin Gold,” was the prompt reply.

Graham nodded. “Deal. And nothing cheap, Johnathan.”

“Like you won’t be doing this for your own enjoyment after meeting him,” Johnathan replied with a snort of his own. “God - what did I do to get saddled with him?”

“Purist?” Graham asked with a sharp look.

“I don’t think he’s that extreme,” Johnathan replied. “But he definitely doesn’t have a high opinion of no-majs.”

“Agent Gladwell!” a pompous looking man hollered as he walked down the stairs, a swish to his shiny robes. “I hope this won’t take too long. How long until our portion of the lesson commences?”

Clarice caught the wry, unimpressed looks that Professor Graham and Agent Gladwell exchanged. Judging from the ugly snort to her right, Ardelia had too.

“We’ll get to it quickly as we can, Wexley,” Gladwell replied dryly. “This is Professor Will Graham, whom we’ve been assigned to assist.”

Graham nodded, and the new guy looked relieved that no hands were offered. Clarice frowned.

“Hopefully this won’t take all day, Professor,” the newcomer drawled, “some of us have important things to do.”

“Wow, what an asshole,” Ardelia muttered. Clarice had to agree.

“I still want the whiskey,” Graham remarked as Wexley went to sit down, “but I would do it for the pleasure alone.”

“Told ya,” Gladwell smirked.

“Alright class!” Professor Graham called out, quieting conversations as the last stragglers headed towards their seats. “I hope all of you were in the auditorium last week or know someone who took notes. Today we’re going to talk about what your chances are if you do find yourself having to take down a wizarding perp without a witch or wizard assisting. To help me in this lesson are two wizards from Sector Seven - Agent Gladwell and Agent Wexley.”

Everyone sat forward, their interest so tangible Clarice could almost taste it.

“Now, realistically speaking,” Graham continued, leaning against the front of the podium as he usually did, “if you have a gun on you then you’re most likely going to win.”

Wexley snorted.

Instead of continuing on as he would have last semester, Graham turned to face the man. “When’s the last time your shield charms held against a bullet?” he asked sharply. “What about nine? How well have you perfected the art of ducking?”

The blond agent looked baffled.

“That’s what I thought,” Graham chided before the man could formulate a response. He turned back to the class. Clarice spared a moment to wonder where the uncharacteristically harsh undertone to his
words had come from. Did he grow up around wizards who flaunted their abilities and never took his seriously, or was there something else?

“Most shield charms don’t hold up long against bullets,” Professor Graham told them. “But there are more powerful shields that can, so don’t take it for granted. Especially not as the wizarding community becomes more accustomed to muggle weaponry and increases their defenses against it.”

“Our defenses are already more than sufficient,” Wexley disagreed.

Professor Graham ignored him. “Hand-to-hand will also be helpful to you - martial arts or just plain brawling. Anything physical. Unless things have changed in the last ten years, wizards rely mainly on their magical prowess, so most of them are only effective as range fighters.” Graham looked to Agent Gladwell.

Gladwell apparently know what he meant and shrugged. “There’s been a slight upswing in martial arts clubs in the last few years, and the European countries most affected by the Second Rising have a high number of graduating classes containing those who made a point to train for wandless and close-range situations, but largely wizards are still most effective mid-range.”

Professor Graham nodded. “So for the next ten years you’re probably safest getting right in their faces.”

One of the braver students raised a hand, and they all startled a bit when Graham called on him. They weren’t used to their teacher actually allowing an interactive classroom yet. (Clarice hoped it would spill to every area of class - not being able to ask the man questions had been her biggest annoyance last year. At least, before they all agreed to stop trying in an attempt to make things easier on the man when he’d started to really look sick.)

“Why ten years, sir? Wouldn’t it take less time?”

“Wizards are slow learners,” Professor Graham drawled with a tone dry enough to form a desert. Beside him, Agent Gladwell nearly fell over laughing.

“This is all well and good,” Agent Wexley interjected, “but I fail to see the purpose of your advice. A no-maj has almost no chance of getting that close before spells are cast.”

Graham turned to him, and Clarice found herself tensing up. She couldn’t have explained to anyone why, but something in the set of Graham’s shoulders brought screaming to the forefront the irrefutable fact that Will Graham was dangerous.

“Agent Wexley,” Graham commented, the flatness of his tone doing nothing to calm the sudden pounding in her veins. “Thank you for volunteering a practical demonstration for the students.”

Wexley nodded and pulled forth his wand, clearing the podium and table out of the way with a flick and muttered word.

“Standard shields?” Agent Gladwell asked as he also moved to the side.

“A reflexive dome, if you would,” Graham replied.

A dome-like structure shimmered into being over the area.

Ardelia leaned in close to Clarice and whispered, “Somehow I don’t think that wizard is nearly as scared as he should be.”
Clarice spotted the smug look on his face and nodded. “You’ve noticed it too, then?”

Ardelia gave a languid shrug. “I’m still not sure how dangerous Professor Graham actually is - always seemed the soft, quiet type to me - but you don’t survive as a baseline human in a wizard war without a ruthless capability to take people out.”

Clarice... hadn’t thought of that angle before. “Good point.”

“Do you know the rules for a wizard’s duel?” Wexley asked, standing across the room from their professor.

Graham hadn’t even taken off his suit jacket. “I’m not bowing.”

“Count of three then,” Gladwell interjected from his seat perched on the table which now rested against the seating area. He was outside the faint sheen of the protective dome. Clarice wondered how effective it was - and what the variables of what it worked against were. “One, two, three.”

Wexley lifted his wand and began to speak. Will Graham moved.

He ducked forwards and left, first, likely anticipating faster spell-casting. Keeping low, he loped forwards until sprang up directly in Wexley’s space - barely an inch remained between their chests. Professor Graham placed a hand to the agent’s neck and calmly stated, “Dead.”

The whole thing had taken maybe six seconds. The room was silent in a vigil of awe.

Wexley stumbled backwards with wide eyes. “Did you get a quickening charm before this?” he demanded.

“Professor Graham has not been charmed in any way that would give him an unfair advantage against you,” Agent Gladwell duly reported. “Or any advantage. No warding, compulsions, potions, or even rune help. Count of three?”

Wexley scowled, but settled into an actual fighting stance as Graham returned to the other side of the room. Gladwell counted down again, and both men shot like rockets into motion. Wexley actually shot off a few spells before Graham tackled him to the floor.

Wexley growled, “Again.”

They went at it again, Wexley growing more and more ruthless each time. Professor Graham barely looked like he was straining. Time and again he either threw Wexley into a locked hold or tapped him at a vital point and proclaimed the man dead. Graham had even dived to the floor at one point when avoiding a spell, rolled forward, and reached up to tap the wizard’s retreating femoral artery. “Dead.” It had been ridiculously impressive.

Eventually Wexley stopped calling for rematches and stood there scowling. “Who the fucking hell are you?” he growled in frustration. “You’re a fucking no-maj!”

“I told you,” Gladwell interjected, “he’s a veteran.”

“Of what war?” Wexley demanded. “None of the no-maj weapons compare to pure magical might!”

Professor Graham snorted. “Magical might? You do realize we took out Rabastan Lestrange with a sniper rifle, right?”

Wexley went so still, so fast, it was nearly comical. “You - you’re - you fought in the Second
Agent Gladwell sent the other agent a scathing look. “A no-maj submits an application to start teaching a wizard defense class in the FBI Academy and you didn’t read his file?”

Wexley looked flummoxed, but not nearly as ashamed as he should have been at such a rookie mistake. “But - he’s a no-maj.”

Professor Graham was exceedingly gracious and merely rolled his eyes. “And that, class, is why you shouldn’t worry about fighting a wizard nearly as much as you all have been worrying. Class dismissed.”

Clarice couldn’t stop thinking about it, though. Professor Graham seemed to be too dismissive when it came to wizards. Certainly there were individual witches and wizards he held in the greatest esteem, but he seemed to discount the entire wizarding community as a whole. It was almost like how some wizards dismissed baselines - mundane, no-maj - as being not worth their time because they couldn’t be a threat if they didn’t have magic. She would perhaps think this was the man getting his own in before he was judged, but there was a darker underlying heat in his glare that made Clarice suspect that his reasons ran much, much deeper than that.

Granted, a large portion of the wizarding world had by all accounts depended on Harry Potter, a child far younger than she herself was, to save them all from a single man. If the reports were right, children won that war - and Clarice was pretty certain it wasn’t because every other adult in magical Britain had died. And then they’d blamed their savior for not being there when someone else with grand delusions of taking on the mantle of Dark Lord attacked a major thoroughfare, because obviously the man should have been there and not traveling, likely an attempt to adjust to no longer being a child soldier.

No, Clarice didn’t blame Professor Graham for his dark dismissal of the wizarding community, no matter how dumb it seemed to Clarice. No one should simply dismiss a threat because of the actions of a few.

Unless, of course, Professor Graham didn’t see wizards as a threat.

Which either meant that he was stupid - highly doubtful - or that Will Graham was too deadly for most wizards to even pose a threat.

Clarice... wasn’t sure what to make of that.

She also wasn’t certain what to think of the sudden surplus of wizards. She knew, logically, that desensitizing them to magic would help them react appropriately, but she couldn’t help wishing she’d had a bit more chance to study this phenomenon before being surrounded by people casting spells about, no matter how lucky she knew the FBI was to have so many of Sector Seven giving practicals. Clarice tried not to focus on her fears even as she kept an eye on the wizards running around her school, doing crazy things like demonstrations in highly public areas. Even standing behind a protective shield, she still didn’t feel terribly safe when watching two wizards flaunt their magic.

“My, that is cool,” Ardelia, who didn’t share her concerns, stated. She was watching the impromptu mock-wizard’s duel in the hallway with wonder and awe. Clarice watched it to take note of trajectories - the two Sector Seven agents had said they’d put up a shield, but she had no desire to be hit by a spell.

One of the agents shot a bright red light off, and it curved through where a shield should be, and
Clarice wasn’t going to be fast enough -

There was a pressure at her side - an arm? - and a sharp tug, and Clarice could no longer see the curse due to the flannel in her face. There was a deep grunt and the sound of something tearing, but she felt no pain.

Clarice blinked, and slowly registered the fact that she was safely ensconced in the arms of Professor Graham, nestled to his chest and no longer in danger. Then she remembered that she had been in danger, and pulled back to look at Graham’s side.

There was a large, jagged slice through the man’s shirt, but there didn’t seem to be any blood.

Graham looked at her sharply, giving his own once-over, and then was gone and tackling the agent who’d shot off the spell to the ground.

“What the hell?” the man’s partner exclaimed, even as he disarmed the wizard who was currently being pinned down.

“You used a cutting curse when your only shield was a failing clipenium?” Professor Graham snarled, his weight leaning sharply on the knee that pinned the downed wizard’s wand arm. “And aimed it at my students.”

“Why would you do that, Jeff?” the other agent asked, lowering to his knees. “I know you throw curses better than that - it was way off.”

Something hard and dark surged beneath the skin of Graham’s face until it changed his countenance into an expression more akin to the monsters Clarice had thought herself too old to believe in. “Check his arm,” Graham growled. His arm pressed tighter to the downed agent’s throat.

The other agent blinked at him in shock. “But we - we’re all checked, sir. He doesn’t have the mark.”

Graham shot him a harsh look that made Clarice want to apologize for incompetence - and she was still across the hall from him! He moved the hand not holding the agent down into his pocket, removing a small blade and opening it only to cut himself as if this was something that one merely did when proving a point. “Raise his sleeve,” Graham ordered.

The agent hastily complied, and Clarice thought him a smart man.

“Standard line-two wand movement. The spell is gabh brath,” Professor Graham said, before smearing his blood on the pinned wizard’s left forearm.

The blood shimmered away, and so too did the wizard’s unblemished skin. Instead there lay a sickly green tattoo - a screaming skull, its mouth opening around a coiling serpent. The Dark Mark.

Clarice remembered, through her shock, that Professor Graham had fought Death Eaters in his youth and quickly assessed the man, only to find her blood running cold.

There was murder, in those green eyes. His shoulders were tense like a wolf preparing for the kill, his arm strained where it pressed against a vulnerable throat, and his eyes promised nothing but pain.

Clarice was about to watch her favorite professor murder a man in cold blood.
Desperate to avert what no one else seemed to think would happen - why was no one moving - Clarice did the only thing she could think of.

Clarice faked a step closer, cried out in pain, and crumpled to the floor.

Professor Graham was at her side in moments, the darkness in those eyes refocused, for now. “Status,” he barked.

Clarice needed to keep his focus, and so she summoned tears she pretended to force away and softly muttered, “My - my ankle. I think I sprained it. I’ll just - ah!” Clarice cried out in shock more than faked pain, startled by Professor Graham’s sudden slinging of her into his arms. She found herself once more sheltered against the man’s chest, held firmly as Graham turned to leave.

“I’m taking her to medical. You turn that filth into the proper authorities, agent,” he ordered, harsh and unquestionable. Then he turned to the rest of the hall. “If you’re not helping - get your arse to class!”

Students sprinted into motion and down the hall, a couple of agents moving to help the wizard apprehend his partner. Graham strode with purpose and haste to medical, but Clarice found she wasn’t jostled by his stride.

She was... warm, actually. And comfortable. And Professor Graham had just swooped in, like something out of a story, and was being so -

Clarice chided herself for her ridiculous thoughts. Her blush was harder to banish.

Soon enough they were in medical, and Clarice found herself sitting on an exam table as her professor prodded her ankles for fault. When he could find none, he sat back on his heels with a deep, resounding sigh.

“Thank you.”

Clarice startled into looking at him, and found her gaze fully caught in his.

“Thank you,” Graham repeated. “You saved me.”

Clarice’s blush came back full force, and she glared at her knees. “I didn’t do much,” she protested, “just pulled a ‘weak ankles’ like an idiot.”

“You read the situation with great clarity and came to the correct conclusion,” her teacher corrected. “You knew I was going to kill that man. You knew it wasn’t likely to be quick. You took what you knew of me and my priorities and cut straight to the quickest way to diffuse the situation without casualties.”

Clarice found her chin being raised, and green eyes bore into her very soul with nothing less than pride. “Never, ever get caught up in how little or stupid the methods may seem - it worked, Starling. And if that’s how you handle a crisis now, I can’t wait to see what kind of agent you’ll be.”

Oh. Oh - Clarice hoped she hadn’t swallowed her tongue. There was a strange lump in her throat, and she didn’t seem to be able to speak.

“You did good, Clarice,” Will Graham told her in a gently firm tone with pride in his eyes. And then, after a pat on the shoulder, he left.

Thank god he left - Clarice was likely redder than ketchup by now. How utterly embarrassing.
Not quite as embarrassing as her friends, though.

“Oh come on!” Ardelia protested, as she and their closest friends crowded Clarice in their living room for a long night of “studying.” “That’s it?”

“What more do you want me to say?” Clarice asked. “I noticed he was going to kill that man, embarrassed myself, and Professor Graham thanked me for getting him out of there. What more do you want?” She was keeping the substance of the conversation to herself - those words were too affecting to air in front of all and sundry.

“Professor Chili Pepper swoops in like a knight to rescue you from the slightest harm and all you said was ‘he picked me up’?” Sam declared incredulously. “Spill, Starling! How did it feel to have the Group Fantasy come true?”

“Ah.” Clarice hugged the couch pillow to her chest as the blush overcame her face again. The Group Fantasy had started last year, when Bri had brought up how hot Professor Graham had to be when he’d been a cop, which had dissolved into many discussions of different situations where their professor would save their lives in some dashing manner. It had been a conversation borne of probably too much alcohol and definitely too little sleep. And Chad. He was looking at Clarice with far too interested eyes, and he might have looked like a typical jock but was probably the gayest nymphomaniac that had ever existed.

Hoping she wouldn’t ruin her studious reputation, Clarice gave in. “He smells really nice.”

And the questions poured out, and Clarice spent a good while of the impromptu sleepover answering them.

Jack sat across from Will and Alana, and wondered how to go about this. “I want to bring Abigail Hobbs in,” he stated, deciding the straightforward route was probably best.

“For what, Jack?” Will asked.

Jack prepared himself for a fight. “To ask her about her father’s crimes.”

“You can’t possibly still think she had anything to do with this,” Alana protested, as expected.

“I think the possibility of magic opens up a lot of loopholes,” Jack countered. “Garrett Jacob Hobbs has been confirmed as a wizard - an old pureblood line, even. We can’t be certain of anything about this case now.”

“He killed the muggle way,” Will stated firmly. “If he’d used magic, I would have called in Sector Seven.”

And how Will knew enough to apparently sense when magic was happening was another complication Jack didn’t want to get into today. “I need to question her. Abigail could have more information on the case,” he insisted. Jack paused, and then decided to be blunt. “We also have to consider the possibility that she was involved.”

Alana reared up in her seat, ready to lay into him for suggesting an innocent, traumatized girl might be faking one of those adjectives when Will raised a hand to stop her.

They both went silent and looked to Will, whose gaze had hardened to something more akin to granite.
“Abigail Hobbs was bound by blood magic,” Will stated firmly. “I called a friend to remove it - he’ll be here tomorrow. One interrogation room - a nicer one, please - and you and a high operative of Sector Seven with experience in family-bound victims can watch with Alana. I will be in the room with her, and afterwards Hannibal and I will take her home.”

Jack felt the vein in his jaw tick. “You knew,” he stated flatly.

“Magic was still hidden,” Will replied without apology. “I didn’t find out until the case was already closed. Even then, what was I supposed to tell you? You’d lock up a child for the sins of her father, sins she could not oppose.”

Alana’s eyes had gone wide, but her voice was steady. “Will, what was Abigail bound by?”

Will sighed, and took off his glasses to rub at his eyes. “Silence,” he said. “Some slight compulsions to do what Hobbs wanted, probably. Definitely boundary wards to ensure she didn’t run away. That’s just what I could figure out - these are strong, Alana. Bill’s a master curse-breaker, and I’d trust no one else to unravel them. Sheer power aside, they’re tangled and complicated, to hold even after Hobbs’ death.”

“I’m going to trust you on this, Will,” Jack said, and god help him but he did. Despite the lies that had been told, despite the harsh realities of their working relationship, despite the shadows Jack knew lurked beneath those eyes and all the trouble they were going to bring, Jack trusted Will Graham with all the surety an old cynic like himself could muster.

And so he found himself greeting an older man with stress-greyed hair and the impression of weight on his shoulders as they followed Will’s instructions to the letter. Jack’s initial response was to like the agent, and Jack liked him even more as, after swift introductions, they both wordlessly focused their attention on the scene in the interrogation room, where Will was making his own introductions.

“Abigail, this is Bill Weasley. He’s the friend I told you about,” Will stated. “Bill, this is Abigail.”

“Hey Abigail,” Bill - an interesting-looking man with scarring down the side of his face - greeted. “Nice to finally meet the newest niece.”

Abigail blinked, the confusion softening the edges of terror on her face. “Niece?”

“Will’s family is our family,” Bill stated with a shrug. “Now I’m going to run a few diagnostics. Okay?”

Abigail nodded. Jack watched as Bill went through several motions with his wand, muttering to himself with increasing vitriol as results printed themselves onto a piece of paper. When that was done, Bill turned to Abigail with a seriousness that told Jack he wasn’t going to like what happened next.

“When I take these down, everything they kept you from saying is going to pour out,” Bill stated. “They kept you from physically saying them, not from having the words ready to say, and they’ve been building up behind that barrier. They’re complicated wards, but only strong due to blood-ties, and so with that barrier down they’re going to tumble out.”

Abigail gulped, and Will took her hand in his. “I’m right here Abigail,” he stated softly. “I’ll be right here the whole time.”

Abigail turned to him then, wide-eyed and terrified in the most honest expression Jack had ever seen on the teen. “Promise you won’t hate me?”
“You know I won’t,” Will replied firmly.

Whatever reassurance Abigail sought from green eyes she must have found, for she turned then to
Bill and nodded.

With motions and words Jack couldn’t begin to comprehend, Bill Weasley did his job. And a flood
of words began to pour forth from Abigail.

“Run. Run, he’s going to kill you. Please - look at my eyes, don’t listen to my words - stop trying to
comfort me damnit! I’m not scared for myself I’m scared for you, please realize something’s wrong
and don’t listen to me!”

Jack felt his shoulders fall as he listened to a girl he’d known was an accomplice scream and cry and
plead and beg. For her father to stop. For the victims to realize what was wrong and run. For her
father to stop making her do this. For her father to just kill her already and be done with it.

Will held her through all of it, letting her bury into him and rocking gently. He murmured into her
hair words too soft to be picked up by the mics, yet clear in intent. When the words pittered off into
silence he held her tighter, and Alana stepped forward to switch off the sound in the booth.

“I hope you’re happy now, Jack,” Alana bit out before she stormed off.

Jack looked to the agent beside him, who gave a heavy sigh. “Not faking it,” he declared. “If that
child had been capable of alerting anyone to the situation, she would have.”

Jack nodded. He found himself borrowing that surety and applying it to his final report. As he went
home to Bella, he tried not to think of Abigail bundled between Hannibal and Will, two men kinder
to her than her own father had ever been.

I had to know, Jack reminded himself. Even so... I hope she survives it.

Alana moved Abigail into one of Hannibal’s spare bedrooms as Bill paced the boundary lines
outside with his brother Ron and warded the house. Hannibal was grateful for the extra protections,
especially as he remembered the broken face Abigail had worn when he’d gathered her from the
FBI.

“I hope you will continue to be her therapist,” Hannibal commented as he cooked dinner. It was
relaxing, even if he wasn’t using his favorite meat. Will, who was upstairs helping Abigail get
settled, had warned him what would happen if he fed the British side of the family without their
consent.

Alana took a long drink of beer before answering. “Of course I will. But I’m not sure if I’m the best
suited to help her anymore.”

“You are kind, and know far more of moving past unpleasant facts than many I know,” Hannibal
returned. “She has also started this journey with you.”

“A bumpy journey,” Alana muttered. “Feels like I didn’t get anywhere, unless you two helped out.”

“Nonetheless, you’ve moved forward,” Hannibal countered. He paused in his motions to catch
Alana’s eye. “Abigail may progress more rapidly, now that she is in a safe home and has the weight
of unsaid words off her chest. It would be more rapid still, if she did not have to start the process over
from scratch.”
Alana blinked at him, her usually strong spirit wavering. “You really think I’ve helped her that much?”

“You are a wonderful psychiatrist,” Hannibal nodded. “I’ve no doubt Abigail wouldn’t have come as far as she has without your guidance. Besides, it will be far better to give her stability in this, rather than uprooting everything at once. Abigail knows you fight to give her the best - there are no other hands I’d entrust her to.”

Alana nodded back, reassured. “Thank you, Hannibal. How do you always know what to say?”

“I am just very good at reading people,” Hannibal replied, resuming his work. “If you would chop the tomatoes, I would appreciate it.”

“Oh good, now he won’t ask me,” Will stated in good humor as he joined them. He stopped as he noticed the new arrangement sitting in the corner. “You got a breakfast table.”

“Since you all insist on taking meals in the kitchen, I felt it wise,” Hannibal replied.

Will just laughed at him. “Abigail’s in her room. I’m going to see how Bill and Charlie are, if you’re good?”

“Quite good, thank you,” Hannibal returned, smiling at his love. Will smiled back, and then disappeared.

“You two are sickeningly adorable together,” Alana commented.

“I should hope so,” Hannibal stated. “I feel sickeningly in love. As if I might burst at any time.”

Alana smiled at him, knowing him well enough after all these years to know that it had been a large admission for him. She couldn’t understand the true scope of the magnitude of his feelings, but she knew enough. “How does that feel, when you’re usually so distant in your affections?”

Hannibal paused a moment, truly thinking that over. Finally, he had to settle on one word, “Strangely, I feel at peace.”

All was quiet, in the grove. Twilight softly sank into night, as gently as the body being laid to rest. Gentle breaths, no longer hoarse with screams, the air having forgotten that frightful ringing. No sounds, save those that belonged to the sleeping Earth.

And those that prayed to the most ancient earth, in tongues not often heard. Gentle lifts of eldest song not heard for an age. Yet it, too, belonged to the Earth - for it was of the Earth it implored three blessings. For rebirth. For light.

For magic.

Chapter End Notes

**Clipeum** is Latin for shield, so in true JKR fashion I just threw in extra letters and wham! Spell.
Gabh Brath - naturally I forgot to write down where the fuck I found this, and it has yet to be found again, so according to a quick google they're both old Scottish-Gaelic meaning "take, receive" (Gabh) and "knowledge, notice, information, treachery, treason, betrayal" (Brath, which later became mbrath, or "act of betraying; treachery, betrayal; act of spying, reconnoitring; act of revealing; revelation, sign; act of depending (on); dependence, something depending (on)”).

Your fun fact of the day, I guess.

And yes, I swear, we're getting closer to why Will Graham doesn't consider himself a wizard. It's coming - I'm even littering small clues all over. But let me take a moment to reiterate - Will Graham is a highly traumatized individual, and a supremely unreliable narrator. It's one of the reasons I try to add in perspectives from more practical people, so a clearer picture is shown. Exhibit A - Will's dismissive-ness of Wizards. Is he right? No. Is it likely to change? Not at all.

Even in the books, Harry is a fucking terrifyingly powerful wizard. Thrown into a war where they grasped any and every thing/magic that would work and needing to take exceedingly powerful adult wizards out as quickly as possible? Oh yeah, Will Graham is a nuke. So he doesn't view most wizards as a true threat - it doesn't mean he won't take them out with extreme prejudice (Will knows too well what a lucky shot can do) but he's simply on another level than most.

Harry Potter was a survivor. Will Graham? He's a warrior. And that truly does make all the difference.

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