Strawberry Moon

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Strawberry Moon

by Escalus

Summary

Six years after graduating from Beacon Hills High, Stiles Stilinski is eight weeks from completing his course work at the FBI Trainee Academy in Quantico, Virginia. A chance encounter with one of the instructors at the academy, Will Graham, gets him assigned to the Behavioral Analysis Unit as support staff. Eager to make his mark in the bureau (though wary of having the perceptive consultant look too closely at him), Stiles readies himself for the next stage of his career.

The past begins to haunt him those as he tries to balance that new career with his ongoing relationship with Lydia Martin. It's harder than it looks. What won't help is the fact that the BAU will put him and his friends neck deep in the hunt for the Chesapeake Ripper.

Notes

I've take liberties with the timelines. Since Hannibal never specified its time period, we'll use Teen Wolf's barely-even-there timeline and make the action start in 2019, when Scott, Stiles, and Lydia are 24 years old.

The primary goal of this story is to use Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, and the BAU crew to explore the long-term effects of what Stiles, Scott and Lydia went through in high school.
I do not own anything from Teen Wolf or Hannibal. This story is an homage and a celebration of these great shows.
Chapter 1

Stiles Stilinski was going out of his mind.

He looked down at the five case files piled on his desk, fully aware that he only had until the next afternoon to finish write-ups for every one of them. He was also fully aware that he had physical training the next morning and a qualifying exam at the pistol range right after lunch. The only way he could get these files done in time was if he simply didn’t eat or sleep for the next eighteen hours.

It was inevitable; he was going to wash out. After all the work he had put into this, after all the money he had put into this, his dream, he was going to wash out of the FBI Training Academy with only eight weeks left to go. Either that or he was going to snap. The FBI may be one of the world’s premier law enforcement agencies, but it had never witnessed the resplendent glory of Mieczyslaw “Stiles” Stilinski snapping. It would likely be the most brutally spectacular thing most of these people had ever seen in their short lives.

He was sure that he was exaggerating for affect, even if it was only to himself. If he tore off all his clothes and ran screaming down the sidewalk at Quantico in the middle of the night, it wouldn’t be the worse mental trauma he had endured.

After all, the past had seen him out of his mind before, saddled with crippling hallucinations, sleep paralysis, and waking dreams during the day. Being frantic with too much work and not enough time could not nearly be as bad. He had to maintain perspective. He had been possessed by an ancient demon fox and his body ridden around like a bumper car at the Worst Carnival Ever; the fact that he was hovering inches above the ‘Get the Fuck Out of Here’ line at the Academy should definitely not be as bad as that.

He barely remembered that he had also spent three months trapped in an extra-dimensional train station and that hadn't been fun, but right now there was a small part of him who wanted the Ghost Riders to carry him off again. At least the incredible number of people he would disappoint would forget that he had even existed. As long as he didn’t have to spend eternity with Peter Hale, he’d welcome oblivion that rather than face the spectacular burn out he was approaching tonight.

Because he was going to fail; he knew that as surely as he knew he had been chewing on his fingers like they were beef jerky strips. He was going to fail so tremendously hard that the light from his failure would reach an alien civilization in a million years and they would all point their tentacles in the direction of Earth and laugh at his incredible stupidity for thinking he could do this.

He stared at the case file in front of him as if it had personally plotted his doom. He had five – five! – to write up before the last class tomorrow afternoon and it was already nine p.m. It was physically and mentally impossible.

This wasn’t freaking high school, where he could spin off a ten-page paper in the evening before running from deranged alphas and still pull off an amazing grade point average. The techniques and shortcuts he had developed there did not help him one bit.

This wasn’t even George Washington, where after a disastrous first semester plagued by overconfident procrastination, he had buckled down, kept his mind focused (well, as much as possible for someone like him), and managed to graduate in the top third of his class.

This was the FBI Training Academy, and he was skirting the edge of the abyss. He knew that part of this panic was only in his mind, but he imagined seeing the instructors giving him their best ‘You
thought you could be an FBI agent?’ glares. They were right. He was going to explode in a shower of a million flowery sparks of failure.

Stiles stood up from the desk and paced around his dormitory room. He knew he was getting himself worked up. He understood that if he wanted any chance of getting his work done before the time it was due, he had to calm down and believe in himself.

That shouldn't have been hard, since he was so very close to his goal. He had eight weeks left of the twenty week training period and, if he didn’t fuck it up now, he’d be an FBI Agent. All the work he had put in for the last six years would pay off.

“Eight weeks. Fifty-six more days, Stiles! You can do this.”

Stiles looked over at his bed where he had tossed the other contents of the desk earlier in the evening. He saw the unopened letters from his father; one of which would have to be a birthday card. He had been too busy even to think about reading or responding to them. He had called his dad, where he had continued his practice of ‘what Dad doesn’t know, won’t hurt him’ by pretending that everything was okay.

Everything was not okay.

He saw the unopened invitation to Lydia’s graduation from MIT with her doctorate. Even though they were technically dating, he hadn’t seen her in three months. He had just been too damn busy since arriving at Quantico, and she was going to graduate next week with a doctorate in mathematics after only six years of study. He felt like a selfish heel. She constantly told him not to worry about it, but he did worry about it. He was already dragging her down.

He saw the present Derek had sent for his birthday. It was still not un-freaking-wrapped, heavy and mysterious. He kept telling himself that he should open it, should call Derek up and let him know how cool it was that he remembered that smart-mouth irritating know-it-all from all those years ago. But he couldn’t. He told himself he would do that when he had a chance to focus. The rate he was going that was either going to be in eight weeks or next week on the flight home.

He knew that on his computer was a dozen rejected Skype invitations from Scott, which he particularly felt bad about because during his time at George Washington, he’d been more than a little annoyed with his best friend over the Skype sessions Scott had missed. In fact he had actually played the ‘you have to make time for me if you want to be friends’ card, and now he was the one being the dick.

He went into the bathroom and ran the faucet, allowing the water to get nice and cold. His face in the mirror looked just as frantic as he felt.

“You could go home,” he told the face in the mirror. “You have a criminology degree from George Washington. You completed the D.C. police academy. You could leave. You could wash out. Lots of people do.”

The face in the mirror did not reply, but it did not look happy about what he was saying.

“You could go home,” he told the face in the mirror. “You have a criminology degree from George Washington. You completed the D.C. police academy. You could leave. You could wash out. Lots of people do.”

The face in the mirror frowned at him. It wasn’t going to be an easy sell.

“No one would hold it against you. Hell, your father would love to see you again. You could
actually have days off again. You’ve been going full tilt for six years, and it wasn’t exactly Paradise for the three years of high school before that.”

The face in the mirror shook his head. Now it was just being stubborn.

“Oh, God. This is going to be an ego thing again, isn’t it? I’m going to make this into something that’s all about my perceived inadequacy issues. I’m going to say that Lydia wouldn’t want to keep seeing a loser who ran away from Quantico. I’m going to say that I’m going to disappoint everyone by not sticking it out.”

Stiles washed his face with the water and then looked back up.

“Come on. Scott wouldn’t blame you, even though he’s two years from being a freakin’ puppy doctor. Lydia doesn’t love you because of your title. Your dad doesn’t really want you to be a …”

The face lifted an eyebrow at him. There was no throwing in the towel tonight.

“Okay, okay. Back to work.”

Stiles turned out the light in the bathroom and sat back down at the desk. He’d pace himself. If he could get one done every hour and a half, maybe he could be in bed by – four a.m.?

He let his head flop unpleasantly onto the manila folder. With his eyes closed, he prayed once again for the Ghost Riders to come.

####

Stiles managed to write up all five case files and only received poor marks on one of them. He considered it a mild victory. The effort cost him though. He was nowhere near regaining the sleep he lost and every class, every run, and every training session put him farther and farther from being okay.

He felt like a zombie. A note-taking zombie. He was literally writing every word that came out of the instructors’ mouths.

And now this early morning class was going to be just another nightmare. ‘Essentials to Profiling’ was at least theoretically interesting to Stiles, but he could barely focus on the screen swimming in front of him.

It didn’t help that Professor Graham was a total Fruit Loop.

Stiles knew he could be vulnerable to claims of ‘it takes one to know one,’ but, seriously, if you were going to try to teach, you might want to actually try looking at your students once in a while. Professor Graham kept his gaze either on the floor or on the display from which he was lecturing. When he asked for responses, he would point at students without meeting their eyes, and Stiles could tell that he tended to look above people’s heads at their raised hands.

This teacher didn’t like his students much.

“The killer, who has been caught, committed five different murders,” Graham droned on. He had been pointing out the killer’s meticulously planned ritual. Any other day, it would have been fascinating to Stiles, but today he had to force himself to pay attention.

“Now. In the third and fourth murders, this happened.” Graham changed the screen to another crime scene photo. The picture showed a circular smear of blood on the wall. “Investigators found one of
these in the living room of the third murder and another similar smear in the kitchen of the fourth murder.” The mousy professor turned to the class. “Who wants to suggest a possible meaning, given what we know of the killer’s method and motive?”

There arose a rather lively discussion about the possible meanings of the circular smear of blood. Some people thought it had to do with the killer’s fragmenting psyche. Some people thought it could be related to the weapons he used. One person – clearly an overachiever with too much damn coffee in their system – had a theory that it was tied to German runes or something crazy like that.

Stiles’ tired annoyance grew and grew until he finally blurted out, far too loudly and without raising his hand. “Nothing. They meant nothing.”

Professor Graham suddenly looked at him with interest. “That’s an interesting proposition, Mr. … ahhhhh, Mr. Stilinski.” He walked over until he was very close. “Would you like to explain to the class why you believe that this mark meant nothing?”

Stiles swallowed. While he had talked in class before, he hadn’t been this confrontational. He had left that behind in high school; people were far more status conscious in higher education. It was just because he was so tired that he had done it. However, there was no avoiding it now; everyone was looking at him.

“It doesn’t fit with anything else. The smears have no obvious connection to the victims or the message the killer was trying to send.” Stiles remembered very clearly when people had left messages about their victims in his life. “It’s not a message or a ritual. It’s a circular smear of blood.”

“And why?” The professor took off his glasses and looked at him. “Would the killer do that? Why undermine his carefully constructed tableaux to leave smears? Was he trying to confuse investigators?”

“No.” Stiles replied. He took another breath: in for a penny, in for a pound. “He wasn’t. The mark means nothing because it means nothing. It’s not a trick. It’s just a thing.”

Mr. Graham gestured with his glasses for him to go on. He was getting awfully close – closer than the quirky little man usually got to his students.

“Killers aren’t robots.” Stiles had to keep going; going back would look lame and incompetent. “They get bored. They get tired. They trip. They doodle. Not everything that a suspect does at a crime scene is going to directly relate to the crime. It looks like he just smeared his hand on the wall.”

Graham put his glasses back on and stared at him. “But how would we differentiate between something that was done on purpose to embroider the killer’s statement and something that the killer had no intention of doing?”

Stiles swallowed nervously. The professor was being even freakier. “Instinct. Intuition, I guess. I’m assuming that as you work more and more on these types of cases, you’ll get a gut sense about these things. I know it doesn’t sound professional, but, in reality, not everything can be cleanly defined.”

Graham paused. “You happen to be correct.” He turned back to the rest of the class. “This brings me to one of the things we are going to be talking about today. Overinterpretation. A great many investigations have failed to capture their target because the investigators dug so deeply into clues that they lost track of the goal of the investigation: finding the killer.” He laughed grimly. “Like a snake swallowing its own tail.”

Mr. Graham went on to discuss how to compensate for overinterpretation in an investigation. Options included compensating by having a tolerance for open discussion. Another way to compensate – and the FBI did this all the time – would be by having a supervisor that was not part of the investigative team. Another way to do it could be by having a devil’s advocate – usually someone involved in the hard sciences.

That brought the class to an end. Stiles sighed. He actually had nothing to do tonight. He could sleep. It would be wonderful. Maybe after dinner, though, he could force himself to actually answer some mail, both post and digital.

His heart dropped to his stomach when he heard Professor Graham call out. “Would you wait a moment, Mr. Stilinski?”

Stiles took a deep breath and gave him his most sincere smile. “Sure.” He stood by his desk while Professor Graham waited until everyone had left the room.

“That was a particularly insightful comment you made. During my time as a teacher, I’ve never had someone come to that conclusion so quickly. What made you think that?” Graham sounded genuinely interested in his comments.

Stiles paused, searching for the answer himself. It had been, exactly as he said, intuition. He’d been drifting off into another class-shortening day dream and he’d just said it. However, he decided he didn’t want to actually tell his instructor that. He would like to get a nice grade out of the class and a recommendation.

It had to come from somewhere, so he thought about it. Maybe he could give a really impressive answer.

His stomach dropped when he realized where it came from. He couldn’t give the instructor the truth because the truth was horrifying: once upon a time, he had been a killer – or more accurately, controlled by a killer.

It had been the memory of the nogitsune choosing the wrapping paper that he had used not only for Coach’s gift but also for the fake bomb on the school bus. The 1000-year-old spirit hadn’t chosen the paper for a secret message or a threat or even because it meant something special. Using his body, it had stood in a Walmart and said: “Oooooh, this looks nice.” That was all. Nothing sinister. Nothing violent. The paper was aesthetically pleasing to the monster. If someone had been trying to profile the thing wearing his face and obsessed over that wrapping paper, they would have spent years trying to discover a meaning that didn’t exist.

Well, if they could have grasped the fact that the killer was a void kitsune possessing a teenager in the first place. That was unlikely.

The horror must have worked its way out of his mind and onto his face. Will Graham was staring at him like he was some sort of air-breathing fish.

“`I had a very interesting childhood with more violence than normal,” Stiles finally managed to squeak out. “My father is the sheriff and I had a morbid curiosity about crime.” This was all true, but the next part would be a total evasion. “You get a different appreciation for these things when you come at it from an amateur’s point of view.”

Will Graham was still staring at him. It was more than staring. It was like high-level scrutiny. Examining.
Stiles was absolutely aware of Will Graham’s reputation. His naturally curious nature had been forged by supernatural fuckery into a razor-sharp weapon of paranoia. Six years away hadn’t dulled the edge one bit. He knew everything publicly accessible about his teacher, so he knew of Will Graham’s unique ability to get inside people’s heads. While Stiles understood that it wasn’t anything weird or telepathic or invasive, he still didn’t want anyone crawling into that particular Chamber of Secrets.

“Well, if there’s nothing else, Mr. Graham, I should get going.” Stiles immediately began grabbing his stuff so he could exit from the room. He threw only one look over his shoulder to see the teacher still staring at him as he left.

Unfortunately, it took only three days until things got even stranger. Stiles received a note to go to the office of a bigwig. Not a small wig, nor a medium wig, but a bigwig.

Stiles told himself as he waited in the office that this was just a huge misunderstanding and that he wasn’t being expelled. He also told himself he wasn’t a teenager any more. He was twenty-four, a college graduate, and seven weeks from becoming an FBI agent. Sweating nervously was for losers. He was not a loser.

“Do you know why you are standing right now in my office?” Jack Crawford looked like he wanted to punch him on principle and get back to work.

“No, sir.”

“I have requested that you be assigned on a temporary basis to the Behavioral Analysis Unit. You’ll be working as support on ongoing investigations.” Director Crawford gave him this look as if daring him to say no.

“I’m flattered, sir, but …”

“But what?” It was brusque, clipped, and short. Every trainee would kill to be in the BAU.

Stiles took a deep breath. “Frankly, sir, my performance at the Academy strains to reach adequacy. I wish I was doing better, but I’m not. I have only seven more weeks of …”

Jack Crawford was looking at him like he was going to smack the living shit out of him. One eyebrow was slowly creeping up the side of his face like the warning gauge on an airplane.

“You’ll find, Trainee Stilinski, that my personal recommendation is more than enough to make up for you barely being adequate. You do understand the opportunity this presents to you? All you have to do is tell me: do you want this opportunity?”

Stiles thought about it very quickly. On the positive side, this could make his career. Even if he later decided that Behavioral Analysis was not for him, having a recommendation from Jack Crawford would open lots and lots and lots of doors. Also on the positive side, it wasn’t like he hadn’t actually dealt with serial killers before, and these probably wouldn’t come after him personally. On the negative side, there was Will Graham with his disturbing stare and mind-reading talents. However, the teacher was only a consultant. Stiles probably would never even meet him during his assignment.

“Yes, sir. I want this.”

“Good.” Crawford gave the impression that any other answer would have been unacceptable. “Report to Dr. Price. He’ll introduce you to your duties.”
Stiles left the office, feeling elated. This was not what he had been dreaming of since he first arrived in Quantico; it was even better. He didn’t even bother to go get something to eat before he went over to the laboratory.

“Oh, good,” the forensics expert said when he arrived. “It’s the new piss boy.”

Stiles elation deflated.

“Just kidding. Though seriously, you understand that you're here to essentially keep our records straight why we do the actual forensics?” Price was too busy to turn around to talk to him, so Stiles was staring at his back.

“I knew I had to start at the bottom, sir.” Stiles was polite and respectful. His father would have been so proud. His friends would have checked him for a concussion.

“Good. You can start with those.” Dr. Price pointed at a stack of files about a foot-and-a-half tall on a nearby desk. “Those are Will Graham’s crime scene notes. You need to transcribe them into a standard FBI format and supply translations.”

“Translations?”

“Yes. Graham’s insights are very useful, but he has this tendency to get a little artsy and it doesn’t help a case when you have to have a masters in literature to understand what a report means. Somehow he thinks you're the one to get them into shape.”

“Uhm?” Stiles gasped; it demonstrated his total brilliance before the forensics expert. “Mr. Graham requested me?”

“Yep. By name. I hope you're as good as he thinks you are, because I have to tell you that your most important job will probably be converting Will-Speak into actual English.” Dr. Price shook his head, obviously dismissing him to get to work while he went back to his own tasks. “This is my design. What in the world does that mean?”

At this point, Stiles could only think of what his father always said in situations like this. “Awwwww, hell.”
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Lydia, Scott and Stiles are celebrating Lydia's graduation when the Minnesota Shrike case interrupts the festivities.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The three of them were laughing in the hallway of the motel, not loud enough to disturb the other guests, but still without restraint. They were laughing the way only people who had gone through hell and death together could do with each other. Stiles felt the exhaustion clawing at his eyelids, but the drunken joy burning within him encouraged him to dally. He had his left arm draped around Scott’s shoulder, allowing his oldest friend to carry his weight, and his right arm wrapped around Lydia, preventing her from moving away, not that she was trying to do so. He felt more at ease – he felt more right - than he had for weeks and weeks and months.

“You guys … you guys are the best.” Those words sounded so trite and thoughtless; they sounded like something people said to strangers they had tied one on with at a sports bar. Stiles didn't care; these two were the best friends he had and were likely to be the best friends he ever could have. Sniffling with emotion, he slid the card into the door and opened it, but he avoided saying something more meaningful by retreating into humor. “After you, Dr. Martin.”

“Don’t mind if I do, Agent Stilinski!” She poked him in the side as they entered the room. “I have the bathroom first.” Lydia winked at both of them and then strutted into the bathroom, even though he wagered she was just as tired as he was. She disappeared without another word and he was momentarily bereft. How long would it be before he no longer constantly craved another moment with her because they were actually living together?

Scott gave him a one-armed hugged and broke away. His best friend was probably just as exhausted as they were, but he didn’t show it. Instead, he had, irritatingly, the same fragile little smile on his face that had been there all weekend. Stiles panicked for a second as he watched it. Yeah, it was late and both of them were tired, but Scott used to grin so differently when he was younger. Now Stiles could have sworn that Scott no longer really manage a truly beaming smile. Had he done this? When he ran off to be a big FBI agent, had he stolen his best friend’s happiness?

Stop it, Stilinski, Stiles told himself, you told yourself you’d put the paranoia away for tonight. Scott was just tired. Werewolf or not, he had driven the eight hours from Cambridge to Quantico all by himself while Lydia and Stiles had giggled like school children in the back seat. Hell, Scott had driven across country to attend Lydia’s graduation just a few days before.

Scott broke the silence. “I can get another room …”

“No, no, no!” Stiles insisted. “You're staying with us. You aren’t interrupting anything. Lydia and I are going to be unconscious the minute we hit that bed, and you probably will be too.”

“What if you wanted to be alone? What if she wanted to be alone?” Scott remarked. “You’ve not had any private time together this whole weekend. Lydia was either trying to keep her mom and dad
from tearing each other apart or impressing the hell out of her colleagues.”

“Dude, don’t worry about our sex life. We’re adults now, we don’t have to do it every time we’re in the same zip code. And really, nothing like that is happening tonight. After all, it’s nearly …” Stiles sought out the clock on the end table. “Jesus, it’s 4 a.m. I have to be back at the Academy by noon.”

He steered Scott further into the room – as usual, the alpha let him push him around – and threw their bags on the floor by the foot of the bed. “We’re gonna sleep.”

“You could at least have gotten a double room. Or let me get one?”

“Scott, do I have to ask you how much in student loans you owe?” Stiles groused. “How much do you think I owe? How much do you think Lydia owes? In ten years, we’ll be able to stay in luxury suites, but until then, it’s Econo Lodge all the way. Anyway, what are you worried about? It won’t be the first time we’ve shared a bed.”

Scott nodded sadly at the mention of his loans, ignoring the question about the bed. “You’re right about how much I owe. I’ve got two more years left in school and I think they’re eventually going to come for my first born.”

“And that’s why you shouldn’t have given Garrett’s money back to Peter,” Stiles teased. “Hold on, I have to text my supervisor. For some reason I don’t quite get, they need to know if I change my itinerary.” He pulled out his phone. “And there is no way you are sleeping anywhere but in that bed; you drove all the way from home to attend Lydia’s graduation, you drove us down here, and you’re going to have to drive all the way back. Lydia and I insist.”

“It’s not a problem if …” Scott began as Stiles texted the message to his supervisor.

Lydia, her timing perfect as always, emerged from the bathroom. “Nope. No more arguing, you dumb werewolf. It’s your turn. Into the bathroom. Shoo!” Lydia looked as, well, plain as anyone could ever imagine her looking: over-sized t-shirt, sleep pants, makeup removed, and her hair up in a ponytail. She still could style herself with the best when she cared to, but six years of pure research had diminished her need to be the best-dressed banshee on the continent. It didn’t matter to Stiles; she never looked more beautiful than she did every single moment he got to see her.

As the alpha shuffled off to the bathroom, Stiles sidled up to her, waggling his eyebrows. “Unfortunately, I wasn’t exaggerating. It’s gonna be lights out the minute I hit the pillows.”

She put a hand on his chest. “They’ll be plenty of time for that other stuff later. I thought you weren’t sleeping well again?”

“I will with you here.” He dipped in for a quick kiss. He wanted to do it again and again and again, but she was right. There would be plenty of time for that later. “The sleeping problems are nothing to worry about. They’re just mundane, average, everyday, I-am-an-amazing-impostor-and-I-don’t-even-know-how-I-got-into-this-program stresses keeping me up.” He smiled but had to finish texting his supervisor. “You know how it is.”

“I really don’t,” she teased.

“Yes, Dr. Martin.” He finished the text and sent it. She pulled the phone from his hand.

“You’ll be back on campus by lunchtime,” she offered as she turned the phone off. “Until then, you are off the grid. You need your rest.”

“One of these days …” Stiles went to the bed and turned it down. It would be a tight fit with all three of them, but they could do it. Scott instinctually enjoyed the snuggling, and both of them had grown
to like it. “One of these days, we won’t be so far apart.”

“Sheh,” she whispered. Lydia was the best. She was patient. She was confident. If she believed in him, there was nothing he couldn’t do. Even wait for her. “I know.”

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Scott shook Stiles to wake him up which was annoying enough on its own, but even more so when accompanied by the sound of a huge bass drum. He flailed a bit from where he was nestled between Scott and Lydia on the bed. He felt like crap. “Leave me alone. Damn it, Scott.”

“Someone’s at the door, dude. Many someones.” The drum resolved itself into someone pounding on the door. “I’ll get it, but they’re probably here for you.”

_Bullshit_ Stiles thought, _Let me sleep_. The clock on the nightstand unhelpfully said that it was 8 a.m. _What evil force has manifested that wants me up at this hour?_

Scott stumped over to the door, pulling a t-shirt on as he went. Stiles couldn’t help but check him out as he went to the door. _Hey, I’m allowed. It’s in the Bro Code._ Scott was even more defined and bulkier than he was in high school, which was totally unfair. He wasn’t in bad shape himself, but he still looked rather scrawny compared to his best friend.

Scott pulled open the door. “Can I help you?”

Stiles believed he must have fallen back asleep, because he was sure he began hearing Director Crawford’s voice. Maybe he shouldn’t have said yes to the director’s offer if he was going to start dreaming about him.

“Trainee Stilinski!” That was not a dream voice; that was a real-life voice. Stiles shot up in bed, which woke Lydia up once more and she grumbled next to him. Standing in the doorway was Jack Crawford and a few other people he was too bleary to recognize. Strangely enough, to Stiles’ sleep-addled mind, it looked like Scott was presently blocking the director from coming into the room.

In fact, when Stiles managed to focus, it looked like they were in each other’s faces. Stiles was wrong; it wasn’t a dream, this was a nightmare come to life.

“Yes, sir?” He swung out of the bed, only to realize that he was in his underwear as well. “Uhm. Uh, what can I do for you?”

“We have wheels off the ground in forty-five minutes.” The director turned away from the door. “Don’t you ever turn off your phone again.” He stalked away.

Stiles gawped. He had no idea what was going on, but his gut instinct told him he had to hurry. With the director no longer in the doorway, two members of the forensics teams could clearly be seen giggling obscenely in the hallway. Scott scowled after the director’s retreating back; from the look on his face, Stiles was lucky that Scott wasn’t growling out loud.

As his best friend rushed around the motel room getting his things, Scott remembered his manners. “Why don’t you come in?” It was better than making them lurk in the hallway.

Stiles tried to talk in his hurry to get dressed. “Okay. What’s happening? Where are we going?”

“We’re scrambling for Minnesota. The full team. It was an early morning decision. Sorry to crash your weekend off.” The woman turned to Scott who was still standing relatively angrily near the door and extended her hand. “Hi, I’m Beverly.”
Scott shook it, politely. He had calmed down; even as a werewolf, he had seldom been as angry as the moments before. “Scott. Nice to meet you. Who was the shouting guy?”

“Scott!” Stiles hissed, scandalized. “That was Director Crawford, head of the Behavioral Analysis Unit.” He was trying to pull on pants while gathering up his stuff. When Scott's head cocked to one side in confusion, Stiles snorted. “My boss’s boss.”

“We’re all part of his unit,” Beverly added helpfully. “Man behind me, who is just as grumpy as you are, is Brian.”

Stiles nearly fell over when he tried to put on his socks and introduce people at the same time. Lydia, who had covered herself with a blanket, demurely spoke up. “Lydia. I’d say this was charming, but it’s not.”

“Oh!” Beverly said. “You’re the mathematics prodigy. I read your paper on combinatorics. The half I could understand was absolutely fascinating.”

“I like her already, Stiles. Why didn’t you tell me you were working with cultured people?”

Stiles was rushing about the room trying to make sure he had all his stuff. “I’ve been working with them for four days!” He complained. “I don’t think I’ve even got their names until this morning.” He straightened up as he realized that he was going to have to leave now.

“Guys, I’m sorry, but …” Stiles had his blazer in one hand and his bag in the other. He rushed over to Lydia and gave her a good-bye kiss. “I didn’t know.”

“It’s all right, dude. Duty calls. We’ll talk when you get back.” Scott clapped him on the shoulder. “You go catch the bad guy.”

Beverly Katz shoved an identification badge at him before she got into her car. He wasn't a special agent yet, but he was no longer considered a trainee. The field promotion made sense if he was going to be working with evidence from an actual, ongoing case. He pulled it on over his head so it rested on the wrinkly mess of his jacket.

Brian Zeller, the other tech, turned to him from the passenger-side front seat and shot him a grin. “Looks like you had a pretty spectacular weekend.” It was carefully phrased to be a hair shy of leering.

“What?” Stiles scrunched up his face. “It was pretty cool, but there was a lot of driving.”

Zeller nodded salaciously and turned back to the front of the car as they sped toward the airport. “I bet there was.”

“How? Oh. Oh. OHHHHH.” Stiles realized what he was implying. “I went to Lydia’s graduation for her doctorate. We didn’t … well, we have … but not this weekend. No time.”

Beverly and Zeller shot each other impish smiles. Beverly remarked, “I would certainly have made time for the two of them.”

Stiles blinked from the back seat. Two of them? His mind, still befuddled by lack of sleep, no coffee and the headlong rush to the airport, didn’t put two and two together for fifteen seconds. “Wait. No, wait. Scott and me and Lydia aren’t like that. I’ve known Scott for years.” Stiles bit his tongue because he almost slipped out with He’s my alpha but he caught it in time. “We’re just super
comfortable with each other.” He finished lamely.

He needed coffee before his untrammeled tongue made him look like some kinky sex fiend. Which wasn’t a bad thing in itself, but he didn’t need to get off on the wrong foot with these people. Defense wasn’t working out, so he went with the best offense – sarcasm. “You know, this could be considered a mildly hostile work environment.”

Zeller affected a mock serious face. “Me? I didn’t say anything! Did you say something, Bev?”

Bev shook her head, all wide-eyed innocence. “I didn’t say anything either!”

“Ha, ha.” Stiles looked at his bag in the seat next to him. He was so totally unprepared. “I guess I should start putting together a go-bag in the future. What’s so damn important in Minnesota?”

“The Minnesota Shrike,” Beverly responded immediately.

“I read the top page of the profile in the lab,” Stiles grimaced. “I know I’ll just be bagging evidence and transcribing notes, but do you have the complete case file that I could read?”

Zeller looked back at him, a little impressed. “I’ll get it to you on the plane.”

Scott and Lydia sat down at a quaint little diner across from the motel. They ordered coffee -- lots and lots of hot coffee. Lydia also had ordered a grapefruit, while Scott had ordered the Farmer’s Breakfast Special. From its description, he might end up with half-a-cow on his plate.

“Well,” Scott grumbled into his cup. “That was exciting.”

Lydia yawned. “Well, I suspect that it’s something we might as well get used to. It’s amazing that he’s been assigned to the BAU. Don’t tell Stiles this, but I didn’t think he’d ever get a shot at the big time, given what he told me about his work at the Academy. I should have anticipated he’d undersell his performance. Same old Stiles.”

“The Behavioral Analysis Unit is the big time?” Scott asked as he fidgeted in his seat. He was really hungry, but the meal hadn’t arrived yet.

“You call in the BAU when you’ve got a serial killer and you have no idea how to catch him. It’s a really prestigious position and that man you almost punched is one of the most influential men in the bureau.”

Scott stared at her, wondering how she knew so much more about the inner workings of the Federal Bureau of Investigation when his father actually worked there.

“I read.” She explained brightly, but then her mood soured. “It’s a great opportunity for Stiles.”

“You don’t sound particularly happy about it,” Scott observed.

“I understand that what happened this morning won’t be a one-time occurrence. As long as he’s with the unit we can expect it to happen all the time. He’ll be flying all around the country constantly, and he certainly won’t be able to move back to California. They’re based in Virginia.”

Scott felt his appetite disappear. It’d been years since Stiles and Lydia had left Beacon Hills for school on the other side of the country, but Scott had always believed that eventually they would come back home. Well, maybe they wouldn’t move back to Beacon Hills, but there was an FBI field
office in Sacramento, two hours away. Close enough for things to be the way they were supposed to be.

Lydia read his mind. “If he stays with the unit, he won’t be coming back. And … neither would I.”

Scott swallowed. It made sense. Lydia’s talent could get her a job anywhere; she already had recruiters from the federal government trying to get her attention, and Quantico wasn’t that far from D.C.

“I’m happy for you.” He wasn’t happy at all. He smiled the biggest fake smile he could. “You guys would visit on the holidays, right?”

Lydia reached out to cover his hand with hers. “Maybe. Scott, you need to be prepared for the possibility that we’re not going to be able to be … pack anymore.”

Scott could only keep breathing as she voiced a fear that had been secretly gnawing at him for years. He had first thought about it one lonely night during his freshman year at U.C. Davis. On that day, he had finished the last midterm of his first ever batch of midterms – God, did he hate midterms – and he had suddenly realized how different his life had become. It wasn’t just that he was out of Beacon Hills and in college. He had looked around his dorm room and realized, for the first time in a long time, that he was alone. He had made acquaintances at school, but he hadn’t really had the time to make actual friends. The pre-veterinary program requirements weren’t easy, so his routine had become established quickly: wake up, study, class, study, eat, study, work out (just so he wouldn’t go nuts in his room), study, and sleep. There had been no pack at Davis. No Stiles to distract him. No Liam to guide. No Malia or Lydia or Mason or anyone to go to the movies or discuss something new and interesting. It had only been him.

The realization had freaked him out. Even before he had a pack, he had always had someone (Stiles) to waste time doing nothing very important. Even before he had a pack, he had always a friend (and it was always Stiles) who cared if he was feeling down or overwhelmed.

He was an adult now, so he didn’t let homesickness drive him back to Beacon Hills. In fact, he was careful not to go home too often, because he didn’t want to give Liam the impression that he didn’t trust him. He told himself he’d grow out of being homesick. He still had the pack, even if he only saw them on Skype or on weekends and holidays. He told himself that they’d all be back together, eventually. They’d finish college and come back home.

Now Lydia was telling him that his fear had not been simple homesickness. His fear was real, and it was coming true.

Lydia was looking at him, both sympathetically and expectantly, from across the table. For some reason, it didn’t make him feel better that she cared. It made him angry. “What do you want me to say?” They were interrupted by the waiter as she brought their meals to them. It gave him an excuse to bite down on the angry words clawing up his throat.

Lydia lifted an eyebrow. “I want you to say that you understand. You have to know how much of an opportunity it is for him, Scott. And you have to know that … I have the freedom to choose where I wish to be.”

Scott stared at the food before him, before he picked up his fork and began shoving the food into his mouth. It must have been quite a sight for the other people in the restaurant and for Lydia. However, it kept him from speaking, and he felt it was best that he didn’t talk right now.

“Scott.” Lydia said as kindly as she could. It didn’t actually work. It infuriated him.
“So. That all meant nothing to you?” He knew it was wrong for him to say the moment the words left his mouth. Of course, it meant something. “I mean. Hell, I don’t know what I mean.”

Lydia picked up her spoon and dipped it into her fruit. She was being patient.

“I feel like a cliché. I feel like the jock who suddenly realizes that his glory days are behind him, and he can't help but try to remind everyone of what a great time high school had been so he can feel validated.” He snorts and throws his fork down. “But where jocks got trophies, I got blood and horror. That's all I am for you, isn't it? Why the fuck would you want to come back?”

But he wanted them both to come home. He wanted them to want to come home.

“You were captain of the lacrosse team.” Lydia frowned. It was a lame joke and she knew it. “Are you angry with him?”

Scott narrowed her eyes at her. “No. I’m just angry. You think I want Stiles to give up his big chance? But if you think I’m going to be happy about …” He picked up the fork again and shoved a bit of sausage in his mouth to buy him some time not to say what he was going to say. Lydia obviously wasn’t going to let him get away with it.

“You know what? Fuck this. I could tell myself that we’ll still talk and I’ll still see him on the holidays, but you and I both know that it isn’t the same. I’ve been lying to myself for the last six years, pretending that I still had him. It's the funniest thing when you think about it -- you know what took him away from me? Not chimeras or darachs or ghost riders, but good fucking grades!”

“You’ll have the rest of the pack ….”

“Yeah. Except Stiles. Except you. I’ll probably lose Mason as well. It’ll be me, Liam, Hayden, and maybe Corey. I can't help but notice that every human gets to leave, and the rest of us get to stay, whether we want to or not.”

“You could make a different choice, Scott.”

“I haven’t had a real choice since I was sixteen,” Scott snarled. He threw down a twenty and a few ones into the half-eaten meal. “I'll be in the car.”

Chapter End Notes

I found out that trainees at the Academy can leave on certain weekends, as long as they provide a detailed itinerary. Pretty interesting!

For fans of Hannibal, Stiles does not go with them the first time they head to Minnesota. He's with them for the copycat murder in "Aperitif."
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Stiles gets to work with the BAU team on the case of the Minnesota Shrike. Lydia and Stiles talk about old memories surfacing within him. Scott begins the long drive back to California. Stiles meets someone new and potentially very interesting.

Chapter Notes

This chapter borrows some dialogue directly from Hannibal.

Stiles stood in a field in Hibbing, Minnesota, waving his arms like a mad man. His present goal was keeping the crows off of the corpse of Cassie Boyle. Even with the occasional help of Zeller, the damn birds were being really, really stubborn. Dr. Price had explained to him that among his duties would be making sure that the crime scene remained as uncontaminated as possible.

Usually during investigations, a task as simple as keeping animals away would have been handed off to the local police, but the Hibbing officers weren’t really prepared for the grotesque sight before them. They grouped themselves in little knots, drifting farther and farther away from the gory tableau unless specifically told to get closer. This was beyond their experience, and it was far beyond what they wanted their experience to be. Distance was soothing.

Stiles had received a few compliments from his new team on his demeanor. This was his first crime scene working with the BAU, and even some of the more veteran agents had looked a little green about the edges when confronted with a girl’s corpse mounted on stolen deer antlers.

He wondered if he should be proud that he’d seen enough death by the end of high school not to be phased by something as artistically gruesome as this. Would it be gauche?

Because it was undeniably artistic. Stiles wouldn’t admire anyone who would do this to a living girl, but even he had to acknowledge the sheer … competency of whoever had executed this. The killer had kidnapped the woman, stolen the antlers, and mounted her in a field in the space of one night. This was no amateur.

He shooed the crows away once more. Or were they ravens? They were probably ravens. Bold birds that felt not the slightest bit of fear of the agents. Who were these monkeys to get in the way of their meal?

“It’s petulant,” Stiles overheard Will Graham saying to everyone within earshot. “It almost feels like he’s mocking her. Or … he’s mocking us.”

Stiles flinched at the tones in the special investigator’s voice. The words were speculative and searching; the special investigator was narrating the steps he took towards the conclusions he was drawing. It sounded just like Stiles would imagine a good detective’s voice would when you first listened to it, coolly drawing the facts together and coming up with conclusions to catch the killer.
But with each word, another emotion entered into the voice: anger. Not anger for Cassie Boyle specifically, because to Graham as much to the forensics team as much to Crawford and as much to him she was just a pile of meat with a name attached to it. The anger was directed at a killer who decided that this – this slaughter – was an appropriate way to tweak the noses of the investigative team. See, the killer was saying, this is what I think of your paltry attempts to try to catch me.

Something stirred in the back of his head. It was a memory, like when you entered someone’s house and you smelled perfume which was so like what your grandmother always wore. The memory was powerful and yet indistinct. Stiles wasn’t sure exactly where it came from.

“Our cannibal loves women. He doesn’t want to destroy them. He wants to consume them. To keep some part of them inside.” Graham’s voice was now pleading with Director Crawford for purchase. The consultant was convinced that this wasn’t the Minnesota Shrike.

“The cannibal that killed Elise Nichols had a place to do it and no interest in … in field kabuki.” Graham's fury surged back, but now Stiles couldn’t tell at whom the anger was pointed. It was no longer totally directed at the killer, and it certainly wasn’t directed at the team or the victim. It was more disturbing because it was unfocused.

At George Washington and at the Academy, Stiles had had a long line of instructors tell him that the worst thing you could do was take a crime personally. Engaging it on a level above ‘the case’ might give you insight, but it also opened you up to allowing your own personal emotions to color your thinking. The best approach to analysis was to build a wall between your professional life and your personal life. From what Stiles was able to tell, if Will Graham had ever had a wall, it had been bulldozed years ago. The man was vibrating among the field grass like a snapped guitar string. Stiles listened to Will's mountain anger, but he couldn’t focus on it. That strange feeling was back like an itch on the back of his head, like a recollection begging to resurface.

Now it was the other FBI agents' turn to drift away from the scene. They had heard of Graham’s reputation, but it was one thing to hear about it and another to see it in action. Stiles didn’t move with them. He had his own mystery to figure out and something about the way the case was being laid open was bringing it to the surface.

Crawford demanded more information about the copycat. The director must have an amazing amount of trust in his special investigator because there was no conclusive indication that this was a copycat except Graham’s deductions. Stiles certainly wouldn’t argue against them. The first day in the field was not the time to pipe up with some half-baked Stilinski insight.

“He may never kill this way again. Have Dr. Lecter draw up a psychological profile. You seemed very impressed with his opinion.” Graham stalked away from the corpse and out of the crime scene.

“Oh, there might have been some anger directed at Director Crawford, thought Stiles. And who the hell was Dr. Lecter?

Stiles went over to where the forensics team was still working. Part of his duties was to walk the evidence samples to a secure vehicle so they could maintain the chain of evidence. It wasn’t super glamorous, but it was important.

Zeller made a noise in the back of his throat. “Well, that was … really something.”

Price rolled his eyes and kept focus on his work, but it was clear he agreed with the sentiment.

“But I can’t argue with it,” Beverly answered.
“Why not?” Price snapped. “There’s no evidence supporting his conclusions.” He shifts his eyes over to where Stiles was standing. “What do you think?”

Stiles paused. He could play this off as he didn’t really have an opinion of his own. That would be the safest play. But since when did Noah Stilinski’s son go for the safest play?

And, honestly, Graham had asked him to be part of the team, so he must have had a reason to do it, even if Stiles was going to be ‘the new piss boy.’ So the question Stiles had to ask himself was: why was he here? Was it just to pad his resume? Or was he actually here to contribute?

“There isn’t any evidence refuting his conclusion, either. In that case, I always go with the more experienced gut.” All three of the forensic technicians stopped what they were doing and looked at him. He felt like he was before a review board. When Price’s eyes narrowed, he felt he was before a firing squad.

“Fair enough,” Price admitted and Stiles could breathe again. “Do a sweep to make sure we haven’t dropped anything. We need all the evidence we can get; eventually, we’ll be able to put a story to this with more substance than a gut feeling.”

Stiles did as he was told. The worst possible thing you could do in an investigation was leave an important piece of evidence behind. He saw the coroner’s assistants were ready to get the body. The team would do a more thorough autopsy back at the BAU.

Even as he helped them, there was still that vague thought that plagued him, lurking restlessly just inside his forehead, behind his eyes. It was about Cassie Boyle, about what Mr. Graham believed, about whoever had mounted this woman on a deer antlers as a provocation, as a …

Stiles coughed in surprise. He thought he had been trying to recapture that feeling of recognition, but he has actually been doing the exact opposite. He had been trying to push it away – to deny that he knew what this was. He felt his gorge rise at it, but fortunately, he did not throw up.

Stiles said it out loud, because he had to. He was compelled. “This was a trick.”

Lydia loved her Cambridge apartment. She refused to live like a vagabond and so when she had decided to complete all her degrees at the Institute, she had found a small but well-laid out apartment which she had redecorated. It gave her peace, especially when she found herself straining under the weight of being a prodigy. She never sweated her classwork; it was the expectations of those around her that caused her the most stress. Some people believed that geniuses never needed time to learn, and she should be perfect immediately. When it got too much, she tended to stay in her apartment for days. It was her domain.

It had been a very long weekend and while she did not have anything to do Monday morning, she had still resolved to go to bed early. However, it was a little after eleven when the phone rang. She rolled over and checked the number.

Stiles. She was very tired, but she smiled as she picked up the call. “Hello there, stranger.”

Stiles immediately broke into apologetic babbling. “I woke you up. I’m sorry, I didn’t think. It’s only ten here, and you didn’t get that much sleep today …”

“Stiles, it’s okay. You didn’t get much sleep either. How are you doing?” She rolled onto her back in bed, relaxed. How weird is it, she thought, that things have come to the point that the sound of his voice makes me happy? Very weird. And pretty wonderful.
Stiles remained silent for more than a minute. She had learned enough about him over the years to know that whatever had prompted him to call was serious. She had also learned that in situations like this, it was absolutely most inappropriate time to push the issue. If she pushed, he’d deflect. She needed to be patient, and he would tell her when he was ready.

“Did I seem … did I seem different to you this weekend?” His voice telegraphed his discomfort. The question had cost him a lot.

“No, not at all.” Lydia sat up. She was being completely truthful, but Stiles sounded so unsure of himself that she knew something had rattled him. “What’s going on?”

“It’s nothing.” His voice was closing down. God, she hated it when he got like this.

“Because you always lead off conversations this late at night with things that mean nothing. You promised you’d try to stop doing this.” Stiles would never stop trying to hide the things that bothered him, but she also would never stop trying to get him to trust her. Sometimes it seemed like he was just waiting for her to leave. If she could get him down to hiding only fifty percent of the things that bothered him she would be incredibly happy.

“It’s just. Well, twice in the last week I’ve …” His voice sounded so small. “I thought about it. It. You know. Once in class and then once at the crime scene today.”

Lydia considered this, but she did not need to consider it for long. There was only one topic that could frighten him like that. The memories frightened her, as well, but that was all they were – memories. She knew better, however, than to dismiss his fear out of hand. “Tell me about it.”

“I was in class and Mr. Graham was talking about interpreting evidence and he was talking about a detail at a crime scene …” Stiles went on to explain how he had an insight into the lecture.

Lydia listened carefully. The class sounded interesting. “Okay. Go on. The other time?”

“It was at the crime scene today …” Stiles told her this story as well, but she realized that he was editing stuff out. He liked to protect her from the less pleasant aspects of his work. She sighed inwardly; he kept forgetting that she was a banshee. Death was nothing new to her.

“Stiles.” She spoke gently but firmly after he had finished. “What do you think makes someone a good detective?”

“What? What are you talking about?” Stiles was confused. He sometimes did forget that she was far smarter than he was.

“I am talking about what makes a good detective. Perception, which you have. Determination, which you have. And experience … which you have. Just because that experience comes from a supernatural source that no one else could understand doesn’t make your experience invalid. You learned things from it. Using them to catch the bad guys --”

“You don’t understand …” He interrupted her but then he stopped. She could imagine him smacking his head with an open hand. Of course she understood.

“You’re worried that it changed you.” She supplied. “Even now, after all these years, you’re worried that you are … I don’t know, tainted.”

“Yes,” he whispered.

“You were changed, Stiles. You were tainted. But that’s life.” She knew that right now he did not
need her to be gentle. He needed her to believe in him. “You are stronger because of that. So you have an insight into an alien mindset – considering that you might be making a career of hunting down serial killers, that’s an asset, not a detriment.”

Stiles let out a long breath over the phone. “Wow. What did I do to deserve you?”

“Nothing. I have simply deigned to grace you with my presence.” Lydia understood that the scars that Stiles bore would never go away. There would be always part of his mind that remembered being in control by no longer being in control. Part of him would always miss it. Just as she knew that there was always a part of her mind that would be terrified of being someone else’s puppet.

But that’s life, she repeated to herself, we are the sum of what has happened to us.

Stiles laughed. “Well, can you put Scotty on? I want to apologize for having to bail on him today.”

“Oh, well.” She winced. “We’re going to have to talk about that. We had … kind of a fight?”

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Scott pulled his motorcycle over in a wooded area near the highway somewhere in central New York, between Utica and Syracuse. He knew he had only spent five hours on the road, which was a relatively small part of the forty-five hour trip back to California, but it was getting late. He rolled the bike into a copse of trees to conceal it from the road and spread out his sleeping bag.

For anyone else, sleeping out under the stars might have been dangerous, but he was the most dangerous thing in the night for a hundred miles in any direction. He had decided not to waste money paying for motels for his trip home. He didn’t mind the sleeping bag, and the long journey gave him the time he needed to think anyway. Unfortunately, his thoughts on the way up had been a lot more pleasant than the thoughts he was having now.

Maybe while he was lying here he figure out why he was being such an enormous baby. He had stormed out of Lydia’s apartment almost immediately after dropping her off. He would have described it as acting like a high schooler, but he had never done anything that immature in high school. He guessed he would need to have said that he was acting like a middle schooler.

He kicked off his shoes and struggled into the sleeping bag, twisting back and forth in order to get comfortable on the ground. He had turned his phone off; he didn’t want to talk to anyone when he was feeling like this, and contrary to popular opinion, the fact that you had a cell phone didn’t make it mandatory that you had to be available all the time. It wasn’t his desire to be alone for one night that was foolish; what had been foolish was for him to get mad at Lydia for something that no one else in the world would be surprised at.

College was supposed to open up the world, he thought as he studied the night sky. It was supposed to make us more than we were; not destroy the worlds we already had.

The wind picked up; it wasn’t yet winter but it wasn’t exactly warm. The chill wouldn’t bother him. He knew what did bother him, what had crawled under his skin and sat there, ripping at the edges of his nerves. He was being changed against his will again. You would think that the knowledge that this happened to almost everyone his age would make it easier for him to accept. It didn’t.

Life was taking the people he needed from him, and not by killing them. Stiles had told him at the beginning of senior year his greatest fear; that they would become the ‘high-school friends.’ They would be able to get together three or four times a year to reminisce. They’d go out to the bar or cook out on the patio and one of them would say to the other “Do you remember when Theo was a
complete murdering douchebag?” Then they would laugh and the afternoon would go by so quick and it would get dark and they would have to pack it in and go home. Slowly, the visits would come less often. Children would be sick. Work would make demands. Suddenly, it would be their twenty-fifth-year high school reunion, and they would realize they hadn’t seen each other since the last reunion, five years ago. They’d stare at each other as if they didn’t know each other anymore.

He couldn’t get comfortable; a seething anger might keep him up all night. The only thing he could think of that would stop it would be to sabotage Stiles’ chances at the BAU. Scott would never do that, so he was going to lose. He’d watch the remains of their friendship fade away rather than hurt Stiles for his own selfishness.

The clouds broke above him and the half-moon, luminous and cold, crept through the sky. I’ll always have you, Scott thought. Changing but permanent, like a clock for my soul, even when the clouds cover you.

A terrible and beautiful idea occurred to him then. If only he could learn to do what Derek could and turn into a wolf completely. If he had learned how to do that, he would do it right now; it would be so easy. He could leave his clothes and his motorcycle and his phone and his student loans and his consuming fear behind him. He could disappear into the forest. The police would find his things and assume foul play. His mom would be heartbroken, but she’d understand. So would the pack. They would understand that he just couldn’t stand there anymore and watch the things he loved go away.

But he couldn’t do that. He had never learned how.

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Stiles slept for almost five hours that night, so he was up hours before dawn. Considering that he had only had four or so hours of sleep the night before, it was looking like today was going to be one that required naps.

He could only hope he wasn’t suffering from insomnia again. Throughout school, the occasional bout of sleeplessness had caused anxiety, but they had always passed. At least he hadn’t had any nightmares tonight.

So, he did what he did whenever he woke up too early and couldn’t go back to sleep. He ran. It was cold in Duluth; this far north it got colder more quickly than D.C. or California. It was okay, though, as he had stopped by a store after work the night before and bought some good clothing. He had no idea how long the investigation would keep him here.

Running in the chilly dawn was strangely invigorating, his breath leaving trails behind him through the air. He had taken up running in high school in an effort to get better at lacrosse but eventually it had become an end to itself. He needed to dispel some of the stress of yesterday and last night anyway, especially if he was going to do house-to-house interviews in Cassie Boyle’s neighborhood. He needed to focus on the job, not his fear of the long-term effects of possession or Scott’s disappointment. He wasn’t mad at Lydia for telling Scott that; it probably would have to be talked about sooner or later but as usual, he had been putting it off. He felt disloyal.

He would have called Scott and talk to it, but he was sure that Scott had turned off his phone. He was either sleeping, driving or pouting. It would have to wait until later.

He turned the corner after his run – he thought it was five miles, but he wasn’t sure – and came to a stop in front of the tiny motel that they had used. He’d go in, get a shower, get breakfast and then
start the interviews. Inwardly, Stiles sighed. It was unlikely that the house-to-house interviews would reveal anything, given the killer’s obvious skill, but in cases like this you did it anyway.

As he finished his cool down walk, he saw a man getting out of a car in front of the motel. The man was tall, blond, and older and he had with him a few plastic food boxes. “Excuse me?” The man had a sonorous voice. “Would you mind telling me which room is Will Graham’s?”

Stiles stopped. “Uh. May I ask who you are?” Stiles also wanted to know how this guy would know that he would know where Graham was staying.

“I’m Dr. Lecter. I’m a colleague of Mr. Graham’s. I saw you at Quantico when I was there the other day.”

Dr. Lecter must have been very perceptive to remember him, and something about the stranger made Stiles a little nervous, even though the psychiatrist didn’t look all that intimidating. “Oh.” Well, he had heard that a Dr. Lecter knew both Director Crawford and Mr. Graham. “Room 10.”

“Thank you.” The doctor was very courteous. Stiles went back up to his room, but he couldn’t shake the weirdest feeling. It was like something important had happened, but he couldn’t tell himself what it was.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Will and Stiles have a few personal conversations after the shooting at Garrett Jacob Hobbs’ house. Scott goes to get advice on his anger towards Stiles from an old ally.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The scene outside of the Hobbs house was one of complete and utter chaos. Officers and agents scrambled to get the crime scene under control; an ambulance pulled away taking Abigail Hobbs to the hospital. A coroner’s van circled the block, trying to find a place to park. Stiles imagined the frenetic burst of activity as if someone had put a firecracker in a hornet’s nest; the resulting chaos was pointless, but it could still damn well hurt.

Stiles himself stood on the sidewalk that lead up to the house, standing strangely still in the midst of the frenzy. He had forced himself to remain still, but he wasn’t focusing on the case. Nor was he near to panic; only the most extreme situations made him panic anymore. It was one of the benefits of his exciting high-school career. Instead, he was feeling a very different emotion.

He was pissed off. Stiles sometimes forgot how selfish and ignorantly cruel people could be, even those who should know better.

He stamped over to the nearest Bureau car and searched for an evidence kit. When he found one in the trunk, he snatched some cloths and some plastic bags out of it like they had all personally offended him. Then he grabbed an evidence camera, though a lot more gently since they were pretty expensive. He knew how to take evidentiary pictures, even though it wasn’t specifically his job during this investigation. With his teeth gritted in irritated disappointment, he went to the side of the road closest to the Hobbs house and almost threw the supplies he had gathered down in front of Will Graham.

The older man stared at the house in blank dismay. This wasn’t so odd considering that it was a murder scene, but the special investigator was also covered in blood. He was speckled with little red beads showing up on his skin and his glasses like seed rubies. Stiles had watched the man acting as if he were paralyzed for three minutes before he realized that no one was doing anything about it. Mr. Graham was obviously in distress about killing the suspect, but everyone was so busy following procedure that they left the poor guy standing there traumatized.

Bastards, Stiles thought. He took up the evidence camera with a furious jerk and stepped right in front of the man. He snapped one, two, three pictures. The flash went off each time; it startled the consultant so much the Graham shook himself out of his daze.

“What?” Stiles watched the man refocus, his pupils dilating from the light.

Stiles held up one of the cloths he had grabbed from the car so Graham could see it. It was white and designed not to shed fibers in order to keep them from spoiling evidence. “Do you want to take your glasses off, or do you want me to do it?” He kept his voice light as if had been asking if the special investigator wanted ice in his drink.
Because Will Graham was considered a talented profiler and a prodigy, Stiles expected a far more erudite and confident answer. To be fair, though, killing a suspect after witnessing the suspect slit his wife’s and daughter’s throats might diminish the urge to talk. “What?” The exclamation sounded just as lost as the first time Graham had uttered it.

“I am going to remove your glasses. I will stop if you say ‘no.’” Stiles reached up slowly and took the glasses off, wrapped them in a cloth, and put them carefully on the ground. Then he took another cloth up in his hand, once again so the other man could see it. “I am going to wipe your face off.”

“You don’t have to do that.” Graham was suddenly combative and pathetic all at once. His flinch indicated that he did not want the attention; his manner demonstrated a desire to vanish rather than have another person deal with his trauma. Stiles thought the gesture was almost possessive.

“No, I don’t.” Stiles replied. “But fifty percent of the people standing in this yard are desperately trying to pretend that they don’t see you covered with spatter, and the other fifty percent of the people standing in this yard are much more interested in following procedure to the letter then helping you get cleaned off as quickly as possible.”

The delivery of that tirade brought a feeble smile to Mr. Graham’s face. “And which percentage do you belong to?”

“Uh. Yeah, math isn’t my strongest subject. My point is that this type of thing isn’t new to me, and right now, I don’t care about procedure. I know that you must feel absolutely nasty right now.” Stiles starts to wipe Graham’s face off. It was weirdly intimate, but Stiles wasn’t the least bit uncomfortable. After he was finished, he would bag up each cloth for the forensic examination. Will shied away a little from the cloth, but he realized that Agent Stilinski was right. The blood felt like the imprints of Garrett Jacob Hobb’s eyes on his skin. “It does feel nasty. How do you know this?”

“Yes.” Stiles popped the ‘p’ for emphasis. Was that insensitive? No, he answered his own question, it’s true. “After I get clearance, I’ll drive you back to the motel so you can change.”

“Tell me how you know.” The younger agent’s invasion of his privacy had broken his reserve. Will was no longer frozen in the moment of consequence. He needed this conversation; he wanted to focus on something until the awful echoes of gunfire stopped.

“Well, in high school, there was this guy; he turned out to be a professional assassin.” Stiles talked calmly as he carefully wiped off the blood. “He thought I knew something about his targets and threatened to shoot me in the head if I didn’t tell him. An FBI agent shot him first, but I got the blood spatter all over my face. It was icky.”

Will did feel much better with the blood gone. “Was that why you joined the FBI? Because an agent saved you?”

“Oh, hell no. That guy is a fucking jackass.” Stiles chuckled grimly. “There were other reasons. Still, I wished someone had come with a towel and wiped me off.” He paused. “That didn’t sound sexual, did it? I didn’t mean it to sound sexual.”

Will burst out laughing in a confused way like he couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “Okay. It didn’t sound sexual.”

“Good. Good. You stay right here, and I’ll be right back.” Stiles took the plastic bags with the cloths inside and the camera back to the vehicle.
Will watched the younger agent leave. He had asked Jack to put him on the team as support because of something he had intuited during their brief interactions in the classroom. It wasn’t just that the trainee was smart – there had been a dozen students in that class more learned and another dozen more perceptive. They were the best of the best after all.

It was that Mieczyslaw Stilinski carried himself differently than the others; he possessed a different quality. There was metal underneath the skin that had been forged by something that Will couldn’t guess at; he just knew the young man would be resilient. This whole strange interlude outside the Hobbs house had just proven that his intuition had been correct. The young man had been through something similar to the elegant butchery they investigated and come out the other side not only with a steely composure but also with a strange whimsical compassion.

Will Graham knew without self-deprecation or exaggeration that he needed people like that around him.

There was another thing that Mieczyslaw Stilinski had that the other members of the team did not have. The forensics people – Price, Katz, and Zeller – were all exemplary scientists. They would gather, catalog, and interpret every single piece of physical evidence that existed. They listened to the conclusions he’d draw. They’d even follow up on them. But there would always be an air of skepticism.

They weren’t the first technicians to look at him as if he was some magician, pulling a rabbit out of a hat. Will believed, and every interaction with him confirmed that belief, that Agent Stilinski would believe in his conclusions. This little exchange only reinforced it, but now he understood why.

When the younger man was talking to him, he had simply accepted the events that had just taken place. He was more interested in Will’s well-being than trying to contextualize things in relation to the case or the deaths within the house. He was used to working on the mundane in the face of the unimaginable.

Will Graham could use an assistant like that.

Stiles returned from consulting with the agents in charge. “Okay, let’s get you in the car. I’m supposed to get you cleaned up, take your statement and then get you on the plane back to Virginia. Sound good?”

Will nodded. It sounded good indeed.

The plane trip back to Virginia was nerve wracking for Stiles for two very important reasons.

He had wanted to start working on the case, but all the evidence that he had brought with them was stored in the luggage hold. He didn’t even have a physical file to look through, and they didn’t allow important FBI documents to be transmitted over phones.

He also wanted to talk to Will Graham about the case, but the special investigator was having a little bit of a breakdown of his own. ‘Breakdown’ wasn’t the right word. It was more like the man had this aura about him that gave the impression he would rather leap out an airplane window other than talk to Stiles. Mr. Graham’s eyes were fixed on a spot far away or perhaps even another person.

So Stiles was on a long flight from Duluth to D.C. with nothing to do and no one to talk to. He tried to reach Scott on the phone, but there was no answer. It did not surprise him because he knew that Scott would still be on the road at this time of day. It would have eased Stiles’ mind if he could speak
to him and get him to understand.

He wanted to deal with it now because he had experienced before what would happen when the misinterpretation of events caused a rift between them. He had talked with Lydia earlier that day, and he was certain that she had given Scott the wrong impression. Stiles wasn’t sure that he was going to stick with the BAU; he wasn’t sure he wanted this level of intensity. But even if he did, he was still pack. He was always going to be pack.

Lydia had done nothing wrong. She was being practical; she was being goal oriented; she was being kind. She had broached it with Scott rather than allow him to do it because she knew that Stiles would want to rip out his eye teeth than have the conversation with Scott about him not coming back to Beacon Hills.

But being pack – which for Stiles always meant being family – was not and had never been a practical thing. It was in the blood and in the soul, etched their by torture and triumph. If his work kept him busy 364 days a year and twenty-four hours a day, that last day – the 365th day -- would belong to his pack. It would belong to his family.

Lydia was the love of his life, but there were things she did not understand, and one of those was the depth of the way he needed Scott. To think that Scott was out there thinking that he didn’t need him any more – well that was simply unacceptable.

“Why’d you do it?” Stiles nearly leapt out of his seat. Will Graham had asked him it out of the blue and he wasn’t talking about his pack.


“You broke protocol for me.”

Stiles shook his head vehemently. “I did not break protocol for you. Victims always come first. That is what I was taught at GW, that’s what I was taught in D.C., and that’s what I was taught at Quantico.”

“I wasn’t the victim,” Graham smirked feebly, “I was the shooter.”

“With all due respect, Mr. Graham, bullshit.” Stiles turned to watch him. “Did you feel your life or someone else’s life was in imminent danger?”

Will Graham blinked. His mind played over the last few minutes of the life of Garrett Jacob Hobbs. The Shrike had already killed his wife, and had already slit his daughter’s throat. Had he been in imminent danger? Was Hobbs coming for him or did he fire out of rage? He had certainly been afraid that Hobbs was coming at him.

Graham turned to Stiles. “Yes.” It was an answer that was not an answer, but that is what he would have to use this time.

“That means you killed him in self-defense and that means you are a victim just as much as those poor women. Most of the cops working that crime scene have never pointed their gun at another human being, let alone pulled a trigger, and God forbid they’ve actually killed someone. Just because killing is done in self-defense doesn’t mean it’s not traumatic.” Stiles said with conviction.

“That’s an interesting view of things, which I don’t think many people would share, Agent Stilinski.” He was sure of it. There was a mystique in the world of law enforcement and even in the FBI that demanded that agents be ready to kill if necessary. Even though everyone knew it was a holdover
from the Eliot Ness era of machismo.

“Well, I’m not many people, Mr. Graham.” The new agent responded.

“Please, call me Will.” Will believed the young man had earned it today.

“Call me Stiles. Mieczyslaw is hard to pronounce.” Stiles relaxed. This was a good sign. This was their first conversation; if they could never get past the awkward stage working with this guy would be very difficult. Will Graham was alternative perceptive and then strangely remote.

“So, Stiles. I couldn’t help but notice that you’re very passionate about the idea of self-defense. Experience with it?” Will couldn’t help himself. He had felt that there was more than just theoretical thinking behind Stiles’ impassioned defense. It was the same thing he felt when the trainee answered that question in class.

“I have experience with a lot of things.” Stiles smiled.

Will knew an evasive answer when he heard one. He gave Stiles a ‘you can do better than that’ expression.

Stiles thought about lying; Will Graham wasn’t a werewolf and couldn’t hear his heartbeat. However, he did have freaky powers of perception, able not only to recreate a killer’s actions but also his mindset from viewing the evidence. Stiles didn’t know if that extended to lie detection, and he didn’t want to find out. “Yes. I might have first-hand experience with the damage a self-defense killing can cause to someone.” He tried to cover it up with exasperation.

“Strange. I read your file before recommending you to the team. There was no mention of such a thing.”

“Must have been an oversight?” Stiles offered. He wasn’t nervous at all.

“I’m not going to push; I don’t really care. I just tend to notice behavior that’s out of the ordinary. That’s why I asked Jack to put you on the team.”

Stiles took a huge breath. “People tend to think that just because a killing is clearly self-defense in legal terms that makes it okay for the person who did the killing. The human mind is not a courtroom. Guilt claws at you even if no jury in the world can convict you.”

“Are you telling me or are you telling yourself?” Will asked, because he wasn’t sure.

“Oh, I’m telling you. I’ve already had this conversation with myself a long time ago.” Stiles winked but Will could see the old pain gathered about the younger man’s eyes. “Anyway, you shouldn’t let guilt for doing what you had to do make you forget what’s important.”

“You sound remarkably similar to my psychiatrist.” Will blinks. “Both of my psychiatrists, actually.”

Stiles made a face. “I hate psychiatrists. No, no, that’s not right. I don’t trust … No, that’s not right either.” Stiles face twisted even more. “I don’t think psychiatrists are very useful.”

Will raised one eyebrow as a question. “I have mixed feelings about them as well, but that’s personal. I always feel like a butterfly pinned under glass when I talk to them.”

“I’ve seen a few. The problem that I have with them is about perception. They tend to have this image of the way they think the world should work. They use it in their work to steer their patients – which includes me, by the way – to get as close to the ‘right’ way to behave and the ‘right’ way to
believe. But I know that they don’t really see the world as it is; they’re seeing the world the way they want to see it. I can’t really explain to them why they are wrong without sounding like I need to be institutionalized.”

“You think you have a better conception of the world than they do?”

“No,” Stiles protested. “I simply have a more complete image of the world than they do. There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

“Shakespeare is always a good lead out.” Will snarked.

“Hey, everyone loved the Bard in my hometown.” Stiles laughed. “And I don’t mean to say that I don’t appreciate counseling. I actually had a really, really good counselor. She helped me quite a bit.”

Will nodded. “I know one who is really great as well. Alana Bloom. You might meet her someday.”

“Mine was a high school guidance counselor. She helped me through some dark times.” Stiles gave him a shit-eating grin. “Then she threatened to euthanize me.”

The both burst out into laughter in First Class.

Scott wasn’t absolutely sure why he had changed direction in the middle of his cross-country drive. Actually, that was a complete lie. He knew why he had changed direction and he knew where his new destination was. He simply wasn’t absolutely sure why he felt that this was the proper thing to do in these circumstances.

It wasn’t like he had endless amounts of free time. Class at Davis would be starting next Monday. His mother wanted him to spend at least a few days with her and Chris before going back to school. He wanted to be prepared for this semester. While he was never going to be a prodigy like Lydia, he was doing well enough to finish his degree in two years.

He’d be Dr. McCall. Take that, Coach.

The thought of that accomplishment should make him happy, but it really didn’t. He wondered whether if he had been a little less ambitious he could have held on to his pack more tightly. No one had complained that he wasn’t there, but he began to suspect that they didn’t complain because of what he had accomplished in high school. They were probably afraid that it would come across as ungrateful.

He shuddered to think of Liam. He had basically handed the position of alpha over to him for the final two years of high school even though, just like him, Liam had never wanted to be a werewolf. Yeah, Scott had driven up from school when it was absolutely necessary, but he had still dumped the everyday responsibility onto his beta. Now that Liam had finished his own schooling and gotten a job as a history teacher and assistant coach at the high school, Scott had saddled him with the responsibility again.

It wasn’t fair to any of them. Maybe that’s why he was going to someone outside of Beacon Hills in an attempt to deal with this low-burning anger. Ever since his fight with Lydia, he had just seethed like a tire fire. Even when he had forgotten about it, it was still there, smoking in his gut.

There were plenty of people he could have talked about his problem with in Beacon Hills. Dr. Deaton was there as he always was. Mr. Argent, his step-father, was there. His mom was there. The
rest of the pack was there. If he was really desperate, he could track down Satomi who he knew was still living her reclusive life in Beacon County. But the thought of going to them made him wince.

When it came down to it, he was embarrassed. When you dug a little deeper, he was ashamed. What type of asshole was he to be resentful of Stiles’ and Lydia’s success? He didn’t want anyone who looked up to him to think less of him, so he knew he had to get advice from someone who understood the crushing disappointment he felt in himself.

In the mountains above Denver, he left the interstate and followed a torturous path into the mountains. It reminded him of one of the movies that Stiles had made him watch – The Shining. It was a really creepy movie, but he didn’t enjoy horror movies as much as he used to, since he started living in one.

He finally found the correct drive; nearly lost among the rocks. Given the identity of the person he was visiting, he wasn’t surprised that the man valued his privacy. He pulled up in front of the log cabin house. It was rustic, private, and solid. He could see the appeal.

Scott didn’t even have to go up and knock. Deucalion opened the door before he could even get up the steps. “Hello, Scott. I’m so glad you could stop to visit.”

Chapter End Notes

This concludes Aperitif.

I think I have police procedure at least roughly correct. Please correct if I screw it up.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Scott relaxed back into one of the large overstuffed leather chairs in Deucalion’s study carefully cradling a glass of brandy in one hand. He knew that he wasn’t a teenager anymore; he understood that he was a grown adult and a powerful alpha. Which left him wondering as to why he felt like a huge impostor, like a child at the grown-up's table.

Maybe the feeling had something to do with the décor of the room. A set of expensive-looking clocks rested on a mantle above a cavernous fireplace. Bookshelves adorned with leather-bound tomes covered the walls, and glass display cases filled with art and artifacts occupied the corners. Scott had only seen rooms like this one in the movies. You were supposed to think that the character to whom it belong was rich, intelligent, and cultured. It would have been as pretentious as hell for anyone else, but for Deucalion it seemed authentic. The older alpha sat across from him, holding another brandy as if it was the most natural thing in the world. He radiated dignity without effort, while Scott had no idea how to correctly hold a brandy snifter. Scott consciously mimicked the alpha while drinking his own glass.

“I can feel this,” Scott said with surprise after he taken a few sips. His only recollection of alcohol had been a long-ago night in the woods with Stiles before the Bite. Since then, no matter how much he drank, he had never felt it. Instead, the brandy spread warmly through his stomach.

“It’s a unique distillation. The location and manner of its production is a secret, and, sadly, must remain so,” Deucalion purred. “Do you like it?”

“I do.” Scott offered what he hoped was a sincere smile. “Thanks. I guess it's what I needed; I’ve been on the road for a long time today.” Werewolf stamina and healing capabilities took much of the edge off being on a motorcycle for fifteen hours, but it wasn’t like he couldn’t become uncomfortably cramped.

“And thank you for agreeing to see me.” Scott kept going politely. “Showing up like this was pretty awkward, but it was a last minute decision. I was coming back across-country …” He stopped because Deucalion burst out laughing at him.

Deucalion’s eruption didn't carry scorn with it, only disbelief. “There’s no need for you to apologize. Forgive me for being amused.”

Scott felt at a loss. “I mean I was raised that it's pretty rude to show up without warning and stinking of the road. I didn’t even think about stopping to see you until I crossed the Nebraska state line.”

Deucalion put his brandy down with another chuckle. “Scott, you send me a Christmas card every year.” The words held some meaning for the man. “You know who I am. You know what I’ve done. And you know that I’ve not suddenly become a good person because of our time together.”

Scott responded seriously. “I know who you are. I knew who you were. Even if you aren’t a good person yet, I don’t see a problem with wishing you Happy Holidays.”

Deucalion clucked his tongue. “I’m sure you get tired of hearing this, but you don’t really understand how special you are.” He stood up and offered Scott a cigar; wordlessly, Scott refused.
“Well, I don’t really feel all that special now.” Scott muttered in response. He felt that creeping anger flare up in his belly. It’d been growing ever since he had left Cambridge. He wouldn’t compare it to a bonfire; instead, it felt like he had swallowed a bank of glowing coals. It made him feel sick and irritable at the same time.

“You don’t seem to be having any trouble with your control.” Deucalion observed, but his intonation indicated he had realized that something was the matter.

“That’s the point!” Scott exclaimed. “I don’t feel any more out of control than I usually do. I know I’m not going to run around attacking people or biting my friends. It’s been years since I felt anything like that.”

Deucalion tilted his head to one side.

“I don’t feel wild, but I feel ….” He paused for words. “Two members of my pack are planning to leave. They’re important to me, but they have opportunities in the world that I can’t give them.”

When Deucalion didn’t say anything, he went on. “I should be okay with them leaving, but I feel like doing things I should not want to be doing. I want to drag Lydia back home by her hair. I want to sabotage Stiles’ career so he has to come back to me.” He shakes his head. “I’m in control, so I know I won’t do these things, but the urge -- the rage -- to do it isn’t going away.”

“Ahhhhhh. Why did you come to me? Why not talk to Alan?” Deucalion sounded only like he was curious rather than judgmental. Scott looked at the brandy glass before him. “Embarrassment. This desire to act out … it’s how I felt when I was a child and my father just up and left. It’s that type of anger; it’s a pointless rage. Given all the time that Dr. Deaton has spent on me, I wouldn’t want to disappoint him, and this feels disappointing.”

Deucalion sat in the dim illumination of his study as if contemplating something. Finally, when Scott was about to ask whether he should go, the older alpha spoke again. “How old do you think I am, Scott?”

Scott took a guess. He knew how troublesome guessing werewolf ages could be. “Mid-forties?”

“I was born in 1952. I’m sixty seven years old. You have met Satomi, have you not?” Deucalion continued after Scott nodded. “She was born in 1903. She’s one-hundred and sixteen years old.”

“I knew she was old but I didn’t think she was that old,” Scott commented. “She looks really … healthy for her age.”

“She’ll probably live another twenty to thirty years. She’s not as strong as an alpha at their prime, but her knowledge and skill make her more than a formidable opponent.” Deucalion said appreciatively. “In my less … benign days, I might have targeted her for my pack due to her age and wisdom, but she was extraordinarily good at concealing her location.”

Scott shifted uncomfortably. “I’m not sure what you are getting at.”

“Bear with me, please. As I said, I’m sixty-seven. Humans at this age are preparing to retire, if they hadn’t retired already. They are facing the certainty of their mortality and beginning to wind down their lives. I am … not. I could live another sixty years. It’s not the norm, just as a human with Satomi’s vitality at her age is unheard of.” Deucalion stood up and went to the window, which opened up over a darkened valley. “Yet, I am still at the peak of my power, and I am very, very powerful. There is a small town near my house. It’s population reaches maybe five hundred people. I
am powerful enough to kill every single person there and get away with it. That’s not a boast.”

Scott was really uncomfortable right now, but he knew that Deucalion was building to a point. He just wasn’t sure he was going to be happy when that point was made plain.

“The conclusion I am inching towards is that we do not fit.” The older alpha gestured between the two of them. “We are not like other men, and that is good, because an alpha is required to be greater than others to protect their pack. But it is also bad, because, as the saying goes, this is humanity’s world; we’re just living in it.”

Deucalion watched the night sky. “So many of the customs and compromises of the modern world go against every instinct we have as alphas. When we act in accordance with those instincts, we focus on the safety and happiness of our pack, which requires us to see, hear, smell and touch them. These instincts don’t care about things like compulsive military service, custody rights, college educations, or career opportunities.”

“I’ve felt those instincts before, but it’s been six years since we all went away to college. Why am I only feeling this way now?”

“Because you’re not feral. Your humanity easily kept those instincts at bay, because you wanted the best for your friends. Tell me, Scott, do you still want that?”

Scott fought the sudden urge to throw the glass across the room in frustration. He should want what was best for them, but he wanted the best of them when they were with him.

Deucalion went on as if he understood. “Before, you managed to suppress your instincts, because you wanted them to pursue their dreams. But now, you want something else. Your own human desires and your instincts are no longer opposed.” The older alpha may have been an ally, but that did not mean he could not have a chuckle at his expense. “Every part of you wants them back, and you have the power to force it.”

“But that would be wrong.”

Deucalion made a slight gesture whose meaning was lost to Scott. “And there you go. You’re not used to what you want and what your instincts are telling you that you should want being so close together, and you’re not used to what you want being opposed by what the world of humans says is the right way to act. Every alpha has to face this eventually. You have the power to get what you want, but it will be considered ‘wrong’ by the rest of the world. It doesn’t matter if you are someone like me or someone like Satomi; every alpha feels this eventually. Shackled by someone else’s rules.” He lifts a lip as if he was growling at something.

Scott realized that he already knew this, but it took Deucalion’s explanation to make him put a name to it. He wanted them back no matter what, and he didn’t understand why he couldn’t have them. It wasn’t fair.

“What do I do?”

“I’m not a psychologist, Scott. I can offer insight, but I can’t help you work through this.” Deucalion shrugged. “But it is something you have to do, and you are at a disadvantage because you became an alpha when you were so very young. Most people become accustomed to this frustration before their eyes turn red. I only know that you must find a way to deal with it.”

“What if I can’t?” Scott wondered out loud.

“Then it will eat at you, like a fire burning at your foundations. You’ll wake up every day with this
disappointment in the world tearing at your insides. Eventually, it will be all you can think about.” Deucalion stood up and walked over to Scott, putting a hand on his shoulder. “And when it is all you can think about, you will finally use the power you have, no matter what the cost. And on that day, we’ll get to see.”

Scott didn’t feel reassured by the hand on his shoulder. He couldn’t tell if it was meant to be support, meant to be a warning, or meant to be a benediction. “What will we get to see?”

“Even with little experience and little direction, despite all of your mistakes, you’ve made an excellent alpha,” Deucalion offered. “When this feeling consumes you completely, on that day, we’ll see how excellent a Demon Wolf you’ll make.”

Stiles had really wanted to talk to Will after their next class. He completely understood why his classmates had applauded Will as a hero. They were thanking Will for stopping a killer like Garrett Jacob Hobbs. After all, just like him, they were here to learn how to bring justice and save lives.

He also understood why it made Will uncomfortable to hear the applause. Yes, he did save someone’s life and the life of everyone that the Minnesota Shrike might have killed in the future. But he also did kill someone, and Stiles knew exactly how damaging that could be.

He was going to stop and talk to him when he saw Dr. Bloom coming down the hallway. He’d seen her before, but he had never been introduced, so he wasn’t going to interrupt. He had vowed to himself that he would keep being a student separate from being a team member. Stiles had also heard that Dr. Bloom was an amazing counselor, so she’d probably be better for Will right now than he would be.

He moved with a new purpose over towards the dormitories. Director Crawford had been right; he was going to be able to graduate, no matter how much his extra work with the team was making him fall behind in school work. The director’s recommendation was far more important than a graded test.

He was going to his room to catch up on his reading when one of the hall’s supervisors called out to him. “Stilinski! You’ve got a visitor in the lounge.”

Stiles paused. He hadn’t been expecting any visitors. Not only did he not have many friends in Virginia that weren’t already on campus, but there was also the fact that getting onto campus was difficult in itself. Access was restricted and the supervisors looked down on too many visitors. Whoever wanted to meet him must have been really determined.

He should have guessed it was Lydia, looking spectacular as usual. She had dressed to impress and given the way everyone else passing the lounge was looking at her, she had succeeded. She was arrayed in pastel green.

He sidled up to her with a smile. “Not that I mind, but what are you doing here?”

“I have here a list of relatively affordable apartments in the region between Washington and Quantico. You and I will be looking at several of them today.” She stood up primly.

“Well, I have to check my …”

“You already gave me your schedule, Stiles, so I know you are free this afternoon.” She extends her hand. “Come on.”
Stiles took a step back. “I thought I was the one with boundary issues. Let me put my books away and I’ll join you.” He pauses. “Just to be clear, is the apartment for you or for me?”

Lydia tossed her head. “Us. Dummy. Now get a move on.”

Elation charged through his veins as he rushed up to his room. She had just asked him to move into a place together. They had been involved in a long-distance relationship for the last six years, with only a few summers of ‘normal dating’ back home. It was a big step, and the only bigger step was marriage. He quickly changed out of his uniform and into casual clothing. She was right, by the way, he did have the afternoon free.

She was still waiting, though a little less patiently, when he got back. She had driven down from Cambridge, so she had her Lexus. It was a 2017 model, but she had sworn off Toyotas long ago. Once they were on the road, he took the list from her and studied it. She had been thorough. “How long have you been planning this?”

“How long at all,” she replied with a cheery smile. “In fact, it was only two days ago that I decided. There are plenty of places in D.C. I can work. You know I hate moving at the last minute.”

“This is a pretty big step, you know,” Stiles said quietly. His pulse was still fluttering about it.

“I know. I will probably choke you out two or three times until I get used to living with you.” She was in a great mood. Everything was humorous.

He hated being the one to put a damper on that. “I mean, are you sure that you want to come to D.C.?”

“Why wouldn’t I? While teaching has its appeal, it would be easier to get a tenure track position if I’ve done some serious work with think tanks. I already have an interview with one of them.”

The unspoken proposition is that he was here as well. “Well, don’t go overboard on the lease.” He said, cautiously.

No matter how cautiously he had said it, she was going to divine that something was afoot. “Are you having second thoughts?”

“You’re asking me if I’m having second thoughts?” he asked, patiently.

“You’re asking me if I’m having second thoughts?” Lydia replied icily. “Why wouldn’t I? While teaching has its appeal, it would be easier to get a tenure track position if I’ve done some serious work with think tanks. I already have an interview with one of them.”

The unspoken proposition is that he was here as well. “Well, don’t go overboard on the lease.” He said, cautiously.

No matter how cautiously he had said it, she was going to divine that something was afoot. “Are you having second thoughts?”

“About living with you? No. Maybe! Yes.” He shrugged helplessly. “I’m afraid that if you have to see me in the morning without my makeup on you’ll be disappointed.”

She lifted both eyebrows at him as she drove the car, but he knew she appreciated his humor.

“Seriously, I don’t even know where I am going to be assigned. I could go anywhere in the United States. I could go back home.”

“Why,” she replied icily, “would you go back home?”

“I don’t know, my dad? My best friend? All my other friends?” Stiles protested. He knew what she was going to say before she was going to say it.

“Did you talk to Scott?” It was an accusation.

“Of course. No, he didn’t pressure me.”

Lydia raised one eyebrow. “Did he tell you that he was disappointed that there was a chance you weren’t coming back to California?”
“Yes …”

“Yes …” Lydia said. “I’m not angry, but let’s call it what it is. You’re not sixteen anymore, Stiles; you’re twenty-four. You need to think about these things clearly.”

Stiles sucked on the inside of his cheeks. He thought about it as the car moved along the Virginia roads. “Do I need to think about these things clearly? Or do I need to think about them the way you do?”

Lydia did not get angry. As far as he could tell, she was carefully considering her words. Like all couples, they had had their fights – most often when he let his insecurities overwhelm his common sense. He never intended to start a fight; what he had with Lydia was too precious too waste with squabbles. But this time he felt she was being unfair.

“Stiles,” she said finally. “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

“What?”

“I mean that literally. You have an opportunity here that you have earned. One that many of your fellow trainees will never have in their entire careers. Why would you want to toss that away for …?”

“For my best friend? For my pack?” Stiles interrupted.

Lydia glanced at him with something that looked like pity. “You are not a werewolf. You don’t need a pack.” She hurried on. “The pack was good. It is good, but so is what you are doing now. It’s a career where you can utilize your talents, you can utilize your experience, you can build your reputation, and you can help people.”

They drove on in silence. She finally parked the car at an apartment. Stiles didn’t care about the apartment itself. Did it have a bedroom? Check. Did it have a kitchen? Check. Did it have some place to do the laundry? Check.

It did not meet Lydia’s specifications. The layout was congested. The master bedroom was too close to the living room. The only apartments that they had open were on east side, which meant the apartment would get the full morning sun.

Back in the car, they drove to the next apartment on the list.

“Am I an apartment?” He suddenly asked.

She gave him a look that told him she had no clue what he was talking about.

“Am I Jackson 4.0? Am I a project to you?” He couldn’t help himself. He was uncomfortable with this turn of events, and sarcasm made him feel secure.

“I am not quite sure what you are getting at, but I don’t think I like the insinuation.” Lydia’s tone was icy once again.

“You like pushing your boyfriends. You like making them the best that they can be. You pushed Jackson to be the big man on campus. You pushed Aiden to not just reject his past but to make up for it. You pushed Parrish to come to terms with what he was. Are you trying to – I don’t know – push me past my co-dependency on Scott? Is that the plan?”

Lydia opened her mouth to reply but then thought better of it. She took time to think about it before
she answered.

“Yes and no.” It was a definitive answer. “Do I want you to be the best person you can be? I think that’s a fair assumption. Do I want you to make decisions in your life that don’t take into account your friendship with Scott? Yes, I think that’s also fair. But I have changed, too. I am not going to withhold my affection until you do what I think you should. I did it with Jackson and I did it with Aiden. In a way, I did it with you when we were in high school. I offered my love up as a prize if the men in my life met certain criteria.”

She took one hand off the wheel and held his. “I am not doing that this time. You have my affection even if you decide not to follow my advice. This time. I think you should take this opportunity. If you don’t take it, I think you’ll always worry that you did it because you were afraid.”

Stiles squeezed Lydia’s hand back. “You know, it’s really great that you have so much faith in me.” He wasn’t lying there. “This is a big step.”

It was. He was shopping for apartments with Lydia Martin thousands of miles away from home. He just wished he didn’t feel like he was being forced into making a decision right now. He was weeks from achieving personal goals and career goals. He had hoped it wouldn’t feel like the ground was slipping out from under him.

Chapter End Notes

This coincides with the beginning of Hannibal Season 1, Episode 2 "Amuse-Bouche."
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Stiles helps Will out after the horrifying incident with the mushroom gardens, witnesses Freddie Lounds being skeevey, and has his first private chat with Hannibal Lecter.

Stiles tromped through the fallen leaves of the Elk Neck State Forest, heading towards the side of the road where the local police officers were keeping three teenagers who had discovered the mushroom-covered bodies in the woods. He knew that the local police would consider it just a formality, but he knew that there were certain questions an FBI agent would ask that a local police officer wouldn’t.

The trees were sort of breathtaking in their resplendent colors. The forests of the East Coast were so different than the Preserve of back home. They not only had a different look but they also had a different feel. He still enjoyed being out in a forest, which was weird, considering how many bad things had happened to him and the people he cared about under the trees.

The kids were still dazed by their gruesome discovery and a little overwhelmed by the police interest, but they were also excited by being the center of attention. Stiles smiled to himself. I know this music.

Stiles started off by establishing himself as a friend through a rousing discussion of pop culture. All three of the witnesses were excited to see the fourth Avengers movie that was coming to theaters soon, and Stiles got them talking about the first part of Infinity War. Once he established a rapport with them, he could get to the meat of the discussion.

Police were too used to employing authority, in Stiles’ opinion, to get to the truth. They demanded automatic trust and automatic obedience, and they did not realize that those two demands were often at odds at each other. When fear and shock had wormed their way into your breathing, when the world was no longer how you thought it was, you didn’t need someone poised to condemn you for the feelings you were having. You needed someone to guide you.

It should be the investigator’s concern to be objective in their reporting, while the witnesses, the victim, even the suspect should be as comfortable as possible. Tension and panic didn’t make things clearer; they made things chaotic.

Stiles knew all about that.

One of the things that college had forced him to grow out of relatively quickly was the urge to respond to every unpleasant situation and emotion with sarcasm. He had not feared being lonely when he was away, with all his friends were at least eight hours away, so he had tried to branch out. It seemed strangers did not enjoy a sharp comment when they were trying to deal with important matters. Not everyone was Scott McCall, endlessly patient with the verbal abuse he heaped upon him.

It wasn’t that he was giving up on his sarcasm. That was never going to happen. It was as essential to what he was as breathing, and it was still useful when dealing with those people who couldn’t quite keep up with him. But now he had trained himself to understand that sometimes it just wasn’t the
right tactic when dealing with people, especially when he was now in a position of authority.

Mieczyslaw Stilinski in a position in of authority – would wonders never cease?

The report he got from the teenagers was almost identical to the report he got from the local police and the Maryland State Police. It did not matter, and he did not consider it a waste of time. It was the most probable outcome of any follow-up, but if you didn’t check, you might miss an important clue.

He sent the boys off with their parents and headed back down the makeshift trail to the crime scene. He would probably be sent to do a widening perimeter sweep just to double-check the earlier work of the police. Again, it was just a precaution.

Stiles arrived just when one of the corpses that was obviously not entirely a corpse grabbed Will by the arm. That would be enough to freak anyone out, but Stiles suspected that Will was probably in the middle of a crime scene reconstruction. The consultant would be completely open and completely vulnerable, and the way he staggered backwards away from the body as the forensics team swarmed over it pretty much confirmed it.

It was just like outside the Hobbs house, Stiles observed. No one gave a thought for the man enduring trauma. Was it some sort of law-enforcement machismo? If you enforce the law, you were steel and never felt the power of the crimes you investigate.

Stiles abandoned his sweep and went to Will. “Mr. Graham? Will?”

Will had a tremulous gaze that was fixed not on the body that was being quickly worked on by both forensics people and paramedics but on the empty grave they had just taken the body out of. “I’ll … survive.”

It was delivered with the gallows humor of a dying patient. Survival was always an option, but the inflection of his words gave the impression that survival might not have been desired.

When it looked like Will wasn’t going to collapse or bolt, Stiles worked his way over to where Director Crawford was supervising the loading of the body into the ambulance. It took the director about a minute to turn his gaze on him.

Director Crawford always saw you as a human being. Stiles had never felt an unthinking disdain for the man. He did not treat people like bugs scuttling around his feet or like servants who would be better off not being seen. He could be gentle when he needed to be, but when he was in the pursuit of people who did this, he looked at you without sentimentality. He judged you precisely in relation to what he needed at that moment to stop the killers he endlessly chased, and he had no time for people who were not going to be helpful.

“What is it, Stilinski?” He barked. Obviously, Stiles was now in the way.

Stiles bit the inside of his cheek. After the shock that Will had obviously endured and the lack of focus on the startled investigator, he was half tempted to make a comment designed to underline the callousness. Then Stiles remember this was a Director, and a smart-ass comment would give him no advantage. “I’d like to take Mr. Graham elsewhere to transcribe his experiences.” He didn’t explain why he wanted to do that; it would be obvious to the director.

Jack Crawford swept his gaze over the entire crime scene. He was evaluating. “Get him out of here.” He tossed Stiles his car keys. “Use my vehicle.” Then he was back to supervising the situation.

And that was how, no matter how crushingly direct Crawford was, he won people’s loyalty. When he saw the right thing, he did it. Stiles when back to Will, who was still leaning up against the tree.
“Will, we’re supposed to go back to Quantico and get your notes.” Stiles said lightly, as if this was the most normal day in the world.

Will shook himself. “Are you managing me?” It was a resentful and despairing accusation.

Stiles pretended to be shocked. He looked exaggeratedly over Will’s shoulder to see if there was anyone there. “Are you a rock star now? I’m actually just chauffeuring you!”

Sarcasm still had its uses.

Will chuckled. “Okay. Okay. Let’s go.” They worked their way over to the car and got inside. There were no words to be said between them yet, but Stiles was content. The first step in making things okay was to remove the victim of the trauma from the site of the trauma.

They drove in silence until Stiles was sure that he had reached the highway. He didn’t want to get lost in the back roads of northern Maryland. It would be very embarrassing to everyone involved.

“Will,” Stiles broached. “Where am I taking you?” Mr. Graham had asked him to use the first name on the flight back from Minnesota. “Where’s your car?”

Will stirred himself from his silent focus on the countryside outside the window. He wasn’t startled; he was recalling himself from wherever he was thinking about. Stiles wondered if it was the crime scene they had just left. He hoped not.

“Quantico. Jack drove me up.” Will did refer to Director Crawford as ‘Jack.’ Stiles would never dare to do that at this time. Hopefully, in a few months, when he had proved his worth to the team, he could take that liberty. Not yet.

Again, this was another change from high school; authority figures tended to get his best witty efforts back then. Especially alphas; he idly wondered where Derek was right now.

“You aren’t going to ask?” Will grumpily interrogated from the passenger seat. He was pressed back up against the seat as if it he couldn’t support the weight of his own head.

“Ask? Ask what?”

“If I’m okay.” While they had gotten to first-name status, they hadn’t gotten to the point where the older man wasn’t warily suspicious of any attempt at social interaction.

Stiles hummed. “Nnnnnnnnnnno. I tend to not ask questions to which I already know the answers. It’s a bad habit, and it usually ends up with hurt feelings and the need for awkward avoidance in hallways. Thus, it’s far, far safer to acknowledge that I don’t have to ask those sort of questions.”

The corners of Will’s mouth turned up almost imperceptibly. “Would you mind if I asked you a favor?”

“Nope.” Stiles answered truthfully.

“I just realized that it’s nearly three. If you drive me all the way back to Quantico for my car, I’ll never make it to my appointment in Baltimore in time. I’ll buy you dinner if you take me to my appointment, and then wait around so I can get home.”

Stiles thought about it. He had some cases to fill out tonight, but he had an ongoing extensions due to the work they were doing. He was no longer worried about flunking out. “I can do that. Where do you have to go?”
Will gave him an address in a tonier part of Baltimore. “It’s my therapist’s.” He loaded every syllable of the word with disdain. “Where do you want to eat?”

“Oh, I’m not really picky. I’ll eat anything. Just tonight … nothing with mushrooms, okay?”

That got the chuckle that Stiles wanted.

#####

Dr. Hannibal Lecter’s office was a converted house. He was just going to let Will off in front of the building and then play a phone game in the car for an hour, but Will insisted that he come in and be more comfortable.

Stiles thought that the psychiatrist wouldn’t have recognized him from the brief time they had met up in Minnesota, but Dr. Hannibal Lecter’s eyes showed that he recognized as they stood in the waiting room. “Good afternoon, Will. Good afternoon, Agent Stilinski.”

Will jerked a thumb over his shoulder. “You have Stiles here to thank for me getting to my appointment on time.”

“Then I am very grateful to him,” Hannibal’s smile seemed completely authentic. Stiles suddenly felt a sliver of concern slide into his chest. He returned the smile as well as he could, but he wasn’t sure it came across as sincere.

“No problem at all.” Stiles shook his head. “On second thought, I think I’ll stay in the car. I’ve always been uncomfortable in doctor’s offices and hospitals. No offense intended.”

Will looked like he was going to protest but the psychiatrist artfully opened the door to the rather large office, while the doctor replied to Stiles gently. “No offense taken. Perhaps you could find someone to talk with about your anxiety.”

Stiles went to answer cheerfully but under the Hannibal’s calm gaze he felt a little self-conscious. “I might do that. I’ve just never felt safe in a psychiatrist’s office.”

“Understandable,” Hannibal remonstrated. “Some psychiatrists’ offices aren’t particularly safe.” His small smile got a fraction of a millimeter bigger. He closed the door behind him.

Stiles made a face at the closed door. That was a weird joke. He went back to sit in the vehicle, which was technically the FBI’s but he was kind of on FBI business.

He thought about calling Lydia while he was waiting there. They had found a wonderful little apartment that had satisfied both their needs. Well, since his needs had been WiFi, a door that locked, and four walls, it had suited Lydia’s needs. She had interviewed for a think tank in D.C., and she had let others know that she was interested in being interviewed. She had gone back to Cambridge to finish packing up her apartment. In a week, she would be here. In six weeks, he could be moving in with her.

He giggled out loud. Wow, I am so much an adult. But he couldn’t help it.

However, she was probably at dinner right now, and he didn’t want to interrupt her. He could call his father, he supposed. It would be mid-afternoon in Beacon Hills. Most people would be at work, including his dad. He would just have to do as he said, and play games on the phone until Will was done with his appointment.

It wasn’t long though until he saw another car pull up. Stiles caught it out of the corner of his eye. He
was usually observant, but he was also bored right now. His mind would have returned to his game,
but then he saw a flash of a very distinctive hairstyle – a mass of dark red curls.

Stiles watched the woman with a degree of interest, but then he realized he has just seen her that day
at the crime scene. It couldn’t possibly be a coincidence, especially as he watched her enter Dr.
Lecter’s building. He went out and wrote down her car’s license plate number.

It didn’t take him long at all to get a name from the local police – Freddie Lounds. She was a tabloid
reporter and the primary content creator and editor for Tattlecrime.com. Stiles snorted at the name.
Who thought that one up? He did not have to wonder what she was doing here; she was stalking
Will Graham.

His first thought was to confront the woman, but he really didn’t have any jurisdiction to burst into
Dr. Lecter’s waiting room and start something. His second though was to wait until Will came back
and let him know, but he also dismissed that. Will deserved to feel like he could safely visit his
psychiatrist. For the same reason, he rejected going to Director Crawford. Trust was important in this
situation.

At this point, there was only one thing to do. Stiles would confront Dr. Lecter on his own.

#####

“Good afternoon. I am surprised you would come to see me, given your stated reluctance to deal
with psychiatrists and their dangerous offices.” Dr. Lecter was just as humorous as he had been the
other day.

“Oh, well, I’m sorry if I gave you the wrong impression. This is a personal matter, but it isn’t that
type of a personal matter. I wanted to meet with you privately over something that happened the
other day, when I had dropped off Mr. Graham for his appointment.” Stiles straightened his jacket
nervously. He had no idea why he was nervous.

“Why don’t you come in? We can discuss it in my office.”

Hannibal Lecter’s office was … off the charts. Stiles had to stop himself from whistling. No wonder
people went into this field if this is the type of place they could own.

“You have to understand that since you are not seeing me for therapy, doctor-patient confidentiality
will not apply to our conversation.” Dr. Lecter remarked as he moved toward his desk.

“I understand. I just thought this might be better handled with a personal visit rather than involving a
lot of formality.” He cleared his throat. “Are you aware of the connection between Mr. Graham and
the patient that entered your home during his last appointment?”

Dr. Lecter sat down at his desk. “Ah. You noticed Ms. Lounds’ arrival. I can assure you that she
arranged that appointment under false pretenses. Unfortunately for her, I was able to divine her
identity pretty quickly.”

Stiles sighed in relief. “Oh, that’s great. I was afraid …” He trailed off.

“You were afraid that I was colluding with a tabloid reporter?” Dr. Lecter’s voice took on a slight
tenor of reproach. “I wonder if I should be insulted by the insinuation.”

“That’s not what I meant!” Stiles protested. Under the pitiless gaze of the psychiatrist he shook his
head back and forth. “Well, I didn’t know for sure. You can’t blame me for making an effort to be
thorough.”
Hannibal’s left eyebrow increased its altitude by a millimeter.

“Okay, I was paranoid and I thought that there was a possibility that you were working with her, because I saw her at the crime scene earlier that day.” Stiles admitted. He realized just how rude he had been. “It just seemed to me very suspicious.”

“Have you shared your suspicions with Will Graham? With your supervisors?”

“No.” Stiles replied with a shake of his heat. “That wouldn’t have been what I wanted.” He saw that the psychiatrist was expecting further elaboration. He smiled to himself; Hannibal Lecter may have been the first person in a long time who wanted him to talk more. “Will is comfortable enough to talk to you about his problems. He needs that, beyond the formality of a psych evaluation. I wanted to make sure that remained on the table.”

“You haven’t known Will for that long, Agent Stilinski. You’ll forgive me for observing that this level of concern seems to have established itself remarkably quickly.” The psychiatrist watched him with hooded eyes. “Are you sexually attracted to him?”

“Yeah. Have you seen dat ass?” Stiles lashed out with sarcasm. He turned to storm away from the desk, but then stopped himself. “I’m sorry. It’s just this isn’t the first time that someone’s confused me being compassionate with wanting to get into someone’s pants.”

“Compassion for relative strangers is actually extraordinarily rare, Agent Stilinski. On the other hand, base appetite is a far more common occurrence.” Dr. Lecter gestured to a chair across from the desk. “Sit down, please.”

Stiles sighed and took a seat. He had been the aggressor, and he had asked for the meeting. The least he could do is sit down and listen.

“I am curious as to why you’ve expressed such a compassionate interest in Will Graham.” Dr. Lecter continued. “He has mentioned that you have twice ignored protocol in his interest.”

“To be fair, I didn’t ignore protocol. I simply reinterpreted it to meet my needs. It is completely legitimate to treat law enforcement as victims if they’ve been victimized.” Stiles spread his hands. “I haven’t been reprimanded yet, so I don’t see as if I have done anything wrong.”

“So it is your opinion that rules are only rules if their enforced.”

“More like rules are enforceable in different ways. As I said, I haven’t technically broken any protocols.” Stiles smiled. “Are you a stickler for rules, doctor?”

“No.” Dr. Lecter replied quite seriously. “I find certain rules laid down by society cumbersome and without merit. Still, you have taken at least a small risk in regards to your career in your compassion for Will. I’m curious as to why you would do that.”

Stiles was suddenly nervous. He would usually in situations where the person he was talking to had no authority over him, make a quip and dance away. He shared what he wanted to share when he wanted to share it. But Dr. Lecter’s personality was very forceful; it would seem to be a very simple question with a very simple answer, even though for Stiles, it was emotionally fraught.

“He’s not the first person I have met coping with emotional fragility without a proper support system.” Stiles replied. “In the past, I’ve watched terrible things happen to a lot of people because someone was forced to operate without being shown any compassion. He hid a lot of his pain, but it was still there, and it influenced him to make terrible decisions. If someone had just taken the time to understand, a lot of people wouldn’t have had to endure the consequences of those decisions.”
“Mr. Graham is the same. His gift allows him to take it all in, and other than you, no one gives a shit if he’s coping with it as long as he gets results.” Stiles snorted. “They don’t seem to realize that there is a great deal of space between ‘completely functional’ and ‘non-functional.’”

Dr. Lecter seemed to agree with his interpretation, but he also seemed displeased by the fact that he had made those interpretations. “Perhaps they are respecting his privacy.”

“Sure, but only when it suits their agenda to do so.” Stiles snapped back. He was talking about Director Crawford, but he wasn’t going to say that. He did not know if he could trust this psychiatrist. “I also respect his privacy, and my agenda is simple: to show compassion. It certainly doesn’t conflict with yours.”

“And what is my agenda?” Dr. Lecter asked, in all seriousness.

“Since he seems to want to talk to you, I guess that your agenda is helping deal with what he sees.” Stiles suddenly doubted his own words, but he didn’t have anything but a gut instinct. “As I said, it is one of the reasons I came to you about Lounds.”

“I appreciate that fact. I also appreciate your desire to assist Will.” Dr. Lecter contemplates the top of his desk. “Would it be within your interpretation of protocol to assist me with aiding Will?”

“Uh. How do you mean?”

“I’d like you to return so we can talk. I would like you to share your perceptions of the work you are doing together with Will, without revealing anything connected to the cases you are working on.” Dr. Lecter said cautiously. “I would consider it counseling, which would invoke patient client privilege.”

“I won’t spy on Mr. Graham for you.” Stiles replied.

“I’m not asking you to do any such thing. However, if during our conversations, you could give me insight as to his work environment, we can probably, together, maximize the benefits of your … compassion.”

Stiles thought about it for a moment. He had seen that the work Will Graham was doing for the FBI had a deleterious effect on his mental state. Will needed someone to help him. Stiles was good for being there and being a friend, but as much as he disliked psychiatrists, he wasn’t in their league. It couldn’t hurt. “Okay. But I won’t discuss anything with you that Mr. Graham asks me to keep private. You can’t help people if they can’t trust you.”

“I understand that entirely, Agent Stilinski.” Hannibal Lecter replied with a great deal of emphasis. “Maintaining Will’s trust in me – and by extension in you – is very important to me. So we have a deal.”
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Lydia finishes moving into her house and has lunch with the BAU Team.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lydia folded up the cardboard box and put it on the stack with the others. The apartment building she had finally settled on was a beautiful building in the Cameron Station neighborhood of Alexandria; one of its more attractive features was a thorough commitment to recycling. Her phone rang from counter in the kitchen; from the caller ID, she could tell it was her mother.

Lydia glanced at the clock as she picked up the phone; she had plenty of time to talk to her mother. She loved that she had plenty of time, because that meant she had planned this move well. Given the number of plans of which she had been a part that had gone bottoms up, she had cultivated an appreciation when things exactly as they were intended.

“Hi, Mom.”

“Hello! How is my favorite daughter?”

“I’m your only daughter, so I’d better damn well be your favorite.” She sat down on the couch, kicked off her shoes, and put them up. “How are you, Mom?”

“I miss you.” Natalie always said this to her; it approached the point of ritual. Lydia had realized years ago that it was just another way of saying ‘I love you,’ while being a gentle accusation that she didn’t visit enough. “I didn’t catch you at a bad time?”

“Not really. It’s not even eleven, and I’ve only got two things left on my agenda for today. I’m going to finished unpacking the last box from Cambridge and I’m taking Stiles and his new co-workers out to lunch.”

Natalie hesitated on the other end of the phone. Lydia wondered if her mother would broach the easy topic first or the hard topic.

“You’ve unpacked already?” So it was the easy topic. “That was fast.”

“Of course I have. You know how much I can’t stand unpacked boxes. There were still a few things I need to purchase to make apartment look ‘finished’ though, and I am seriously debating repainting the bedroom.”

“You’ll have to send me pictures, so I can give you my opinion,” her mother teased. “Even though you don’t want it.”

Lydia knew when she was being set up for an opening but she also knew that her mother believed she was doing this out of the love. She said the words that would set the stage for the discussion that her mother wanted to have. “I’ll send you pictures. I’ll always want your advice.”
That did it. Both traps had been laid. “You’re going out to lunch with Stiles and his colleagues at work?”

“Actually, I invited them to lunch. I want them to get to know me, considering the ungodly hours Stiles will probably be keeping with the FBI.” Lydia knew to lay some ground rules down for this discussion. “They’ll probably be calling the apartment at all times of the night.”

“I hear that happens with law enforcement types,” Natalie played her first card. “It’ll be something you’re not used to.”

“Seriously, Mom? I’ve had a long distance relationship with Stiles for six years. I’m totally familiar with getting phone calls from him at all times of the day and night. It’s one of his least endearing traits.” She countered. “I’ll probably get more regular sleep once Stiles moves in than I’ve gotten throughout my doctoral program. I’m planning the lunch is to make sure his coworkers are comfortable with waking me up at all hours.”

“Oh, I see. Is Stiles moving in already?”

Lydia smiled to herself. “Oh, no. He’s not done with Quantico for another six weeks, officially. I’ve told you that before.” She had; her mother was trying to be coy.

“You know, it might not be a bad idea if he got his own apartment first for a while before moving in with you.”

Lydia triumphed; she had gotten Natalie to slip up first. “Mom, that wouldn’t just be a bad idea, it would be a terrible idea. I’m ready. He’s ready. The only one not ready for this is you. I know you like him, so why are you opposed to him moving in?”

“I just don’t want you to get hurt, honey. Not many people move in with their high school sweethearts and make it last.”

“He wasn’t my first high school boyfriend; he was just my last. I went on dates with other people at college; he insisted on me doing that out of some misguided mix of nobility and insecurity. It’s not like I don’t know his flaws.”

Natalie’s voice was tenuous; Lydia knew it came from a desire to be protective. Mothers. “Do you?”

“Oh, yes. In six weeks, he’ll be moving in; he’ll be getting his personal items out of storage. As much space as I’ve left for him in the closets and the spare bedroom, I know that his clutter will absolutely take over the apartment. He’ll leave case files with pictures of dismembered corpses on the kitchen counter. I’ll find drinking glasses everywhere. I’m already planning for the fight over his Star Wars figurine collection, especially that Boba Fett doll he’s never taken out of the package.”

“Are you going to be able to handle that?”

“Of course. I’ve already got a table set up in the utility room where I will put his stuff that migrates around the apartment. He’ll get used to checking there when he can’t find things.” Lydia says. “I’ve already set up my passwords so he can’t break them, and I have stored everything I don’t want him to get his hands on somewhere that he can’t get at them without me knowing.”

“Do you think that’s the best way to live?”

Lydia smiled. “It will be perfect.”

That was Stiles for her. Perfectly infuriating; infuriatingly perfect. The variable to her constant.
“Honey, if you are sure, then I’m sure. I just had to ask.”

“Oh, Mom. That’s your prerogative. Now, what’s up back home?” Even though Lydia didn’t really consider a permanent return to Beacon Hills likely, it would always be home to her. Any place where you had shed that much blood had to be home. She had friends, living and dead, closer to her there than anyone else could ever be.

She leaned back on the couch as her mother shared the latest gossip with her. It was mostly harmless. Her mother would never change; she would never stop trying to keep Lydia away from the supernatural. Natalie couldn’t grasp the fact that Lydia was supernatural. That disconnect was never going to go away.

Natalie was the first one in the conversation to bring it up though. “You know we just hired one of your … friends. For the school.”

“Yes. I heard that Liam’s going to teach there. I’m sure you had something to do with it.”

“I may have had a little something to do with it. As you know, I’ve been trying to make the school a safe zone …” Lydia’s eyes rolled at her mother’s quixotic way of approaching the situation. “… for a few years. Having Scott’s … deputy? … as a teacher at the school is going to make that easier.”

“The term is beta, Mom.” Lydia wanted to point out that the presence of Liam at the school might draw enemies of the pack there, but the school was already a locus for telluric currents, so they would be drawn there anyway. In the end, tough, it would most likely be healthy for everyone to have an actual grown werewolf present during classes. Liam would be teaching history and acting as assistant coach for Finstock. She decided to tease her mother. “Did you at least check his driver’s license?”

“Yes,” Natalie rejoined, just as sarcastically. “He passed the very thorough background check.”

“I just remember you guys hiring a century-old Nazi werelion during senior year to teach physics,” Lydia remarked. She could be nostalgic now that everyone was safe. She suddenly missed the frequent playful banter between her and her mother. Phone conversations every other week weren’t the same as being at home, and it has been such a long time since her last visit. “I hope you’ve improved their quality.”

They continue the back and forth until it was time for Natalie to go teach her next class. Lydia felt warm; she laid back on the couch basking in the glow of the realization that after so many years and so many thousand miles, she was closer to her mother than ever.

Lydia still had plenty of time before she had to leave for lunch with Stiles and his co-workers. She would get this last box done in that time. She took it down and set it next to the hope chest in the living room, cutting it open carefully with the box cutter.

She had saved this box for last for two very important reasons. She didn’t want to open it up at all until she knew that Stiles wasn’t going to be there. He didn’t need to be looking into its contents. She also knew that it might be a little upsetting for her to go through it, and she wanted privacy if she did get upset. The limited amount of time would help keep her powering through it.

The hope chest was one of her prized possessions. Not only was it originally built in Massachusetts when it was a British colony, but it was intricately beautiful. It had been nicked up, faded, and filthy when she had bought it. With time and patience, she had renovated it into its original beauty. She never thought that she would like working with her hands like that, but it had been pleasing in its own way. It had also made the chest hers in a way few others things were.
It not only had a sturdy lock on the top, but it had an added feature. It had a false bottom that only she knew about. She hadn’t told Stiles about it, and that was with good reason. She had no need to tempt him into digging into her secrets. She knew it was one of his weaknesses.

It was into the compartment revealed by the false bottom that she unpacked this box. She took out the framed picture of Jackson; she had had it framed during her first year at MIT. After six months of her new relationship with Stiles, she found herself no longer resentful of Jackson’s move to London. You don’t forget things like your first love. You don’t forget when your first love brought someone back from horror. She placed the Christmas cards that he had sent her next to it and, finally, the key to his house. It no longer worked, of course, but he had made sure that she kept it as a reminder.

It did not make her feel guilty that she had kept these things nor did it make her feel guilty that she kept them from Stiles. Her feelings for Jackson were hers, and it wasn’t unethical for her to hold onto them. To cherish them. To use them.

She picked up the key and held it to her lips. It had been the first time she had truly realized that her heart could mean something to someone other than her. She would never get rid of it. She put it carefully down at the bottom of the chest.

She realized that others might consider this some sort of trophy collection; she had other memorabilia but she did not hide them away. Next to Jackson’s picture she placed Aiden’s report card and school photo from the third grade. The twins had become so used to not having their picture taken that this was the only thing Ethan could give her when he had left Beacon Hills so long ago. She would tear up when she looked at it. Third-grade Aiden was just a gangly tow-headed boy with average grades who looked a little lonely but mostly happy. He certainly wasn’t the brutal monster he grew up to be.

That little boy was more like the man that he was becoming when he died. She did that. She had learned by what had happened that love was dangerous. By the time she began flirting with Jordan, she had become carefully precise in what she wanted. By the time she realized that she loved Stiles, she was scared by the power of her own feelings. It had taken forgetting him completely to realize how much power that had over her as well.

She had observed that romantic interaction had a form of mathematical precision. Each time she put her heart into play, she became more resilient to the damage she sustained while she became more sensitive to the damage she could cause. Each time she offered herself to someone else, she earned more in return. It was a pattern she recognized.

Love was an infinite series.

The only other thing she kept in this hidden space were what Lydia jokingly referred to her as her ‘Black Books.’ To the outside observer, they were two journals and a case full of DVDs. They comprised a record (even if some of them were reconstructions from memory) of every single banshee premonition she had ever had. She realized when she left Beacon Hills why learning about her own nature was so frustrating. No one had done any rigorous exploration of the powers of her kind. Everything she could get her hands on were observations arising from other mystical practices. While the knowledge of druids, of hunters, of werewolf scholars were useful, they were always written with the philosophical biases of their sources. Science was cleaner; it dealt in first principles.

Her work on her abilities had taken a back seat to her education and her life, but she had never completely ignored it. The fact that her powers manifested less frequently in Cambridge made that far easier to do, though over the years she had determined though that her powers responded to her mental connection to the subject. The closer the death was to someone she cared about the louder the sounds accompanying it. This was, at base, why the folktales had banshees connected to a particular family.
It was also why this lunch was going to be so important. She realized long ago something that Stiles had not. There was no one, not even her mother, to whom she was connected with more than Stiles Stilinski, and he had just joined the FBI’s premier task force for dealing with serial killers. He was going to be involved with death on almost a daily basis.

Soon, the screaming would begin.

She also knew how important this was to Stiles, so she wasn’t going to let herself get in his way. Lydia didn’t know how long she could keep it hidden from him, but she was going to try her best. This was more than just a job for Stiles; he was going to help people with his talents on his terms not because he happened to be adjacent to powerful supernatural creatures. She hoped it would finally convince him of his worth.

She grabbed her coat, checking her makeup on the way out. It was time to set the stage.

Stiles laughed along with the rest of the lunch party as Jimmy Price told a story about a college prank gone wrong. Some trainees had stolen a practice cadaver from the morgue to scare a friend, planning to get it back before the weekend was over, only to have lost the keys. It sounded like a movie script gone bad, but Price was an expert storyteller full of wit and vigor.

But Stiles wasn’t really paying attention to the story, no matter how well it was being told. He was paying attention to Lydia. Or the person who was supposed to be Lydia Martin but wasn’t acting like her at all. This woman with the artfully styled red hair, the perfect make-up, the witty repartee, was trying just a little bit too hard.

Lydia Martin never tried too hard.

Stiles glanced over his shoulder to see Beverly Katz smirking at him. Had she picked up on his discomfort? Ugh. He wasn’t used to situations where everyone was smarter than he was.

“So, Lydia,” Beverly opened up warmly; they had all determined to let the titles, the doctors and the agents, get put to the side five minutes into lunch. “What are your plans? What are you interested in doing?”

“Oh, I sent out some resumes. I’m sure something will come up,” Lydia replied with a hint of false concern, as if she was actually worried that she wouldn’t find a job.

“Lydia,” Stiles said carefully. He didn’t know why she was trying to be modest. The only one who should be modest was him – everyone else at the table was an already an expert in their fields. “You’ve already had a few interviews.” He turned to the others and explained to the team exactly where Lydia had had interviews at the most prestigious think tanks in D.C.

By the time he had finished talking, everyone at the table was looking at him with expressions that ran the gamut from fond exasperation to barely contained humor.

Jimmy Price picked up his whiskey sour and remarked. “Oh, this boy’s got it bad.”

Stiles blushed. He may have gushed a little bit over Lydia’s talents, but she deserved to be gushed over. Lydia herself reached over under the table and brushed his leg reassuringly.

At the same time, Lydia changed the topic. “I’m surprised Mr. Graham didn’t come with us to lunch. Stiles talks about him so much.” Stiles wasn’t quite sure why she selected that topic.
Zeller chuckled around a fork of food. “Mr. Graham isn’t exactly the lunch-going type.”

Price smirked back at Zeller over his drink. “I am sure he does eat lunch. A little bit of lunch for a very little guy, but not where anyone can see him.”

Beverly laughed out loud. “He’s not the most social of people, Lydia. In fact, he’s pretty anti-social. It takes all kinds of people to work in our field.”

Stiles knew that the gossip was light-hearted. “Hey, there’s nothing wrong with being an introvert. Especially someone with unique set of talents. I’m sure you can imagine how hard it is to come out into public.”

“Oh, I know. We’re forensic scientists. We poke at dead bodies for a living,” Price remarked. “It’s just a relief to find someone less socially adept than we are. You can’t blame us for enjoying it.”

Lydia teased in return. “If that’s true, you should have really met Stiles in high school.”

Stiles looked at her like she had stabbed him in the back. “Lyds!”

Beverly leaned forward. “Now, you have to spill his secrets. We’re relentless,” Zeller and Price nodded like a group of educated vultures.

Lydia offered Stiles the sweetest of smiles. “You know those tired teen movie plots where the geeky, spastic, but warm-hearted nerd wins the heart of the Queen Bee on campus through his plucky determination and sheer luck? They were talking about us.”

“Lydia,” Stiles scoffed. Was she really doing this? “I wasn’t a nerd.”

“Stiles, you created a ten-year plan in third grade to win my love.” Lydia observed coolly but with sparkly warmth in her eyes. Stiles was going to curl up and die from embarrassment.

Stiles almost covered his face with his hands but he glances back over at the others who were having a great time. But none of their faces betrayed any sort of disdain. Stiles realized that Lydia knew exactly what she was doing.

“Well, if you are expecting us to share our high-school stories,” Price remarked. “You’re going to have to buy me a lot more drinks.”

They ended up not telling any more high-school stories and Price did not end up returning to work that afternoon drunk. A pleasant time was had by all, except for Stiles, because he wasn’t quite sure what the time was supposed to be.

In the car outside of the restaurant, Lydia turned to him, expectedly. “So, are you mad at me?”

“Mad? No. I do feel like I just played a game, and I have no idea what the rules to it were. What was that all about?”

“It’s called making friends, Stiles. You should have learned about this by now, even with the fact that you are so privileged.” Lydia said archly. “All-in-all, I think it went pretty well. I think they could even like me eventually.”

“I’m privileged?”

“Yes,” Lydia smiled at him. “Not everyone gets to make friends by being their obnoxious selves all the time. The rest of us have to construct pretty faces when we first meet other people. We have to
sell ourselves. It’s only after we get comfortable can we take the masks off. You’ve never learned that skill. As I said, privileged.”

“I thought I was supposed to be mad at you. You were the popular one in high school. I’m still not getting your point.”

“I was popular because I was good at creating faces for other people to see. I know how to restrain my own feelings and my own desires in order to fit in. What you helped me figure out was that I didn’t need to wear that mask all the time, which is why I love you. But I still need that ability,” Lydia explained. “You’ve never learned how to restrain yourself. Growing up, I never had someone who would take all my crap without complaint; I never had a Scott. I’m only a little jealous.”

“I feel like I’m being insulted. You want me to pretend to be something I’m not?”

“Not for me. And I don’t know if you can learn to do it for others, but that’s not your fault. No one ever made you learn when you were younger; we had a lot more important things to worry about.” She leaned over and kiss him. “I’ll protect you, Stiles. This I can do.”

Stiles didn’t say anything. He hadn’t realized she felt this way about him; he thought he had grown up from high school enough for her. She didn’t seem angry.

Lydia observed as she looked out the window. “From what you and they said, I’m pretty sure that’s what you and Will Graham have in common.”

Chapter End Notes

I felt it was important to give you insight into where Lydia was emotionally and with her banshee abilities, because there was no way she was going to not come into play in later chapters.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Scott fails to contain his anxiety about Stiles leaving the pack. Stiles tries to help the BAU team with the Lost Boys. Someone has started killing people in California.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scott stood out in the mid-December morning drizzle, drawing patterns in the condensation on the window of the antique shop. This was one of the ubiquitous strip malls that had been built in the nineties though most of them were now abandoned store fronts. Stiles’ phone call had caught him in the middle of Christmas shopping. With it pressed to his ear, he drew a smiley face.

“Scott, buddy, are you there?” Oh. Stiles was waiting for him to respond to his announcement. In his mind, Scott formed the words that would give his friend absolution, because that was definitely what Stiles was expecting. Wasn’t that what Scott had always done? Forgiven him?

“So you aren’t coming home for Christmas at all?” Scott instead let the disappointment seep into his voice. Maybe if he stopped trying to pretend it didn’t bother him, Stiles wouldn’t act as if it shouldn’t bother him.

Stiles paused as if he hadn’t expected that type of response, which Scott though with grim satisfaction, he had not. “Yeah. Yeah. I’m sorry, but we’re in the middle of a pretty important case. It’s my first case as a real agent and not as a trainee …”

“Sure. Sure, I get it. So you actually decided to stick with the BAU.” It wasn’t a question. It was a statement. Scott kept drawing with his finger until he realized he had begun to draw a spiral on the window. He bit his tongue and wiped it away.

“Yeah. I told you that last week.” Stiles offered helpfully. “Are you … are you mad?”

“Why would I possibly be mad? I remember that call, too. It was the call where we made plans for this Christmas.” Scott felt that unpleasant anger well up in him. He tapped his finger on the glass and realize he had grown a claw. He forced his heart rate back down.

“Scott, you’re being unreasonable.” It had been happening more and more often; Stiles had picked up some adult-style approaches to conflict

“No, I’m being upset because I made plans for my Christmas break, and the person I made those plans with has given me less than two days warning before canceling. I’m upset because we’ve not spent more than three hours together at one time in the last eighteen months.”

“There was that car drive back from Cambridge?” Stiles could still go for the funny, even if it didn’t work.

Scott didn’t answer, because as much as he was seething, he didn’t want to make this day get any worse. He just waited in silence.
“Scott, there’s someone killing people.” Stiles snapped in frustration. “That’s more important than your feelings.”

“Oh?” Scott should have put the brakes on the conversation right then. He should have just said good bye and hung up and waited until they had both calmed down. He should have done anything but what he did next. “Well, it took you long enough to learn that lesson, you fucking hypocrite.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Stiles demanded.

Scott had to be extra careful not to crush the phone with his hand. He let his head fall back on the store window with a dull thud. What the fuck was wrong with him? He knew what was wrong with him. He had said it to hurt Stiles so Stiles would be hurt; as long as Stiles could be hurt by what he said, it felt that he still mattered. It was so, so childish. He had stuck the dagger in just a little bit, and it was going to hurt whether he pulled it out or pushed it in.

This was still Stiles. He was still Scott. He pulled it out. “I’m sorry; forget I said that. I’m just disappointed that’s all.”

“No, I want to know what you meant by that. What did you mean I’m a hypocrite?”

“It doesn’t matter, Stiles. Look, we’ll see each other … “ He wanted to make a plan for that, to move on from his rash words, from this ruined goddamn Christmas, but the truth was he had no idea when they would be able to get together again. “… when we see each other.”

“No, I want to know what you meant.” Scott could hear Stiles breathe heavily through the phone. “Did you … was that about Donovan?”

Scott hung up the phone. There was no way to mitigate this damage. He stood there in the drizzly parking lot, looking out across the crappy, gross mall of Beacon Hills on a crappy, gross day in December. He barely remembered what having a drink felt like – he had only sneaked a little alcohol twice before the Bite -- but he wanted one right now.

He must have stood there for ten minutes, phone in his hand, waiting for Stiles to call back. Or maybe trying to get up the courage for him to call back. Where was all his courage now? He’d went hand-to-hand with the Beast of Gevaudan, but he couldn’t get up the nerve to call his best friend up and apologize for using one of the worst memories Stiles could possibly have as a tactic in an argument.

Because there was part of him that couldn’t say that he was sorry. Stiles had hid Donovan’ death because he felt bad, and people had been dying. That time it had been Scott’s responsibility, and Stiles had spent precious days hiding and lying and feeling guilty while Scott had been forced to face chimera after chimera dying and watching his pack fall apart and being played like a fucking idiot by Theo, alone. And after all that, Stiles had tried to explain the reason he had hidden it as “It was just the way you were looking at me that night.” Like it was Scott’s fault. And Scott had let it slide, like he let everything slide, because best friends were worth it. Weren’t they?

Of course, that was six years ago. They should have moved past it. Well, Stiles had moved past it, hadn’t he? Moved all the way past it and all the way to F. B. I. on the other side of the fucking country. While Scott was still here, facing Beacon Hills alone.

The phone buzzed and Scott had it up against his face before the first ring was over. “I’m sorry, Stiles, I don’t know why I went there.” That was a lie. He knew. “I won’t …”

“Uh, Scott? This is Liam.” Scott could now add embarrassment on top of the feelings of shame,
unbanked rage, and misery.

“What’s up, Liam?” Scott fell into Alpha Mode. He had to; it was part of the job description.

“It may be nothing, but I was out running in the preserve today and I found some weird tracks. I was wondering if you weren’t busy, you could come and help me follow them? It could be nothing, but if it rains harder or it snows, we’ll lose them.”

Scott took a deep breath. Well, of course. “Where are you?” Liam gave him his location in the Preserve. “I’ll be there in twenty minutes. See you there.” He hung up the call.

“More fucking bullshit in this fucking town that I have to fucking deal with for the rest of my goddamn motherfucking life!” He shouted at the rain-filled parking lot. Without thinking, he took the bag he was holding and threw it out across the parking lot with all of his strength. Not just with all of his human strength; all of his strength.

The Lord of the Rings Clock shaped-like Barad-Dur with the Eye of Sauron made a burst of delicate noise when it smashed against the wall of the building across the street. Scott had planned to give it Stiles for Christmas. He had been on his way to buy an apology gift for Lydia. Two hundred dollars down the drain.

Well, it wasn’t like he would have been able to give it to him any time soon, anyway.

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Stiles tried to focus on the files spread across the table in front of him. They were looking for the next possible set of victims for what the forensic team was calling “the Lost Boys.” Will Graham, Alana Bloom and Beverly Katz all stood around the table working together. Well, they were working, but while to everyone else Stiles was working right along aside them, he was actually thinking about anything else but the information in front of him. He couldn’t concentrate. His mind kept drifting back to the fight with Scott on the phone and then the weird-quasi fight with Lydia about that fight. To tell himself the truth, both fights had caught him completely off guard and he wasn’t sure what to do.

Stiles had talked about the phone conversation while he sat at the kitchen table and Lydia did the dishes. He remembered thinking that she had looked so charmingly June Cleaver-esque in her yellow Playtex gloves. She wasn’t going to let dish soap ruin her hands. He explained how betrayed he felt by the conversation.

Lydia hadn’t even turned around as she washed plates. “Well, that certainly was immature of him, but, on the other hand, he was right.”

Stiles had glanced up at her. “What?” He was taken aback. He thought he would be on her side.

Lydia had glanced over her shoulder at his tone. “You hid information that the pack could have used. You concealed things that left the pack wide open to Theo’s machinations. And you did it because you felt bad. He’s not wrong.”

She had gone back to washing the dishes as if she had just discussed what they were going to have for dinner tomorrow. Stiles, on the other hand, had felt like he had just been punched in the face. After a few minutes of silence, Lydia once again had turned to look at him. She must have read something in his silence and in his face, for she had sighed and put her hands on her hips.

“Please don’t tell me that you and Scott have not talked about this?” She had asked. When he had shaken his head she had rolled her eyes and turned back to the sink. “Boys are so stupid.”
“I couldn’t tell anyone …” He had begun.

“Mieczyslaw Stilinski, so help me, would you please think before you speak!” She had turned around and pulled out a chair across from him, the yellow gloves still on her hands. “You could have told someone, but you didn’t want to, because you felt bad. It was probably a combination of your self-esteem issues and unresolved trauma, but the fact is you could have and you should have told someone. At least be honest with yourself; you’re not a sixteen-year-old boy anymore.”

Stiles had gotten angry with her then. “Well, I’m sorry I wasn’t as good as Scott.”

Unfortunately, Lydia had never and would never back down when he got angry; she had always gotten angry right back. That’s how he knew they were going to work out. “That line must have been real handy all through high school. Whenever you did something wrong, you could shift the blame to Scott being too good, as if the universe made you screw up to balance things out. But you know what I see? I see a gun and a badge over there that tells me that you are just as good as Scott.” Mercilessly, she had pointed them out to him. “So who are you going to pin it on the next time you screw up? Me?”

Stiles had pushed away from the table and had stalked out of the room. They had not spoken for the rest of the night, except for Lydia assuring him she wasn’t angry when they went to bed. He had been and no matter how much he tossed and turned over it, he was still angry.

Instead, he found himself staring at a pile of folders of missing children, trying to force his mind to work. Images of missing children just kept swimming around. Stiles didn’t have a gut feeling about them. He just kept cycling through their abandoned faces.

Will Graham was building a profile for the next probable target of the Lost Boys. Stiles found himself admiring him; Will really was brilliant at taking evidence and turning it into description, melding psychology and poetry. “He’s an outsider that doesn’t look like one.” The special investigator sounded both sad and knowing. “He’d have a vocation – something inventive or mechanical.”

Stiles wondered for a moment if that was something that Will Graham had noticed about Stiles that day in class. Back in Beacon Hills, Stiles had indeed been an outsider, before and after wolves, even while people like Erica had thought he was cute. It had been his behavior that had set him apart. In comparison, only a blind person could have dismissed Will as anything but attractive, but he wouldn’t have been anywhere near the popular crowd back in Louisiana.

Stiles may not have been as attractive as Will, but he did have him beat in something inventive and mechanical. Where Will had worked on boat motors -- Stiles had seen them in his house when he picked him up – Stiles had run with wolves.

Beverly pointed out a file for a family that had recently moved to Fayetteville. “He won a junior high award for his work on pretty sophisticated computer circuitry.” Stiles crowded over her shoulder to read the description. He looked like a nice kid.

“Why do you think these kids are susceptible to C. J. Lincoln?” Dr. Bloom had asked. Stiles always liked her tendency to ask clear questions that demanded a clear answer. Most of the hack psychologists he had met avoided opening themselves up to failure by dancing amidst obscurity. She wielded her questions like a machete, clearing a path through the underbrush.

This was one reason Will worked so well with her. Once he could see his destination, his mind filled in the blanks. “Because our boy may have a brother but their ages or their interests keep them apart. So, he’s a brother without a brother.”
Or maybe distance and history kept them apart, Stiles thought sadly. Damn it, he should have gone home. He wasn’t adding much to this case but an extra pair of hands and an extra pair of eyes.

“Brothers looking for a mother. They’re killing the mothers last.” Dr. Bloom pointed out. That was something all three connected incidents had in common. The murder of the mother was separate and last. It was important.

Stiles realized that he had seen something like almost exactly like this before. “Sometimes the people closest to you are the ones holding you back the most.” Peter had wanted Scott to replace his old pack with a new one. He had wanted to be the most important thing in Scott’s life; it was the only way to insure loyalty.

Will gave him a look. “You are saying this is motivated by jealousy. Shared love is weak.”

“It’s a transformation,” Stiles turns back to him. “There’s a woman out there who wants sons, and they have to be her sons. Not someone else’s.”

Dr. Bloom ran a hand through her hair. “But why have the boys do it? If she loves them so much, why take the risk that they’ll fail. We saw what she did when one of her boys failed her.”

“For her, the love has to be reciprocated for it to be real.” Stiles slipped back into sarcasm. “What wouldn’t a boy do for his mother?”

“The ultimate gesture of devotion,” Will said sadly.

They spend the next three hours hypothesizing possible techniques the woman could use to get these boys to kill their own family while scouring through the files to locate any information that could tie the latest possible victim to a woman. When they get the convenience store photo, Will rushed it to Jack’s office while he and Beverly got ready for deployment. Everyone in the room was confident they had the next target.

Stiles did not actually fire his gun as the assault team rushed to save the last family. He stopped by the corner of the swimming pool as Will confronted the woman with the boy. The only instinct at that moment, Stiles could tell, was for Will to magic up a solution where the boy did not die. He watched Will get down on his knees, pleading. Stiles was more than willing to do what he could for others, but he wouldn’t offer himself up like that for a stranger, no matter how young.

Stiles, strangely and sickeningly, wanted to stop all others from interfering to see if Will could actually reach the boy. Instead, Beverly ended it with a bullet. Now all that was left was to pick up the pieces.

#######

Scott felt himself dragging as he walked up the sidewalk from the parking garage to his dorm. He only had three semesters left and the boards and he’d be finished. He’d be a doctor. Honestly, he wondered how anyone without werewolf stamina could make it through the eight years of school. He could barely make it through the days now.

It didn’t used to be like this. When he first started college he had been equal mix of terrified and excited, and while it had been rough – it’s not like he entered at the top of the class – he had been eager to show people what he could do. Now, some days it was all he could do to force himself to go to class in the morning. He did go to class. He did the work. He wasn’t even doing that badly – but again, not at the top of the class – but there wasn’t any excitement.

It didn’t help that all the communication between him and Stiles for the last month since that phone
call had been short texts. Texts that didn’t say anything of any importance. Texts that danced around what had been said and not said. He wasn’t going to call; it wasn’t about an apology, because they both knew that Scott would be sorry for what he said. It was about the other thing.

Lydia was right. They weren’t going to be able to be pack anymore. Hell, Stiles wasn’t going to be much of anything to him, anymore. His life was on the other side of the country. Scott had to learn to deal with what he’d lost. It wouldn’t do anyone any good if he couldn’t face reality. As Deucalion said, it could even do a lot of harm.

But he couldn’t reach that point. Not yet. It just felt that everything had slipped right through his fingers while Scott had been paying attention to school.

Just like the smell of fresh blood that he nearly missed as he started up the stoop of his apartment complex. It couldn’t have been more than an hour or two old; he was getting better at scents as he grew older. It was fresh blood and it was human. He located the end of the trail of little drops between the base of the stoop and the street.

That was most definitely odd; if the trail had started there, there probably shouldn’t have been so much blood. If it stopped there, it meant that it started somewhere else and stopped right in front of the building. The person bleeding was picked up by a car.

Scott entertained the idea of just walking into his building and going to bed. While he had his work done for tonight, if he got involved in something, it could take all night which meant he would be even more tired for class tomorrow. The blood smelled completely human, which meant it wasn’t his responsibility. Crime happened all the time, and he wasn’t a cop.

It was none of his business, he told himself. Except that the blood was fresh which meant that people could be hurt. No one else but a creature with a heightened sense of smell would have noticed it. But it was none of his business. This wasn’t his territory.

He rubbed his face in exasperation and began to follow the trail back to where it came from. When had he become so predictable?

The trail was not hard to follow. Steadily and smoothly he followed it for six blocks until he arrived at a townhouse equidistant between campus and the highway. He ducked immediately into an alleyway between two homes when he saw the place was swarming with police and emergency services. He sighed in relief; he could go home with a clear conscience. Someone was already on top of it.

Scott listened in on the conversation between the police, just to make sure. Three people had been shot and killed in a town house. It was terrible, but at least it wasn’t supernatural. He turned on his heel and went to leave when he overheard a word that made him crash to a stop.

One of the coroners described the bodies as undergoing a port-mortem hemicorporectomy. Scott’s heart dropped into his stomach.

Chapter End Notes

This takes place during the episodes "Oeuf" and "Coquilles," though no scenes from the latter appear.
I also take some dialog from "Oeuf."
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Events begin to move after the mysterious deaths in California. Stiles finally catches Hannibal’s full attention.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lydia first heard the sounds in her new office. She did not even have to scream, because the office was just so quiet. She had negotiated for it. She took a pay cut for it. After all, money was just money. It’s easy to dispense because you don’t actually see it on the table at the meetings, when it’s numbers written on a page. An office, on the other hand – not just any office but one of the best offices – conveyed a certain concrete reality to social status.

Why does she have a nicer office than me? Because she’s better than you. Lydia insisted on this office. She could earn the money back later.

Lydia did have a great deal of sympathy for these poor, poor geniuses at the think tank. A good fifty percent of them were brilliant as hell in high school, but they chose to sit out of the social whirl. They told themselves they were just too smart for it, but in reality they were afraid of sticking their toes in the water and having it bitten off by fashionable sharks. Lydia was one of those sharks.

And now they were out in the ‘real world,’ a saying that Lydia despised to the core of her being, and they thought that now they would finally get the respect they deserved without the social games that dominated high school. They were wrong, of course. The social games of high school were training for the social games of the office. They were outclassed.

The office was quiet and sunny with two big windows and a very nice desk. She could be both comfortable here and intimidating. When she heard the first sound that morning, it was a flapping like a piece of paper in a strong breeze. The second sound was the scraping of metal over wood. The third sound was muted and distorted singing like someone was listening to a church choir on a really bad radio. Lydia felt relief, irritation, and surprise at both the relief and the irritation. It had been the first thing she had heard in over a year, and while she knew that it meant nothing good, she was glad she still had the ability.

She wasn’t at its mercy any more. She took out a pad of paper and a pen and began writing down descriptions of what she heard. She knew that death wasn’t imminent; she hadn’t screamed. This was a warning echo, and she had long ago learned not to ignore warning echoes.

Lydia’s only concern is that it sounded like the first two sounds were coming from one place and the third sound was coming from another. She wasn’t quite sure what that meant, but she theorized that it could mean they were coming from two different possible deaths.

She typed up a brief summary of the sounds and emailed them to Scott and Stiles on their personal accounts. Lydia felt pleased with herself. She was getting the hang of this.

#######
Stiles pulled up in front of Will Graham’s lovely farmhouse in Wolf Trap just thirty seconds after another car did. He had volunteered to make sure Will’s dogs get fed and walked while Will as finishing up the Angelmaker case with Director Crawford.

The way this particular case had played out was very reassuring to Stiles. Not the fact that an individual with incurable brain cancer had slaughtered three people because he believed they were evil and needed redemption, but the fact that the case had been broken up by good detective work. Stiles had sympathy for the Angelmaker – though that didn’t excuse his actions – he knew what it felt like to have your own mind betray you and to be terrified of death. The killer’s last act had been on himself, and Stiles knew what that must have felt like as well, though he had managed to avoid that particular end.

The woman getting out of the car ahead of him was Dr. Bloom. Will had warned him that he might have asked her to do the same thing as he was, but he had assured the investigator that it was no big deal. Stiles had noted that Will looked completely demolished by the pace of the cases. It was the least he could do to make sure the dogs were fed.

Dr. Bloom turned back to watch him as he drove in and got out. “Good afternoon. We’ve been double-booked, I take it?”

“Yeah, I’m sorry,” Stiles called out. “Mr. Graham said he didn’t sleep very well, and he may have not remembered that he asked both of us to do this.”

“It’s no problem. There are more than enough dogs to go around,” she called back. “And please. I know he has you call him Will. Call me Alana when we’re not in formal surroundings.”

“Sure, Alana. Call me Stiles. I don’t make anyone pronounce my first name.” Stiles wondered if Alana was Will’s girlfriend. He knew that they worked with each other professionally, but colleagues in the psychiatric circles usually didn’t come out to your house and feed your dogs. They could be just friends, he guessed.

She gave him a very warm and genuine smile. “I heard you talked Will into going to the movies with you.”

“No, that’s not exactly true,” Stiles admitted as they approached the house. “I badgered him into going to the movies with me. I really wanted to see the Avatar sequel that came out. The original came out when I was fourteen. I couldn’t get anyone else to go with me, and I found that he hadn’t been to the movies for five years. I think he had a good time, but I couldn’t really tell.”

Alana dug the house key out of her jacket pocket. “Why not?”

“Well, the movie sucked.” He sighed. “I admire the confidence it took to release a sequel ten years after the original, but it was so long ago the movie had to re-establish the world or they had to trust that everyone had seen the original. They tried to split the difference – half the audience was bored half the time and half the audience didn’t know what was going on half the time. I wish they had just gone one way or the other.” Stiles looked at Alana who was looking at him. “That was not even remotely the point of that question, was it?”

Alana laughed. “No.” She unlocked the doors and they deluged by dogs of all shapes and sizes. “Do you want to walk them or do you want to get the food?”

“I’ll get the food.” He babbled at her. He shook his head at the great impression he must have made.

“And to answer your question, Stiles, my question was more about his behavior than the movie
quality. I agree; it sucked.” Alana winked at him, as she went outside with the dogs.

Stiles burst out laughing. Alana Bloom was really something. He went to work in the kitchen, getting the dogs’ dinner ready. It seemed to him that Will Graham spent more time and effort on his dogs’ meals than he did his own.

It took a while. He placed the last bowl down where they could get it and banged two cans together. “Come and get it, you mangy pack of mutts!” He did not have to call twice.

Alana observed him while he made sure each dog got their own bowl. Stiles looked up at her. “Are we sure Will isn’t a dog-napper?”

“No.” She shakes her head. “He swears he tries his best when he finds a stray to find their owner, but I somehow think he doesn’t try at all.”

The dogs were all friendly and well-adjusted. “They’re a lot easier to deal with than people, I suppose.”

“A lot of things are easier to deal with than people.” Alana watched him carefully. “May I ask a question?”

Stiles bent down and petted one of the dogs who responds enthusiastically. He nodded in response to Alana.

“You’ve gone beyond workplace collegiality to be friendly with Will. Why?” Alana sounded curious not accusatory.

“Kindred spirits, basically.” Stiles didn’t think he should hide it from Alana. She could probably find out if she dug deep enough, and he didn’t want that. She would probably do it as well; he could tell she was pretty protective of Will Graham. “I know firsthand how exposure to violence can lead to isolation.”

“Trauma can cause social anxiety. How bad was yours?”

“Was? I admit that the hypervigilance and insomnia has faded over time, but they never really go away.” They tended to do that when you weren’t being chased by monsters in the dark. “The psych evaluation for the FBI was a nail biter.”

“You seem to be well adjusted, socially at least.” Alana leaned against the wall. “And willing to extend a hand to others.”

“Coping mechanism. I focus on others to avoid dealing with my own problems.” Stiles' smile slipped. This was true. He was avoiding the talk with Scott. “I can be a little over-bearing. Boundary issues.”

“Oh.” She nodded. “Well, Will has his own set of boundaries. He’ll let you know if you cross them. I, as Will’s friend, want to thank you.”

“For what?” Stiles asked, a little stupidly.

“Focusing on Will to avoid your own problems.” Alana winked and bent down to play with Winston.

#####
Scott met Chris Argent at the fanciest steakhouse in Davis. Scott had never eaten there before; he was a graduate student and a very hungry alpha werewolf. Ordering an appetizer would have broken his bank account. However, the design of the restaurant, which focused on dim lighting and isolation, made it a good place for a clandestine meeting. No one would accidentally overhear their conversations.

Scott finished his sweep of the room while they were waiting for their server. “We’re clean. If there’s someone who can overhear us, they can also hide very well. We could have met at my apartment, Mr. Argent.” Scott explained. “You’ve been there before.”

“I like the steaks here,” Chris explained dryly. “They’re really good, and I’m buying. I’ve told you before to call me Chris. I think we’ve moved past that level of formality, don’t you? I am your stepfather.”

“I know, but … I feel weird when I call you that, Chris.” It was totally true. He did feel incredibly weird when he tried to be familiar with the hunter. And forget ever calling him ‘Dad.’ Nope. Maybe it was the memory of uncomfortable home-cooked dinners, crossbow bolts, and gunshots. “And I’m not going to try to talk you out of buying me dinner. You do know how much I eat, right?”

“I’m aware. I brought my black Visa.” As much as the past still remained in the booth with them, they joked easily. It wasn’t until after the server had taken their orders that the conversation turned serious.

“Technically, Davis exists in a no-man’s-land between my territory and the pack to the south,” Scott explained. “Neither of us wants to claim it, because both packs want to have access to the university and a treaty offering right of way would be a big pain in the ass. I’ve met the alpha to the south; she’s a little too violent for my tastes, but she’s not a monster. She hasn’t lost any pack members.”

“I checked in with Satomi, and I had Deaton check with every known supernatural in our territory. No one is missing people. They could have been omegas, but none of them smelled like werewolves.” Scott said worriedly. “I think they were human.”

Chris frowned. “You’re sure they were cut in half?”

“Yeah. I had to sneak into the morgue – it’s a lot harder when your mother doesn’t work there. They were exactly the type of cut you threatened me with.” He made a gesture. “Could it be a coincidence?”

“Hemicorporectomies are used as an extreme medical treatment,” Chris suggested, but both of them knew he was reaching for straws. “But the fact that a blood trail was laid directly to your home? That’s an old hunter’s trick.”

“So what do you know?” Scott asked.

“Truth to be told, I don’t have much pull in the hunter community anymore.” Chris sounded regretful, but he did not look like he regretted leaving that life behind. “I’ve talked with the people active in the community, but none of them have heard anything about hunting in Davis.”

Chris fell silent for a moment as the server brought them there drinks. Scott looked enviously at Chris’ whiskey sour.

“Marrying your mother pretty much ruined any influence I have within the community.” Chris’s attitude shone forth; he could care less about losing that influence. “The only way I could have made them more convinced that I had gone native would be if I actually married a werewolf.”
“I’m sorry, Chris.”

“I’m not.” Chris took a sip of his alcohol. “There was a time when I was very happy. I had a beautiful family and I had a calling that was both important and necessary, and I was very good at it.” He paused. “Now, I have a beautiful family and I have a calling that is both important and necessary, and I am very good at it. Your mother made that possible. My father may think I’m a failure for abandoning our legacy, but …” He took another drink and said with the driest sarcasm Scott had heard since Stiles. “I think I’ll get over it.”

“I think we have to assume that the murders were pointed at me.” Scott said dourly. “But I don’t know what to do next.”

“Sometimes, Scott, there isn’t something to do next. There’s nothing to do but wait.” Chris cautioned.

“But they killed innocent people. What if they kill more?” Scott drained his entire drink in one gulp. It was just water. “I can’t just sit by and do nothing.”

Chris smiled at him, but it was a sad smile. “Why do you think some hunters have trouble following the Code?”

Scott put his glass down with a clink. He thought about it. “Because they can’t really hunt one of us until we’ve actually killed someone.”

“Right. The whole ethical system is dependent on the actions of another. You can’t prevent the death that enables you to act. If there had been time, I think our new Code would have caught on. It would have satisfied a lot of hunters.”

‘If there had been time’ was code for ‘if Allison had lived’ and the both knew it. Scott’s hand tightened on his fork.

“Don’t blame yourself for something someone else does. That’s something everyone one of us has to learn. The truth is that neither of us have the resources to learn more, nor there’s nothing we can do about it.”

“It’s just so damn frustrating.” Scott complained.

Chris watched him try not mangle his flatware. “Are you all right?”

“I’m in control,” Scott snapped back. He was.

“That’s not what I asked. Are you all right?”

“No. I feel like that I’m five points behind and the game’s half over and I haven’t even gotten off the bench. I can barely get up in the morning. Three people are dead and cut in half and the only thing I can do is wait to see if it happens again. Stiles and I are circling each other, because neither one of us wants to have a conversation that we both know is going to happen. Stiles and Lydia are going to leave the pack. I feel trapped. I feel angry. And Duke said …” He bit his tongue. He hadn’t want to tell anyone about it.

Chris raised an eyebrow. “You talked with Deucalion.”

“Yeah. On my way back from Lydia’s graduation. She mentioned the possibility of them leaving the pack and I was a lot more upset than I’d imagined. I thought that maybe what I was feeling was something supernatural, but Deucalion told me it wasn’t. It’s psychological.”
“Oh?” Chris was interested in this.

“This world was made by humans. We don’t fit. As much as I tried to ignore it, I don’t fit. People aren’t supposed to leave the pack to go have careers.” Scott looked down at his plate. “He told me I had to learn to deal with it, or there could be trouble.”

Chris laughed. It was more of a chuckle. “Scott. Scott, no one likes it when people leave. I don’t know if it is worse for you because of instinct, but we’ve all had to deal with it. Wait ‘til you have children.”

Scott smiled wanly back. He was sure that Chris thought it was something they shared, but he was also sure that Chris wouldn’t have wanted to sabotage Allison’s chances for a future just because she was too far away. He let it drop though. This was his problem to deal with.

The steaks were pretty fantastic, though.

####

Hannibal Lecter finished preparing dinner for Alana Bloom. He always enjoyed having people over for dinner – one way or the other. Alana was among his most favorite guests. She could match his intellect and she was always unfailingly gracious. He approved of this.

“Tonight’s dish,” he offered as he came into the living room, “is Maple-Garlic Marinated Tenderloin served with baby carrots and whole black winter frozen truffles.”

Alana looked over it speculatively. “It smells amazing. Do you even wonder if I am using you for your kitchen?”

“If you are, then I am using you for your exquisite company, and I consider it a fair exchange.” He offered her, wordlessly, one of his favorite vintages of wine. She nodded and he poured.

“Fair exchange. That happens so rarely, I imagine.” She sounded like she was talking to herself. It piqued Hannibal’s interest as he sat down across from her seat.

“You are going to have to explain that to me. I’m afraid I can’t quite puzzle it out.” Hannibal was always as open and forthright with Alana as he could be. It pleased him to be so.

“Have you met Agent Stilinski?” She asked. “The newest member of the forensics team that Will recruited for the BAU. Wiry. Dark-haired. Expressive personality.”

“I have.”

“I can’t help but think,” Alana picked up a piece of loin, “that there is more to him than appears on the surface or in his official file.”

“Oh? I couldn’t help but imagine that Will sees a little of himself in the agent. They do seem to have several traits in common – a unique empathy. Will’s gift is far stronger, however.”

Alana finished chewing her food before answering. “This is simply magnificent, Hannibal. The garlic and the maple are well balanced.” Her smile faded slightly. “I don’t think it is a gift. I think that it is experience. He’s gone through more than his file suggests.”

“You’ve read his psychological evaluations?” Hannibal asked.

“I do it for all the members of the team. Jack may want you to handle Will’s unique case, but it’s not
just a primary investigator who can be damaged by their work.” Alana clucked her tongue. “But he’s not.”

“He’s not being damaged? And you are concerned by that?” Hannibal was interested, mildly.

“Most new agents go through an adjustment period where the things they see weight heavily upon them. This hasn’t happened to him. He has the bearing of a much older agent and many of the same coping mechanisms.”

“Implying that he has experienced similar trauma before.”

“More trauma than his file suggests. It could be nothing, but I have this nagging feeling he’s both compartmentalizing and projecting.”

Hannibal thought about it with his glass to his lips. “You suspect he is concealing trauma. That could be a very serious matter, Alana. If he lied to the bureau …” He puts the glass down after letting the observation trail off.

“I have no proof; I have only speculation at this point. I’m not even sure that I want to pursue it. His behavior, while unorthodox, is within ethical boundaries.” Alana shrugged. “I’m just curious.”

“And his projection?” Hannibal prodded gently.

“That is where I am treading on ethical grounds. I think he may be attaching himself to Will. I think that Agent Stilinski is used to being there for someone who isn’t there anymore, and is trying to find someone new. A replacement.” She shakes her head. “The ethical question is that I think it is really good for Will. It’s not my place to moderate friendships in my presence.”

“Is it?” Hannibal kept his human face on but inside he was concerned. “What has he done?”

“He’s successfully gotten Will to engage socially. An important first step.”

Hannibal digested that as the conversation moved on to other topics. He had his own plans for Will Graham, and the possibility of him become less socially excluded was not one of them. Oh, no, he thought, that wouldn’t do at all.

He’d have to look into this Stiles Stilinski.

Chapter End Notes

I tried to research gourmet cooking and psychology as best I could. If I make a blunder, please let me know.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

While working with the team in California, Stiles realizes who the killer has to be. Stiles and Scott try to figure out a way to stop the killings while trying to avoid the emotional issues building to a head. The tension causes a pretty serious problem.

Will Graham found that he liked flying under certain conditions, which was surprising when he thought about it. The idea of travelling in an airplane with two hundred people he didn’t know left much to be desired, but he had put up with it before. However, travelling in a chartered jet with six people he knew very well turned out to be far more relaxing. Far above the ground, he could imagine that the nine people in the plane (he had to include the two pilots) were everyone that existed. It was quiet.

At one point over Kansas, he had forgotten he was with other people. Beverly had been taking a nap, Jimmy and Brian had been going over the case files in the back of the plane, and Jack had been on his laptop catching up on paperwork. The tap, tap, tap of the keys had been soothing. He had noticed that Stiles Stilinski had been furiously texting people for the whole trip, though he kept the phone on silent so as not to disturb anyone.

Hannibal Lecter had stared out the window the whole time, looking at nothing. Will had apologized to him, as he thought the psychiatrist must have been bored. “There is no need to apologize, Will. I would have refused Jack’s invitation if I did not wish to come. As I said to you the other night: this is all very educational. I haven’t visited this part of California, so it is a new experience for me.”

The illusionary isolation was rewarding to him; he felt so much less stress. Will knew he would never have the money to get his own private jet and he probably didn’t have the patience to learn to fly, but he was tempted. He was very, very tempted.

Unfortunately, they had ultimately landed and now he stood before the house of Ernest and Wilma Kettleback in Knight’s Landing, California. They and their daughter Marilyn had been murdered and mutilated in the middle of the night. Director Crawford’s team had been called in because it had been exactly one week since a group of three graduate students had been killed in the exact same way in Davis twenty miles to the south. The local branch was worried. The investigation into the first murders had been slow going with no discernible motive. Given that they were obviously the same killer and that the time between the murders was very short, they had asked Quantico for the best. Will would have to get inside this person’s head quickly.

The process did speed up investigations but it was not without its own particular brand of trauma. Will Graham carefully tore off, folded up, and stored away the parts of his personality that would never ever do the crimes he was imagining and then allowed the evidence to guide him in creating a new personality. It always sounded so clinical when he described it, when instead the actual doing was violent and chaotic. He destroyed himself and recreated himself like a masochistic phoenix, again and again and again.

It was impossible to tell when the transformation would be especially painful. His mind would catch on something that he and the subject of his imaginings shared, and his mind would tear like a sweater caught on a thorn bush. The deeper into his subconscious the killer would reach the harder it was to
force the killer out. When he had imagined Abel Gideon’s murder of the nurse, he couldn’t even narrate.

Luckily, thankfully, this was not one of those times. The imago of this killer slid over his mind like an over-large coat. Nothing caught on his rough edges. He stood before the two-story house in a quiet neighborhood. He could have been visiting the family of three late at night. He breathed in the night air.

“I arrive at the Kettleback’s house in the middle of the night. They will be asleep by now, and all the lights are off. I am not alone.” Will looks to his left and right to see the three men with them. “These men will make sure that I can do my work without interruption. They are loyal to me.”

He approached the steps to the front porch. “Two will stay out front while one will cover the back. The alarm system has already been disabled. I already have a key.” He enters the house. “The Kettlebacks have no knowledge that when they went to sleep, they would never wake up again.”

Will’s walk through the house was purposeful. He strode through it easily as if it was his own home. “I barely pay attention to my surroundings. I have so thoroughly scouted this house that I could walk it in my sleep and in the dark. In fact, I do.” His tread was heavy on the stairs up, but it would not make enough noise to wake the sleeping family.

“I shoot Marilyn Kettleback first.” Will pulled the trigger on the teenager twice with the suppressed pistol. He felt neither elation nor remorse. “I am not sure that is her name, but it does not matter to me. I make sure she is dead so she does not wake her parents.”

“I have no animosity toward the Kettleback family. They are means to an end.” Will entered the master bedroom and dealt with the parents. “After I shoot the parents, I inspect the balcony of their second floor and test once more the strength of the banister. It must support three bodies. It will.”

Will imagined dragging the three bodies out of their bedrooms and suspended them from the banister. He heard the railing groan under the weight. “This is the important part. This is the message.” He descended the stair.

“After I cut the youngest Kettleback in half, I have a fit. I am not as healthy as I used to be.” He sits down on a chair and uses a tissue from a box on the side table. “It takes a few minutes to recover. I have time. I am not an amateur, so I take the tissue with me.”

He took a few steps back to admire his handiwork. Each corpse is bisected at approximately the same place. The blood soaked the floor completely.

“I admire my work. My enemies think that I am weak. I have been tricked and defeated and they think that makes me toothless.” Will Graham grits his teeth in anger as the emotions worm their way through his head. “They think they have nothing to fear from me.”

“This is a declaration to those who have robbed me. They will reap the consequences of that action. I will drown them and everyone they care about in blood. This time they won’t be able to stop me.”

Will Graham turned to look Stiles Stilinski straight in the eyes. “This is my design.”

Will Graham shed the personality he had recreated, trying to process what he had learned. He turned to Jack, who was waiting patiently behind him. “The person we are looking for is a sadist, but his treatment of the family was not sadistic. The pain he wants to inflict is on enemies, and they are not here. Not yet.”

Will caught Stiles’ eyes one again and he blinked, because he thought he saw something akin to
panic in them, but the younger agent turned away. Before he could follow up on it, Jimmy Price got his attention. “Now, that’s something you don’t see every day.”

Jack Crawford too walked over to where Price is looking at the digital autopsy of the first set of victims and verifying it with the others. “Each person was cut in half with a single cut. They had to have used a large bladed weapon.”

Zeller made a face. Like so many coroners, he used humor to repel the horror. “So the killer is Conan the Barbarian?”

Price shakes his head. “The killer had to have both strength and skill to do this. I am thinking a broadsword, but I can’t be sure until I do a closer inspection. The Davis coroner took good notes, but nothing beats direct inspection.”

“I think we’re looking for an older man,” Will spoke with surety. “He’s strong and he’s skilled, but he’s losing that strength. Old age is becoming a problem for him. These murders were not only intended to intimidate their ultimate target or targets but also to demonstrate his continued prowess.”

Beverly Katz was checking the stairs. “So he’s going through a mid-life crisis? Showing off for the womenfolk?”

Will shook his head. “He’s showing off for someone, but it is not sexual. This is anger. Hatred.”

Jack Crawford shakes his head. “I don’t like the idea that he has helpers who don’t participate in the crime. Group killers require participation to keep cohesion.”

Will points at Jack. “You’re right. Our killer is an authority figure to his assistants. He’ll be charismatic and used to command. They’re used to doing what he says.”

“When does he stop?” Jack demanded. Director Crawford was singularly oriented on results.

“I’m not sure Jack. The problem with this crime is that it isn’t directed at the victims. These people are being killed to challenge and hurt his true target.” Will gestured to the blood on the floor. “I think that the hemicorporectomy is a symbol that only the targets will understand.”

Zeller popped up. “It might be useful to look at unrelated crimes which used it. If it has some meaning for both the killer and the targets, if we knew what it means it could help us identify them.”

Jack nodded in response. “That’s going to take a lot of time and it’s not going to be light reading.” He turned to Stiles. “You’re on it.”

“Sure, Director.” Will noticed that Stiles still wouldn’t use Jack’s first name. He also noticed that he seemed totally and completely agitated. Stiles excused himself to head outside. As he turned back to the scene before him, he noticed that Hannibal had also disappeared.

####

Stiles took a deep breath, and as casually as he could, made his way across the street to the park that was easily two hundred feet from the Kettleback home. He couldn’t shake the deep-seated pit of anxiety in his stomach.

He hadn’t consciously planned to shake off the past. Life had just turned out that way. Now that the past had come roaring back and inserted itself back into his life, he realized how much he had relaxed. He realized how glad he had been to have left all of it behind. Now, he was scared and furious and he knew exactly how much goddamn trouble he was in.
Stiles didn’t bother to try to hide his anger as he walked up to where Scott was standing near the park bench in the twilight. He stuffed his hand his jacket pockets and waited.

Scott closed his eyes for a minute and then opened them suddenly. “No one can hear us if we don’t raise our voices.”

“It’s Gerard. It’s fucking Gerard.” Stiles spat. “He’s not only behind the murders; he’s doing them personally.”

Scott frowned and rubbed at the back of his neck. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, Scott, I’m sure.” Stiles was amazed at the venom in his own voice. He was scared and taking it out on Scott. He suddenly felt like he had never graduated high school. “The team in that house is the best in the goddamn country. Three geniuses in the field of forensics, the director of the Behavioral Analysis Unit, and a profiler so damn good that he teaches profiling at the academy! I’m fucking standing there listening to them describe Gerard Fucking Argent as if they were watching him plotting my demise!”

“Hey, calm down …”

“Calm down? You know what task I just got assigned?” Stiles watched as he put a finger in Scott’s face. “I get to check out previous records to see if I can find out there is some sort of goddamn meaning to someone cutting someone in half with a broadsword! Well, it’s the easiest damn job I’ve ever fucking had because I already know what it means.”

Scott took him by the finger and lowered it. “Stiles. Take a moment to calm down. You shouting at me isn’t going to solve anything.”

“It’s going to make me feel better since your bullshit is invading my life again.” Stiles spoke angrily and took a step back. He did take a few deep, gulping breaths. “You know …” He started but he looked up to see Scott’s eyes glowing their bright red. “Are you crazy?”

“My shit is invading your life?” He said slowly as he dimmed his eyes down back to their normal color.

Stiles was stunned. Scott was actually angry at him. It was not annoyed. It was not frustrated. It was going-to-punch-you-in-the-face angry. Scott hadn’t even been angry during the confrontation in the rain storm about Donovan; Stiles had been doing all the yelling.

“Scott …”

“You want to tell me something important? Then talk like a normal person. You want to yell at me to make yourself feel better? I’ll leave.” Scott snarled.

Stiles knew that there were a lot more important things that had to happen in this conversation. They didn’t have time for this fight. “I was just …”

“You were just dumping your anxiety on me, like you’ve been doing since elementary school. I’m sorry, Stiles, I don’t have time to be your personal punching bag tonight.”

Stiles opened his mouth to argue, but he realized that Scott was right. “Fine. No more yelling or dumping. Gerard Argent is coming for you. He is killing people in groups of three to announce his intentions.”

Scott clenched his fists. “Do you have an idea why?”
“He’s boxing you in. He knows you won’t be able to ignore innocent people dying. He also knows that you know that you can’t allow a full F.B.I. investigation into these murders. He’s pushing you to move before you’re ready, and it’s going to work. The longer this goes on, the greater the chance that the Bureau will discover something that we can’t explain away or, even worse, the Bureau catches him.”

Scott took a few deep breaths to steady himself, before forcing himself to meet Stiles’ gaze. “Wouldn’t that be for the best? I mean you’d arrest him for these crimes and he’d be sent away.”

“Unless he’s got a brain tumor or he got hooked on hallucinogens, he’s doing this on purpose. He’s an old man. He wants to be the one to get you, but if he doesn’t, he’s going to hurt you any way he can.” Stiles was seeing the pattern even as he was talking about it; his intuition put the pieces together. “He will spill everything. You know he could out the supernatural to the authorities; I’m sure he’s got proof stored somewhere. If he’s capable of doing what I saw in that house, he won’t care about the consequences that information, as long as it hurts you.”

Scott frowned. “I want to say that he wouldn’t, but he would. He went against the Code just to cure his cancer. I can’t say that he wouldn’t do this.”

“No. We can’t.” Stiles took a deep breath. He wished he hadn’t lead with that outburst that had gotten Scott so angry. In his defense, Scott never had gotten angry at his rants before. If he hadn’t liked that particular rant, he wasn’t going to like this. “There is only one way to stop this investigation. You’re going to have to kill him.”

“Well, of course.” Like the flip of a switch, Scott was back to being angry again. Stiles immediately wondered if there was something else bothering him. Usually Scott managed his anger pretty well; it was, after all, a necessity when losing your temper could end up with things and people being ripped apart. “You would suggest that.”

“I’m not being flippant.” Stiles may have started the conversation off on the wrong foot, but this was damn important. He had to make Scott understand. “He’s killed six people, and you better believe that he’s counting on the fact that you’ll be reluctant to use lethal force. He’s counting that when you clash, he’ll either kill you or you’ll send him to jail where he can still hurt you.”

“Hurt us, you mean.” Scott replied a little nastily and then rubbed his hand over his face. It was a gesture that Stiles knew well; Scott was trying to bring his feelings under control. Again, Stiles had noticed the rush of true anger. “But why don’t you do it, if you are so convinced that it’s necessary? You’ve got a gun now. I assume you know how to use it.”

“That’s just brilliant. If you haven’t noticed, I’m an agent on the case. To protect you, I’m going to have to lie to my bosses and conceal evidence. I get caught, and I’m done at the F.B.I.” Stiles hissed in return. “Hell, I could even be breaking federal laws as we speak. You’re not the only one who is going to compromise their morals.”

“My morals?” Scott demanded. “Stiles, have you even given it the slightest thought that maybe, just maybe, there might be another reason for me not wanting to kill other than my morals.” Scott grabbed Stiles by the shoulders; his grip was firm but not painful. “Has it never occurred to you that almost every single person who came at us in high school felt that it was super important to get me to kill someone? They all tried: Peter, Derek, Deucalion, Noshiko, the nogitsune, and Kate. Did you ever realize that a tiny part of me, as fucked up as it would be, felt relief that the Dread Doctors just wanted to get me out of the way?”

Stiles hadn’t, actually. He had just thought that Scott had a stronger moral code then he had. Stiles knew that had he been in Scott’s place, he probably would have killed. He had killed.
“Did it ever occur to you that the reason I’m so big on not killing isn’t just because it’s wrong — though it is — but because it’s one of the few things that no one’s ever succeeded in taking from me? So I don’t need you telling me that I have to give it up because of someone like Gerard. Can’t I have one thing that’s mine?”

It hadn’t occurred to Stiles that this was true. “Why didn’t you ever tell this to me?”

“I didn’t think I had to tell you that. I thought you’d understand,” Scott answered, sadly. He looked defeated suddenly.

Stiles avoided his eyes by focusing on a tree in the distance. “You may not have a choice this time, Scott. I am ninety-nine percent sure it’s Gerard, and if it is, he’s already got us in check, and we didn’t even know we were playing. You’re going to have to put that on the table, because he’s going to be relying on your refusal, and it may be the only advantage we got.”

“So now it’s back to being ‘we’? Are you sure about that?” Scott sounded morose. His emotions were certainly unstable tonight.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Stiles knew what it meant, but he didn’t want to talk about it right now. If he spoke the words about Lydia and he leaving the pack, he couldn’t unspeak them.

“You know damn well …” Scott suddenly stopped and looked across the street. “One of your people is watching us. Damn, he’s quiet. I didn’t sense him until the wind shifted.”

Stiles raised his head from where he had been focusing on the ground instead of Scott’s face. Hannibal Lecter was watching the pair of them. The psychiatrist probably couldn’t overhear them, but it did freak Stiles out a bit. He crossed the street. “Can I help you, Dr. Lecter?”

“Not at the moment, Agent Stilinski.” The psychiatrist coolly waited for him to fully get on the sidewalk. “I’m sure I’ll think of something before this trip is over. Was that a friend of yours?”

Stiles glanced back over his shoulder to where Scott was heading for his motorcycle. “Yeah. I grew up around here. He’s an old friend.”

“He seemed highly agitated. I hope my presence didn’t cut short your conversation.” Hannibal’s voice was smooth and amiable.

“We … we have some issues to work out.” Stiles laughed. It wasn’t a lie. Scott had practiced and practiced his control and that required him to keep a tight lid on his emotions. He’d seldom seen Scott this angry since he had been bitten, and it had never been directed at him.

“One can describe friendship as the systematic resolution and creation of issues. To live so close to another person is quite risky. It requires a delicate touch and much deliberation.” Hannibal observed. “One more question before we return to the Kettleback home?”

“Yes?” For some reason, something in the psychiatrist’s tone made the hairs on the back of Stiles’ neck stand up. There was nothing overt to worry about, though.

The corners of Dr. Lecter’s lips curled up in what could have been an approximation of a smile. “Who’s Gerard?”
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Scott comes to a decision concerning Gerard’s fate. Beverly Katz discovers an important clue to the identity of the killer they’re pursuing. Stiles has his first appointment with Dr. Lecter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Unaware that he was being watched, Richard Clifton flipped off the Late Show and yawned. The rest of his family had gone to bed hours ago, but he had stayed up. The man, probably in his early fifties, went from room to room, turning off lights and checking the locks on the doors and windows. His heartbeat was steady. He wasn’t afraid.

He entered the darkened kitchen last. The house was quiet; upstairs, his wife and his two visiting grandchildren were fast asleep, their breathing creating a delicate rondo that he couldn’t hear. He opened the refrigerator and bent over to examine its contents, the light casting shadows across the room. He could have been trying to figure out if he wanted a snack before bedtime. He closed the door without getting anything.

He turned around to see a pair of red eyes staring at him from the darkness.

The alpha sprang across the kitchen, grabbed him by the throat and pushed him up against the wall so his feet weren’t touching the ground. Richard Clifton had no weapons with him, and his strength wasn’t enough to break the alpha’s grip.

“Sorry about this, Mr. Clifton,” said the alpha, showing him a full set of fangs. “But you haven’t been answering your phone.”

The hunter’s eyes went to the bottom of the back door instead of looking at the werewolf holding him. There was no damage. The alpha followed his eyes and nodded.

“You're going to tell me where I can find Gerard Argent,” Scott let the man down so his feet could touch the floor. The tension lessened in the room but it didn’t disappear entirely.

“Why would I do that?” A hint of bravado crept back into the hunter’s voice.

“Because he’s killing innocent humans,” the werewolf growled. “He’s perverting everything you stand for, and you know he’s doing it. He’s become a worse monster than I could ever be.”

“I don’t believe you. Even if what you say is true, why would I know that he’s killing humans? Why
would I know where he is?” The bravado had fled and now there was only denial.

“You’re one of his oldest friends. He’s the man that trained you, and you helped train his son. You’ve hunted together for decades. If anyone is going to know where he’s hiding between his murders, it’d be you.” Scott released him completely.

“Did his son tell you that?” Scott smelled Clifton’s revulsion for Chris. Scott didn’t care about Clifton’s prejudice; he only needed answers.

“Does it matter? You’ve read about the murders in Davis and Knight’s Landing in the news?” Clifton nodded in response. “What the papers haven’t said is that the bodies were cut in half. They were all human; none of them knew anything about our world. Gerard is using innocent people to get at me. You’re going to tell me where he is.” Scott stuck a claw in the man’s face. “Because you know he’s getting the authorities involved, and that’s no good for you at all.”

“You drove a long way for nothing,” replied Clifton. “I don’t know where he is.” Scott could tell that it wasn’t a lie, but he recognized an evasion when he saw it. He had been counting on it. “The authorities can’t prove anything about me. So that seems to be your problem.”

Scott growled once again. Sometimes, his reputation got in the way. “What do you think is going to happen if Gerard’s personal vendetta outs me to the F.B.I.? Can you imagine that?”

Clifton was an experienced hunter, as Chris had described him. Not as callous as Gerard, but just as determined and just as hateful towards werewolves. “I can imagine them catching you. You should just leave; I don’t know where he is, and if I did, I wouldn’t tell you. I know you aren’t going to kill me.”

“No. I’m not.” Scott took a few steps back from him. “But I do have a plan if the F.B.I. comes after me. I’ll see how many relatives of yours I can bite. You know how to reach my stepfather, if you change your mind.”

Scott was gone before Clifton could get a weapon. His goal had never been violence. He had wanted to intimidate the man, unsettle him. What he had done made him sick to his stomach. He ran.

Scott ran until he reached Christ’s SUV three blocks away. He immediately got into the passenger seat. “It’s done. Everyone is in position?” He wiped his mouth with his shirt sleeve.

Chris gestured to the phone tap he had on the dashboard. “He hasn’t used his land line. Mason’s not reported him using his cell either.”

Scott picked up and studied the GPS tracker. “I don’t like this.”

“Corey volunteered, Scott. You have to let your pack help you.” Chris said offhandedly as he reached over and adjusted the gain on the GPS. “Clifton’s a good hunter. If he’s going to contact Gerard, he’ll leave his house to do it.”

“I know he volunteered, but that doesn’t make me feel any better about doing this. Clifton’s a hunter, and I’m letting Corey sneak a ride in the back of his car. What if he discovers him?” Scott looked out the window as if he could see Clifton’s car.

“You have to trust in them and trust in the training you’ve given them. Corey knows enough to run and hide if things get rough, and I doubt Clifton has encountered anything remotely similar to a chimera.”

“I know. I know.” Scott turned back to his stepfather. “I don’t know whether to be happy or upset
Chris lifted his eyebrows in amused disbelief. Scott understood that this was the Argent’s calling, but Scott couldn’t help but still wish, even after all these years, that he and his friend wouldn’t have to do things like this.

Argent did a check in while they were waiting. Liam and Mason were at the cell phone tower. Malia and Hayden were back in Beacon Hills making sure that Gerard didn’t target their loved ones. That left Argent listening in on the land line and Scott monitoring the GPS tracker.

Scott could feel the tension in the car. It wasn’t between him and the retired hunter. The situation had caused them both to feel off center. For Chris, it was the idea that his father had stooped even lower than he had thought possible. Gerard was willing to endanger not only the supernatural world but every hunter that still stood by the Code. Most importantly, Argent was facing the possibility that he was going to have to become a patricide. He had tried to use the Argent family contacts, but it would take too long. Gerard had got to them first.

Scott couldn’t let him do that. He had no doubt that Chris had killed before, but he also had no doubt that killing your own father was something completely different. In a way, Chris was his father now, and Scott was an adult. If Gerard had to die, he was going to do it.

It was easy to say, but not an easy thing to contemplate. He didn’t want to kill. Not even Gerard. But he knew – he knew in the very depths of his chest – that Stiles was right. Gerard had designed this plot to take advantage of his reluctance to kill.

He remembered Gerard saying that if he wanted to play chess, Scott had to be prepared to sacrifice his pawns. Eight years had passed since the old hunter had said that, and Gerard still thought he was the same kid. In many ways, he was and he was happy about that.

In important ways, though, he was not. Aside from the recent upheaval with Stiles and Lydia – which he was going to deal with, he promised himself, he would deal with it – he was successful, stable, and more in control than ever. He was a predator; he had proven to himself that he didn’t have to be a killer.

But in his gut, he knew Stiles was right. Gerard was willing to endanger thousands of people and kill innocent humans to reach his end goal, and he was counting on Scott not being able to embrace murder. That outcome was just unacceptable.

Scott clenched his hands as they waited in the dark. He was going to do it. He was going to kill Gerard Argent.

The GPS beeped. “Clifton’s on the move. Let the others know.”

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In the temporarily commandeered space used by the BAU team in the Sacramento Field Office, Beverly Katz stared at what she had just discovered. It was so subtle that she could barely believe that she hadn’t manufactured it, but it was real. It was there.

Once she was absolutely sure, Beverly jumped out of her seat, snagged the evidence in its protective container in one hand and her tablet in the other, and rushed to Jack’s temporary office.

It was far too small for such a big man in her eyes, but then again Jack’s personality always made him seem to loom larger than he was. Jack, on the other hand, seemed comfortable no matter what office he was in. As long as progress was being made on the case, Beverly assumed he’d be
comfortable working in a gas station restroom.

She knocked on the door on her way in. It was rude as hell, but there wasn’t time to waste.

“Well, come in,” Jack quipped sarcastically.

“We’ve got a problem, Jack, a big problem.” She put the evidence down right in the middle of his desk, effectively covering the paperwork he was going over. It had no importance compared to this.

Jack scanned the evidence. “What am I looking at here?”

“This is a single sheet of newsprint that was collected at the Kettleback house.” Beverly pointed out. “I noticed it because it was covering blood spatter from the post-mortem mutilation without having any trace on its top surface.”

“So, it was moved there after the mutilations,” Jack observed. “It could have been the initial investigators or a mistake …”

“Yeah, but I wanted to make sure I excluded it,” Beverly explained. “It’s from a local newspaper in a town an hour and a half north of Knights’ Landing. It’s a page of advertisements, personal ads, and a story on the local library. It’s dated nearly five weeks ago.”

Jack folded his hands together and looked at her. He was attentive now but patient.

“I didn’t think much about it, but then I remembered the evidence inventory from the first murder.” She brought up an image on her tablet. “This is a single sheet of newspaper from the same city and the same date – the same issue. That is a pretty huge coincidence, so I went looking for a reason. That’s why I said we’ve got a big problem.”

Jack leaned forward as Beverly pulled up another image. “This is the front page story from that newspaper on that day.”

Jack cursed once. “It’s a challenge, all right. This bastard is challenging us. I want every police report from that city for the last ten years.” He pointed at the picture on the tablet. “I want his juvenile records. This is a threat against one of my team, and no one does that to us.”

“Jack, his juvenile records would be sealed.”

Jack bellowed as he got up from behind his desk and strode toward the door. “Then unseal them!” He flung open the door but the person he was looking for was not there. “And someone find out wherever the hell Agent Stilinski is!”

Beverly looked down at her tablet. The front page of the Beacon Hills Examiner on that date had a big story: SHERIFF’S SON JOINS PRESTIGIOUS FBI TASK FORCE. A picture of Stiles Stilinski from his senior year looked up back at her.

Hannibal Lecter opened the door to the hotel room. “Good afternoon. Please come in.”

Stiles walked into the hotel suite. He blinked. “Did you … is this the most expensive hotel room in Sacramento?”

“I am accustomed to a certain level of refinement. It is not that I did not appreciate the room that the FBI offered me, but I preferred to pay for my own.” The psychiatrist walked over to a pair of over-
stuffed leather chairs and gestured to one of them. “Why don’t we have a seat?”

“You’re very polite for someone resorting to blackmail,” Stiles grunted sarcastically before having a seat.

“I value civility and I despise rudeness. Rather than using such a loaded term, perhaps we could call this an attempt at understanding?” Hannibal sat down opposite him. His demeanor cooled about a degree with the word blackmail. “I am curious to know what about this case engenders such an emotional response in you.”

“Do you? What makes you think that I’m emotional about this case?” Stiles scoffed.

“I can name at least six different indicators in your posture, your mannerisms, and your tone that indicate a high degree of stress, and we have just sat down. I can also tell that you employ wit to deflect inquiries into your emotional state,” Hannibal responded. “This seems like avoidance.”

“You’re not my psychiatrist.” Stiles grunted. For some reason, he felt on the back foot. He seldom felt that way.

“No, I’m not,” Hannibal turned and produced a form. “We should take care of the legal requirements. If you would sign this, please?”

“What is it?” Stiles took the paper and looked it over.

“It is a standard disclosure form. By signing it, you acknowledge that I am your psychiatrist and that our conversations are covered by patient/client privilege.” Hannibal explained. “It is for your protection as well as mine.”

Stiles had learned about these exceptions in school. It would keep Dr. Lecter from discussing anything about this case with the rest of the team or any law enforcement really, without his permission. He brought out a pen and signed it. It was clearly the smart thing to do.

“Very good.” Hannibal took the form and placed it in a briefcase. “Now that we have established our relationship, you can finally answer the question I asked you that precipitated it. Who is Gerard?”

Stiles looked at the ground and looked back up at Hannibal. He didn’t want to talk about Gerard with this man, but he had little choice. The non-disclosure agreement only covered what they talked about in therapy, and the conversation that the psychiatrist may or may not have overheard was before that. He needed to find out what Hannibal knew.

“Gerard Argent. He’s a man I met in high school.” He caught one of his fingers tapping on the arm of his chair. He stopped them by force of will.

“And what is this man to you?” Hannibal asked but then continued without pause. “Other than the person you suspect of being the serial murderer your team is pursuing.”

Stiles’ mouth dropped open. This was bad. This was so very bad. “How?”

“I have sufficient experience to know when a person is terrified by a particular circumstance. You and your friend were not only concerned by that name, but both of you were also afraid. It is a simple deduction.” Hannibal watched him carefully. “Even now, thinking about him makes you nervous.”

“I’m not afraid of him,” Stiles stated firmly.
“The strength of your reactions indicates otherwise. Fear is the recognition of danger. I do not think that you would be reacting as you are if you felt that Gerard Argent was not dangerous.”

“Oh, he’s dangerous.” Stiles took a moment to steady his breathing. Hannibal waited expectantly for him to continue. “You’re not going to let me wiggle out of this, are you?”

“That would be contrary to our purpose here, Agent Stilinski.” Hannibal spoke his full name and unlike almost everyone he had met, the doctor pronounced it perfectly. “You are here to convince me to keep your secrets. If you are to do so, I must know what they are and why you want me to conceal them.”

“Gerard Argent kidnapped me when I was in high school.” Stiles was trapped and he knew it. “I never reported it. In fact, I lied about it. It was right after we won the state championship in lacrosse, and I was missing for a few hours. I told my father that it was kids from the other team.”

“Your father is the local sheriff. Why did you conceal this fact from him?”

Surprisingly enough, Stiles sensed no condemnation or even concern in Hannibal’s voice. The psychiatrist simply wanted to know. “Gerard kidnapped me to send a message. I wasn’t going to deliver that message.”

“Did he sexually abuse you?”

“No!” Stiles protested.

“Did he physically abuse you?” Hannibal asked again as if he hadn’t implied something hideous.

“It wasn’t anything I couldn’t handle.” Stiles didn’t like these memories.

“You were kidnapped to send a message. Who was supposed to receive that message? The friend you met in the park in Knight’s Landing?”

Stiles gritted his teeth. “You’re really good at making guesses, Dr. Lecter.”

“I am proficient in reading human interaction, Agent Stilinski. With whom did you speak about your kidnapping?”

“No one.” Stiles breathed out. “I didn’t talk about it with anyone.”

Hannibal’s eyebrow lifted a fraction of a millimeter. “Why not?”

“The kidnapping was an expression of power. I’m sure you’re familiar with the psychology of abductors. By kidnapping me, by hurting me, he was demonstrating his power over me and those who cared about me. Talking with them would have made them feel guilty or responsible, which is exactly what he wanted to happen.”

“Don’t you think you have the right to talk about it with someone?”

“Didn’t you hear me? I wasn’t going to be a tool.” Stiles realized he was raising his voice. “Sorry.”

“Internalizing the motivations and consequences of trauma is a way of exerting control over that trauma.” Hannibal pointed out simply. “Talking about this with a trained professional would not have enabled Gerard Argent’s agenda; I’m sure even as a teenager, you understood this. However, remaining silent enabled yours.”

“There were secrets that had to be kept. Secrets I couldn’t tell anyone.” Stiles danced around the
edges of what Hannibal was saying.

“Did it make you feel noble, keeping the secret of your kidnapping to yourself? Did it make you feel powerful?”

“You’re saying I did it out of ego? I was doing it to protect people. No one was harmed by what I did or didn’t do.”

“I don’t think that’s true. I think you were harmed by keeping it a secret. I think that it harms you even now. When you think of Gerard Argent murdering those six people, do you blame yourself for not speaking up?”

Stiles nearly shot out of his seat. “Are you saying that it’s my fault he’s killing people?” He exclaimed loudly.

“Not in the slightest.” Hannibal gestured back to the seat. “Please sit down. I am suggesting that there are consequences to your actions that you are unprepared to address. Both you and I understand intellectually that participation in the expression of someone’s psychopathy is not the same as encouraging it. Yet, it is not rationality we are addressing, but an irrational, emotional response.”

“I helped stop him then. It was the right thing to do.” Stiles did sit back down. He was older now; he understood where responsibility lied. “I know it’s wrong of me to feel guilty for what he’s done. “ He knew it was wrong to make Scott feel guilty for what Gerard has done but hadn’t he pretty much done that in the park?

“Yet you do feel guilty. I can help you with this, if you continue our sessions.” Hannibal explained. “Guilt can be a powerful force, but like all powerful forces, wielded recklessly it is dangerous.”

“A little guilt is healthy.” Stiles answered, remembering a past therapy session. “People without guilt are sociopaths.”

“That’s not a real thing.” Hannibal said dryly. “I find I can take or leave guilt at my discretion.”

“When would you choose to feel guilty?” Stiles demanded incredulously.

Hannibal leaned forward to add emphasis to his point. “When it is useful.”

Stiles opened his mouth to answer when his phone rang. “I’m sorry, but I’m technically on call.” He picked up. “Stilinski.”

The psychiatrist did not look offended.

Stiles blanched as Jack Crawford ordered him back to the Sacramento offices immediately. “Are you alone?” The director demanded.

“No. I’m with Dr. Lecter.”

“Dr. Lecter doesn’t have a sidearm. I’d like the two of you back here as soon as possible, which means fifteen minutes ago. Understood?”

“Yes, sir.” Stiles looked up as the director hung up. “Somethings happened. I’m ordered to return to the offices. I think Director Crawford would really like you to come with me.”

“By all means,” observed Hannibal. “Let’s not keep Jack waiting.”
As much as I tried to research this, I am not a psychologist. Not even close. Read it for enjoyment.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Stiles is confronted by the BAU team about his relationship with the killer. Hannibal uses this opportunity to get Stiles on his side. Lydia gets involved.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The visitor’s suite at the Sacramento Field Office of the FBI had been professionally decorated with an eye to combining both utility and welcome. The suite was usually employed by visiting administrators on supervisory visits or task forces, such as the one occupying it now, working on a specific case. There were four offices, a work room, a break room, and a private conference room. The central chamber around which these lesser rooms were arranged was built on a modular plan. It had relatively comfortable chairs and modular tables so the space could be reworked to serve the visitor’s needs. This day it had been arranged in a semicircle; unconsciously a single chair had been placed in the middle of that semicircle.

Stiles was supposed to be using that chair, but he hovered around it; he felt that if he did sit down, he’d be less like an equal and more like a prisoner facing an inquisition. Spread on a table before him was the fresh evidence that had merited his immediate return to the field office. The newspapers left at the crime scene had inescapable implications. He slowly raised his head to see his team – because they were his team now – staring back at him. Their expressions varied from concerned to angry, though none of that anger was directed at him, yet. Of course, they didn’t have the full story. Oh my god, he thought to himself, I am so utterly and completely f**ked.

He chided himself for his denseness. Why had he not realized that Gerard would not just design his revenge to screw Scott over, but he would also design it to screw him over? Stiles imagined he should be flattered. He hadn’t believed that Gerard would give him a second thought. But he had, undoubtedly. The newspapers left at the scene pointed directly at him in a way that a blinded Coach Finstock could have picked up on.

“I don’t know what to say.” This was utterly and completely true. He didn’t know what to say, because there was nothing to say that wouldn’t destroy everything. He stood in a virtual mine field.

Stiles had not the slightest clue how to start trying to explain it, and he was afraid to lie. If he lied, it wouldn’t be like lying to his father, who had always wanted to believe him. It wouldn’t be like lying to the various enemies he and his pack had encountered throughout high school, who either disregarded him as unimportant or had been focused on other things. It wouldn’t be like lying to his college professors, who had hundreds of other students and couldn’t be bothered to focus enough to detect him. The people in this room were experienced professional investigators trained to detect both falsehoods during interrogations and analyze evidence to determine the truth. What made it even worse is that he didn’t want to lie to them. He respected them; he wanted to be accepted among them.

God damn Gerard Argent to the lowest depths of Hell. The old hunter must have had a similar scenario to this in mind when he laid his trap for Stiles.
Jack Crawford’s demeanor settled into a good approximation of a steel knife left outside during a frosty night. “You know, I don’t think if I were in your position, I’d know what to say right away either, but you need to focus and tell us everything and anything you can.” The director shoved a thick finger at the evidence before him as if it had personally offended him. “This is a challenge to this team and my Unit, but this isn’t some elementary sandbox. We end this quickly, and that means you need to figure out what you need to say.”

In the back of the room, Will Graham had been leaning up against the wall with his arms crossed and his eyes closed. He hadn’t been paying attention to everyone as they entered, but Stiles realized he had been paying attention. He came to a conclusion and pushed himself off the wall. “Agent Stilinski, do you think that you were expected to find the clues?”

Stiles startled over the question because it wasn’t what he was expecting to hear at all. It gave him something less destructive to think about. It was public knowledge that he had joined the Behavioral Analysis Unit. Gerard knew enough to design a serial killing that would attract the attention of the unit, and thus it would reach Stiles’ attention at the Bureau. But then again, if Gerard had wanted to send him a message, there were a dozen of more subtle things and more violent he could have done. “You know, I’m not sure. I’ve never actually read the Beacon Examiner.” That was the best answer he could give at this time. It was the truth but not all of it.

Director Crawford turned to look at Will and raised one eyebrow. It was his standard ‘tell me what I’m missing’ expression. It was the whole reason he relied upon Will to put the evidence together in a way that others couldn’t.

Will rubbed the bridge of his nose beneath his glasses with his thumb and forefinger. He obviously wasn’t feeling well; at times, he looked feverish. “The challenge is personal, but the evidence is general. If someone was personally going after Stiles, they would have used something specific to him. You weren’t in Beacon Hills on the day that newspaper came out, were you?”

“No.” He had intended to be. He had made plans with Scott, but he had cancelled. Even if he hadn’t ditched their plans at the last moment, he probably wouldn’t have read the Examiner anyway.

Beverly suddenly clicked her pen as she figured out the point that Will was driving at. “If the killer has enough knowledge of the FBI to figure out what he had to do to bring us here, he could have known that a novice agent wouldn’t be doing primary evidence processing.”

Will leant over the evidence, staring down at it. “We were meant to find the evidence, but we were meant to find it in such a way that we would do exactly what we are doing now. The killer wants us to find something out about you, Stiles, but I don’t think it is something you want us to know. He’s trying to force you to tell us. That’s the challenge.”

Stiles moved to sit down on the chair as a way of stalling. Will’s conclusion was obviously correct. The only thing he could think of to do was deflect, and there were three experts in human behavior in the room who had probably seen it enough to call him out on his bullshit. He thought he had two alternatives; actually, he had three alternatives, but the third would be a disaster. He could try to lie his way out of this, but that was only a holding action. If Gerard Argent was determined to implicate him in this mess, supplying the BAU with more evidence would be easy. Or, he could ask for a lawyer. Technically, he knew he was guilty of providing false information on his application to the FBI, and he could plead the Fifth. Of course, that would mean the end of his career and an additional charge of obstruction of justice. Or, he could tell them all about the supernatural, which would either get him sent to a mental health facility or it would betray ninety percent of the people he called his friends.

Stiles couldn’t see a way out, and he was already sweating. He licked his lips nervously.
Suddenly, another voice, smooth and calm, broke through his thoughts. “If I might interject,” Hannibal Lecter spoke from a comfortable seat in the back of the room. “It might be more of a challenge, Jack, than any of us can conceive. I cannot speak more about it without violating confidentiality.”

With that, all the attention in the room switched immediately to the psychiatrist. Stiles amazed himself by simultaneously feeling relieved and tensing up.

“What?” Stiles could have rolled his eyes at his own eloquence.

Dr. Lecter continued with an air of professional concern. “While I cannot speak of the details, it is entirely possible it is beyond his capability to give you the information you need. Earlier today, we had our first session as doctor and patient.”

The director turned to look at Stiles for confirmation. Stiles had no other choice but to nod in agreement.

“If I could have a moment with Agent Stilinski alone, I think I can be of use to both him and the investigation.” Dr. Lecter sounded very sincere.

Jack’s eyes slide between the three of them: Hannibal, Will, and Stiles. While he oftentimes appeared that he was impatient, this was not true. He simply had a fine tune sense of what would help an investigation and what would slow it down, and he wasn’t afraid of using his authority to get things done. Right now, he trusted Dr. Lecter. He gestured with one arm to an unused office.

Once they were inside, Stiles gave the psychiatrist a glare. “What do you think you are doing?”

“I think it’s obvious that you should be less concerned with what I am doing than with what Gerard Argent is doing. Unless I’ve severely underestimated your intelligence, I believe you understand at least one of his goals.”

The psychiatrist seemed undisturbed by Stiles’ anger.

“He just doesn’t want to kill me. He wants to destroy me.” By now, even Greenberg could have figured that out. “He wants to ruin me like he thinks we ruined him.”

Dr. Lecter’s slight nod confirmed that he thought so as well. “I can offer you a way out of this, but it will require your cooperation.”

“I can get myself out of it.” Stiles had nothing to back that up. “Why would you care?”

Hannibal Lecter raised both eyebrows. “I have two reasons. First, whenever I undertake an action, I make it a point to be aware of the consequences of that action. I am sure you recognized this in my behavior towards Abigail Hobbs.”

“I’ve heard that you and Will have formed personal attachments to her. You’re saying that you feel similarly to me.”

“Out of curiosity, I forced you to involve me in your affairs. This creates a certain degree of responsibility. I am your therapist; my purpose is to help you.”

“Getting me out of this would require unethical behavior on your part.” Stiles countered.

“I think one can argue that leaving you vulnerable to your enemy’s machinations is just as unethical.” Hannibal made it sound so very reasonable. “If I am to err in this matter, I would prefer to err in favor of my patient.”
“And your second reason?”

“Quid pro quo. I am also Will Graham’s therapist. It hasn’t escaped my notice that you have a beneficial effect on Mr. Graham. I’d like you to continue to do so. That requires your presence on his team.”

Stiles pursed his lips as he calculated. He couldn’t argue with any of the points that the psychiatrist had said, but there was something in his gut that bothered him. On the other hand, there were people waiting for answers outside that door, and he still had no answer for him that wouldn’t hurt the people he cared about. “How do we play this?”

“You have admirably handled the trauma this man inflicted upon you in high school. We simply emphasize that trauma to explain why you cannot share the information the investigation requires directly. Jack and Will have no reason to suspect that what we tell them is not true.”

“You’re going to lie to them?” Stiles asked.

“Yes.” Hannibal announced as if it was the most rational thing in the world. “Unless you would rather allow Gerard Argent to succeed?”

Stiles stared at him and the doctor just waited for his answer. It was in his hands. Stiles made his decision, and he would live with the consequences. “All right. Let’s do this.”

They returned to main room. The forensics people had left, leaving only Jack and Will waiting for them at a table. Stiles took a deep breath. “I waive confidentiality for the purposes of this investigation.” There was no going back now.

Hannibal directed him to sit down on chairs opposite the other two. They were listening intently. “Agent Stilinski came to me for assistance after working the Kettleback crime scene. He was having trouble dealing with memories and emotions that the scene was bringing to the surface. In summary, the agent was assaulted and kidnapped during high school.”

Jack was at him again. “That never showed up in your application or your psych evaluations.”

Dr. Lecter inserted himself before Stiles could answer. “I believe, Jack, the incident was so traumatic that Agent Stilinski was psychologically incapable of sharing it. It was never reported to the police. After all, telling the police would have meant telling his father.”

Stiles glanced over at the doctor in slight alarm. That was so close to the truth that he suddenly wondered if Lecter had been investigating him. Suddenly, his gut feeling of wariness exploded into something far more dangerous. If Lecter had been looking into him, he was going to investigate the good doctor right back.

Without taking his eyes of the psychiatrist, Stiles confirmed it. “I couldn’t. I couldn’t tell anyone.”

Will leaned forward and his face softened. He cared so much for those have been damaged by the killers they hunted. “Can you tell us what trigged these memories to surface? What was it about the crime scene?”

Stiles shifted his eyes to the floor. He needed to give up enough information to lead the team to the right conclusions without giving them too much information. He glanced up at Lecter who nodded, encouragingly. He would definitely have more therapy with the psychiatrist; it would be a good way to gauge the man.

“He threatened to cut my friends in half.” Stiles said slowly. “Until you said that this was a
challenge, I thought it was just a coincidence.”

“Why didn’t you report this when you were back in high school?” Jack demanded. “Did he tell you not to?”

Once again, Dr. Lecter interceded before Stiles could speak. “The assailant physically assaulted Agent Stilinski in order to send a message to his father and his friends. Sharing the information with anyone, including his father, would have fulfilled the assailant’s purpose. Agent Stilinski’s refusal to tell anyone was an act of defiance – one that became so ingrained that he can barely bring himself to speak about it, even now. I was barely able to get him to speak about it in a controlled environment.”

Will nodded as if another piece of the puzzle had fallen into place. “Stiles’ refusing to speak was a defeat for our killer. Everything has been arranged this so he would have to tell us what happened. This, too, is a form of revenge.”

Jack leaned back. “He wanted the secret out. I know this is going to be difficult for you, agent, but do you know this man’s name? I need you to tell me that name now.”

Stiles knew that thanks to Lecter’s interference, he was going to have time to fix this. He could beat that old bastard again. He only had to play up the fact that he was emotionally traumatized and he could conceal any information he wanted. It didn’t hurt at all that he was actually emotionally traumatized by it, but with the psychiatrist’s backing, he could stall until the others could fix things.

“His name is Gerard Argent.”

&&&&&&

Lydia seethed, sitting in the dark in her perfect apartment. Stiles was waiting on other end of the phone for her to reply to the information he had just given her. She knew she had to reply soon; he had called her as soon as he had the chance to be alone, and he didn’t have much time before he had to check in. Jack Crawford had put him in protective custody. Her anger was totally directed at that monster who was threatening to ruin everyone’s lives.

It was a mark of how close she and Stiles had gotten that he had wanted to call her and tell her everything, even though half way through the conversation, she realized that he was not telling her everything. Before, he would have wanted to protect her from this, but now he understood that this was the last thing she wanted. He did leave out key information, but only things that both knew. He was also leaving any indication of what he wanted her to do, but she has a strong suspicion why that was true.

“Have you called Scott yet?” She gripped the back of the chair so hard that knuckles were white. Why couldn’t this be over? Why did these assholes just leave them alone?

“No. I can’t.” Stiles answered. It was obvious from his tone that he wasn’t going to either.

“Don’t you think he and the others should know?” Lydia wondered what was going on there. He knew that they had hit a rough patch, but she thought certainly that a danger like this would over-ride the trouble.

“Absolutely. But I can’t.” He repeated. She could hear the emphasis, and she understood it was for her.

Then his reasoning struck her; it was obvious. He had to be able to say that he hadn’t shared information with people who could be considered part of the investigation. Talking to her wouldn’t raise any red flags, as everyone involved in the investigation knew about their relationship, and she
was on the other side of the country, but if he called up people that could be interacting with Gerard right then, it would look as suspicious as it definitely was.

“Oh. I understand.” She did understand. He had called her first because he was asking her to contact the others. He hadn’t told her anything about the investigation that would get him in trouble, but he had told her enough that she could warn everyone else. He had always been clever.

Lydia asked worriedly. “Are you okay? That has to be … terrifying.” He hadn’t had to face anything like this for years. Just because they had endured crap like this in high school didn’t mean that they were immured to it.

“I’m okay. Old reflexes coming back.” It was a joke, but to her, it wasn’t funny. “My new psychiatrist has been very, very helpful. Like Theo levels of helpful.”

“You have a psychiatrist?” She hadn’t missed his clue. He was warning her that he was suspicious of this person.

“Dr. Hannibal Lecter. He’s based in Baltimore. I think I’m going to keep seeing him.”

She got a piece of paper and wrote the name down. She was absolutely going to spend time looking into this person. “If you think it is a good idea, I think it is a good idea. I have your back no matter what.”

“I’m going to have to go. We’ll be heading home to Beacon Hills in the morning. Should I tell your mom anything?”

Again, he was giving her more information. “Drive her crazy by telling her we’re getting along famously. I’m betting that she didn’t think we’d make it this long.”

“Will do. I miss you.”

“I miss you, too.” She sighed as she disconnected the call. She stopped herself from immediately dialing Scott. Cell phone calls could be traced. An immediate call, if it was detected, would look suspicious.

She could hardly believe that Gerard was of the same family as Allison and Chris. She knew he was dangerous, but this was a level of evil of which she hadn’t conceived. Was he that upset that his attempt to secure his family’s legacy had been derailed? Was he that upset that Chris had married Melissa? There had to be something more to it. Gerard had always been about survival.

Unless, she guessed, it was no longer an option for him. Derek’s bite had cured his cancer, but Scott’s poisoning had left him weak. But when Chris healed him, could that have neutralized the beneficial effects of the bite as well? Lydia would start listening for him.

She tossed the idea out of her head. She was going to do what Stiles had asked and investigate this psychiatrist. She’d trust the pack to deal with Gerard.

Chapter End Notes

I rewrote this chapter five times. This is the version I hate the least. I know what I needed it do, but I just couldn't get it right. In the end, it was either post something or abandon the work. I didn't want to do that. Please savage it!
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Scott contacts his father to discuss the problem with Gerard Argent. Will Graham visits Beacon Hill High School and goes for a walk in the woods with Stiles.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It unsettled Scott McCall more than it should that he and his father shared the same taste in restaurants. They disliked ‘fancy.’ This rough-and-tumble country-themed steakhouse satisfied their aesthetic with peanuts in pails and placemats with puzzles to keep young children busy. The steaks didn’t come in sizes less than ten ounces and there were exactly four types of salad dressing.

There had always been some innermost part of Scott that feared turning into the oblivious, selfish man he believed his father to be. Actually, he knew his father to be. As they had mended their fences, he had grown to know that his father was self-centered and callous. But he had also grown to know that his father was not just those things. Rafael McCall was also determined and conscientious. He was often terribly and rudely wrong, but when he realized that he had been wrong, he made it right. Scott realized that his father was never going to be made the list of Top 100 Dads, but he also realized that they could be something more than people who occasionally shouted at each other.

His mother had assured him that even though he could be oblivious, Scott could never be his father. He simply cared too much for what was happening to other people, and he was willing to find the best in them. That alone made sure he’d never be Rafael’s mirror image.

Tonight, Rafael McCall sat across the table from him, staring at the porterhouse on his plate like he lost his appetite. He was not happy. “Why didn’t you call me first?”

Scott went with the truth. “I want you to be my Dad; I don’t want you to be my contact in the FBI. You don’t know how much stress we put Stiles’ dad under in high school. It wasn’t pretty, and I don’t want to use you like that.” He picked up his fork and stabbed at a fry. “I’m not in high school anymore. Like it or not, it’s my responsibility to handle things like this.”

Rafael didn’t answer immediately. He stared at his son as if recalculating how he would have to treat him. “I am your father, and part of being your father is that I should be trying to protect you, even if you’re an adult. Even if I didn’t do it when you were in high school.” The meaning was clear in his words; perhaps none of this would have happened if he hadn’t been an absentee father.

“Dad, don’t do that. Maybe it would have been better if you were there. Maybe it wouldn’t have been. You don’t know if you could have stopped me from sneaking out of the house with Stiles that night. You can’t beat yourself up about that.” Scott had been down the road of ‘what-if’ himself, and he knew it didn’t go anywhere good. “I have to decide what to do now, and that’s why I need your advice.”

“So we are on the same page, in the future, if it involves the Bureau, I am your contact in the FBI.” Rafael spoke in his voice of command, which Scott hadn’t listened to for years. Scott didn’t call him out on it, because this time it was coming from a desire to help him.
Scott ate the fry on his fork. He didn’t want them to get cold. “You can’t help now, though. You’d just get in trouble. This is such a mess. Of all the things I thought that one of my old enemies could do, I never imagined anything like this.”

“If it makes you feel any better, I wouldn’t have thought that a psychopath like Gerard Argent would have involved the BAU on purpose, either.” Rafael shrugged. “Usually criminals try not to get caught.”

“It doesn’t actually make me feel any better,” Scott admitted. He shoved another fry into his mouth; they needed more ketchup.

Raphael McCall tilted his head to the side. “You aren’t blaming yourself for his victims, are you?”

“Dad, I … Yes.” Scott wanted to be truthful right now, because what he was going to say next was going to be really, really hard. He remembered what Kate had growled at him: A powerful, wealthy, aristocratic family of werewolf hunters. But yet, somehow, in less than a year, this great family is decimated by a teenage boy. If it bothered Kate that much, how badly would it bother someone as obsessed with his legacy as Gerard. “I humiliated him. Twice. If he’s killing people, it’s to get at me. If he’s arranging this whole insane murder-art thing, it is to get revenge on me.”

“First, you were a teenager being targeted by a professional killer. I don’t care how long his family has been ‘hunting.’ You did what you did to protect yourself and your mother.”

Scott forced himself not to roll his eyes. His dad had had a bone to pick against the Argents since Chris had married his mom. The reveal of the supernatural to Rafael may have made his father more predisposed to the Stilinskis, but the knowledge that Chris once thought that he had the right to hunt his son had soured his father’s opinion on the Argents as much as the hunter wooing his mother had. It didn’t matter that Scott believed Chris had earned his forgiveness; it didn’t matter that Melissa had grown to admire him.

“I poisoned him, Dad. He spent eighteen months spitting up black goo because I did that. Then I convinced his own son to betray him. I should have realized he wasn’t going to let it go.”

Raphael scrunched up his face. “I had a partner, once. He was a good agent. He was a better man. During a case, he turned a member of a drug gang into a Confidential Informant. You know what that means?”

“Yeah.” Scott’s best friend was a cop’s kid, after all.

“After the case was over, my partner discovered that the CI was involved in some terrible things. Assault. Rape. Child abuse. They didn’t come out until after the trial, and the CI had been given immunity to prosecution for crimes he had committed during the investigation.”

“So, there wasn’t anything that he could do?”

“Not a thing. My partner couldn’t handle it. He began to obsess over what the CI had done, what he convince himself he had allowed to happen. It consumed him.” Rafael shook his head. “He left the Bureau. I don’t know what he is doing now, but all I know is that we lost someone to guilt that only existed in his head. He forgot that what that man did wasn’t his responsibility. What was his responsibility was what he did, and what he did was use a bad man to stop a lot of other bad men. Tell me why you poisoned Gerard Argent.”

“Because I was scared of him.” Scott admitted. “He walked up to me and stabbed me in the stomach in public and then promised to do the same to Mom. I couldn’t trust Derek not to get Mom killed, so
I had to come up with another way to stop him.”

Rafael knew about the whole werewolf thing now, but not the details. He had to order a strong drink before he could continue. “You did it to save her? There’s nothing wrong with that.”

“But …” Scott had repeated these arguments to himself, but they didn’t seem to hold much weight for him when Gerard was cutting innocent people in half.

“No buts. What would he have done if you hadn’t?”

“He wanted to be a werewolf to cure his cancer. He wanted to be an alpha. He would have killed anyone in his way to do it.”

Rafael took another stiff drink. “It’s the same thing as with my partner. You did what you had to stop a bad man.”

“Did I?” Scott poked at his steak. His appetite had vanished with the appearance of those memories.

Rafael sighed in his condescending way. Scott still wasn’t sure that his dad understood what he was trying to get at. It hung like a dark knot behind his breastbone. Rafael began talking about responsibility and his voice faded off into meaningless words, like the adults in the Peanuts cartoons. He realized that while his father knew the truth that didn’t mean he understood it. His dad was talking to him as if he was human, as if Scott’s responsibilities were the same as any other person.

It had been good once in a while to pretend that he was still human, but Scott had uncomfortably realized that he couldn’t keep pretending. All through high school, he had clung to the belief that he could still be human, but that couldn’t last either. It was as Deucalion had said: this was humanity’s world, and he didn’t fit. His father didn’t understand. In another world, he could have just been a predator …

“Dad,” Scott interrupted his father in mid-sentence. “I have to kill him.”

“What?” His father ground to a halt at the revelation.

“Stiles is right. It doesn’t matter if we catch him; he’s put himself on the Bureau’s radar. Stiles tells me that the BAU team is the best in the country. He’s planning to get caught.”

“He should get caught!” Raphael raised his voice and then looked around. Luckily, they were pretty much alone in this part of the restaurant.

“Then he’s going to tell them about me. About us.” Scott could imagine it; he could imagine the consequences even if Stiles hadn’t laid it out for him. “It won’t only be me getting hurt. Everyone that Gerard knows about is going to be exposed, which is pretty much everyone. That can’t happen.”

Rafael opened his mouth, closed it, and then drained his drink. “There’s got to be …”

“I’ve let him go twice now. He’s broken the Code his family has held for generations like you used to break your promises. I don’t know why he’s done this now, but I know he’s not going to stop. He is fucking determined to destroy me by destroying everyone I care about, and he’s relying on me refusing to kill to win.”

“You don’t have to be the one who does that to him.”

“Yes, I do.” Scott put his fork down on his plate. “I’m the alpha. I made the decisions that let him do this. I can’t ask anyone else to do it.”
Rafael gritted his teeth and retreated into anger. Scott had seen this before: the frustration of helplessness, of wanting to do anything, manifesting as rage. “If you aren’t going to listen to me, why did you even ask my advice?”

“I didn’t understand why I asked you to meet me for dinner. I really thought that it was to ask your advice, but I know what it was.” Scott looked down at his plate. He really wished he could drink. “I was stalling. I … I was confessing.”

“Scott!” Rafael exclaimed. He waited for a moment and leaned forward to whisper insistently. “You’re talking about premeditated murder.”

“I’m talking about stopping someone who is holding the equivalent of a gun to someone’s head.” Scott replied. “You know what that’s like.”

Rafael leaned back in his chair. “No court will see it that way, son. You’re not an officer of the law. People don’t have the right to act like a vigilante, no matter what the reason.”

Scott stood up. He couldn’t eat anymore, anyway. The food had turned to mud and ashes in his stomach. “Dad. I’m not a person; I’m a werewolf.” He walked away from the table.

Will Graham stood outside Beacon Hills High School on this late winter’s day. The weather was chilly, but it wasn’t nearly as cold as it was back in Maryland. He had only a light jacket on. The school itself wasn’t particularly unique; it looked like many other high schools in many other cities in the United States.

The sun shone weekly in a wispy sky. He wondered how many people this sun looked down upon, and how many secrets those people kept buried as deeply as his friend and teammate had buried his own. Stiles Stilinski wasn’t yet a close friend the way other people would consider him, but Will didn’t particularly care to make many friends, so maybe he was ‘close.’

He hadn’t actually meant for it to happen. He preferred his privacy. He had seen something in the way Stiles approach criminal situations that was unique. It was a no-holds-barred form of abductive reasoning. It was still a raw talent and it would take many years to hone it into what it could be, but it was strong. There was no better place for him to develop it then at the BAU. Also, he got Price off his back over his crime-scene notes. The friendship, he guessed he had called it that, had come entirely through Stiles. Will had set up practices and boundaries in his life to help keep him stable, but it also kept him antisocial. Only Alana had managed to slide through before due to her earnestness and honesty. She cared for him, and she was honest about why she cared for him. Now, in the last couple of months, he had two more people insert themselves into his personal life. Dr. Lecter had started out as a way to keep Jack Crawford’s blood pressure at a reasonable level, but he had quickly become indispensable to Will. He never felt more grounded than after having his conversations with the psychiatrist.

Stiles, on the other hand, had randomly decided to pursue a friendship with Will and blew past any boundaries and practices he had embraced. Neither the awkwardness of his own social skills nor any subtle hints that personal interaction was unwanted deterred him.

Now, though, it was Stiles that seemed to be pulling away from the team. Whatever had happened to him during high school was something he absolutely did not wish to talk about. Will did not believe Stiles when he said he couldn’t talk about, but he did believe that Stiles was terrified to talk about it. There was a difference. Hannibal could be no help, because unlike Will, Stiles had formally made
Hannibal his psychiatrist, which mean Hannibal could not violate confidentiality.

Jack Crawford had insisted that Stiles not be alone during the time that the team searched for Gerard Argent. The team was coordinating with local authorities and members of the San Francisco field office in their effort to track down the suspect. The local authorities consisted of Stiles’ father, the sheriff and his deputies, while the San Francisco field office’s representative was the father of one of Stiles’ high-school friends, who’s step-father was the suspect's son.

Stiles had insisted on stopping by the high school. He said he needed to talk to one of the teachers, who was his girlfriend’s mother. Will had only met the formidable Lydia Martin once. She seemed like the type of person who would be part of Hannibal’s social circle. Rather than meet someone of similar force of personality, he had demurred to wait outside.

Will suddenly found himself walking around the school, coming to some sort of sports field. It looked well cared for, and it was presently being used by a group of teenagers, both boys and girls. He recognized the sport as lacrosse, which they had definitely not played in the schools he attended in Louisiana. Even if it had been, athletics had never been something he was interested in.

Running the practice was a middle-aged man with wild hair and a seeming compulsion to blow a whistle every five minutes. He seemed a little unhinged to Will, but the athletes seemed to follow him without much complaint. It was kind of heartwarming, really. Will sat down on one of the bleachers to watch the practice with some of the other teenagers.

The man with the whistle looked over at him and raised an eyebrow. “Why aren’t you dressed?”

Will glanced behind him. “Uh. You’re talking to me?”

“Yes! Why do you little punks think you can come to practice and not be dressed?” The man brandished a clipboard at him.

“Coach!” Another man, too old to be a student, ran up to them. “He’s not a student!”

“Are you sure, Dunbar?”

The young man grimaced in apology to Will. “Yes, Coach, he’s like over thirty?”

“Who can tell how old students are anymore!” Coach wandered off to run drills with the students.

“I’m really sorry,” said the younger man. “Are you here for one of the players? I’m Liam, the assistant coach.”

Will produced his identification, but he kept looking at the Coach, rushing over the field and blowing the whistle. “Is that man okay?”

“Oh, Coach? He’s a little eccentric. He’s a very good coach and an okay economics teacher.” Liam offered him a smile, but Will could tell it was a little forced at the edges. “Do you work with Stiles?”

“I do? Are you a friend of his?”

Liam extended a hand. “I sure am. I haven’t seen him for a while; he’s been busy with you out east. I’ve missed him a lot.” The assistant coach had a very firm handshake. “I hope you enjoy your stay here.” He faltered a bit. “Uh, you know what I mean, after you get the bad guy or whatever it is you do.”

“So, you knew Stiles when he went to high school here?”
Liam nodded. “Yeah. He was a junior when I transferred here my second semester of freshmen year. We were on the lacrosse team together.”

Will could image a younger Stiles running around on the field. “Were you close?”

Liam grimace once again and then shrugged confidently. “In some ways we were closer than family.” It sounded like a boast.

“So, you knew Gerard Argent.” Will made it a statement. He would be able to tell a lot by how the assistant coach responded.

“No. I only met him once … twice.” Liam sounded defensive. “I was in middle school when he was principal here.”

“Seen him around recently?”

Liam shook his head. “Nope. Haven’t seen him. Haven’t been looking.” Will could tell that the young man was hiding something, but before he could, Liam suddenly whirled around and waved. “Stiles! Over here.”

Will didn’t quite understand how Liam knew that Stiles had only then emerged from the school on the other side of the practice field. He hadn’t been looking in that direction.

Stiles’ face was neutral. Whatever he had been doing in the school hadn’t sat well with him, or maybe he was unhappy to be home. “Hey.” He eyed the pair of them. “Liam, this is Special Investigator Will Graham. I told you about him, remember? He taught at the academy. Will, this is Liam Dunbar, a pain-in-the-ass pipsqueak.” It was a forced joke.

Liam frowned. “Stiles, I’m a teacher here now. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Graham. You’re going to be able to spend some time with us, Stiles? Before you leave.”

“Pleasure was all mine.” Will hadn’t missed the emphasis Liam had made on ‘us.’

“Hard to tell. We’ll let you get back to practice. Will, mind taking a walk with me?” Stiles wasted no time moving Will along from the field.

They walked away from the field. Will looked back to see the younger man staring at them. “Stiles. You seem a little stressed out.”

“Well, it’s been a stressful day.” Stiles walked fast down a path to a wooded area that abutted the school grounds. It was some sort of Preserve.

Will let him walk without commentary for a couple of hundred yards. “You didn’t need to hurry me away from your friend.”

“What?” Stiles stopped and turned to him. The agent turned on the charm suddenly, when before had been cool and distant. “I wasn’t hurrying you away from anyone. I didn’t want to interrupt practice. Coach can get a little aggressive if something interrupts. I did enough suicides in high school not to wish them on others.”

Will shrugged in acceptance of the lie and kept walking through the woods. Going into the trees was the easiest way to isolate both of them from Stiles’ past relationships. “Do you want to know what I think, Stiles? I think that a lot more happened here than just a single incidence of kidnapping.”

“Why would you think that?” Stiles joked as he followed a trail down into a valley and then back up
the other side. “Isn’t kidnapping enough?”

Will rubbed at his face. “Instinct. Ever since you came back to your home, you’ve been acting like you expect enemies to leap out from behind every tree.” He looked back at the school. “You nearly dragged me away from one of your school friends.”

“Trauma can cause hypervigilance,” Stiles responded.

“Yes, but hypervigilance doesn’t vary in intensity due to location. You’re not simply hypervigilant; you’re on guard, like you expect enemies behind every corner.” Will gestured. “I don’t know what happened here, but …”

“Telling you what happened here, Will, isn’t going to stop Gerard Argent one minute quicker. Sometimes secrets need to remain secrets.” Stiles spat out. It was the first time he was ever angry with Will and the look on his face when he realized it turned to remorse. He took a deep breath. “I’m sorry. Beacon Hills does that to me. Do you know what it’s like to hate a place so much but still recognize the truth that you belong here? I’ll never want to stay in this town, but part of me will never leave.”

Will accepted that this was as close to the truth as he was going to get. Stiles refusal to talk about it was at least partially voluntary. “I don’t care as long as you withholding information doesn’t get innocents killed.” To change the subject, he took his turn at making a joke. “And we may never leave, because I think you’ve gotten us lost in the woods.”

Stiles scoffed. “I know the Preserve like the back of my hand. We’re not lost.”

Will pointed over to a clearing over between two trees. “Then why have we passed that big stump like twice in the last five minutes?”

Stiles jerked as if he had been stabbed and looked in that direction. “Oh, shit.”

Chapter End Notes

This takes place between Hannibal's Episode 1x07 "Sorbet" and 1x08 "Fromage."
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Lydia starts her investigation of Hannibal Lecter. Scott, Stiles, and the BAU pursue Gerard Argent.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lydia breathed into the night air. “I was made for this.”

She did not even need to check herself in her compact’s mirror concealed within the clutch she carried in one hand while she closed her wrap with the other. Her mind’s eye maintained that she was as close to perfect as she could reasonably hope to be. Lydia knew how to draw attention, and she would draw the attention she wanted. She corrected herself: she would draw the attention she needed.

As entertaining as this night would be – she loved a quality symphony orchestra as much as she loved any public event – she wasn’t here for just a night out. Lydia was going to find out everything that she could know about this Dr. Hannibal Lecter because Stiles had thought it best to investigate him. She had learned that the psychiatrist sat on the board of directors for this orchestra. This meant that this particular performance would be filled with people who saw him socially, and since he was still in California with Stiles, she could do it without fear of discovery.

As much as you could research someone online, there were certain types of information that you could only get socially. And to be social, you had to look like you belonged. Lydia was confident that every single eye would be on her tonight, and that is exactly what she needed. People had to want to be near her, and they would talk about what she wanted to talk about to do it.

She had managed to put together an interesting biography of the man. Hannibal Lecter was slightly over fifty and he was born in Lithuania to very wealthy parents. They died when he was young as did his sole sibling. He was very wealthy; he still had an estate over in the Lithuania. He studied medicine in his home country and then Germany, and he had travelled extensively before earning his license as a surgeon.

Lecter had taught at John Hopkins and also worked as a surgeon in a local Baltimore hospital. A decade or so ago, he had given up surgical medicine for a new career in psychiatry. He was extraordinarily well-respected, having written a monograph on social exclusion that was considered fundamental to the study of that phenomenon.

Lecter was active in the high society scene in Baltimore. He concentrated on the fine arts, specifically involving himself in music. So far, so normal. Lydia wasn’t going to stop looking for three reasons.

First, she trusted Stiles’ gut. Or, more particularly, she trusted Stiles’ gut enough to get her own confirmation on his gut. While they had been blessedly free of supernatural entanglements through most of their college careers, she never forgot the lessons of high school. If Stiles was disturbed, she doubled-checked.
Second, she had heard from Stiles the full story of how Dr. Lecter had insinuated himself into Stiles’ life. On one hand, it was creepy and invasive. On the other hand, the psychiatrist may have saved Stiles’ career and inadvertently saved the secret of the supernatural from coming out. Still, that degree of manipulation reminded both of them of Theo, and if this was a Theo-like situation, they weren’t going to be caught the same way.

Third, she was enjoying herself. It was a time of change for her, just as it had been when she had moved from Beacon Hills to Cambridge. Then, she had felt good about leaving everything behind including the imminent threat of danger and the mysterious puzzles to solve. Now, though, the idea that she could pursue a mystery on her own, that she hadn’t lost that skill, thrilled her.

The mezzanine of the concert hall was filled with people, all dressed out like competitive songbirds. The reward for being dazzling was attention. The punishment for being tasteless was mockery. They circled each other and even though she had come by herself, Lydia felt amazingly confident.

She understood that the true conversations wouldn’t start until after the performance, but she could at least identify the people who were going to be worthwhile to spend time with. There were the usual parade of lawyers, businessmen, and dilettantes. Some were people that she could see herself cultivating, and some were people with more money than taste. Both could be useful.

As she was taking a flute of champagne from a tray with a nodded thanks to the waiter, someone jostled her arm, spilling the drink. She kept the irritation off of her face, and politely told the waiter that she did not need a new one. The place was not that crowded, so the person who had done it was just clumsy. She turned to see who it was.

“Oh! Excuse me.” The culprit is a rotund little man with a big black beard and a slightly nervous manner. Standing next to him is a tall man with very intense eyes matched only by his manner and a garish bow tie. His eyes rolled slightly at his friend’s faux pas. “I’m terribly sorry!”

He does sound distinctly sorry so Lydia gives him her best smile. “It’s no problem at all. No harm done.”

“Thank you, that’s very kind of you.” He seems haplessly genuine. “Franklyn Froideveaux. This is my friend, Tobias Budge.”

“Lydia Martin.” She extends her hand so Mr. Froideveaux can take it. His grip is slightly moist. She realizes that he must be extraordinarily anxious, but he is trying to pretend that he belongs here. She’s seen this before. She has sympathy for him, but she also has a little respect. It would be so much easier not to come to a place that made you feel like that.

Lydia extended her hand to Mr. Budge who took it lightly. She thought she heard the sound of a bow being drawn across strings, but there were no musicians outside the concert hall. She nodded to him and then drew her hand back.

“I have not seen you here before,” Mr. Froideveaux continues. “Is this your first visit to this symphony?”

“This is my first time at this symphony. I recently moved here from Massachusetts.” Her eyes slid around the room when it was polite to do so. She had long learned to listen when strange sounds appeared.

“Is Mr. Martin with you?” Franklyn suddenly looked stricken, as if he realized that this could be read as a come on. “I mean, if there is a Mr. Martin.”
Mr. Budge chuckled lightly.

“I have a fiancé, but he is not here with me tonight.” This was a lie; Stiles hadn’t asked her to marry him yet, but she imagined that he eventually would when he got up the nerve and felt established in his new job.

“Oh, I hope he can come next time,” Franklyn enthused. “I have really found the concerts wonderful. Why did you decide to come here?”

Lydia kept her smile on bright. She imagined that Mr. Froideveaux could be tiring to speak with. She also imagined that’s why he was close friends with Mr. Budge, who seemed to prefer not to speak.

“It was recommended to me by a friend.”

“Oh! My psychiatrist suggested it; he’s on the board.” Lydia nodded appropriately as she realized her kindness had paid off with unexpected dividends. She would ask the pair out for dinner after the concert. She knew that wouldn’t be seen as unexpected. She didn’t think she’d have any trouble getting Franklyn to talk about Hannibal Lecter.

#######

“Stiles.” Will was looking at him with a mixture of exasperation and fatigue. “For the third time, I don’t sense anything strange. It’s just a tree stump.”

Stiles winced and gave him his best non-communicative shrug, which would probably exasperate Will more. Of course, Will didn’t sense anything from the Nemeton. Will wasn’t supernatural; he was just a man with a particular talent. Stiles tried to tell himself he had wanted to make sure, but he knew the truth. If Will hadn’t unconsciously steered them to the Nemeton, then Stiles had, and the Nemeton had wanted him to find it.

Will sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “What does this stump mean to you?”

Stiles realized he couldn’t just refuse to answer. He had to give Will something. “I’ve seen it before. Couple of times.”

For a moment, Stiles thought he was going to get away with it, that he would be able to turn around and lead Will out of the preserve so he could continue to pretend to look for Gerard Argent. With his father’s, and now Scott’s father’s, cooperation, stalling until the pack could take care of that old bastard was now a possibility, though not easy by any stretch of the imagination.

At least, Stiles had thought it was possible until Will spoke again. “I don’t believe you. I don’t think that you are psychologically incapable of talking about what happened to you during high school, no matter what Hannibal’s diagnosis is. I think you simply don’t want to talk about it.” Will didn’t speak as an accusation but as more of a description.

Stiles felt the tension in the air. His relationship with Will Graham hung on this moment, because Will place a lot of value in a relationship on the truth.

Will understood. “You’re talking to me and only me.”

Stiles made a decision. “There are things I can’t tell you because it’s not my place to tell. It’s not just me who is going to be hurt if too many of these things come to light. And hurting people, people I care about, is exactly Gerard Argent’s goal. He wants these secrets to come to light.”

Will didn’t look upset. “I suspected as much. Tell me what you can. Let’s start with what’s so important about this?” He indicated the Nemeton.
“You wouldn’t believe me.”

Will frowned. “I’m hardly the poster child for mental stability, Stiles. I won’t judge.”

Stiles opened his mouth and then closed it. Every sentence he thought of sounded more and more insane. What Will thought of him was important. “Ever read Romeo and Juliet?”

“I did go to high school, Stiles,” Will smirked.

“Well, in Beacon Hills, the Hales were the Montagues and the Argents were the Capulets. The tree used to be very important to the Montagues.” That didn’t sound too bad.

“This is about the Hale fire. I read your father’s reports on the way up here.” Will turned back and studied the stump. “I wondered why someone would take the time to cut it down, since it was in the middle of the woods. It was a threat against the Hales, wasn’t it?”

Stiles gut feeling snapped back to the fore. Why had they never looked into who had cut the tree down? If the Hales had been the protectors of Beacon Hills, they would have known the danger of cutting the Nemeton down. They would have guarded it. So whoever cut it down was attacking the Hales; it was obvious.

Will nodded as if something had just occurred to him. “Gerard Argent cut it down. While the reports said that this Kate Argent woman was the person who set the fire, he was the instigator.”

If Stiles had needed proof about the skill of Will’s profiling, he wouldn’t now. This made what he was saying even more dangerous; he couldn’t count on Will not being able to fill in the blanks if he just gave a bit more information than he should. “You’re probably right, but it’s more complex than that, because while it started with the fire – or maybe it started when this tree was cut down – it didn’t end there.”

Stiles threw a glance over his shoulder. Was that why the Nemeton had pretty much insisted that it be found? Did it want to supply him with this last clue about its own history? Or was it warning him that the final confrontation with the person who had hurt it so badly was at hand?

“IT hasn’t ended, has it?” Will said quietly. “This is just the next encounter, but what has that to do with you?”

Stiles smiled ruefully and gestured for Will to follow him. “There aren’t many Argents left – there are three of them. One has rejected their ancient feud. One is an international criminal. And the last is Gerard Argent. There aren’t many Hales left; there are four at last count. But hate has a way of sucking innocent people in; they always need more bodies for the pyre.”

“Did you get sucked in?”

“No.” Stiles said bitterly. “Eight years ago, I walked in. I walked myself and my best friend right into it. I was a stupid kid with a friend who was stupid enough to follow my lead and after that, things just got worse and worse and worse. I tried to pretend I was out. I tried to pretend I could get free. I ran away. I’m still running. I’ve run all the way to the F. B. I.”

Will moved closer to him while they walked and made to reach out with one hand, perhaps to put it reassuringly on his arm. But the investigator just couldn’t bring himself to do it. “Maybe you should keep seeing Hannibal. That doesn’t sound like the truth. That sounds like guilt that someone like you shouldn’t be carrying. Sixteen-year-old boys aren’t the equals of adults; they’re the victims of them.”

“You don’t know, Will. You don’t know everything that happened here.”
“I’ve read the summary of the events of your high school years. I know about the deaths. I know about the serial killings and the spree killers.”

“You think you know,” Stiles felt hysterical. “You only know the most basic of what happened, but you don’t know how and you certainly don’t know why!” He gripped his fists as he kept walking. “You only have the evidence we let you have.”

“We?” Will glanced down at the ground. “You’re father’s involved in this, isn’t he?”

Stiles felt his heart catch in his throat. “This was over. This was done. We beat them all. We were out. I was out.” He hadn’t felt this panicked since senior year. He kept walking forward. He had to get away without leaving Will lost in the Preserve. The sun felt hot on his shoulders; it felt like judgment.

Will had this understanding look on his face. “Stiles, calm down. I know who I am after right now, and it is not you or your friends. Do you and your friends go around killing innocent people?”

Stiles clenched his fist. “No.” Only I do, he added silently.

“Gerard Argent may seek to expose your past, but he is killing people who are not even remotely connected to it in order to do so. We’ll catch him. We’ll stop him. Believe me.”

“That’s what he’s counting on, Will.” Stiles took a deep breath. “Either he’s going to kill people I care about or we’re going to catch him and he’s going to ruin their lives.”

The Preserve gave way to a paved road. They weren’t far from the car at the high school. Stiles could tell that Will was troubled. The only thing his imagination could inform him of is some sort of mundane crime that Stiles, his family, and his friends were covering up. As a cop, this shouldn’t be his problem. He could not even imagine the supernatural.

Their progress was interrupted by the sound of their phones ringing. Stiles got his first. “Stilinski.”

It was Crawford. “We found him. I need you two here in five minutes.”

#######

Scott walked down the darkened hallway of the high school. He wasn’t afraid. He knew very well that there were few things in the world now that he was helpless against. He unsheathed his claws; they were sharp as razors. He ran a tongue over his fangs; they could part flesh like his hand passed through steam in the morning shower. He was strong enough to flip a car over. His eyes could see in the dark, his ears could hear heartbeats in the parking lot, and he could smell the terror of weak-willed men.

Fear was for the powerless.

He walked down the hallways at an easy pace. He had somewhere important to go, and this was the way he had to go to get there. He was going alone, but that was okay. If this was really something dangerous, he would have brought his pack. He would have brought his allies, but this was something he had to do himself. He stopped in front of the chemistry room door. It was locked. Scott’s face screwed up in confusion.

Oh, he realized he was being silly. He had a key.

Peter Hale was standing in the middle of the darkened classroom. He gave an exaggerated sigh. “Oh, there you are. I thought we were going to have to wait all night!” He gestured for Scott to come in.
“Sorry,” Scott said easily. He didn’t owe Peter an explanation.

“No, you’re not, but I guess that’s your prerogative now, isn’t it?” Peter clucked his tongue, grabbed his chin with one hand, and shook his head. “Look at you. If you don’t mind me saying, Scott, you really should step up your game. You’re an established alpha and less than eighteen months from being a doctor, and you dress like that.”

Scott looked down at himself. So, he was dressed casually: sneakers, jeans, a t-shirt and a hoodie. “Uhm, what’s wrong with the way I’m dressed?”

“You are about to complete the last step of a very, very long journey, Scott,” Peter scolded him. “And you look like you’re heading towards third-period Social Studies. It’s time I gave you a makeover. You know what they say -- *Vestis virum facit!* Or in your case -- *Vestis lupum facit!*”

Scott realized that Peter was right. He nodded his permission.

“Boys!” Peter clapped like a pretentious tailor. “Get rid of these rags.” He turned and went to the other end of the chemistry room where there were several racks of clothes. The omega started going through them, dismissing that one with a huff and that one with a sneer.

Standing right in front of him was a full length mirror. Peter was right. You couldn’t really tell that he was a powerful werewolf in these clothes. He looked like just another sheep who couldn’t be bothered to be fashionable. He didn’t fight when a pair of hands started tearing the clothes off. It didn’t matter that these had been his clothes. He had outgrown them.

Peter came back with a stack of clothing with him. “I think we’ll go with the leather. After all, you’re a predator about to make your first kill. It’s important to show that you understand what you are doing. And this red silk shirt will do nicely. It matches your eyes, and it’ll hide the bloodstains.”

Peter was right. His eyes were glowing a baleful red, like coals in Hell. He got dressed before Peter’s appraising glance. Someone was helping him get dressed, but he couldn’t quite focus on them. “You sure this will look good?”

“Bitch, please.” Peter sounded offended. “I’ve been thinking about what to dress you up as since the day I met you. You’re going to look exactly as I’ve always intended you to look.”

Scott looked at himself in the full length mirror. He did look dangerous. He did look like someone that weak people would run screaming from if they met in a dark alley.

“Now, Scott, let my helpers do your style and manicure. Clothes can only go so far.” Peter winked. “I’ll supervise.”

“Helpers?” Scott looked around.

“Volunteers. When they heard that you were finally going to take the big leap, they couldn’t wait to come help you get ready. After all, they had the honor of being your practice runs.”

Scott felt himself being guided into a chair that would be seen at the hair salon. His hands were put in some solution and he could feel his hair being washed. “Practice . . . runs?”

“Oh, yes, Scott. You see, the length of time it took you to get to this point,” sneered Peter, “had a cost. These are just a few acquaintances who find themselves with plenty of free time because your stupidity, your negligence or your carelessness murdered them. They couldn’t pass up the opportunity to help prepare you for your big night.”
Scott felt the air rush from his lungs. He tried to focus on who was helping him, but hands held him down.

Peter turned to one of the figures. “Aiden, please do me a favor and get rid of that stupid motorcycle. It looks like he’s on the small potatoes motor cross circuit and not as an assassin on a job.”

Scott tried to protest that he wasn’t an assassin, but the words wouldn’t come out, because they weren’t true. He couldn’t even turn his head, but out of the corner of his eye, he saw Aiden salute Peter. “You got it.”

“How short should I make the hair, sir?” Donovan asked Peter.

Peter clucked his tongue. “I’d say make it short. Fluffy hair makes him look like a cocker spaniel. What do you think?” He turned to the woman that was preparing to give him a manicure.

“If we’re going for intimidating, the shorter the better!” Allison smacked Scott’s hands, playfully. “Stay still. You’re just lucky that Lydia taught me how to do this before you got me killed.”

Scott did as he was told. “So, tell me Scott,” Peter pulled up the mirror, “do you think you look like a proper killer yet? Do you? Scott?”

There was another voice. “Scott.” It was far away, and it was insistent.

“Scott, it’s rude not to answer me,” Peter demanded as Scott watched himself in the mirror. “Do you think I’ve made you into a proper killer yet? All of us have worked so hard for this moment.”

“Scott.” The far-away voice was insistent.

Peter’s eyes gleamed blue as he gestured at the mirror. “Tell me, Scott. Tell me, Alpha, do you think you’re ready to be a killer yet?”

That far-away voice was getting closer.

Scott studied the mirror. He looked so different. He looked like claws and teeth. He looked like death on two legs. “Yeah. Yeah, I think I’m ready.”

“Scott!”

Scott started out of the bed in his old room. He was sweaty and shaking. He must have been dreaming. “What? I’m here!”

Chris Argent loomed above him. “Sorry for waking you up, but we found him. We have to go.”

Scott blinked as he looked around the room. “Okay. Okay.” He had to get his pulse under control; he was in danger of uncontrolled transformation out like a newly bitten wolf. He knew how to do control himself, and he knew what he had to do.

“I’ll be downstairs,” Chris said reassuringly. “You should get dressed.”

Chapter End Notes

*Vestis virum facit* = "Clothing makes the man."
Vestis lupum facit = "Clothing makes the wolf."
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Hannibal Lecter attends a BAU briefing in Beacon Hills; Scott makes his move against Gerard Argent.

“First off,” Jimmy Price began the briefing, “I want a personal armed guard twenty-four hours a day as long as we’re here. The number of law enforcement officers who have died in this city is truly frightening. I feel my insurance rates going up while I’m standing here.”

Jack Crawford crossed his arms in impatience. It was a gesture, Hannibal noticed, that he used frequently. To his practiced eye, it did not express true irritation, but the easy camaraderie he had with his forensics team. He had a chair in the back of the small room. Compared to the offices of the BAU at Quantico or the suite at the FBI Field Office, the Sheriff’s Station at Beacon Hills was cramped. Jack Crawford commanded the center of the room, as he usually did, while Beverly Katz and Brian Zeller flanked him. Katz was taking notes. Zeller was drinking coffee.

“Fine. I’m making a note that you get sent the bill for my funeral.” Price turned to the board and pointed to the crime scene and family photographs on the far left. “First grouping occurred in 2005: The Hale Fire. Eight men, women and children were locked in their home and burned to death. Only three family members survived. Ultimately, the crimes were attributed to Kate Argent, Gerard Argent’s daughter, posthumously.”

Hannibal remarked to himself that the Hales were a good-looking family.

“Second grouping occurred in January and February of 2011: eight murders and six attempted murders. The first death was Laura Hale, one of the survivors of the fire, found in the woods and cut in half at the waist.” Price emphasized that. “Another survivor of the fire, Peter Hale, disappeared and his body was never found. His personal nurse, however, was found dead. The other four murders were connected to the Hale fire as accomplices. The forensic evidence indicates that at least three of them were murdered by a trained wolf.”

Beverly Katz raised an eyebrow. “That’s unusual.”

“No more unusual than hemicorporectomies.” Price replied acerbically. “The last death in this grouping was Kate Argent herself. Report says the wolf she was using turned on her. The police came to the conclusion …”

“She was covering up loose ends,” Crawford interjected.

“Yes, exactly. Where it gets interesting for our present case is that most of the attempted murders happened at one time and in one place. Five students were locked in the local high school with the trained wolf.” Price flourished his hand at the pictures on the wall. “Agent Stilinski was one of those five, but you should pay some attention to the other four.”

“Dr. Martin?” Beverly said. “Huh.” At Jack’s glance, Beverly explained. “You met her at the motel room on the way to Minnesota.”
“McCall was there as well,” added Zeller. “But the kicker is the other girl that night’s name was Allison Argent. It looks like Kate Argent tried to kill her own niece.”

Hannibal was being thoroughly entertained. This town seemed a lot more complex than it looked like from the outside.

“Keep these names in mind, you’re going to be seeing a lot of them.” Price moved to the next collection of photographs. “Third grouping occurred in March and April of 2011. Ten deaths, including the killer, one Matt Daehler. On the surface, there seems to be no connection between the second group and the third, until you look closer. The first death in this grouping was the night before the funeral of Kate Argent and thus coincided with the arrival of her father, Gerard Argent. I can’t find a concrete connection between Daehler and the Argents, but there’s more than a few suspicious coincidences.”

“You’re not going to believe this,” added Zeller.

“The second death in the grouping happened to a car mechanic, one that happened to be servicing Agent Stilinski’s car at the time. He discovered the body.” Price gave an exaggerated shrug. “We could put his down as a coincidence, but Agent Stilinski was also present when Daehler attacked the police station and left four deputies dead. Final coincidence, it was during this time Gerard Argent’s daughter-in-law and Allison’s mother, Victoria, committed suicide due to undiagnosed depression.”

“It’s a small town,” Jack pointed out. “It isn’t impossible that it was a coincidence.”

Price rolled his eyes. “Meanwhile, Gerard Argent, acting as principle for the high school for which he had no qualifications whatsoever, hosted the state lacrosse championships. After Beacon Hills’ victory, Agent Stilinski claims that Gerard Argent kidnapped him. Strangely enough, this was at the exact same time another player had a near-fatal episode on the field. Look at the name.”

“Jackson Whittemore,” observed Beverly. “He was at the school that night.”

Jack’s face scrunched up in disbelief. “What are you telling me?”

“I’m saying that I think this vendetta isn’t new,” Price concluded. “He’s been targeting Agent Stilinski and his childhood friends for years. There are still four more groupings that I could walk you through, but I don’t need to. I can connect ninety-eight murders in this town over a period of two-and-a-half years to those five children and their families. Now, Whittemore moved to London after the third grouping. Allison Argent died during an ‘unsolved carjacking’ during the fifth grouping. The remaining three are involved in every single grouping.”

“The killings end after graduation. Beacon County still has a higher than average murder rate, but nowhere near as high as that twenty-eight month period.” Price continued in disbelief. “Of course, there doesn’t seem to a single bit of hard evidence that ties these murders to Argent or these five students. The evidence that does exist is inconclusive in every way imaginable.”

“That doesn’t seem possible.” Crawford frowned. “You’re saying that he’s targeting them because they got away with something.”

Price replied. “It’s possible. Now, if they are connected, someone was doctoring evidence.”

Zeller admitted reluctantly. “Easy enough if your father had been sheriff during that time. Or your father was an FBI agent.”

“Is there enough evidence of tampering to prove collusion?” Jack Crawford demanded.
“I think,” Beverly observed, “that is exactly what the killer wants us to do.”

Jack grimly nodded in agreement. “If we catch him he wins. If we don’t catch him he wins. I don’t like that.”

Hannibal decided that he had remained out of the discussion long enough. “Jack, if I may make an observation. You remember Will’s profile of the killer. This is a war, a war he intends to win at any cost.”

Jack chewed that over. “You’ve been given permission to discuss his therapy with me, Dr. Lecter, so answer me this question. Is there a possibility that Agent Stilinski understands this? Is he not talking to us because of psychological inability or is he not talking to us because he knows that doing so would expose the past?”

Hannibal was unsurprised. “I believe the trauma that Agent Stilinski experienced is real. I believe that he has behaviors that should be addressed by therapy. I believe that this trauma makes him extraordinarily reluctant to discuss what happened in this city with anyone, especially people from whom he wishes to earn respect. Is he aware of possibly criminal actions taken to protect him? I cannot rule it out.”

Hannibal met each person’s eyes in turn. “I think that you have to be open to the idea that if Gerard Argent is the person behind these killings, he is capable of terrible acts of violence, so much so that it may have required extra-legal steps to protect minor children six years ago.”

“But we don’t know that,” Jack answered.

Hannibal allowed himself the smallest of congratulatory grins as the conversation continued. There had been a point where he thought that this trip would be a waste of time. No longer. He now had everything he needed to manipulate Stiles Stilinski and keep Will Graham in his orbit.

In addition, the private war of Gerard Argent was a source of amusement. Hannibal was never a fan of suicide missions, but a plan that enabled Argent to win no matter what course of action that his opponents took was something to be admired. Of course, it did have a weakness, one that Agent Stilinski had divined.

Hannibal had definitely been able to read Stiles Stilinski’s lips enough to hear him demand that his friend – which by now the psychiatrist had deduced to be Scott McCall – kill Gerard Argent. It was the only practical way out. He wondered if Mieczyslaw Stilinski had ever killed anyone. It would be entertaining to find out.

That might happen quicker than he had imagined. Midway through the fifth grouping, Jack Crawford received a phone call from the Sacramento Field Office. There was an anonymous tip on Gerard Argent’s location.

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Malia had her arms crossed, teeth bared and eyes flashing. Scott glanced behind him to the day-lit street. Before he could admonish her, she snarled once. “You’re an asshole!” From the looks on the rest of his pack’s faces, they agreed with her.

“This is a trap. We know it’s a trap.” Liam wasn’t even looking at the knot of people gathered in the alley; he was studying the street at well. He sounded more disappointed than angry, which was a change for him. “Why can’t someone go with you?”

Scott couldn’t explain to them why he knew he had to go in alone without explaining to them the
significance of this location. If they knew why Gerard had chosen this particular warehouse, they
would not let him go alone, alpha or no alpha. Their loyalty was touching, but the fact that Gerard
had chosen this location made it absolutely necessary he go alone. Scott’s eyes had seen the patch on
the outside wall where Stiles’ jeep had made an entrance, all those years ago.

Why does every bad guy in this goddamm town have to be so goddamm dramatic?

“That we know it’s a trap doesn’t make any difference, because unfortunately for us, it’s a very good
trap,” Scott admitted openly while fidgeting with the sleeve of his jacket. “We need to stop him
today, because we know that he’s just going to kill more people if he gets the chance. You four
aren’t going with me not because I don’t think I’ll need you, but because he can’t get away. Each
one of you will take a side of the warehouse; if you see him leaving, follow him and call Mr.
Argent.” Scott may have made a decision for himself, but he’d be damned if he tried to force it on his
pack. They didn’t know what he had planned.

“What about you?” Corey worried.

Scott hated the idea of manipulating the pack like this, but this wasn’t going to be like anything they
had done before. Stiles had convinced him that he wasn’t going to be able to get Gerard to back
down, and he knew that under no circumstances could he permit Gerard to share his secrets with the
FBI. What he contemplated still made him sick, but he had come to a decision. This was to the death.

Scott put on his best smile. “It won’t take all four of you to follow him. If you see him leave, two of
you work together to follow him while the other two come and get me. I also need all four of you to
make sure we’re not surprised by the FBI task force here in town. They may not tell Stiles if they
find out where Gerard is. Keep in touch with each other.”

Hayden showed him her phone. “Why isn’t Mr. Argent or your dad … I mean Mr. McCall or Sheriff
Stilinski here? No offense, but they’ve been like trained to do this?”

Scott couldn’t explain that Mr. Argent was busy establishing alibis for the pack. He and his step-
father had had long discussions over the last few days about that very topic. There had been a few
shouting matches, though it was concern, not animosity, that motivated them. It wasn’t that his step-
dad wanted his father spared; Chris just had though that if anyone had to put the old man down, it
should be him. Scott wasn’t going to let that happen. He had finally won the argument by talking
about the future. If they were going to survive this, they had to be able to survive the investigation
that came after. Scott didn’t know how to set that up, but Chris did.

“Mr. Argent’s working on something else. My dad and Stiles’ dad are too close to the BAU team;
they’ll be watched. Trust me. This is going to work.” Scott wasn’t totally sure if this was going to be
a lie. “Go, get into position and let me know when you are ready.”

Scott had never been back to this warehouse since the night of the championship game. He’d done
what was necessary here, but it wasn’t a place that he liked to think about. He approached it
cautiously after receiving confirmation from his betas, and when he reached the building, he paused
at the wall and put his ear to it. There were only five heartbeats in the warehouse. He didn’t know
Gerard’s heartbeat well enough to identify him, but he was pretty sure that the old hunter wouldn’t
have set this up for anyone but him. He took a breath and opened the door to the warehouse.

It was a weird feeling getting yourself ready to be shot. The only thing he could compare it to was
when he had been practicing skateboarding before he was turned. He’d try a new trick, and he knew
was going to fall down a lot. He knew it was going to hurt. The point was, though, that if you didn’t
do it, you’d never learn the trick. He never thought he would apply that to being shot, but it had
come about. Getting shot was part of stopping his opponents.
Surprisingly enough, the hunter did not fire at him immediately. He did have a shotgun, and it was pointing at Scott, but he didn’t pull the trigger. “Did you come alone?”

“Yeah.” Lying wasn’t going to make any difference, but maybe bravado would. “Are we going to do this or what?”

The hunter seemed reluctant not to start fighting, but he picked up a radio instead. “He’s here. He says he’s alone.”

Scott clearly heard Gerard’s voice on the other end. “You know what to do. “

The hunter frowned and headed towards the door Scott had just entered. Scott felt the distrust and hatred radiating from the man. He didn’t care; it’s not like this man would be first werewolf hunter or werewolf who had decided what he was before talking to him. He stood aside and let the guy leave.

So, Gerard wanted to do this alone? That was fine with him. That would decrease the chance of other people getting hurt. He moved through the hallway to the entrance to the main chamber; Scott guessed Gerard would be waiting for him at the same place.

It surprised him that the door opened to reveal a veritable maze of shipping pallets. Scott nearly laughed out loud. It hadn’t even occurred to him that the warehouse would no longer be abandoned. The only question was whether Gerard had set it up this way or if it had been as much of a surprise to him.

Scott put his back up against one of the pallets so he could text the pack his status, but he couldn’t get a signal. Why would Gerard be using a cell phone jammer? Everyone knew this was a trap, so it wasn’t that he wanted to prevent others from warning him.

Scott didn’t like this move. He couldn’t see a reason for it, and that made him nervous. He was also, he admitted, a bit out of practice with the on-your-feet thinking. After the Ghost Riders, all the threats drawn to Beacon Hills had been relatively minor. It was only rarely that he had to have come up from Davis to help out; between Liam and the in-the-know adults, the trivial matters had been handled. That had been a good thing.

The fact that he felt a little at a loss this instant was not a good thing, especially when he was trapped in a warehouse with a psychotic hunter. Scott pushed down his anxiety, muttering to himself: “It’s like learning to ride a bike …”

He decided to change his approach. If Gerard wanted to think out of the box, he could as well. Instead of following the twisty maze of passages, he climbed up one of pallets to the top, where he could see over the whole warehouse. He easily discerned an open area, and it was at almost the same place as the previous confrontation. Dramatics. He leapt from one towering pallet to another.

Of course, Gerard Argent was there and ready for him. He had a table and a chair and a circle of mountain ash. His eyes were closed, which meant that he expected Scott to talk to him first. Chris would have shot him by now, but Scott wasn’t his step-dad.

Scott jumped down from the stack of boxes to the ground. No back flips this time; it just didn’t feel right. “Gerard.” He was still fully human in form when he announced his presence. Gerard was too savvy to be intimidated.

“Well, well, well, I didn’t think that you would show up alone, Scott. How did you like my invitations?”

Scott wasn’t going to play this game. He wasn’t going to trade one-liners with psychopaths – not
today. Before he could think about anything else, he caught a scent, both familiar and revealing. It explained everything. “It’s back. Your cancer is back.”

Gerard stood up from the table. Casually, he flipped open the cloth and picked up a broadsword. It was probably the same one he had mutilated all those people with. “Yes, it is. What do you think triggered all of this?”

Scott narrowed his eyes. “You can’t be trying to get the bite again; even you aren’t that stupid.”

Gerard did not like being called stupid; he visibly mastered himself. Scott listened carefully because this new information changed everything. “No, I’m not. It wouldn’t work anyway. I’ve already been bitten. Technically, and only technically, I’m still Derek Hale’s beta.” He smirked nastily.

“No, technically you’re an omega.” Scott didn’t want the man to think that he was connected to Derek Hale even for a second. “As you deserve.”

“Is that derision, Scott? You didn’t used to think like that. But it doesn’t matter. My son counteracted your poison with the wolf’s bane he fed me. I’m not werewolf enough to have a reaction to it, but I’m not werewolf enough to prevent my cancer from relapsing. But, it seems I’m still werewolf enough that chemotherapy is no longer an effective treatment. I’m going to die.”

“You want my sympathy?”

“No. I want you to understand that you and only you are responsible for the hell that’s going to descend on every single person you love, starting today.” Gerard rested the tip of the broadsword on the ground and drew a pistol.

Scott took a deep breath. “Because you have it all figured out, don’t you? You’re going to expose the supernatural to the FBI. You get revenge on me for not letting you kill Derek or me or my mother. You get revenge on me for not letting you risk other people’s lives to stop the Beast.”

“What, in my entire life, made you think that I would give a damn, Scott? You denied me my family’s triumph over the Hales. You denied me the cure for my cancer. You denied me the right to reforge my family’s legacy by killing The Beast once again. I’ll be dead in three months at the longest, so I have only a little time to establish my legacy.”

“Your … legacy?”

“I am going to leave the world different than how I found it, Scott. I am going to change everything. I’ll be gone, but I die knowing that you and every other supernatural abomination will never have an easy rest again.”

Scott heard the surety in the man’s heartbeat; he saw the madness in his eyes. “We can stop you. I can stop you.”

“No, you can’t, Scott. The FBI are already on their way here, if they aren’t here already. My men called them on the way out.” Gerard snarled. “I know you can get through this mountain ash, but even if you could get through it in time, you’d be weakened and I’d cut you in half. I’d take great pleasure in that. Even if you walk out of this warehouse right now, I’ll still reveal everything I know. I’ll tear your lives from you in civil brawls, bred of an airy word.”

_Fuck your Shakespeare obsession, you bastard_, Scott thought to himself. He focused his hearing and he could hear car doors slamming and people running. The FBI was here. He had to end this now. He walked toward the mountain ash circle.
Gerard readied his sword. “Now, you’ll learn the price for being too weak to do what’s necessary.” His plan was clear – as Scott was struggling to push past the barrier, Gerard would hack at him.

“No,” Scott replied. He couldn’t believe he was about to do this, but he had walked himself into a trap, and not just Gerard’s trap. He’d come here to kill and in the end, because he’d made that decision, it was the only thing left to do. He pulled out the pistol that Chris Argent had given him from the back holster concealed beneath his jacket. “I won’t.”

He emptied the entire clip into his step-grandfather.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

In the aftermath of Gerard Argent’s death, disaster strikes. Lydia, Scott and Stiles try to pick up the pieces while Will Graham tries to figure out what the puzzle is.

Stiles Stilinski knew one thing: time was an illusion.

For example, he was not a twenty-four-year old FBI agent with years of education and even more years of handling crises that would curl the hair of most young-adult Caucasian man-boys. He was instead a sixteen-year-old pop-culture addict who was watching his entire life spiral out of control due to stupid mistakes.

At least, that was what this day felt like. He was standing outside a warehouse – not just any warehouse, but that warehouse – with his father, his best friend’s father, the BAU team, his psychiatrist, an FBI tactical squad, and a half-dozen of his father’s deputies. Along with this Menagerie of No, he had little information. He was never alone enough to talk to his dad or Agent McCall and he couldn’t very well phone or text the pack members. It someone saw him doing so, he was as good as caught.

It wasn’t fair, but then, that was the point wasn’t it? Gerard Argent had sought revenge and he had insured that the strongest assets poised against him were neutralized. The old bastard had designed this to torture Scott with his refusal to kill, but he had also designed this to keep Stiles neutralized and frustrated as well. No matter how twisted Grandpa Evil was, he knew his enemy.

The team was moving fast and Stiles could tell his father was becoming overwhelmed. His father was a great sheriff, but he wasn’t in the same league as the FBI. He wished he could go over there and tell him what he needed to know, but he had to pick his actions carefully. If he broke protocol, he’d be giving Gerard exactly what he wanted.

So, he stood there, arms crossed, waiting, while Crawford was handing out assignments to the team. There was no give and take now, there was just instructions. The director finished and started heading towards the warehouse.

Stiles hadn’t been given an assignment; even Price had been given an assignment. “Director?”

“Stilinski, you’re not coming in. You stay here with Graham and Lecter.” Stiles would have protested but the look on the man’s face very, very strongly indicated that this would be a bad idea.

Stiles nodded. It was all right. It was all right. It was all right. It was not goddamn all right and he was approximately thirty seconds from throwing his identification at Crawford and telling him to shove the BAU, the FBI, and this entire fucked up situation up his very intimidating ass.

Will got right in front of him. The special investigator was looking tired and drawn, but he was more concerned with Stiles right now. “You’re too close.”

Stiles nodded sharply once again. This was true in more ways the one. He wasn’t religious, but he believed in something and he offered a prayer to that something that Gerard was so far gone in his
It was a bad prayer. It was selfish. Stiles didn’t care, as long as the person he tried to kill wasn’t his dad.

“It must be frustrating,” observed Hannibal from a position slightly behind Stiles, “to know what to do and have the will to do it, and be prevented by something as insensately inflexible as protocol.”

“You’re damn right,” he muttered back to the psychiatrist.

Will shook his head, rubbing at his temple. “You haven’t told us the truth, Stiles, but I don’t have to know the truth to know that you aren’t thinking clearly when it comes to Gerard Argent. You’ve got too much invested.”

“That’s exactly the problem,” Stiles replied sharply. “I have far too much invested. I also know that when dealing with Gerard Argent, none of you understand what you are up against.”

“Then tell us.” Will gestured in an irritable way to indicate that sharing was the easiest solution.

“I can’t.” Stiles tried to keep himself under control. Thank God he wasn’t actually a werewolf. “I know one thing I can tell you – if you think you have Gerard Argent figured out, you’ve already lost. He knows how to turn the tables.”

As if the universe wanted to prove that once and for all, Stiles Stilinski was completely and unequivocally right, gunfire rang out. Ten shots, one after the other, as if someone had emptied a full clip.

Stiles swore, pulled his sidearm and ran toward the warehouse. Orders or no orders, he wasn’t going to let people die while he stood on the sidelines. He heard Will’s exasperated shout and the pounding of his footsteps behind him. A glance backward showed that Dr. Lecter was simply observing, eyes glittering with interest in the light from the street lamp.

Will finally to him to stop at the edge of the warehouse. “Stiles, you can’t just run in there. The teams are in contact with each other, but if there’s a firefight . . .”

“I know. Damn it, I know the rules for engagement.” He put his back against the wall. “But I also know this warehouse. I’ve got a place to check.” He knew they had boarded up the entrance he had made with the jeep, but it could be an entrance not covered.

Will followed with him. He had his gun drawn as well. Stiles felt guilty; he knew that Will was still a little touchy about guns since Garrett Jacob Hobbs and Eldon Stammets. Stiles also noted that Will was sweating heavily though the night air was cool. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah. Just a little hot.” Will was slurring his words and shook his head violently. “Better now.”

Faintly there were sounds of shouting inside. “Has no one texted you?” Stiles asked Will as they crept along. Will grunted a negative, and Stiles didn’t like that at all.

They were near the entrance that Stiles was thinking of when suddenly Will lurched forward and grabbed him by the shoulder. “Look up. Do you see that?”

Stiles glanced up, but unlike Will, he relaxed immediately. He had been so anxious with everything going on that seeing the familiar pair of red eyes glowing above him was comforting. Before he realized what he was doing, he called out to Scott.
Will rubbed at his eyes causing Stiles to realize that this wasn’t a good thing. It was a bad thing. A very bad thing. Before he could prevent it, Scott jumped down the side of the building. “What are you doing?”

“I … did it.” Scott stuttered. It was then that Stiles saw that Scott wasn’t all right. Scott’s eyes were unfocused, though they had stopped glowing, and he was shaking. Why the hell was he shaking? “I killed Gerard.” His voice was small; in his hands was a pistol; it was still smoking.

There are moments in your life when you realized you were utterly and completely wrong. Stiles had always thought that Scott had stood against killing because of his morality or because of his innate kindness. It was easy to come to that conclusion because Scott was moral and he was innately kind.

Now, with Scott standing before him, Stiles realized that it was more than that. At some point in the past, it had become part of how Scott saw himself. Maybe it had happened when he refused Peter’s demand that he kill for his alpha. Maybe it had happened when he had denied Derek’s demand that he be allowed to kill for expedience, or Deucalion’s demand he kill for power, or Kate’s failed attempt to transform him into a monster that killed with no remorse. Whenever it had happened, the refusal kill had become part of who Scott was and now that it was gone – no matter how necessary the killing had been – something inside his friend had been broken.

Scott had power, but that didn’t mean he was strong enough to tear himself apart and put himself back together. Stiles realized that this is what would have happened to him if his father had died. Scott had destroyed himself because that is what Stiles had told him to do.

Before he could think of what to say, before he had even had time to process what his own realization meant, he ran out of time.

Will Graham pointed his sidearm at Scott. “Stay where you are! Put your hands up!”

“Uh, Will …” Stiles turned to the consultant reaching for something to say. “You don’t want to do that.”

“He just confessed, Stiles. He’s got a weapon in his hand.” Will looked dizzy, though he was managing to focus on Scott. “We have to place him under arrest.”

When Stiles had called Scott down, he had completely forgotten about Will. What the hell was wrong with him? But he knew what was wrong with him; he was afraid. He had been afraid that he wasn’t going to be smart enough to solve the problem before something exactly like this happened and he had reached out to the person who had always been there. “I’m not arresting my best friend.”

Stiles pushed down his panic. This was what he was good at – thinking on his feet. This wasn’t unsalvageable; Scott was a powerful Alpha. He could take Will’s memories of this whole encounter. Stiles knew that Scott hadn’t actually done more with that trick than read memoires, but it was the only solution that came to mind.

Except when he turned around, he knew the plan was pretty much scuttled in the harbor. Memory manipulation took concentration and care, and Scott was as far as confident as you could possibly get. He actually had his hands up even though there was nothing that Will Graham could do to someone like him. He was giving up; his eyes reflected a terrible mix of resignation and hopelessness. Stiles had seen that look before in a motel parking lot and on a hospital roof.

“No, no! You do not get to fucking do this!” Stiles shouted. “Not this time.”

“He saw me. It’s okay.” Scott said. He tossed the gun to one side where it clattered on the pavement.
It would be dangerous to do that, usually, but there were no bullets in it.

“You don’t get to pull this martyr shit again! God damn it!” Stiles was angry because he understood. Scott McCall was feeling guilty about something and so he was going to throw himself onto the nearest live grenade. Some things never changed. He holstered his gun to try to show the investigator that things were secure. “There’s got to be … Will, come on, you know this isn’t that simple!”

Will had been listening but his face was set in a firm line even as sweat beaded on his upper lip. “No, I don’t know. I guessed, but you kept your secrets. Stiles, what do you expect me to do?”

“He’s got to do his job, Stiles,” Scott said in that calm voice that made Stiles want to punch him. “You need to do yours.”

Stiles felt his own pulse rise and the desperation burst out in his voice. “You’re going to make me do it, aren’t you? Why can’t you run?”

“Some things you can’t run from, Stiles. I murdered someone.”

Stiles closed his eyes and tried to imagine how he could wake up tomorrow and look at himself in the mirror. He tried to imagine how he’d face his friends, his father, Melissa. He couldn’t. If he was lucky the world would end tonight. But for now, the world was still spinning.

He cuffed Scott and read him his rights.

#####

It was late. Lydia should be asleep by now, but she was waiting for Stiles’ call. It was past midnight in Virginia, but she knew it was a little past nine in California. Fear fluttered behind her shoulder, but she brushed it off. He could be hurt, but if he, or anyone she cared about, was dead or dying, she would know it.

She did know that Gerard Argent was dead. She had heard gunshots like they were in the room next to her, and she sensed their target. Was it cold that her first thought was ‘Good riddance to bad rubbish?’ She wouldn’t mourn him at all. To her, he had forfeited all rights to consideration when he had rejected his second chance. She was far more worried about the consequences his end might bring.

Lydia could wait without fretting; patience was actually one of her strengths. She had had aggressive and manipulative people love her throughout her life, and she had found that one of the best ways to deal with someone like that was to simply wait them out. If they really cared for you, they would come around.

She had just started a kettle for some tea when the phone rang. She hesitated when she touched, like she was in a horror movie about to open a door, but then put that away and answered.

“Well.” She started out as if everything was completely normal. “You certainly waited long enough to call me.”

“Lydia.” Stiles nearly whispered into the phone. “Gerard’s dead.”

“Obviously.” Stiles was acting very strangely, she thought.

“You …” He took a breath once again. “You don’t understand …”

This told her something was wrong. Stiles was never at a loss for words. “Start at the beginning.
What went wrong?” Stiles was breathing heavily on the other side of the phone. It wasn’t a panic attack, Lydia was sure, but he was very, very upset. She wished suddenly that being a banshee meant she could teleport.

“It was Scott …” Stiles took a deep breath. “He killed Gerard.”

“And? That’s what you wanted, wasn’t it?” She demanded. Immediately, she regretted it.

There was a choking noise on the other end of the phone and now it was Lydia’s turn for her pulse to skyrocket. “Scott’s okay, right?”

“We caught him.”

Lydia was not stupid; in fact, she was pretty much the antonym, but sometimes she wished she could be. She figured out the antecedents of those vague pronouns in about fifteen seconds. “Oh, god. They don’t know …”

“No, all our stupid little secrets are safe. Is that all you fucking care about?” Stiles snapped. Lydia let it wash over her. The only reason he yelled at her was because he couldn’t flog himself and hold a conversation with her at the same time.

“I’m sorry, Lyds. I’m sorry. I can’t …” He took another deep breath. “There’s nothing I can do.”

“Actually,” she said acerbically, because it was better than panicking, “you can stop feeling sorry for yourself and tell me what is going on there.” She had to shock Stiles out of whatever undertow of emotions was threatening to drown him.

“He was caught coming out of the crime scene by me and another FBI member with the weapon that will undoubtedly be tied to the ten bullet holes in Gerard.” Stiles took another breath. “Gerard had henchmen tip off the FBI and had signal jammers inside the warehouse. The pack couldn’t warn Scott that he was being surrounded. He almost …” Stiles broke off.

“Go on.” She had to get Stiles thinking practically.

“He almost got away, but I think he caught my scent and came to me. He was pretty torn up by it, Lydia, I should never have pushed him.” Stiles’ breath hitched up over the phone.

“Enough of that.” Now it was her turn to snap, though she had to force herself to do it. Stiles needed to stop crying and think of solutions. “Where is he now?”

“Holding. He’s been arrested by the FBI but he’s not been officially charged yet.” Stiles ground his teeth; she could hear it. “Lydia, there’s something you need to be ready for. Dr. Lecter saw me talking with Scott a couple of days ago. If Scott talks …”

“Scott would never give you up.”

“You didn’t see him, Lydia. He’s really shaken up, and the FBI is very good at what they do. If Scott talks, they might arrest me as an accessory.”

Lydia sighed. “Even drunk and half asleep, Scott would never give you up. You know that.”

“Maybe he should.”

Lydia rolled her eyes. She needed to be there, not completely across the country, but that couldn’t be helped. “Have you talked to the rest of the pack, yet?”
“What would I say to them? Oh, hey, by the way, I got your alpha sent to the hoosegow?”

Sarcasm was better than despair. “You and Scott did what you’ve always done. You protected them. This time, it didn’t work out as well as it could have. Do you think that anyone would possibly think you did it on purpose?” She meant the question as rhetorical. “If you’re worried about it, call Chris. He can break it to the others.”

“Okay. Okay, that sounds like a good idea.” Stiles was grabbing onto the idea like a lifeline.

“Of course, it is. I thought of it.” She exuded confidence. “Call me tomorrow. Try to get some sleep tonight.”

Stiles hung up after promising he would. Lydia stood there, considering what she had just learned in the dark of the kitchen. The kettle whistled and she turned it off.

Her first thought was uncharitable. It’s not my problem. She had her own life here on the East Coast with Stiles. What could she do about it anyway? It’s not like she was a lawyer or she had pull within the legal community. She had her own life to lead.

She dismissed that, because she knew what it was. Just because she didn’t ignore problems until they went away or internalize the consequences of actions she didn’t take, didn’t mean she didn’t have unhealthy coping mechanisms as well. Things couldn’t hurt her if she didn’t care about them.

But she did care, but just like Stiles, there wasn’t anything she could do.

#######

Will Graham watched the suspect through the glass of the booth. “I’d like to talk to him, Jack.”

Director Crawford was eyeing the deputy who was standing near the door. “Do you really think that necessary?” Will was actually relieved when he heard Jack say that. This meant Jack wasn’t too interested in uncovering the truth of what went on here, now that he knew Gerard Argent wasn’t going to be slaughtering families to prove a point.

“No. It’s not necessary. Call it curiosity.” Because Will Graham was curious. First, he wanted to understand what secrets Beacon Hills could possibly hold that would cause not only so much loyalty but so much slaughter. Second, he was still disturbed by his hallucination about the suspect.

Jack nodded. “I don’t think that the Sheriff will mind.”

“I don’t think he will either,” says the deputy. “As long as you don’t go alone.”

“I don’t think he’s a threat, Deputy …” Will began.

“Parrish, sir. It is just a precaution.” The deputy opened the door for him and let him into the interrogation room. Will noticed that Scott McCall wasn’t chained up, which was odd for a murder suspect.

“Scott. Special Investigator Graham would like to speak with you.”

Will studied the way the man barely lifted his head. “Do you mind if I sit down?”

McCall shook his head. “No. Please.” Parrish took his position in the corner of the room. From the attitude that radiated off him, Will would have assumed he was the prisoner. It was interesting. He felt no hostility from McCall, though at all.
“I was wanting to talk to you.” Will Graham began. “I know things may be difficult right now.”

“I’m not going to talk to you about what happened without a lawyer present.” Scott spoke quickly. He smiled bitterly as if making a joke. “My dad’s an agent. He’d get mad if I did it.”

“That’s fine. I won’t ask about tonight at all. I want to talk about what happened in high school. I know that something did. I’m a friend of Stiles’.”

Scott looked up an interested in that. “You are, aren’t you? Can you tell him something from me?”

“I can.”

“Tell him that he can’t blame himself. He didn’t make me do anything.” McCall said it with the most passion he had shown since he had been arrested. “But you should already know, that if Stiles wasn’t going to tell you about high school, I’m not going to tell you anything either.”

Will Graham put both hands on the table in a gesture requesting trust. “I just want what’s best for everyone.” It was really strange that McCall seemed more concerned for Stiles than himself. But that was telling in its own way.

“I’m sorry, but you aren’t going to get anything from me.” Scott shook his head firmly. “I will tell you one thing. If Stiles is your friend, then you’re very lucky. You should take good care of him.”
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Stiles has his second session with Dr. Lecter. Lydia and Stiles have a fight.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Good afternoon, Mieczyslaw,” Dr. Lecter said as he opened the door to his office. “Please come in.”

Stiles hesitated at the door to the office; it was different this time and not just because the therapy was taking place in Baltimore rather than Sacramento. The last time he had come for an appointment, he had been there to make sure that the psychiatrist wasn’t planning to blackmail him. But then Dr. Lecter had managed to save his ass by covering for him with the BAU, and Lydia’s investigations had only come up with nothing incriminating about Dr. Lecter. Last time, he was there because it was a tactically sound way to manage the situation. This time, he had to admit that he was hoping that he could find some help here, because he hadn't found a way to cope with recent events anywhere else.

The last few weeks had seen all of his normal coping mechanisms fail miserably. He had avoided the pack completely, and that had made things worse. They had avoided him just as much, for there had not been one phone call, e-mail, or text since the day he had arrested Scott. In the past, his withdrawals had met with expressions of concern, with pleading, with people tapping on his windows. Now, there was nothing. The silence and its accompanying mystery tore at him. Were they so angry with him that they had severed contact in retaliation? Were they thinking that he needed space to deal with everything? Or, and this was the worst outcome in his mind, did they just no longer care? Had he been gone so long and made his intention to leave Beacon Hills so clear that they just didn’t think of him as pack anymore?

Lydia had been completely unhelpful in trying to fathom what was going on with the rest of the pack, as they had been fighting. She had accused him of being selfish and insecure by trying to make this about him rather than about what had happened in California. He had answered that everything that had happened in California was about him and what he had done. He was sleeping – or rather not sleeping – on the couch.

If that was difficult, it didn’t even come close to the way that he and his father were furiously not communicating with each other. It was no secret that they had long ago raised talking around the problem to an art form. It kept their feelings safe, but it didn’t do much to help him move on. It also didn't help matters that he had carefully and consistently kept himself from being alone with his dad all the time he had been in California.

He wasn’t getting more than two to three hours of sleep a night. Again. He couldn’t focus during the day. Again. He might have been able to get away with these things in high school, but his co-workers had started to notice. He had been minimally helpful when dealing with Tobias Budge. ‘Minimally helpful’ didn’t cut it at the BAU.

All of this made him glad to be at this office, even though the idea of talking to a psychiatrist
unsettled him. “Wow. That was perfect. I’ve always had trouble pronouncing it, and it’s my name.”
Humor. It was best to start with humor.

“I was born in Lithuania. Polish was one of the first languages I learned after my mother tongue.”
Hannibal gently directed him to come inside the office. His confidence and professionalism soothed
Stiles the way little had for the last few weeks.

As usual, Stiles had to admit that the office was stunning in the way it was set up. One of these days
he would have to sneak Lydia in here; she’d simply die at the tastefulness of it all. “It looks like they
cleaned up the crime scene pretty quickly.”

“It helps to have friends in the FBI.” Lecter winked and gestured Stiles to take a seat in a pair of
chairs that faced each other. “I took a few days away from my practice to regain my equilibrium.”

“I’m glad you’re okay,” Stiles remarked as he sat down. He was being sincere; enough people had
been hurt in the last month.

“Thank you.” Lecter seemed pleased by the courtesy as he took the seat opposite Stiles. “However,
today is about you, and helping you regain your equilibrium. Your situation has obviously changed
since our last session.”

Stiles took a deep breath and let it out slowly, one hand picking at the sleeve of his other arm. “You
can say that again.”

“You must be relieved now that the threat of Gerard Argent is gone.” Hannibal leaned back in the
chair. Stiles wondered how the man could be so direct and so indirect at the same time.

“‘Relieved’ is not the word I would use for it,” Stiles remarked caustically. “I’d say more appropriate
words would be ‘numb’ or ‘exhausted.’ Sometimes, I’d even go as far as to use the word
‘devastated.’”

“Yet, a casual observer might think that you should be pleased by the resolution of the situation.
Your and your friends’ secrets are safe, as you predicted they would be if Gerard was killed. The
killings have stopped; no more innocent people will die. You haven’t damaged your career; in fact,
while they may still have questions about your experiences in high school, your colleagues now
understand that they can trust you.” Hannibal listed off the benefits rationally.

“Pleased? Trust? You make it sound like I did the right thing, doctor. You make it sound like I
should be happy.” Stiles was about as far from happy as he could be.

“Then how do you feel about the situation?”

“What do you think? No matter your thoughts on the utility of it, I feel tremendously guilty about
everything. I can’t sleep because I can’t stop thinking about it. I know you think I should be able to
control my own guilt, but I can’t.” Stiles remembered their first session very clearly.

“You feel guilty about the crimes that Gerard Argent committed, even though you took all the
necessary actions to stop him. Or do you feel guilty about his death?”

“Neither. I’m past that. I don’t feel guilty about what he did to get at me anymore, because I know he
won’t be hurting anyone else ever again.” Stiles admitted. “The world is a better place without that
particular cancer. The world is a brighter place without him.”

“Perhaps you could explain the source of this guilt.” Hannibal looked curious and not the slightest bit
judgmental.
“Isn’t it obvious? The person I consider my best friend in the whole world has been arrested for murder. I’m the man who arrested him for it. Why wouldn’t I feel guilty?”

“As much as I admire your empathy for your friend, Mieczyslaw, he killed Gerard. Not you.”

Stiles bit his lip and gripped the arms of the chair tightly. He had taken enough psychology coursework to know that therapy only worked if you let it work. If he hid things, if he spent too much effort trying to manage his therapist’s vision of him, the time spent in this chair would be wasted. It was, however, so against his own instincts not to hide and conceal, that he realized he was starting to sweat. *You’re a grown-ass adult, Stiles*, he told himself, *do what you have to do to get better.*

“He only killed Gerard because I convinced him that he had to do it. You caught the tail end of that conversation in the park; that’s why I am here.” Stiles swallowed. He was glad that Lecter seemed to care a great deal about confidentiality; he had just admitted to conspiracy.

“That is one way of looking at it. Another way of looking at it is that both you and your friend saw the necessity of that act. There is a difference between coercion and persuasion.”

“Then why is he the only one paying for it?” Stiles demanded and at that moment he realized that he was demanding the answer from himself.

“Mieczyslaw, you’re old enough to understand by now that justice is an illusion that humanity creates for itself. There is no balancing force in the universe that determines who wins and who loses; there is only us and what we choose to make fair. Would your friend be happier if you turned yourself in? In the end, would you?”

“No. Of course not. But there is more to it. There’s history that I won’t ignore. Who am I kidding? It seems like I can’t ignore it.”

Hannibal raised both eyebrows and waited for him to go on.

But Stiles couldn’t go on; he jumped up from the chair and did a circuit around the room. The doctor just let him do it. He tried to think of a way to tell the psychiatrist without telling him the whole truth and he couldn’t find a way. “It’s not just my story. It’s hard … It’s hard to talk about this …”

“One of the ways therapy benefits a patient is the requirement of expression. If I am to help you, I must understand what you are feeling. By forcing you to find a way to express those feelings in a way I can understand, it also helps you understand your own mind.”

“That’s kind of the opposite of how I’ve dealt with things in the past.” Stiles returned to his seat and sat down. “My habits are to deflect, to conceal, to ignore.”

“Even admitting that is a step in the right direction. Let us begin with Marcus Aurelius. First principles – what is the thing, in and of itself?”

Stiles looked down at the floor. “I love Scott. He’s more than just a friend. I’ve told him he’s my brother, and I meant it. I wouldn’t be what I am without him being there. If he hadn’t been there, I … I have no idea who I would be.”

“Have these feelings changed now that he is a killer?”

“He’s not a killer!” Stiles protested, automatically.

“According to what I have learned, he fired ten shots from a Glock 26 into Gerard Argent. That is its
maximum capacity; you don’t fire an entire gun into someone without having the desire to kill. When
he was apprehended, he was wearing a back holster. A concealed weapon indicates clear intent to
employ surprise; he cannot claim self-defense. You know this; you were the one who apprehended
him.”

“I know,” Stiles answered, helplessly.

“Part of the recovery offered by therapy is achieved by learning to accept things as they are. No
matter what he means to you, he did murder Gerard Argent. That makes him a killer.”

Stiles breathed out. “You can’t possibly imagine the sheer amount of irony contained within that
statement. Scott has always been opposed to killing. Always! We got into this whole mess with
Gerard Argent because someone wanted Scott to be his weapon against Gerard’s family, and Scott
refused.”

Hannibal just listened intently.

“I was always the one who wanted to kill people. I might have passed it off as half a joke, but the
other half was deadly serious. I didn’t … I didn’t understand how terrible, how powerful the act of
killing was. I’d sit there like the stupid little boy that I was, and I’d be afraid, and I’d want to not be
afraid, so I’d suggest that we kill people or let people die, like it was the easiest thing in the world.
Hell, once I even lied by omission to Scott so that other people would kill each other. Scott was the
one who wouldn’t let that happen.”

Hannibal had turned his head to the side. “So how many people have you killed, Mieczyslaw?”

Stiles tensed up but he could see that, knowing what the psychiatrist knew, it was a logical question.
He hated that it was a logical question.

“Well, that’s a simple question, doc, but it doesn’t have a simple answer. I guess it depends on who
you ask.”

“I dislike the term ‘doc.’” Hannibal observed drily. “And I am asking you.”

Stiles said quickly and without hesitation. He had thought about this a lot. “I’ve killed twenty-six
people.”

Stiles was surprised that Hannibal’s reaction was one of interest rather than revulsion. The
psychiatrist didn’t demand why he had done it or become concerned about his mental state. He
leaned forward in the chair and asked a surprising question. “And were I to ask this question of
others who know you?”

“Those who were involved – Scott, my father, my close friends – would say that I only killed one
person, and I killed that person in self-defense. Officially, I’ve never killed anyone.”

“You should consider this disconnect between the world’s vision of you and your vision of yourself
as significant. I suspect you are used to having a harsher view of your own nature than the people
around you. Are you unused to having to see that label applied to your friend? Could your disquiet
be the result of a change in your relationship with him?” Hannibal seemed satisfied with the way that
the conversation was going. Stiles was not; he had expressed the truth to someone who was
essentially a stranger.

“I always knew that Scott was better than me. People think that he was childish, because he refused
to condone killing even when it seemed necessary. They thought that he was somehow avoiding
tough decisions because he wouldn’t kill. Yet, if you actually paid attention to what went on, he
didn’t bury his head in the sand when he refused to kill; he always tried to find another way to resolve the situation. Somehow he made it work. If the results were not ideal, well, killing everything doesn’t work all the time either.” Stiles shook his head. “I leant toward killing not because I was smarter, but because I was afraid. I was afraid all the time, and he wasn’t. I guess I resented that Scott was better than me.”

“So, is it the sense of relief that makes you feel guilty?”

Stiles screwed up his face. “Relief? I’m sorry, I don’t follow.”

“Mieczyslaw, you’ve been employing the past tense: ‘was better.’ I’m wondering that after all this time, the fact that your friend Scott is no longer better than you fills you with a sense of relief.”

Stiles’ jaw dropped. “You think …”

“I am suggesting that if you feel guilty about something that you knew had to be done and that it had a consequence that you knew was a possibility, there must be another source for your guilt. I found your use of the past tense interesting and pointed out what it might mean.”

Stiles’ hands couldn’t stay still. “I can’t accept that.”

“Yes, you can, but, right now, you are upset. It’s not illogical that given the amount of devotion you have towards him that you might want to, subconsciously, become his equal. Loving one who you see as greater than you can be unfulfilling. It’s possible that you may have subconsciously desired for his transformation into a killer; it was your idea, after all.”

“Why would I do that?” Stiles mastered his desire to shout. “I know you are trying to help me work things through by suggesting … saying that I planned this is …” Stiles had to take another moment to compose himself. “Worst case scenario, Scott’s looking at first degree murder. That’s twenty-five years to life.”

“We are not talking about a rational motivation here, Mieczyslaw, but an irrational impulse.”

“So you are saying, I secretly wanted to get my best friend to commit murder because I was jealous of him having a stronger moral code than I do?” Stiles laughed out loud, but he could feel the tears welling up.

It was hysterical. It was terrifying. Because there was a part of him that had to acknowledge that he was jealous of Scott. He had only expressed it once before, in that confrontation in the rain, but he had always known that he was weaker when it came to doing the right thing. He was smart, and he was creative, and he could be viciously determined, but in the end, he didn’t have what it takes to be a really good person.

That had died with his mother. He had promised to be good, and it hadn’t stopped anything at all.

Hannibal Lecter was watching him from across the room. Stiles suddenly imagined himself splayed open on a table, vivisected, while the psychiatrist examined each would like he was cataloging them, interested but detached. There was no judgment in his eyes and yet no sympathy. This man would not walk away from Stiles but neither was he blinded by love for him. Hannibal Lecter could give him what he needed, no matter how badly his words stung.

Stiles rubbed at his eyes with the sleeve of his jacket. “What kind of monster would I have to be in order to do something like that?”

“I don’t know what kind of monster you are, Mieczyslaw,” Hannibal answered him with the smallest
hint of a smile. “You haven’t shown me yet.”

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Lydia sighed in relief when she saw that Stiles’ car was still in the parking lot of their apartment building. She wasn’t too late. If she had failed to get there in time because of traffic … Well, her rage would have been terrible to behold.

As she got out of the car, she thought about slashing his tires, but that would be extreme, even for her. There was a limit that she had set on her own behavior; she would never again chase after a man desperately. If he wanted to leave her, she was going to let him, but not until she got the chance to say her piece.

Lydia opened the door suddenly and watched with satisfaction as the color drained from Stiles’ face. His arms were full with the box that he had been carrying to the front door. He didn’t know what to do with it.

“Lydia,” Stiles swallowed. “What are you doing here?”

Lydia narrowed her eyes in irritation. “It looks like to me that what I’m doing here is proving that all men are idiots. Put the box down, Stiles, because you are going to look awfully stupid if we try to have this conversation with you holding something in your arms.”

“I …” He put the box down on the couch. “I was trying to do this when you were at work, because I wanted to avoid this conversation.”

“Of course you would, Stiles. Of course you’d try to disrespect me like this.” She held none of her fury back. She knew that it was a gamble, but she had calculated that only if she let everything go would she have any chance of stopping him. “I put a sensor on the closet with your suitcases. When you took them out, it sent my phone a message.”

“You bugged my suitcases?” Stiles asked incredulously.

“From the day you came back from California, you incredible moron.” She strode to the kitchen. “Are we going to do this sitting down or do you want to yell at each other standing up? Either way, I’m going to pour myself a drink. Want one?”

“I was hoping that there wouldn’t be yelling at all,” he complained. “I didn’t want to make this harder for both of us.”

“You see, you selfish git, that’s just like you. Did it ever occur to you that when the person I want to spend the rest of my life with tries to sneak out of my house in the middle of the afternoon that I might want to yell? That I want to make it hard?” She pitched her voice with vehement confidence, but her hands were shaking as she put two tumblers on the counter. The ice she took from the freezer was sharply cold on her hands; it felt good.

Stiles looked down at the ground and did not say anything for a few minutes. She poured two glasses full of bourbon. She had one in her hand when he walked slowly in the kitchen and stood near her. It was a distance that was intimate and yet sad; he wanted to touch her but refused to let himself.

“I have to go. Lydia, I … I don’t even want to tell you what I did. I swear I didn’t mean to do it, but I did it. You don’t deserve …” He began to try to explain.

“Oh, God!” She exclaimed. She picked up the other tumbler and shoved it at him. “Have a drink before I smack you.” She took a strong gulp of the whiskey herself.
“I am going to say this now,” she continued in a frustrated whisper, “and I will say it as many times as it takes until you get it through your thick skull. You may have loved me since the third grade, and I may have ignored you for years, but I see you now. I know your strengths, Stiles Stilinski, and I know your weaknesses. I know the depths to which you can go and I dream of the darkness that you carry around with you. You’re so arrogant to think that you’re smarter than me, that you think I don’t know who I chose when I chose you.”

Stiles hadn’t picked up the drink. “Lydia, I’m trying not to hurt you.” He sounded so sincere, but she knew what this was and she didn’t like it.

“Well, you’re *failing*. You know, I don’t care what you’ve done, and I don’t care how bad you feel about it. You’ve done this before, you know, putting your feelings first by telling yourself that the people you love won’t love you if they knew what you really were. The name Donovan ring any bells?” She felt a savage satisfaction as he flinched, but she had to make sure he would never do this again. “I am Lydia Martin. I am my own woman. You don’t get to tell me what I deserve. You don’t get to tell me how I need to be protected. And you certainly don’t get to tell me who I love. And, in case you weren’t paying attention, *I love you*.”

Stiles nearly staggered back at the fury of her assault. “What do you want me to do?” he snapped back.

“What I want is for you to trust me. You think I am so weak that I would turn from you? Really, Stiles? I am a banshee. I will scream the death of every single person I chose to love. Every single one, and I chose to love you. Nothing you can do will make me turn from you.” She reached out and placed her hand on the side of his face. “What I want is for you to stop being stupid, put your things away, and then talk to me.”

Lydia held her breath as Stiles studied her face with glistening eyes. The whole thing hung on this next moment and Lydia had shot her best bolt.

“Okay.” He touched her hand and smiled at her, sadly.

Relief flooded her chest so much that it was hard to take a breath. She took another drink and shook her head. “God, boys are so damn stupid.”

Chapter End Notes

This takes place after the Hannibal episode "Fromage."

I want to state once more that this is a feeble approximation of psychology, written for entertainment purposes. Please don’t take it as more than that.
Stiles believed he had the best timing in the world when it came to serendipitously discovering information that might be useful. Stiles also believed he had the worst timing in the world when it came to avoiding awkward social situations.

On one hand, his timing at that moment was great, for officially he was looking for Will Graham to let him know that the full test results of the seventeen bodies from Grafton had come in. That was only partially the truth, because he also really wanted to have a private conversation with the investigator. Ever since returning from California, Will had been very professional with each other, and Stiles wanted to know if he had scuttled his burgeoning friendship with Will. After all, he was finding friends in short supply.

On the other hand, his timing was phenomenally poor, for he had to stop in his tracks when he overheard the conversation between Will and Alana Bloom. They were alone and the tone of the voices made it clear that this was a private conversation. Stiles should not have even contemplated eavesdropping, but instead of just turning around and leaving, he froze. As he often reflected upon, there must be a special place in Hell for people like him.

Even though the conversation didn’t seem to be a pleasant one, Alana spoke in that way that Stiles had only heard her speak twice, but he liked it a lot. She was being firm and kind at the same time; it made you want to listen, even if it was bad news. Such as the news she was delivering to Will right now. “No. It’s because I think you are unstable. And until that changes I can only be your friend.”

Stiles nearly cowered in self-loathing. Was he really listening to these two people with whom he wanted to be friends talking about their relationship? He was; it was important.

“Thank you for being honest.” Will’s strained attempt at sincere acceptance concealed not one part of pain.

Though he could not see her, Stiles imagined Alana approaching Will. “Do you feel unstable?”

“Mm.”

Stiles tried to remain as still as possible. He knew that he’d probably hear Alana and Will leaving the room and he would certainly act like he had just come down the hallway. It turned out that Alana left
first; he could hear her heels on the ground. He waved to her when their eyes met.

“Seen Will anywhere?” Stiles asked innocently.

Alana smiled at him. “He’s in the classroom.”

“Yeah,” Will called, having heard the conversation. “I’m in the classroom.”

Stiles wished Alana farewell and headed into the room. He was used to the rare eruptions of Will’s gallows humor. If this wasn’t one of them, it certainly felt gallows-like, as Will looked as bad as Stiles imagined that conversation had made him feel.

Will turned away from him and bent over his desk; it was a defensive move designed to limit contact. “What’re you doing here, Stilinski? You’re not a trainee anymore. You never have to step foot back in this classroom if you don’t want to.”

Stiles grimaced when he heard the guarded hostility in Will’s voice. It was as he feared; Will was still convinced that Stiles was holding back important information about California. The unpleasant truth was that Stiles was holding back information.

“I came to talk to you.” Given all the lies, a little truth was a good lead.

“Well, you wouldn’t be the first to do that today.” Will reply was wearily sarcastic. Stiles fought the urge to high-five him. “I have a feeling that this conversation won’t go any better. What did you want to talk about?”

There were five seconds after the investigator asked the question during which Stiles considered leading with the information on the Grafton murders, but he decided that it would be dishonest to Will and himself. It would give the profiler an out, which would allow Will to avoid the conversation that Stiles didn’t want to have but needed to have. The mature thing to do would be to speak plainly. Hell, maybe he had grown up after all.

“Are we good?”

Will turned around with his bag in his hands and raised an eyebrow. “I’m assuming you don’t mean are we naturally oriented towards benevolence? I’m going to have say ‘no,’ but I am open to being convinced.”

Now, Stiles didn’t feel like high-fiving him. He was trying to have an important conversation; is this what everyone else felt like when he was on a roll with his own sarcasm? That his question didn’t matter and that he should drop it? That would be annoying.

“You’re angry with me about California?”

Will shook his head. “I don’t have a right to be angry. If I did, it would mean that I expected the expression of anger to change something. I can’t trust you enough to be angry. I can’t trust myself enough to be angry. Did you notice anything unusual at Lake Grafton?”

“I noticed that you didn’t say a word to me all day.” Stiles shrugged at the non sequitur. “I know crime scenes can be difficult for you, but … look, if you want to keep our relationship professional, I can back off.” He laughed bitterly. “I just made it sound like we’re dating.”

Will wasn’t laughing, but he was bitter. “Or you could make it sound like you’re my stalker. You insinuated yourself into my life without an invitation.”
“Hey!” Stiles didn’t know where this was coming from, but he didn’t have to take it. “You asked me to join the team.”

“I asked you to join the Behavioral Analysis Unit because I recognized you had unique insight into the behavior of murderers and criminals; it was superior to most of the trainees in my class. I didn’t realize that you had this insight because you were part of an ongoing criminal conspiracy.” Will rubbed at his face in slight distress. “And no matter why I asked you to be added to the team, it wasn’t an invitation to push your way into my life. Why do you think I wanted a friend?”

“Because I thought you needed one,” Stiles replied truthfully but with a little more volume than he should have. This had been a terrible idea, and he should have realized it before he started. “Because I think that I’ve seen it enough times in my life when someone’s isolating themselves. I guess that’s also insight.”

They stared at each other for like five minutes. Then Stiles laughed again, but this time it was not so bitter. “We’re having a fight. I guess we are friends.”

“Or two people whose lives are collapsing around them,” Will muttered. “I need a drink.”

Stiles volunteered to drive them to the nearest bar. It was in the middle of the afternoon. Things were still tense, but they weren’t completely broken. This was how you repaired things as adult male stereotypes; you went to a bar and drank your problems away. Neither of them were actually going to get drunk, but the atmosphere was conducive to talking.

They settled into a back table where they could be unobserved and unbothered. Will started first and bluntly. “I’m hallucinating and losing time.”

Stiles almost made a joke of having been in the club and having t-shirts made, but it would have raised unfortunate questions and wasn’t particularly funny anyway. “How bad?”

“I first noticed it in California. Your friend’s eyes were glowing when we caught him,” Will admitted. “You didn’t seem to notice it at all.”

Stiles took a very, very long sip of beer.

“Then I started audial hallucinations – I thought there was an animal trapped in my chimney. I kept hearing wounded dogs.” Will sighed. “And … well, I don’t remember leaving Grafton. One minute I was on the beach at Lake Tygart, and then I was in Hannibal’s office.”

Stiles whistled but couldn’t hold back the humor. “Wow. Remind me to stay off the freeways.” He brought his beer bottle in contact with Will’s drink as a toast. “I don’t want to be that guy, but have you talked to a doctor?”

Will nodded. “Hannibal’s helping me, but …”

“You haven’t told anyone else about this?” Stiles guessed and then raised his hands. “I am the last one to complain about that. In fact, I’m kind of flattered that you told me.”

Will gave a wry smile. “I’m hoping a show of trust will engender one in kind. I’ll show you mine if you’ll show me yours.”

Stiles looked down at his beer. “I thought you couldn’t trust me. It’s probably the smartest thing you’d done.”

“If I really didn’t trust you, Stiles, we wouldn’t be talking. I know now that my initial judgment of
you was correct. You have insight that will be useful. You are also, ironically, one of the least judgmental people I know.”

“I’ve fooled you,” Stiles crowed. “I’m very judgmental. I’m just very good at being judgmental. I know there’s a difference between being odd and being weak. I was odd in high school, but I wasn’t weak. I don’t really understand how you do what you do, but I don’t need to. I know what you do with it, and that’s enough for me.”

Will chuckled. “Stiles, I just told you that I drove for three-and-a-half hours without knowing what I’m doing.”

Stiles finished off his beer. “Ehn. I’ve seen worse.”

“I bet you have.” Will laughs. “There are things you don’t want to tell me, but could you tell me why you don’t want to tell me?”

“Why? Will, don’t you understand that I may have severed every single tie with my home town? Arresting Scott …” Stiles contemplates another beer. “I told you I was odd in high school. I had acquaintances – people who knew my name. But I had one friend. One. And it was Scott. We were as close as brothers.”

Will just listened.

“And I did make more friends. I did. But they all met me through Scott. He was … he is our leader. He cared for us; we circled around him like planets around the sun.” Stiles got up immediately and stalked to the bar. He had to take a moment.

Stiles had half the beer gone before he sat down again. “When I was a senior, one of my greatest fears was that he wouldn’t need me anymore. That we would just grow apart.”

“Stiles, you didn’t shoot Gerard Argent.”

Stiles saluted him over the bottle. “You’d think that wouldn’t you. There’s no evidence of conspiracy, is there?”

Will looks at him and finishes his drink. “Are you confessing?”

“Me? Oh, hell no.” Stiles laughed. “I’d never confess. Someone who knew where to look and knew what to ask might possibly suggest that I as good put the gun in his hand and aimed it at Gerard for him. Words and words and words.”

Will frowned.

“There are things more important than the law, Will. There’s life. There’s nothing I wouldn’t do for Scott and for our friends. Nothing.”

“Even arrest him?”

“Yes. Doesn’t that sound unbalanced?” Stiles felt that old familiar sickness. “It seems we have both have reasons to be grateful Hannibal Lecter is in our lives.”

Will nodded but he was studying Stiles uncomfortably. “It won’t work you know, Stiles.”

“What won’t work?”

“I’m not a suitable replacement.”
Stiles stared dumbfounded; for all his quick wits, it took more time than he thought to figure out what he meant. He would like to protest that he wasn’t doing it, but he could see, given what he had just confessed, that he might be tempted to.

“No.” Stiles admitted. “But I didn’t know if I could go on without one. I still don’t.”

Will finished his drink. “You’re probably going to have to find out.”

“Will, you want to know why I can’t tell you anything.” Stiles squared his shoulders and looked him right in the eye. “I’ll tell you one thing, and you’ll understand why I can't say anymore.”

Will looked dubious but nodded acceptance.

“In California, you weren’t hallucinating.”

####

Twelve days. Not even two weeks and Scott thought he had memorized every single tile in the ceiling in his cell.

This wasn’t even a real prison. It was the county jail. He didn’t know when he got sent to a real prison if it would be better or worse. The only experience he had with prison life was how it was represented on television and the movies, and he was pretty sure that wasn’t going to be very reliable.

Scott returned to counting the ceiling tiles. He could get up off the cot and work on his school work. His mother had contacted the school and arranged for his class work to be given to him. If, by some miracle, he’d be acquitted, he’d only have to do his internship and take the final test. If he was convicted, there would be no more school for him; there wouldn’t be a point. He wouldn’t be granted a license.

Unbidden, the image appeared before him of getting out of prison when he was in his late forties – just a little older than Mr. Argent was now. He imagined himself looking like his Dad; it settled like lead in the pit of his stomach. He could be in prison for longer than he had been alive.

The cell opened up to reveal one of the guards. “McCall,” Officer Pembry said. “Your lawyer’s here.”

The county jail had rooms where inmates could consult with their attorneys that were private. He wished they could use those for the visits with his family and his pack, so he could actually talk to them. They were only able to visit him on Sundays for forty-five minutes. All of the pack came – all of them but Stiles and Lydia, he reminded himself – but with his mother and Deaton the visits were like five minutes for each of them.

He almost wished they wouldn’t come next week. The visits hadn’t cheered him up; they had made him tired.

By reflex, he tugs at the jumpsuit he’s wearing to smooth it out and runs fingers through his hair. He knows it must look terrible.

“Hello, Scott.”

The scent, the voice, the sight hit him all at once. People have told him that he has really good control for a bitten werewolf, and maybe for the first time in his life he agreed with them. “What the hell are you doing here?”
Peter Hale smiled his patented, sly and most unwelcome ain’t-I-a-stinker smile and said with mock offense. “Now, Scott, respect for your elders may have changed since I was a young man, but is that any way to talk to your lawyer?”

“You’re my … lawyer?”

“Are you getting enough sleep, Scott? I know that you’ve never been exactly the quickest puppy on the uptake, but I just said that.” Peter turned to the guard. “Thank you for bringing him to me, Officer Pembry. I’ll let you know when I’m ready.”

Scott stood in the room looking down at where Peter was sitting. Peter looked exactly as you would expect your lawyer to look, down to the leather briefcase with brass latches. The guard left, leaving him alone.

“Are you going to sit down Scott? We actually have quite a bit to go over.”

“Where’s my real lawyer?” Scott shook his head. “What are you actually doing here?”

Peter put the briefcase on the table. “I am a real lawyer. I’ve always been a lawyer, though I admit it has been a few years since I practiced. I am licensed by the bar of the State of California. I can show you my diploma, if you don’t believe me.”

Scott scrunched up his face. He didn’t feel like repeating himself.

“Tell me, Scott, did you find your discussions with your court-appointed attorney particularly enlightening?”

“No.” Secrets and lies.

“I have worked in both civil and criminal law. I’ve always had a knack of getting people off for misbehavior.” Peter winked as he opened the case and started taking papers out. “There are very few attorneys who are both knowledgeable about our unique situation and willing to bend their ethics to properly represent people like us. Your step-father knows most of them in California, but all of them have been on retainer at one time or another for Gerard, so they have a conflict of interest. I think you’ll find that I’m your best option.”

“You?” Scott wanted to laugh. He wanted to punch Peter right in the face. He wanted to wake up. Instead, he sat down on the other side of the table. “Why would you want to help me?”

“Because you hate me? Because you’ve tried to kill me? A lot?”

“Why wouldn’t I want to help you?” Peter asked innocently.

“Because you hate me? Because you’ve tried to kill me? A lot?” Scott demanded.

Peter tilted his head to one side, making a show of thinking. “I’ve only tried to kill you twice. Yes. Twice. I don’t think that’s a lot, considering.” He shrugged. “And in my defense, I had very legitimate reasons for doing so. Now, I don’t.”

“You … don’t?”

“The first time I tried to kill you, you were interfering in my righteous vengeance against Kate Argent for the destruction of my family.” Even after eight years, the words were delivered with sharp, unyielding certainly as if it was a pronouncement from the godhead. “The second time I tried to kill you, I was attempting to regain my family’s legacy from someone who I didn’t think deserved it.”
“And now.” Scott growled. “And now you think I somehow deserve it?"

“Of course!” Peter smirked. Then his face grew serious. Gone was the sassy Playtime Iago who twisted the knife with glee. This was the face of the man who had demanded Kate Argent’s apology and who had arranged a plot involving that woman, two countries, and ancient magic. This was the real Peter – the monster who came out of the fire. “You killed Gerard Argent, who had the blood of thousands of werewolves on his hands. Who had the blood of my family on his hands. You didn’t do it accidentally. You did it coldly and with great efficiency. You protected not only me but what is left of my family; you protected your pack; you protected all the packs. You did what was necessary; that’s all anyone could ever ask you to do; that’s all I asked Talia to do.”

“And then I freaked out and got caught by the FBI,” Scott finished.

Fun Undead Uncle Peter was back. “I said you were worthy, Scott, I didn’t say you were perfect.” He snorted and then shuffled through his papers. “So, that is why I am here. I can be the lawyer you need. After all, my greatest skill has always been manipulation.”

Scott wanted, for the first time in his life, not to see the good in people. He could spit in Peter’s face and talk about how he didn’t need the help of psychopathic monsters, but he couldn’t. Everything Peter had said matched up with everything Peter had done. The blunt truth was that someone with Peter’s skills was exactly what he needed right now.

“Allow me to demonstrate. From the way you’ve been holding yourself, from the way you’ve been talking, it might seem to others that you’re not particularly upset that you gunned down a sixty-nine year old man. But I know different. I know that you ripped something out of yourself and you burned it on the floor of that warehouse, something that had made you, you. You didn’t become a True Alpha because of your incredible tactical acumen or your saccharine romantic inclinations. You became a True Alpha out of your intrinsic respect for the value of life, even ones that no one else would give a second thought to scraping off their shoe. Even Gerard Argents. Even mine.” Peter grinned. “Let me help you.”

“What do you get out of this?” Scott snorted. “What do you want?”

Peter chuckled. “As I’ve said before. I want what I’ve always wanted. Power.” He reached across the finger and tapped Scott on the nose before Scott could draw back. “Your reputation was already significant – the True Alpha of this century. But now? Now they know exactly how far you’ll go to protect not just yourself, but all of them. Already word is spreading among the packs of what you did. They’ll be writing odes to you, soon.”

“I don’t care.”

“Of course, you don’t.” Peter rolled his eyes. “That’s what makes you a leader. People listen to leaders.”

Scott slammed the table. “That doesn’t answer my question.”

“Do you know what’s even more impressive than being the savior? Being the man who saves the savior. Especially when it could be argued that he created the savior.”

“No one will ever see you as a hero, Peter.”

“No. They won’t. But they’ll know that I’m the person you turned to when you were in trouble, won’t they? They’ll see what I do to get you out of here, and they’ll know what I’m capable of. It’s a cliché, but people think that the brightest lights cast the darkest shadow.”
Peter gestured with his hands as if to say ‘what can I do?’ He regained his intensity. ‘Being the darkest shadow. I can definitely work with that. Or tell me to leave.’

Scott sat back in his chair. The problem with Peter was when he started making sense. He didn’t have any options, so he stared at the hand that pulled the trigger. ‘I dreamed about you, you know? Right before I did it.’

Peter was taken aback. ‘I’m flattered?’

Scott kept staring at his hand. ‘You told me how happy you were.’ He looked up at the man who had transformed him. ‘You won after all, didn’t you?’

Peter’s smile was blinding in its intensity. ‘I guess I did, after all.’

Chapter End Notes

Just as I am not a psychiatrist, I am not a lawyer!
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal have a discussion in the car on the way to visit Abigail about Stiles. The Sheriff pays Scott a visit in prison. Lydia decides she wants to meet Will.

Chapter Notes

This occurs during the Hannibal episode "Trou Normand."

“How are you doing today, Will?” Hannibal said as Will slid into the passenger’s side seat. They were going to visit Abigail Hobbs and Hannibal had volunteered to drive. Hannibal frequently volunteered to drive. People didn’t keep their cars clean enough for his taste, and his sense of smell was sharp enough to make riding in other people’s vehicles unpleasant. It also gave him another reason to have his car detailed frequently.

“I’ve had better days. Hell, I’ve had better months.” Will admitted. His appearance bore the truth of those statements as well; while he had made an effort to look presentable for Abigail, Hannibal could see the fraying edges. He was certainly beginning to know where to look when it came to Will Graham.

“Good to know,” replied Hannibal. “Hopefully, thing will get better for you. Anything in particular troubling you today?”

“Freddie Lounds’ general existence,” Will grumbled menacingly. Neither of them had taken the news that Abigail Hobbs was planning to work on a book with the crime ‘journalist’ very well.

Hannibal chuckled. “I don’t think I’m yet capable of resolving that problem. Maybe at some point.” He pulled the car out; it would be too dangerous at this time to add Ms. Lounds to the larder.

“Anything else?”

Will stalled for a moment before answering, belying his reluctance. “I think that Stiles Stilinski might be delusional. Or he might think I’m delusional. Or I might be losing my ability to tell when someone is pulling the wool over my eyes.”

“Oh?” Hannibal listened intently. He was finding his work with Mieczyslaw Stilinski intriguing, though not as intriguing as his continued relationship with Will.

“I confronted him about all the loose ends that had been bothering me about the Beacon Hill case.” Will shifted in the seat uncomfortably. “Namely, his unwillingness to share the truth about his past.”

Hannibal nodded in answer, but he was storing up this information for further use. “He has a right to keep his own secrets. Ultimately, they did not hamper our attempts to stop the killer.”

“I know that. I know that.” Will shook his head. “I think I am just having a difficult time right now
telling my friends from my enemies. The ground beneath my feet feels like it’s giving way.”

“What makes you suspect him of being dangerous to you, as opposed to Jack or Abigail or even myself?”

“Jack I understand. I know what he wants. I know how far he’ll go to get it. I want the same thing he wants; I can handle it.” Will smiled softly. “I know you don’t agree.”

“I do have concerns.” That much was definitely true.

“Abigail did not come to me; I came to her.” Will looked at Hannibal with the unspoken ‘you’re the same way.’ “I became part of her life without any volition on her part.”

“Is it so hard for you to imagine, Will, that you might be pursued? That Agent Stilinski was looking for a friend and decided he wanted to be your friend?”

Will avoided answering that question. “We had a confrontation. I assume it was healthy. I told him about my recent problems.”

“About the hallucinations?”

“Yes. And the lost time. He seemed sympathetic and a lot less judgmental than I expected, which I appreciated. But then he tried to reassure me,” Will stretched out the word until it had four syllables rather than three, “by explaining to me that my hallucination in California was not actually a hallucination.”

Hannibal felt one of his eyebrows move up an inch. He kept driving. “This was about the eyes of the murder suspect glowing?”

“Yes. Apparently,” Will’s voice cracked with a desperate irony. “Scott McCall is a werewolf. He said that with a straight face. He believes it.”

Hannibal glanced over at Will with only a little surprise. “Are you sure he wasn’t employing humor?”

“This wasn’t sarcasm; the situation wasn’t tense. In fact, it was pretty relaxed. He believes it. He explained that this was just the beginning of what I didn’t know, and it was the reason he couldn’t share things about Gerard Argent.”

Hannibal remained silent for a few minutes as the car hummed along, adding this new information to his calculations. Finally, he broke the silence. “Will, what do you intend to do with this information?”

Will didn’t answer.

Hannibal tapped his finger slightly on the steering wheel. “In light of this revelation, Will, I think that you might benefit from some reassessment. What is your evaluation of Mieczyslaw Stilinski as an FBI agent?”

Will shrugged as if he didn’t mind. “Stiles is a natural talent. I’ve seen him work crime scenes in a tertiary role and he has an innate sense of how things fit together. He also has significantly more experience for an agent his age, which I’m sure he would have preferred to do without.”

Will glanced out the window as if he was trying to picture Stiles in the reflection of the moving foliage. “His talent and experience are complemented by lack of ennui and a general absence of
careerism that more senior agents with similar skills possess. He’s not perfect; he’s overconfident and overly emotional, but neither of those have interfered in any investigation, save our investigation of him.”

“I agree. He’s a fine agent, yet if you take your concerns to Jack, it may spell the end of his career.” Hannibal observed. Will wouldn’t want to do that, Hannibal thought, and the young man was far too entertaining for him as well. “How would you describe him on a personal level?”

“He manages his emotional insecurity by focusing on individuals. He masks social anxiety by employing humor and sarcasm. Neither of these habits are pathological or even remarkable.”

“In other words, he’s a talented young man with a few quirks of personality.” Hannibal summarized.

“Yes.” Will said slowly. “I don’t even mind him trying to force his friendship on me. It’s my resistance to being sociable that makes it uncomfortable.”

“You have received glimpses of the trauma he has endured as an adolescent. I can tell you that you haven’t even seen the whole picture yet. However, you have just described someone whom, on the surface, seems pretty well adjusted.”

“Except for the part where he believes that werewolves are real.”

“Agent Stilinski passed every psychological test the District of Columbia’s Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation uses to determine the mental health of its candidates.”

“Do I want to know how you got access to his records, Hannibal? And are you suggesting that his belief in werewolves is a coping mechanism?”

“The human mind can be fragile but it can also be quite resilient. One of its primary tools is the imagination. Mieczyslaw might have used his own imagination to turn something unendurable into something that his conscious mind can process.” Hannibal argued gently. “Not all humanity heals the wounds of their lives in the same manner.”

“That’s a pretty unorthodox way of healing.” Will quipped. “It would certainly help if I knew more about what happened to him.”

“That I cannot divulge.” Hannibal would not divulge it even if he could; he smelled metaphorical blood in the water. “Have you given any thought about how your own gifts might appear to the uninitiated?”

Will startled. “You know that I have.” Hannibal had witnessed Will’s reluctance to answer the curious about his talent.

“Agent Stilinski is by all accounts well-adjusted and a useful member of society. As are you, even if on the outside your behavior could be considered … abnormal.”

“You’re saying that I should be fine with him believing his best friend is a mythological creature because it seems to help him be a better person? In other words, whatever gets the job done?” Will sounded disbelieving.

“Precisely.” Hannibal responded with slightly more excitement than he might have wanted to express. He wanted Will to cast aside traditional concepts of ‘sanity.’ “I can assure you that his beliefs do not make him the weirdest person you have encountered, but he is among the benevolent.”

Will sighed. “I suppose you’re right.”
“I frequently am.”

Scott broke into a wide smile when he saw Noah Stilinski come through the door, even in a situation like this. Even in a place like this drab, concrete-infused meeting room. One of thing things he had quickly learned behind bar was the simple joy of a different view. Everything in a prison looked the same. Every room had the same feel. Every light switch was the same color and located in the same place. Every chair smelled of the same cleaner and had the same beige unexciting color.

Seeing this face, even though he had seen it thousands of times before, brightened Scott’s heart. At first, he had found visitors had been wearying. Now they were jewels of time. He was glad to see the Sheriff, even if he really didn’t want to have the conversation he could foretell was coming.

“How are you, Scott?” The question was perfunctory, heavy on the tongue. It was something said because it was something you had to say.

“I’m okay.” The answer was a lie. Both of them knew it.

Minutes passed. Since Noah was the sheriff, this interview could last as long he wanted. There was no forty-five minute maximum visiting time. Noah sat in his uncomfortable beige chair eyes focused on a spot above Scott’s left shoulder. Scott, for his part, focused on the badge above the sheriff’s right breast. Neither wanted to enter the mine field first.

Finally, the sheriff took the first step, but it was less an opening foray and more a side-ways shuffle. If Noah was trying to get at the problem without crossing the lines, when they both knew that the lines had to be crossed.

“Peter Hale?” His face screwed up in disbelief. He had the same look on his face when he had confronted him about the de-aged Derek.

“I need a lawyer. One that knows about us, and one that doesn’t have ties to Gerard.” Scott parroted Peter’s words to him, because just because Peter said them didn’t mean they weren’t true. “That doesn’t leave many choices.”

“But Peter? How can you trust him?” The sheriff had been in law enforcement for a long time. He had seen a lot more of the worst people than Scott had, though Scott could argue that what he lacked in quantity he more than made up for in quality. It made sense that the sheriff wouldn’t be amenable to Peter’s role.

“I don’t trust him,” Scott replied. “Or, well, I do trust him in a way. I trust Peter to do what is best for Peter. He’s convinced me that he gets something out of helping me, something he wouldn’t get if I get sent away for life.” That has always been key to understanding Peter; he divided the world into those things that benefited him and those things that did not. What Scott had come to understand is that the things that benefited Peter didn’t always have to be selfish. For example, Peter saw family as a benefit. Always. Derek, Malia, Cora – they were his to protect, and he would rip you apart if you so much as looked at them. “Also, everything he suggests I run by Chris, just to be sure.”

The sheriff nodded in acceptance, but he wasn’t fully convinced. “I can’t complain about what I’ve seen from him so far, though usually I only talk to the defense attorneys on the stand.”

“Hopefully, you won’t have to talk to him at all then.” Scott had learned the hard way how to talk around things.

“What? You are going for a plea deal?” The sheriff seemed outraged by the idea.
“Shouldn’t I? I’m guilty.” And there it was. “It’ll save everyone the cost of a trial.”

“Guilty?” Noah Stilinski had never yelled at him like this. Yes, he’d been exasperated before, but he’d never been … so disappointed. “Guilty of what?”

“I killed him,” Scott was angry right back. He wasn’t sixteen anymore. He wasn’t going to be cowed by an adult’s anger. “You know that right? I killed him. I walked right up to him and shot him. There was no mind control, no case of mistaken identity, no shapeshifters, nothing. It was just me, making a decision.”

“We both know it’s not that simple, Scott.” The sheriff rubbed at his eyes. “I know why you did it. It’s been explained to me, and explained to me again, but you shouldn’t have done it.”

“Tell me why I shouldn’t have done it.” Scott heard the order as he spoke the words. He’d never done anything like that before.

“There had to be another way …”

“You know me. I’ve always been the person to look for that other way. That’s why I have what I have. That’s why I’ve always done what I’ve always done. This time there was no other way.” At that, Scott’s voice broke, because there had been another way.

“I know a lie when I hear one, son.”

“No, you don’t!” Scott swallowed once again over the angry exclamation. “It wasn’t a lie back when I made the call. We couldn’t capture him and keep him prisoner! We would have had to watch him for years. Decades! If the FBI found him or he escaped, it would be even worse. I didn’t know … I didn’t know when I made the decision to kill him that his cancer had returned. If I had known …”

The sheriff frowned tiredly. He pushed through to ask another question. “Why you? After all you’ve done to not be a killer.”

“That was the point. That’s what he was relying on.” Scott said helplessly. “It was something that wasn’t in his control; it was in mine. That’s how I beat him before. You beat Gerard by doing the unexpected.”

Frustrated, Scott tried to stand up before he realized he was chained to the table. It was a precaution, even though both of them knew he could break these chains with little effort. “Who was I going to ask to do this instead of me? Chris? A member of my pack? You? There wasn’t a paralyzed Derek to use this time.” He wondered why he brought that old memory up after all this time.

The sheriff leaned back and covered his face with his hands. “You shouldn’t have had to do this by yourself.”

“The call was mine.” Scott answered. “I made the decision. I pay the consequences.”

The sheriff lowered his hands, his eyes narrowed. He was just as good a detective as his son. Better. Scott flinched under the glare; he had walked into the trap. “Was it?”

Scott didn’t answer. He couldn’t answer.

“What did Stiles say about it?” The sheriff leaned forward. “He’s the one who brought you the news, wasn’t he? That fancy FBI team figured out what Gerard was up to and how he was doing it, but not the why. Stiles knew the why, so he brought it to you.”
Scott didn’t answer again. He knew his silence was a kind of answer itself, but he hoped that Noah wouldn’t want to pull back that particular curtain.

“Are you to going to answer me, Scott?”

“I don’t know what you want me to say.” Scott lied. He knew that the sheriff wanted the truth.

“Let me make it easy for you. Did Stiles convince you that you had to kill Gerard Argent?” Noah held up a hand. “Before you answer me, I’m going to remind you that I’ve know you most of your life. I trust you. You trust me. That we’ve been able to trust each other has done a lot of good for a lot of people. And so right now, I am trusting you to tell me nothing but the truth.”

“Yes.” Scott breathed out. “Yes, he did. He was right though!”

“You just told me that you were wrong. Stiles pushed you into something else that you shouldn’t have done and here you are.”

“But I pulled the trigger. I did. Not him.”

“Yeah, you did.” The Sheriff stood up. “And that’s between you and the courts now. I don’t blame you; I probably would have done the same thing.”

“But you are going to blame Stiles.”

“Someone has to. This is the second time he’s pushed you to do something that pretty much ruined your life.” Noah held up a hand. “Last time we laughed it off, but I can’t this time. My son and I are going to have a talk we should have had a long time ago.”

#######

Lydia stirred to wakefulness in the middle of the night. Something had disturbed her, and she realized what it was. In the light of the moon from the window, she could see Stiles sitting up at the end of the bed, staring at the clock. His breathing was easy, so it wasn’t a nightmare. He still had them from time to time.

She sat up, reached out, and laid a soft hand on his back. “Are you okay?”

He stirred and looked back over his shoulder. “Yeah. Yeah, I couldn’t sleep.” He turned and lay back down on top of the covers. “Did I wake you?”

“Don’t worry about it. Want to tell me why?” She made her voice as gentle as possible. They had been fighting recently, but she didn’t want to fight and she was sure he didn’t either. She laid back down on the bed. She was prepared to go back to sleep if he didn’t want to talk about it, because when you were in a relationship with someone as private as Stiles could be, you didn’t force him to talk about what he didn’t want to talk about. If you did that, he’d start hiding things from you.

“Promise you won’t hit me?” His voice was half teasing and half pleading.

Lydia offered him a smile in the darkness. “Promise. Just for tonight.”

Stiles looked up at the ceiling. “I told Will Graham about werewolves. About Scott, specifically.”

Lydia blinked twice and counted back down from ten. “Wasn’t the whole point of what happened in California to make sure that the FBI did not find out about werewolves?” She kept her voice as neutral as she could.
Stiles winced. “It’s not the same. I didn’t tell him formally. I told him over drinks at a bar.”

Lydia had enough faith in him to let him continue.

“He needed it.”

“He needed it?” She asked quietly.

“Yeah, I know. Why do you think I can’t sleep? I don’t know why I did it. Well, I know why I did it. He’s been having a rough time of it recently.”

“Stiles …” She bit her tongue in the dark. She decided to be patient.

“He saw Scott’s eyes when we arrested him. He thought he was hallucinating, and I wanted to reassure him that everything he’s gone through hasn’t been a hallucination.” Stiles voice had a strong note of sympathy to it. “I know what it’s like to not be able to tell what’s real or what not. I mean, a few days ago, he drove from West Virginia back here without a memory of it. You know what that is like.”

“I do.” Lydia placed a kiss on his brow. “That was really kind of you.”

“But …”

Lydia opened her mouth to say something more, but she didn’t. Stiles went on, running one hand down her arm.

“But I shouldn’t have told him Scott’s secret is what you’re trying not to say. It wasn’t my secret to tell. I know that. I know … “ Stiles trailed off.

“How did he take it?” Lydia asked. It was important and yet the question could be asked without sounding harsh.

“I don’t think he believed me. I think he thought I was telling him to make him feel better, which I was, but I didn’t make it up. He did say something pretty silly though …” From Stiles’ tone, Lydia could tell that Stiles didn’t actually think it was silly.

She kissed him on the cheek and shifted closer to him in an effort to support him. “What did he say?”

“He said he wasn’t a suitable replacement!” Stiles chuckled. “He thinks I’m trying to replace Scott with him.”

Lydia heard the pain behind his words. She didn’t see it, but she had to make sure Stiles saw it. “Are you?”

“No!” He snorted. “I’m not. I’m not. It wouldn’t be the same. It couldn’t be.” Stiles rolled over to look at her. “Scott is still my best friend, no matter how far away he is. You think I’m avoiding what happened to him, don’t you?”

“I didn’t say that.” Lydia did though.

“I’m not. But … I’m not dwelling on it either. There’s nothing I can do about it, is there? I could obsess over it, right? But that’s not going to help anyone.”

Lydia didn’t give him the approval he sought. She thought that he could be doing more, but even in a relationship that was nearing the point of marriage, she wasn’t going to run his life. She’d push him if she needed to, but she respected who he was. “We could visit him.”
Stiles shuddered. “We just started work. We can’t take time off.” It was an excuse and she heard it in his voice. He wasn’t ready.

“Why don’t we do what we can? Let’s have Will over for dinner. I’d love to meet him.” Lydia suggested.

The idea hadn’t occurred to Stiles. He was still thinking like a student. “That’s … that’s a great idea! Thanks, Lyds. You’re the best.” He started to kiss her again and again, happy with the ability to do something.

Lydia pushed him off. “I am, but I still need my sleep. So do you.”
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Stiles has his next therapy session with Hannibal. Will goes over his recent cases.

Chapter Notes

This takes place during the Hannibal episode "Trou Normand." It contains some dialog from that episode.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Stiles sat fidgeting across from Hannibal in the psychiatrist’s office. Today, he was only slightly, mildly, completely nervous. Will Graham and Hannibal Lecter’s informal relationship meant that Will could have told Hannibal about their conversation. In fact, Stiles remonstrated to himself, Will should have told Hannibal about their conversation.

His nervousness was married with expectation; maybe he wanted the psychiatrist’s approval. Hannibal was calm and collected even when things were chaotic. He may not have been the most excitable person, but his being able to offer insight when your life is imploding around you was a good skill to have in a counselor.

Though, legally speaking, it was a bad thing, because if Hannibal thought that he was a danger to himself or others, he could call the police and wouldn’t that be awkward?

“Do you know what the term ‘Strawberry Moon’ indicates, Mieczyslaw?”

“Uh. It’s what people call the full moon in June. It’s supposed to be connected to the harvest of strawberries.” Stiles swallowed because that topic couldn’t be a coincidence.

“Exactly. If we approach the idea rigorously, the Strawberry Moon is an imaginary concept established by American folklore. The full moon would continue to happen even if strawberries did not exist. Strawberries would continue to be harvested under the full moon or not. In truth, these two events are not connected.” Hannibal lectured him. “It is humanity who has created the Strawberry Moon; it is our minds that create a connection beyond the mundane.”

Stiles frowned in confusion. “That sounds more like poetry than psychology.”

“You will be surprised how often those two arts coincide. Today we should talk about what you have chosen to give meaning to.”

Here it comes, thought Stiles. He should have pre-empted the discussion, but he couldn’t bring himself to do it. He had learned enough that Hannibal wouldn’t be dissuaded and Stiles had matured enough to know that playing games with your therapist doesn’t actually help you.

“I would like to talk about your mother.” Hannibal gave him a camouflaged grin. Stiles discovered
quickly that Hannibal loved puns and jokes, but he neither expected nor desired an immediate response. The psychiatrist liked humor that was so subtle that everyone else noticed but no one had the lack of decorum to call out.

Stiles stuttered with the unexpected topic. “That’s … that’s hard for me to talk about.”

“Which is absolutely why we should,” concluded Hannibal. “Before you begin, I would like to intercept any attempt by you to retreat into mundane detail. I have access to your mother’s medical records.” At Stiles’ surprise, he went on. “I’m your psychiatrist and a medical doctor. Your mother had a neurological disease that can be passed on genetically. All I had to do was ask.”

“What the hell should I talk about?” Stiles didn’t flail, though he felt like it.

“Give me your most vivid memory of her.”

Stiles studied the tops of his shoes instead. “Ha. You know it should be something wonderful. But it’s not. It’s that night. The last night.”

“The night she died.”

“You know, death to an eight-year-old isn’t real. It’s a tall tale, like Paul Bunyan or The Little Mermaid. It’s like the end of the Evil Queen in Snow White and the Seven Dwarves Disney movie. She falls, the rock falls, but we don’t see what actually happens.”

“It is not real until it becomes real.” Hannibal spoke with the certainty of knowing.

Stiles looked up, narrowing his eyes.

Hannibal always claimed to be good at reading people. “We’re here to talk about you, Mieczyslaw, not me.”

“I keep wondering why I can’t remember other things without making an effort. I mean, shouldn’t I remember Christmas morning? Shouldn’t I remember her walking me to school, pretending that she was afraid of me going to school when it was really me being the one who was afraid? Tending my scraped knees or cuts when I hurt myself with whatever hyperactive stupidity I got up to? For me, it’s the bad memories. Always them.”

“You do seem to remember the good times.”

“I remember them when I conjure them. I keep the good ones locked away in secret places so I can dig them out and look at them, like a miser with his rubies. The only memories that come to me unbidden are ones of her dying, of her forgetting who I am, of her wandering outside in the middle of the night, and thanks to a mnemonic device disguised as terribly written pulp fiction, her accusing me of trying to murder her.”

Stiles bit his tongue. He had promised himself no offhand mentions of the weird stuff of the past. He had to share with the psychiatrist, but he didn’t want to incriminate himself. Hannibal seemed not to have caught the mention of the novel.

“You understand the effects of her illness. I would wager that even back then, Mieczyslaw, you knew that she didn’t mean it.”

“Knowing is not the same as understanding,” Stiles replied. “And it certainly isn’t an antidote for feeling.”
“The human mind creates meaning when there wasn’t any before.” Hannibal had his theme for the day.

“Well, eight-year-old me certainly created a lot of meaning,” Stiles rejoined sarcastically. “The worse part about that memory was how empty she was. She’d stop recognizing people as people a week before. She’d stop talking the day before, not that it had been making sense. It had been an hour since she had screamed in fear. The fact that it was gentle was the worst part about the end. No good-byes. No tears. There wasn’t enough left for that. One breathe after another, until there wasn’t another.”

“Most people might imagine it as a pleasant way to die.” Hannibal said thoughtfully. What he was thinking about wasn’t implicit on his face.

“For her? Maybe. For eight-year-old me?” Stiles shook his head violently. “I didn’t know. I thought that no matter how badly she was gone, she could come back. It didn’t … it wouldn’t occur to me that we were already past the point of no return. I didn’t know. I didn’t understand. I had hope until I realized she wasn’t breathing anymore.”

Stiles whispered it. “It took everything. It took hope last.”

Hannibal studied him after that. The room was quiet. Stiles swore he could hear the ticking of a clock in the corner.

“Growing up after that must have been particularly challenging. To live without hope amongst your peers. You were isolated.”

“Nah. Not really. The universe, not being a total dick, supplied me with a surplus of hope. It just wasn’t mine. Kept me from the wrist-cutting set for a good long time.” Stiles bit at his thumb. “He’s in jail now.”

Hannibal’s face told Stiles they would be revisiting that topic.

“Anyway, I also had plans. Plans are a good substitute for hope when you can’t get the real thing. Now, few of my plans ever worked out anyway remotely close to how they were supposed to, but they kept me moving forward.”

“You don’t trust the world.” Hannibal observed. “Planning removes the necessity of that trust. It gives you control. You don’t have to rely on the whims of chance or the whims of others. You rise and fall on the strength of your own cleverness.”

“Are you saying that is a good thing or a bad thing?”

“Again, I’m not here to tell you how to live. I’m here to help you live with the choices you make. Why don’t you tell me how you felt when you were diagnosed with your mother’s illness?”

Stiles coughed and tried to give a stripped down version of the truth. “I didn’t actually have it. It was a false positive.”

“I know. However, there was a period of four days between the time the first diagnosis was given and the time when the error was corrected. Given your problems with your mother’s death, I’m interested in your thoughts at that time.”

No, you’re not, Stiles thought to himself. They hadn’t actually been his. “I … I was horrified, of course.”
Hannibal gave him a look that said pretty much that he didn’t believe him. The psychiatrist sat, patiently, waiting for Stiles to give him the truth.

“Would you believe I had other things to worry about?” Hopeful smile.

Hannibal hummed. “Let’s talk about Gavin Torrance.”

Stiles froze at the name. He knew it; he had memorized it. “Where did you hear that name?”

“As you well know, I sometimes work with the FBI on important cases. I heard it during the same briefing where I heard the names Annabeth Temple and Isaac Lahey.”

Stiles swallowed. “What have they to do with me?”

“Mieczyslaw, in our last meeting you confessed to killing twenty-six people. While I am not a brilliant detective, I am not inobservant. Twenty-four people died in the fifth grouping of the Beacon Hills murders, and the first of them happened the same day you were diagnosed with Frontotemporal Dementia.” Hannibal observed, “Gavin Torrance and Annabeth Temple were killed via sabotage-induced electrocution; Isaac Lahey was hospitalized.”

“Coincidence?” Stiles offered, feebly, panic rising in his throat.

“According to the unmodified police reports, you were missing for two days after this occurrence. Does the name Akifumi Katashi mean anything to you?”

“He was a member of the Japanese mafia that lived in Beacon County.” Stiles was desperate. He hadn’t been in the room for the debriefing, and he had forgotten that Hannibal had been in the room. Partial truths were the way to go.

“Do I need to continue down the list?” Hannibal was insistent. “Lying to your therapist is not only unhelpful but also rude.”

“Like you’ve never had patients lie to you before,” Stiles countered.

“I have. They did not remain my patients for long.” Hannibal seemed archly offended.

“Why don’t you just come out and ask what you want to ask. I’ll decide if I can evade the question successfully or not.” Brazen defiance could work.

Not against Hannibal, it seemed. The man forged ahead without consideration. “Who were the last two people you murdered?”

“Killed! Not murdered.”

“This isn’t a court of law, Mieczyslaw.” Again with the arch disapproval. “What are they to you?”

“Murders.” Stiles let the long sigh out and fisted his hand in his hair. He hadn’t thought about these things for a long time. He had kept the past abstract; it had helped to keep the feelings at bay. “Their names were Aiden and Donovan Donati.” He chuckled grimly. “If Aiden had a last name, I don’t know it.”

Hannibal remained quiet again, as if he were recalculating. Then, he leaned back. “Which monster was it this time?”

“You did talk to Will.”
“I did,” Hannibal nodded confirmation.

Stiles worked his jaw. He wasn’t sure what to say, but he knew that he had to sound things out and quickly. “What did he think about what I said?”

“He thought you were delusional.”

“ Thought?” There was a glimmer of light in this tunnel; Stiles followed it. “He doesn’t think that way now?”

“No. I convinced him that if you were truly delusional that you would have never have passed the psychological testing to get to where you are now.”

“So he thinks I’m lying to him?” For some reason, it would have been better that Will thought he was insane than he thought he was lying.

Hannibal shook his head. “You’d have to be not only very talented but also very experienced to deceive Will, even in his current state. I convinced him that it made it easier for you to deal with what you experienced by attributing it to monsters.”

“Huh. I meant it though.” Stiles mentally slapped himself. Why was he so eager to tell these people things he shouldn’t be telling them?

“No doubt you did. However, that’s not the question I asked.”

“Why do you want to know?”

“Your history and experiences are specific to you. You are still coming to see me, even though the initial danger has passed. I am no longer persuading you with my silence. You want to work on getting better.”

“Maybe I just want to not feel so damn guilty every time I look in the mirror.”

Hannibal chuckled. “That is what I meant by getting better. You still haven’t answer the question that I asked. What monster killed twenty-six people? What lurks beneath your skull? What stares out at you from the mirror when you let your guard down?”

Stiles felt sick with realization. He had only really willingly talked about this with one person: Malia in the throes of moon madness. Theo had tried to drag it out of him, but Theo hadn’t known shit. His father had been so grateful to have him, that he had focused on that – and destroying every bit of evidence that connected him to all those dead people. He hadn’t even talked about it with Scott, who was more interested in making sure that Stiles didn’t blame himself. Not after all he had done. Not even after the second trip to Mexico, when Scott could have understood more. He had bottled it up and locked it way. It had been one of the reasons that Theo could drive a wedge between him and Scott, after all. They had become so used to not talking.

He wanted to talk about it. Ever since Gerard’s bloody re-emergence, the lie that he had vanquished the past seemed more and more hollow. He had told Will about werewolves to make him feel better, but also because he wanted to tell someone else. Hannibal Lecter was a professional at listening. Maybe he could really put the past to rest.

“Nothing stares at me. The hole in the center of my head.”

Hannibal’s head tilted to one side. “An interesting turn of phrase. Tell me more.”
“It’s called a …” Stiles took a deep breath. “A Nogitsune.”

“Now,” Hannibal leaned forward in his chair. “We are getting somewhere.”

The house was quiet; there were no illusionary sounds of mysterious animals trapped in chimneys or wounded dogs whining in the night. His real dogs were nestled in piles on the floor, gathered around the space heater. Usually by this point in the evening, Will would have found his way to bed to face whatever dreams were waiting for him there. But not tonight. If sleep was going to come for him, it would have to catch him.

On the table next to him were the final reports on the Grafton murders. He just needed to review them and put his signature on the works. With Lawrence Wells’ confession, there was little need for haste. His testimony would not be required at any trial. Wells was probably going to plead guilty in return for the death penalty being taken off the table and a negotiation about in which prison he was going to spend the rest of his life. It left a sour taste in Will’s mouth.

On the pile on the other side of those reports was information about different case and a different problem. Nicholas Boyle’s murder was still unsolved. Well, unsolved by Jack. Will had figured it out earlier that evening that Abigail Hobbs had killed Nicholas Boyle in self-defense, and then during his confrontation with Hannibal, he had learned that the psychiatrist had helped her hide the body.

Will had consented to hide this from Jack and the FBI. Hannibal’s reasoning was sound; Jack was already half-convinced that Abigail had helped her father kill all those girls, and this would be just the information he needed to have her arrested and try to bulldozer her into admitting it. He was protecting the girl he had orphaned. It was the right thing to do, so why did he feel so conflicted about doing it?

Will thought about Stiles and their conflict over his keeping secrets. Hypocritically, he had been harsh on the young agent for keeping secrets about his past. Wasn’t this the same thing? Will was trying to protect a girl who was truly an innocent and locked in a nightmare, crafted partially by his hand. He wouldn’t tell Stiles about it, but he resolved to repair their strained relationship, werewolf stories or no werewolf stories.

In time, this will become the only story any of us cares to tell. Hannibal’s voice whispered through the darkened house, echoing in the corners.

Will still couldn’t bring himself to work on the Boyle case. Instead, he reached over to the table to an old, leather-bound book that Brian Zeller had sent over in connection to the California case. He had meant to look at it earlier, but there had been nights when it was difficult to focus on reading without getting a blinding headache. Tonight was different. Maybe the book would help him find sleep.

There was a sticky note on the cover of the book. Now we know where he got it from! Z.

The work was an early American imprint from New Orleans, while it had still been part of New France. The text had that comforting old typeface. This would help him get to sleep relatively quickly, which he really needed. He was sure it could get his mind off of Abigail.

The marked pages began with the story of Marie-Jeanne Valet and the Beast of Gévaudan. It read like a very old fantasy adventure. A terrible creature stalking the French countryside killing at will. Will remember watching a pretty entertaining movie about it when he was younger.

While something buzzed in the back of his mind throughout, he didn’t make the connection fully
until after the story of the Maid had been concluded. She had married and took the name Argent. Will grabbed his copy of the file on Gerard Argent, and there it was in the evidence list – the book came from his personal affects. He read with more interest as the stories of hunting werewolves were written through the book. There was another sticky note, helpfully put there by Zeller; Will couldn’t help chuckle. A librarian would string Zeller up for something like that on a book this old. He turned to that page and read aloud. “When the beast is taken, it is the safest measure to sever it in twain to insure its satanic healing will not bring it back to health.”

Will blinked. Gerard Argent thought he was the descendant of a famous werewolf hunter. He used their techniques. An impossible idea hit him so hard he almost spilled his tea. One of the dogs looked up at him. “That’s not possible, Winston. Werewolves don’t exist.”

The dog didn’t answer and laid its head back down.

Will continued reading on the history of the Argent family. The book itself didn’t go farther than the nineteenth century, but he couldn’t bring himself to put it down. There were two possibilities that spread themselves out before him as he read. The first one, the likely one, was that a deranged and dying patriarch of an ancient family had tried to recreate the mythological founding of his family and had dragged a small California town into his shared delusion. Hundreds of people might be dead because of it.

The other possibility was that werewolves were real.

Before Will could pursue that end any farther, his dogs stirred. There was someone on the porch. He could see their silhouette moving upon the curtains. The light from the full moon made the shadow look huge.

Will stumbled to his feet and went for his pistol that was lying on the table. The dogs didn’t bark. Usually, when a stranger came up to the porch, they went into a paroxysm of warning, telling the rest of the house that there was danger. Danger.

“Danger,” Will whispered. Feeling braver than he should, Will went to the front door and opened it, planning to confront the danger.

When he got onto the front porch, he saw the figure walking across the yard, away from the house. Will recognized the back of the head. “Stiles?”

Stiles, if it was Stiles, didn’t answer. The figure kept walking towards the woods.

Will started to follow him. The hair, the clothing, the gait, all matched the younger agent, but there would be no reason for him not to respond. Unless something was wrong.

“Stiles!” He called out once more. They were into the woods now, and every step he took kicked up dead leaves among the dead trees. The full moon hung low and fat in the sky. “Stiles! Answer me.”

There was a clearing up ahead. He could faintly see Stiles’ outline among the trees in a clearing up ahead. He gripped his pistol tighter, because there was someone else up there with him. His heart was beating in his throat, and Will wasn’t sure why. It was something primordial that struck at his core.

Will stumbled into the clearing, and Stiles and the other person turned to look at him. It was Scott McCall, who should be in jail right now. “Stiles, what are you doing?”

Stiles shakes his head with a regretful look on his face. McCall’s eyes, on the other hand, start to glow the same baleful red and he transforms quickly into some monstrous beast. As he does so, huge
wolves slide into the clearing from the trees, eyes reflecting the full moon hanging above.

“Dude,” offered Stiles with a twisted smile on his face. “I did try to warn you.”

The wolves howled as they pounced.

Will startled up from his chair, the book from Zeller falling to the ground with a thump. This time, all his dogs woke up and started barking until he got the called down.

Chapter End Notes

The movie that Will thinks about is the French "Brotherhood of the Wolf" from 2001.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Will has a difficult time at a murder scene once again, but this time he's not as happy for Stiles to intervene. Peter presents his plans for Scott's criminal proceedings. Stiles has another therapy session with Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during the Hannibal episode "Buffet Froid" and contains some dialogue from that chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Fear makes you rude, Will.” Director Crawford grumbled in disappointment and stalked away, leaving Will Graham standing in front of Beth LeBeau's house.

Stiles watched from inside the screen door. He had witnessed the whole exchange, because immediately after Will and Jack had left the upstairs bedroom, Stiles had excused himself and crept down the stairs to follow both the profiler and the director down. He waited until Will got up on the porch.

“You lost time again, didn’t you?” Stiles interrogated through the screen door. It didn’t take much for him to remember that particular flavor of terror.

“Maybe.” Will responded, surly. “Don’t worry, I’m fine.”

“Will, I know what’s that like. Believe me.” Stiles managed to block the doorway with the body, so Will couldn’t avoid talking to him. “Maybe you should give this one a pass. I don’t care how well you do it.”

“Were you eavesdropping?”

“Old habits die hard. You’re lucky I don’t have a key to your house yet.” Stiles reluctantly backed away from the door under Will’s glare to allow him in. “Come on. Give yourself a rest before you go back in there?”

“I know my own limits, Stiles.” Will paused as he went inside. “You sound like you’ve lost time before?”

“Yeah, so I know that you’re trying to power through it rather than completely freaking out right now. You should let yourself.” Stiles reasoned in the living room.

Will clearly had had enough. “You know, I didn’t accept Jack’s patronizing me; why do you think I should accept yours? He’s an expert, and I’m not a teenager. Thank you for offering your opinions on my mental health, Agent Stilinski. They’ve been noted.”
Stiles took a deep breath and centered himself. “I’m not patronizing you; I’m expressing concern. Have you talked to Hannibal about maybe seeing a neurologist?”

“Yes. He thinks I’m trying to look for a physical cause for a mental problem.” Will tilted his head to one side. “Have you talked to him about your fantastic menagerie?”

“Yes.” Stiles spread his mouth into a thin line. It was always better when they know, but you had to be sure about who ‘they’ were. “You might want to go to a neurologist anyway. Even Dr. Lecter isn’t immune to Maslow’s Hammer.”

“Thank you for the advice, Dr. Stilinski.” Will rounded on him. “You didn’t have many friends in high school, did you?”

Stiles flinched. “What does that have to do …?”

“One of the perks of being an adult is having autonomy. I’ve never seen you respect anyone’s autonomy. I’m guessing that you spent most of college learning to respect authority.”

Stiles gave a weak smile. “Well, that’s true.”

“Well, here’s another thing that’s true. When I tell you I don’t want to talk about something that is private, such as my mental health, I don’t’ want to talk about it.” The worst thing about this is that Will isn’t snarling. He’s not angry. He’s deadly serious. “If you can’t handle that, we will need to make our relationship more … professional.”

Stiles sighed, folding in on himself. “Sorry.”

Will didn’t say anything else; he just went back upstairs.

Stiles gripped onto a piece of furniture for support. He’d thought he’d gotten better at the friendship thing; at least he’d thought he’d gotten to the point where it didn’t hurt as much when things went wrong. It didn’t take long for stress to make him fall back into bad habits.

Stiles told himself he needed to concentrate on his work more when he was actually at work, rather than his personal life or the personal lives of his co-workers. It was a lie, but it made it sting less.

###

“Three years,” Peter announced.

“Three … years?” Scott swallowed on the other side of the table. It wasn’t that long a time; it was forever.

“You’ll be eligible for release in eighteen months with good behavior. And we both know that won’t be a problem for you, will it, Scott?” Peter was smug.

Scott stared down at his hands. “Three years.”

“It was the best I can do, and I guarantee you that it would be the best that anyone can do with a plea deal and far better than if we went to court. You confessed to an officer of the law, your prints were on the weapon, you were arrested at the scene of the crime, and you have motive out the ass. You’ll plead guilty to Voluntary Manslaughter, and you’ll get the minimum sentence. You knew that Gerard Argent was going to keep killing innocents to get at you, and you took steps to protect innocent people.”
Scott kept his gaze locked on the table in front of him. He supposed it couldn’t be that bad. He had killed, after all. Murdered. “What do I have to do?”

“Most of the work is already done. You’re welcome.” Peter slid a finger over the table in a lazy spiral. “But you will have to allocute before the judge. And that could present us with a problem.”

“A problem?” Scott lifted his head, barely. It was hard for him to focus right now.

“You’ll have to explain to a judge why you couldn’t go to the police, especially since you’re close to Beacon Hill’s sheriff. It has to be plausible without being verifiable.”

“What? What are you talking about?”

“According to your father, who is quite charming, by the way,” Peter chuckled nastily. “I’m no longer surprised where you got the motivation to tell me to fuck off so thoroughly way back when. You should have told me that you had daddy issues.” He cleared his throat. “According to your father and Sheriff Stilinski, Director Crawford is keeping an eye on the whole case. The Behavioral Analysis Unit thinks that a whole lot of hanky-panky has gone down in Beacon Hills. Which is also true.”

“And that’s your fault.” Scott tried to sound menacing, but he just sounded tired to his own ears.

“We can play the blame game all we want, but I think that most of it can go back to the man you blessedly put in the morgue. So let’s move on to the future, eh? The problem with the allocution is that the judge has to accept it and we have to make sure that if Director Crawford pokes around in it, and he will, he doesn’t find any holes.”

“I take it you have an idea,” Scott grumbled once again. God, Peter liked to talk even more than Stiles did. “So, why don’t you just get to it?”

“Gerard Argent coerced you into working for his drug and prostitution ring.” Peter could barely contain his glee.

“What. The. Fuck?”

“Oh, everyone who actually knows the truth will find it utterly ridiculous, but to those who don’t know, they’ll find it plausible.” Peter oozed merriment and innuendo. “Handsome young man like you making co-captain of the lacrosse team after being a loser schlub for your entire life? It must have been a dream come true. Unfortunately, all your new popularity caused you some difficulties in the academic sphere.”

“I had difficulties because some fucker turned me into a werewolf and wanted me to join him on his mass-murder spree!” Scott protested. He hated when people thought his grades dropped in sophomore year because he didn’t pay attention.

“No need to cry over spilt milk,” Peter admitted insincerely. “Desperate to keep your new status, you allowed your girlfriend’s grandfather to arrange for your involvement in either his drug trafficking ring or his prostitution ring. Both, if you are feeling particularly masochistic.”

“You’re doing this to slander the Argents!” Scott protested. This felt like a comic routine to him.

“Look, I didn’t force Gerard Argent to start cutting innocent people in half. I would have loved to, but I didn’t get the chance.” Peter snorted and the he grew serious. “Listen to me, Scott. This will work. It’s a plausible reason for you not to have gone to the authorities about Gerard, even though you recognized the threat made against you. If Gerard carried through on his threat, imagine the
shame on your family!"

“So, I’ll shame them now, instead!” Now Scott broke out of his lethargy. “You think I’m going to admit that in front of people?”

“I think you’ll do it to protect your pack and everyone else who has fallen under the watchful eye of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.” Peter stated calmly. “Even I understand that this is a motivation we share, even though we disagree about methods. The work that Sheriff Stilinski did to cover up the evidence of the supernatural was quality work, but it can be undone. This, what I’m asking you to do, will protect that work. It gives people who are curious about what happened here an answer that will dull that curiosity.”

“What if the judge asks me …?”

“This is an allocution, not testimony. No one’s going to cross examine you, and without your testimony there is no case to be made.”

Scott took a few deep breaths. “So, let me get this straight. You want me to tell the judge that I didn’t go to the police about Gerard because if he was arrested, he’d tell everyone what I did in high school.”

“Which is the truth!” Peter gestured for emphasis.

“But you want me to say that he used me to deal drugs or he used me in a prostitution ring …”

“Or both!”

Scott scowled at Peter. “You’re enjoying this way too much.”

“No one ever said I couldn’t take any enjoyment from my work.” Peter acknowledged. “But in all seriousness, it has to be something shameful enough to convince the judge that you felt you had no choice but to kill him, without you actually confessing to a crime in the allocution. It's very important that you don’t do that. It also explains why you don’t want to name other victims involved. “

Scott leaned back in his chair, prevented from going too far by the chains. “Why should I trust you?”

Peter did not take offense in the slightest. “Because I don’t get anything out of lying to you, and it places me in a very vulnerable situation.”

Scott hooded his eyes in disbelief.

“You’re taking a risk accepting me as your lawyer; I’m certainly taking a risk being your lawyer. You don’t think your pack won’t come after me if they feel like I’ve tossed you to the wolves?”

Peter winked. “You don’t think your father and step-father won’t have a competition to see which one of them can skin me alive first? What terrifying end would I face from Lydia or Stiles?”

Scott wished he had been paying more intention, that he had kept his chemo signals under better control.

“You don’t think your best friend and his lady love, who hates me with the heat of a million suns, wouldn’t turn me into a fur coat if I screwed you over?” Peter leaned forward and then his head tilted slowly and dramatically to the side. “You don’t, do you?”

“They have their own lives now,” Scott said quietly, hoping to appear nonchalant and failing miserably. “That’s more important to them than me.”
Scott expected Peter to reply with some witty insult or some skeevy tease, but he did not. In fact, Scott got hit unexpectedly with the scent of sadness. He looked up into Peter’s eyes.

“It seems we have something else in common, Scott.” Peter’s voice was quiet. “We both know what it feels like to be left behind by our pack.”

###

Dr. Hannibal Lecter stared at Stiles from the other chair in the office. “Thank you for your professional opinion on my treatment of Will Graham.”

Stiles grimaced and rubbed his hands together. “I didn’t mean it like that.”

Hannibal seemed mollified. “I am glad, because it certainly sounded like you were questioning my relationship with another patient. That is stepping over the line.”

“Okay, sorry. Sorry. I’m just worried about him.”

“I can assure you that Will Graham’s mental state is very important to me.” Hannibal glanced over to the desk. “However, our hour together should be focused on your mental state.”

“Heh.” Stiles nodded in agreement. “It should be. I’m falling back into old habits. You just witnessed one.”

Hannibal waited for a moment. “Go on.”

“I’ve always had trouble with boundaries, I guess. At least, that’s what people have told me.” Stiles couldn’t retreat into sarcasm. “It’s not wrong to want to protect people.”

“The urge to protect those that are important to you exist in all species. Society, however, has placed limits on how we can express those urges.” Hannibal explained with empathy. “Even though it emotionally may make no sense to us, there is a limit to what we can do while respecting others as human beings with their own needs and agendas.”

“That’s pretty much what Will said, only he was pissed off.”

“That is understandable. We are taught to equate the respect of boundaries with the respect of the individual. To step across that invisible line can be seen as an insult.”

Stiles rolled his eyes. “It always seems like these rules are written for other people.”

“Then you feel that you are an exception to the rules?”

“Maybe? I don’t know.” Stiles shrugged. “It is more like they were written by other people for other people, but I’m expected to obey them.”

Hannibal steepled his hands. “I find that interesting. You consider yourself not an appropriate subject for the rules of society, and yet have chosen your occupation to be enforcing those rules of behavior. Isn’t that a contradiction?”

Stiles wondered again at the quality of Dr. Lecter’s skills when it came to getting people to talk. He had never told anyone else this before – not Lydia, not Malia, not Scott, and especially not his dad about what he was about to say. He suspected they knew this about him, but he had never verbalized it before. “Not necessarily. I can … I do appreciate the goals of all those rules and customs and bullshit. I want the same thing. I want innocent people to be able to live and not be afraid. Why do
you think I wanted to be an agent?"

Stiles shook his head. “But I’ve also seen people, people including Gerard Argent, and people even worse than him. I’ve seen scientists experiment on children with no more concern than you would have swatting a fly. Those rules, those laws, those customs, don’t mean anything to them. And we’re stupid if we think we can stop them by following those rules; it’s like fighting with one arm tied behind your back.”

Hannibal thought about this. “So you believe you get to determine what is right and wrong in the context of any given situation. Others would describe this as arrogant.”

Stiles shrugged eloquently. “I don’t care how others describe it. I became an agent because enough people have told me I have a gift for detection. I became an agent because catching the bad guys is better than letting them do what they want.”

Hannibal got up and went to a cabinet. “Would you like a drink?”

“Uh.” Stiles answered, stunned by the non sequitur.

“Yes, it’s against psychiatric practice to drink during an interview, but I think we’ll just ignore that rule. We’re both adults here, aren’t we, Mieczyslaw? We know our emotional states.”

“Are you trying to prove a point?”

“No, I’m pouring myself a drink.” Hannibal answered drily. “Do you want one?”

Stiles eyed the psychiatrist’s back warily. He still thought this was some hidden point to it. “Sure.”

Hannibal returned with two snifters and handed one to Stiles. “1920 Grand Marnier Cordon Rouge.” He sat back down in the seat and took it one hand. “I hope you enjoy it.”

Stiles wasn’t much of a drinker. He drank beer from time to time and he drank whatever Lydia put in front of him when they were dining in high society. He relied on her to decide what was best to drink. It was important to her, so it was important to him, but it was not important enough to him to learn to do it himself.

To his relief, he didn’t cough when he drank it. This particular drink would be an acquired taste for him, though he could feel the drink spreading through his body. It soothed him a little.

“Thanks,” Stiles said. “I know I sounded like a vigilante when I talked like that. I made it sound more intense than I should have.”

“Do you mean that? I want you to relax, because I am about to ask you a few questions that made you rather agitated the last time I broached this topic.” Hannibal answered.

“Shoot.”

“At our first appointment, we discussed your relationship with your friend Scott. You grew agitated when I suggested that you might have been relieved that he could no longer claim moral superiority over you.”

Stiles frowned at the glass. “I got pissed off when you suggested that I might have planned it that way.”

“I’d like to revisit that, considering how important his situation seemed to you. Was he a believer in
the rules?"

“He believes in principles. I know that his life had been uprooted enough that he couldn’t believe that the law would protect him.” Stiles flexed his hands. “But he protects others, and he believed that killing was wrong. He believed that everyone, even our enemies, all had a right to their own lives. Sounds like a hard sell, doesn’t it? But you haven’t met him. He sold it to everyone. And I …”

“You couldn’t live up to his expectations.”

Stiles swallowed. “That doesn’t mean that I wanted him to fail like that.”

Hannibal took a sip of his Grand Marnier. “Tell me have you been going through any other stress with your friend?”

“He wanted me to come back to California. He was disappointed that Lydia and I were staying in D.C. But the BAU is such a big deal. It’s the biggest deal.” Stiles chuckled. “But I don’t have to tell you that, do I?”

“No, you don’t. Did he resent that you were thinking of staying? Did you have an argument?”

Stiles thought back to the conversation about Christmas. “Yes, we did. You have to understand, I knew that he’d have a problem with it. You might not understand, but it would be against every instinct he had to be okay with us not going home. To be truthful, I had avoided talking to him about it because I knew that he was going to have a problem with it. And, just between us, I’d have been hurt if he didn’t have a problem with it. We were close. No, we are close.”

Stiles took another sip of the Grand Marnier. It tasted strange, but then he’d never had it before. “At the beginning of senior year, I experienced serious anxiety about us drifting apart. And now we are, but it’s because of me that we are. Funny how that works out.”

“You must be grateful for the change in the situation. You no longer have to confront his disappointment or your own anxiety.” Hannibal observed.

“Well, yeah, all it took was …” Stiles stopped. “I walked right into that, didn’t I?”

“Our minds can find solutions to problems subconsciously, Mieczyslaw.” Hannibal proposed kindly. “You were in a situation where your actions had placed stress on something that you valued, so you took action to redirect that stress. I know you didn’t plan on him getting caught.”

Stiles stared at his drink in shock at the ramifications of what Hannibal was implying. He wasn’t upset though; he felt relaxed. He hadn’t had enough Grand Marnier to get drunk. “Maybe I shouldn’t have any more of this. I feel strange.” He put the glass to the side.

“Don’t avoid what you are feeling; the passions that lurk under your skin don’t weaken if you refuse to engage them.” Hannibal admonished.

“Let’s say you are right. Let’s say that I took the opportunity of Gerard Argent’s rampage to lower Scott to my level and distract him from my leaving the pack.” Stiles coughed for a bit. He hadn’t meant to say that. “What type of person would do that to their best friend?”

“Someone who doesn’t follow the rules.” Hannibal’s face loomed before him. “Someone who seeks to alleviate the psychic stress of a fraying friendship without destroying that friendship. Someone who desires control. You have control now, don’t you? You have everything you want.”

Stiles felt stricken and not a little dizzy. “But that would be completely at Scott’s expense.”
“We’ve already established that you had no intention of getting your friend caught. You are only responsible for the consequences you envision.” Hannibal stood up and picked up Stiles’ brandy glass. He went to the window and opened to dump the contents outside. “After our last appointment, I took the liberty of reading up on nogitsune. Interesting creatures. Possibly malicious and totally mischievous. Uninterested in right and wrong.”

Stiles gripped the arms of his chair. The room swam before him. “It’s gone. It’s been gone for years.”

“Such an event never leaves us completely, Mieczyslaw. It shapes us, no matter how much time passes or how much we wished it was not so. We are what we have done. You are what you have done. You’ll be much more at peace once you understand that about yourself.”

Stiles blinked as the room continued to shimmer a bit. “Are you saying that …?”

“I’m saying that maybe it’s time to acknowledge who you are, rather than avoiding it.” Hannibal sat back down on the chair. “Let me help you do that.”

Chapter End Notes

Maslow’s Hammer comes from Abraham Maslow’s The Philosophy of Science: “I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail.”
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Lydia finally meets Dr. Lecter face-to-face. Drugged by Hannibal, Stiles has a disturbing dream. Stiles and Jimmy Price talk about the cost of the careers they've chosen.

Chapter Notes

This chapter takes place during "Buffet Froid."

Lydia checked her reflection in the window at the door of Dr. Lecter’s office before knocking once. Unsurprisingly, she wasn’t upset at having to leave work early. As had had been true most of the time she had spent at her new job, she had already completed the work that she had been required to do today and gotten a head start on tomorrow’s work before she left. It was basic, but necessary, work. Eventually, the managers of the think tank would trust her enough (or the internal politics would change enough) that she would be given a real challenge.

When the door opened, she laid eyes on Dr. Hannibal Lecter in the flesh for the first time. She had seen plenty of pictures when Stiles had asked her to investigate him, but the pictures did not do him justice. He looked the same, but there was a magnetism that pictures could not quiet convey. He must have noticed her pause.

“Dr. Martin?” He asked in a way that made her think that he knew very well who she was, but he was being polite to confirm it. It was old-world politesse.

“Yes. You must be Dr. Lecter. Stiles has told me a lot about you.” She offered him one of her best smiles in greeting. It faltered only for a moment; something tickled the back of Lydia’s mind, but she wasn’t quite sure what it was.

“He has spoken about you as well, but I think he may have undersold your beauty. I must apologize for drawing you away from work.”

“I have to apologize for Stiles. I can’t believe he got drunk at his appointment.” She tried to make her voice sound lightly scolding, but she ended up sounding concerned.

“I wouldn’t describe him as drunk. I poured him a glass of liqueur because I wanted him to calm, and some patients balk at the use of drugs during a session. I didn’t expect such a strong reaction,” the psychiatrist admitted. “You’ll have to let me make it up to you.”

“Oh, there’s no need.” For some strange reason, Lydia felt she was scrambling to keep up.

“I insist. I would love to have you and Agent Stilinski for dinner one evening.” Oh, Hannibal was as quietly charming as Stiles had said.
“We’d be delighted!” Lydia was not exaggerating her delight, which surprised her. While everyone she had spoken with in Baltimore’s high society had raved at the exquisite performance that defined one of Dr. Lecter’s dinner parties, she hadn’t ever imagined going especially since Stiles was his patient. Now she’d get to experienced it first-hand. “Now, let me get my boyfriend out of your way.”

“I can assure you, he’s been no trouble at all. It was my responsibility.” With a smile, he led her farther back into his office. She found the office just as amazingly impressive as Stiles said she would. The psychiatrist had astounding taste.

Hannibal must have noticed her appreciation. He had the grace not to say anything out loud but he let her fall behind as he moved to where Stiles was snoozing, very Stiles-like, on the couch near the windows.

Lydia could not contain herself as she looked around the room. “Perhaps, I entered the wrong field.”

“I will take that as a compliment.” Hannibal bent down and touched Stiles lightly on the shoulder. “Mieczyslaw, your friend is here to retrieve you.”

Stiles stirred and muttered something incoherent. Lydia cocked her head, because something certainly seemed off. She’d seen Stiles drunk before and this didn’t seem like that. Stiles had a plateau when drinking. He was perfectly fine right up until he wasn’t, and while he wasn’t going to win any drinking contests, he wasn’t this much of a lightweight.

Lydia felt a little embarrassed. “Please let me.” She went over and shook him awake. “Time to go home. How much did he have to drink?”

“Not much at all.” Hannibal replied. “Does he take any prescription medicines he might have neglected to inform me about?”

Lydia sighed. “He sometimes takes Adderall. He doesn’t follow the prescription’s instructions; he takes it only when he feels he needs to. I’m very sorry about this.”

“Again, it is not a problem. It’s possible that there was an unforeseen reaction with his medication.”

Together they got Stiles up and put on his jacket. Hannibal walked them to their car. “Thank you once again, Dr. Lecter. Does he have another appointment made?”

“I think he does.”

“Good. Stiles has a habit of avoiding situations when he’s embarrassed. I won’t let him cancel on you.”

“I understand. Have a good day, Dr. Martin.”

“You, too.” Lydia got into the car. Stiles would want to pick up his own vehicle later. With a wave, she pulled out into traffic.

She drove eight blocks until she found a parking garage that suited her purposes. Maybe Dr. Lecter assumed that she wouldn’t know about this, but she damn well did know that mixing Adderall and alcohol did not have the effects that Stiles was experiencing. She had learned everything about Adderall since she had started hanging around with the Pack in high school. Lydia wasn’t ready yet to put sinister motive to what had happened, but she wanted to do her own investigations.

There was also the strangeness that she had felt in Dr. Lecter’s presence that was now only just fading. It hadn’t felt like a threat or anything that should scare her, but she felt different in his
presence. Even with her suspicions, she had thrilled to being invited to one of his parties. This was why she had waited until she was well and truly away from the office.

Lydia checked Stiles’ pulse, his eyes, his mouth looking for some clue as to what else Dr. Lecter had given Stiles. She couldn’t find anything. In fact, he seemed really healthy. Blowing a hair out of her face, she had come to the conclusion that she wouldn’t be able to know anything else until Stiles woke up. Since he didn’t seem to be in any danger, she drove home.

Stiles dreamed.

He knew it was a dream because as cool as Dr. Lecter’s office was, it did not have a Nemeton stump growing in the middle of it, situated between the two chairs he used when interviewing patients.

Dr. Lecter rose from his chair and smiled at Stiles. “I’ll let you think about it for a while. We’ll discuss it during our next session.” He glided easily out of the office, leaving Stiles contemplating the sawed-off tree.

“He’s really quite good at this,” Stiles heard his voice saying.

“Good at what?” Stiles demanded. It was still his voice, but now he meant to say it.

“Digging up the past. All that dark, nasty stuff that no one pays attention to.” Another Stiles – of course it was – looking like he was seventeen climbed up on the stump and sat down cross-legged. “It’s even more impressive when you realize he doesn’t really understand what exactly he is fucking with.”

Seeing his younger self, the first thing Stiles thought was: “Who told me that haircut was a good idea?” The second thought was: “What the hell is going on?”

“Before you work yourself up in a frenzy, you should relax,” His younger self said. “You know that I’m not what you fear I might be because you would be afraid. Are you afraid?”

“Uh. No.” He wasn’t. He was sitting here in the comfortable chair acting as if this was something that happened every day. “Why aren’t I afraid? I mean, considering the past, I should at least feel a little nervous.”

“Two possibilities.” His younger self held up two fingers. “The most probable one is that you, on some level, have recognized me for what I am.”

“Which is?”

“Memories. Your memories. Its memories.” The younger Stiles winked. “Did you ever ask yourself how you were able to just go up and at ‘em like six weeks after they got it out of your head? You took the memories of everything you did and everything it did and you shoved them into a corner of your mind, like you’ve done every trauma you’ve ever experienced, and locked it away.”

“I don’t do that anymore.” Stiles protested.

“But you did then.” The younger self threw out his arms. “Ta-da! Here I am, your dark corner personified. Dr. Lecter would say it’s easier to make me look like him, rather than deal with it in abstraction.”

Stiles bit his lip. “Why are you making an appearance now?”
“Right now?” Void Stiles tipped his head to one side. “Oh, dude, I’ve always been here. This is just the first time we’ve got to do this face-to-face, and I blame the Lithuanian creepster. It’s like he wanted this to happen.”

“Now, you’re making things up. I’ve been fine. For years. I’m totally sane.”

“Uh. Sure. That’s why you called Lydia in a panic from Minnesota to make sure you totally seemed normal!” Void Stiles chuckled. “Again, you already know this, or you would be afraid, and you are not afraid, are you?”

Stiles frowned. “No, I’m not.”

“Part of you had to be aware of the changes that your time together with it had made in you. It really rearranged the furniture in here, and that never really goes away, does it? Even though the thing you fear the most is resting comfortably in a wooden knick-knack somewhere in Europe.” Void Stiles tilted his head to the side and grimaced in the dreamscape. “God, seven years in that canister has got to be really, really boring.”

“If it rearranged the furniture, as you put it, I didn’t notice, and don’t you think I would?”

Void Stiles replied with a smirk. “I don’t know. Would you?” Before Stiles could reply. “Off the top of my head, signs point to ‘no.’ You were really, really calm when negotiating with Araya Calavera for Derek’s release.”

“So was Lydia!”

“Lydia was riddled with anxiety, ask her. And then, not a full two days later, you completely spazzed out in front Rafael McCall with Baby Derek.” Void Stiles sneered.

Stiles thought back to those two memories. “See?”

“The difference being that you were in a ruthless hunter’s family stronghold and you had no idea if the Calavera’s interpretation of the Code extended to you. They might have shot you just to be safe. And while Rafael McCall is a selfish dick, he wasn’t going to hurt you.” Void Stiles pointed out. “There have been signs everywhere, Stiles, but you didn’t want to see them. Why did you suspect that Peter was up to something, when no one else suspected it? How did you know that there was some clue to the Dead Pool on Brunski’s recording of Lydia’s grandmother? How did you feel that Theo was a threat even though you had no evidence but a single crappy signature? How do you fit so well in to the Behavioral Analysis Unit even though you were close to flunking out of the FBI Academy? You’re already valued, even though they don’t trust you completely.”

“Intuition. I’ve been around police for my entire …”

“Keep telling yourself that,” Void Stiles interrupted. “Oh, I grant you, that you do have intuition. Intuition and experience that we gave you. Remember, there was a fox in your head, but just as much as it was in your head, you were in its. A thousand years of mayhem and tricks. You didn’t think that direct exposure to that would change the way you think?”

“So, you’re saying that I owe all that to you?” Stiles scoffed.

“No. I’m saying that I am you. You asked Lydia if you were tainted, and she said you were. She’s smarter than you are. Now, she also believes that you’re all better. Everyone believes that you’re all better, but here is the question you gotta ask yourself! What does better mean?”

Stiles opened his mouth but he couldn’t say anything. He wasn’t sure what he meant by it.
“Here’s the first possibility. Whenever you have been confronted with the terrible, with the unsolvable, with the violence and filth of human existence, you’ve turned to the memories of your exposure to the most terrifyingly efficient creature you’ve ever met.” Void Stiles leaned forward off the edge of the dream Nemeton. “You’ve turned to me.”

“I don’t need you.”

“Of course you do!” Void Stiles fell back with a laugh. “You need me because I solve problems that don’t have solutions. You turned to me just over a month ago when you finally perceived Gerard’s plans. You knew that they only person who could get close enough to stop him would be Scott, because Grandpa Argent couldn’t resist twisting the knife. But you also knew that it would destroy Scott to do it, but you got him to do it anyway. Sophomore Stiles wouldn’t have been able to do that. We certainly could. And we did!”

Stiles stood up out of the chair. “I didn’t do that. That’s not true. I didn’t betray Scott because it was the only way to stop Gerard.”

Void Stiles shook his head. “Why not? You’ve done it before. But, let’s make this less personal. Will Graham catches serial killers because his imagination allows him to not only think like they do but also feel like they do. Do you realize that you have the potential to be just as good as he is? Because you don’t have to imagine anything! You’ve got access to the memories of a creature that’s killed a thousand different ways for a thousand different reasons. All you have to do is stop accessing those memories subconsciously, and start doing it consciously.”

Stiles was beginning to hate this dream. “You said two possibilities.” He sat back down on the chair. “What was the second possibility?”

“Sure you want to hear it?” whispered Void Stiles. “It’s a little dark, to be honest.”

Stiles nodded. Dreams could show you things.

“Remember when you were split in two? Everyone assumed that one of them was you and one of them was it. What no one considered is what if neither of them were you? And neither of them were it?” Void Stiles pointed out as if it were a silly freshman mistake.

“Noshiko said …” Stiles trailed off to remember back to that point. “She said I was more me than nogitsune.”

“Yeah, she was a frighteningly unhelpful bitch, wasn’t she? That really doesn’t counter my point.”

Stiles yelled at his dream doppelganger. “Why wait so long though? If I’m a Trojan horse, why wait for seven years?”

“Strategically speaking, seven years is a drop in the bucket for a creature who has been alive since before the Battle of Hastings.” Void Stiles ran his finger on the trunk of the dream Nemeton, cutting across the growth lines that measured the years. “Maybe we were waiting for a chance to get rid of a True Alpha by putting him in prison? Or maybe we were waiting for you to join one of the most prestigious law enforcement task forces in the country?”

Stiles shook his head. “That’s so farfetched. None of that is happening. This is a dream.”

Void Stiles smirked. “Of course. But if that’s all it is, why are you suddenly afraid?”

Stiles shot up straight in the car’s seat, looking around back and forth. He blinked; his tongue felt like it was cleaving to the roof of his mouth. Was he drunk?
“Stiles?” Lydia asked. “Are you feeling okay?”

Stiles blinked rapidly. There was a moment – just a single moment – where he wanted to tell Lydia everything, but he couldn’t. Not yet. Not before he was sure that something was wrong, and he didn’t just have a paranoid, liquor-induced dream. “No. Remind me not to let my psychiatrists give me weird new alcohol.” He offered a feeble smile.

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Stiles sat at the desk typing up the final reports on the capture of Georgia Madchen. It really wasn’t much of a capture because essentially she had chosen to turn herself in by pursuing Will to Wolf Trap.

Days have passed since his unfortunate session at Dr. Lecter’s office. Once he had sobered up, he felt peaceful. That he did feel peaceful convinced him that the dream was just his mind working out a few of its kinks. Dr. Lecter’s sessions were digging up things that he had buried deep so he could ignore them. He shouldn’t pretend that digging into his psyche wasn’t going to stir up bad memories. Otherwise, things were getting better. He was sleeping well. Lydia and he were settling into a comfortable routine of living together. She had some concerns after the session, but they had reached an agreement where if something weird happened again, he would automatically tell Lydia.

Otherwise, work carried on as well as it could be said to carry on, given work was finding strange killers. He had both sympathy and empathy for Georgia Madchen. He couldn’t imagine being unable to perceive people’s faces; he only knew he would have coped less well than she had. Monsters could evoke horror, but a greater horror could only come from something so normal, so taken for granted, suddenly being gone. Like not being able to read. Georgia had lived with this for decades. It was sobering.

“It’s a happy ending,” he said aloud. She was getting medical care, no longer wandering around in fear, filth and pain. Even if you saw her as the villain, no one else would be dying.

“Enjoy it while you have one,” Dr. Price snarked from across the laboratory. He was working on finishing his reports as well. “We don’t get many of them around here.”

“Happy endings?” Stiles asked suddenly. “You don’t consider catching the bad guy a happy ending?”

“No, not really,” Price answered. “Is there a certain satisfaction in putting the occasional remorseless butcher with anti-social tendencies behind bars for the rest of their lives? Yes. But there is very little happiness involved. That may be because my first experience with any case is always with their victims. No matter how quickly you catch them, performing an autopsy on a five-year-old dampens one’s spirits.”

Price was brusque, but Stiles could tell he wasn’t trying to be mean. “And the worst part is when you get a killer who is so obviously not in a healthy state of mind that you can’t hold it against them. I’ve met killers who were Angels of Death, who couldn’t remember what they had done, who were riddled with guilt, with pain, with fear. You’re glad that they’re no longer killing, but you can’t help but …”

“How do you deal with it?”

“I drink,” Price replied. “And I’ve always cultivated a repartee that is not only witty, but wholesome.
I’ll tell you one thing, if you’re looking for a life free of emotional damage and with no need for coping mechanisms, you’ve chosen the wrong profession.”

Stiles suddenly felt uncomfortable. “But surely helping save lives makes a difference. Doesn’t it?”

“Oh, God.” Price bitterly chuckled. “They didn’t sell this at the academy did they? In my experience, it doesn’t work like that, but then I’ve had to put too many newlyweds together like a jigsaw puzzle to sleep peacefully. You shouldn’t do this job if you want to play hero, and you certainly shouldn’t do this job if you never want to flinch when your phone rings. You do this job because it has to be done.”

Stiles looked back to his report. Beth LeBeau was dead because of some poor woman’s synapses misfiring and a misdiagnosis of Coutard delusion. Nothing he did was going to make that woman’s death mean anything. He thought about the terrible crimes he had witnessed here.

Jimmy Price was watching him with an over-exaggerated expression on his face: wryness masking concern.

Stiles felt self-conscious. “I know what you are thinking, and it’s not true.”

“I was thinking of having a martini, and I know that’s true. But I may have been thinking of something else, but I doubt your psychic.” Jimmy responded. “What am I thinking?”

It was Stiles’ turn to laugh bitterly, specifically at the psychic line. “I pursued a career in this because I’m good at it.” Or part of me is good at it. “I didn’t pursue this career to make up for my past, no matter how terrible you might imagine it to be.”

“Just don’t be like Will Graham,” Jimmy said and turned back to his work.

Stiles grunted. After a few minutes, though, his interest got the better of him. “Why not?”

“All joking aside, he does what he does by stretching his mind into shapes it’s not accustomed to being in.” Price observed. “That’s stressful. You’ve seen it; we’ve all seen it. Yet we still keep letting him turn himself into these killers.” The forensic scientist frowned at the thought. “Elasticity erodes. You pull on something often enough and hard enough, and it won’t go back to its original shape.”

Price sat back down at his computer. “There comes a point when you just have to stop.”
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

Stiles and Lydia attend a small dinner party at Hannibal's.

Chapter Notes

This takes place between "Buffet Froid" and "Roti."

Stiles stared at himself in the bathroom mirror. The tie did not look right. He had been taught by his dad how to do a Windsor knot, but he hadn't been taught to do it well. "Lydia, this is stupid."

Lydia made an exasperated noise from the bedroom. "What is it now?"

"I can't get it to look right." Stiles complained. "It looks like something your mother would have to fix for you on middle school picture day."

"So, it's appropriate for your emotional age." She teased.

"Ha. Ha. Ha. If you ever get tired of math, you could be a comedian." He came out of the bathroom in a pout. "For that, you get to fix it."

"Okay." Lydia was putting on her earrings at her vanity but took the time to give him an indulgent smile. It wasn't condescending. For some strange reason, she loved these little moments of dorky spaz. "I don't know why you're so nervous. You know every single person who is going to be at this dinner party."

"My psychiatrist, my boss, my co-worker, and my girlfriend sitting down for a fancy dinner party where everyone is expected to be witty and charming. Nothing ever could go wrong with that!"

Stiles flounced exaggeratedly down on the bed across behind Lydia's vanity, waiting for her to get finished. "Imagine how many times I can taste the bottom of my own shoe."

"I am." Lydia teased. "I know I think you're charming when you get all insecure, but you can do this if you focus. Just keep telling yourself that it'll go a long way to healing over any lingering resentment about California." Finished with her preparations, she came over and sat down next on the bed and start working with his tie. "That's what you want, isn't it?"

"I want that whole mess to go away." Stiles felt a wave of regret. "It's not, is it?"

"No," Lydia said, frowning as she undid the knot to start again. "It's not. You called your father yet?"

"No." Stiles grimaced. He knew better that to put it off this long, but it had been so easy to do.

Lydia finished tying the knot perfectly. "Stiles! He's left messages for me, and they haven't been happy ones. I can only imagine how pissed off he is getting at you."
“Yeah.” Stiles had listened to the messages left to him. They were getting shorter and angrier. He just didn’t know what to say to his dad. Things unwanted and horrible stirred beneath his skin and his father was going to bring them to the surface. One of the things that made Lydia and him fit so well was that she could figure out what was bothering him without having to make him face the things he didn’t want to face. When he imagined the conversation with his father, all he could see were things he didn’t want to face.

Stiles took out his phone but before he could start dialing, Lydia put her hand over it. “We do have an engagement tonight, Stiles. Call him when we get home. Or tomorrow. You’re already nervous enough as it is.”

“Tonight’s meal,” Hannibal announced, “is roasted loin with caramelized shallots and port wine sauce with mango papaya salad and ginger tea.” He placed the plates expertly in front of each person. They slotted into the exquisite place settings.

Stiles wasn’t a fancy person. He and his father considered going out to the Beacon Hills Outback the height of their social dining experience. The spread that Dr. Lecter had just laid out on the table was pretty overwhelming to him right now. It wasn’t just food; it was pretty. It was like art.

Next to him, Lydia was as cool as if it were the Beacon Hills cafeteria back during the days where every single freshman longed to sit at her table. “Does someone here have a fever, doctor?”

“Someone is feeling a bit under the weather,” the psychiatrist replied. He smiled at Lydia as if pleased by her inference. “Better to be safe than sorry.”

Stiles looked at Will out of the corner of his eye. Since no disease would be suicidal enough to try to infect Jack Crawford, it had to be Will. Indeed, Will was doing his I’m-totally-exhausted-but-I-will-foolishly-attempt-to-fool-you-by-acting-like-I’m-not routine. Since their last discussion, Stiles had resolved to dial down on the expressions of concern. It wouldn’t help Will at all if he was alone when all his fragile mental house in which he was presently living came crashing down.

At Jack’s raised eyebrow, Lydia stepped in. She was so amazing to Stiles; nothing flustered her. “Papaya and ginger tea are natural treatments for fever and mild illness.”

“Nowhere near as effective as medical practice,” observed Hannibal, “but every little bit helps.” He sat down at the head of the table.

“This looks wonderful,” Stiles said, though he absolutely did not want to eat it. It looked like something he’d shouldn’t be eating because someone worked too hard on it. It was wasted on someone like him.

But he did. Hannibal Lecter was not just a good cook; he was an amazing cook. It might be the best meal Stiles had had in a long time, and though he never planned to mention that to Lydia, Lydia went ahead and mentioned it for him.

“I’m not the cooking type. I have better things to do with my time. Stiles should learn.” She pinched him under the table and he had had to fight off a giggle.

Conversation had started out light and moved along quietly. It was nothing serious, but it was soothing. Stiles found himself relaxing in the presence of Director Crawford. When they stopped talking about cases and death and dying and jurisdiction, they could be people. Lydia darted from topic to topic, confident and secure. Even Will looked like he was feeling better. At the end of the
table, Hannibal held court, beaming at the success of the party.

Finally, Stiles turned to the psychiatrist. “To be honest, I’ve never been to a dinner party like this. I expected it to be a little more … awkward, for me at least. I don’t have much experience with things like this.”

Hannibal nodded understandingly. “And yet, you find yourself enjoying it, don’t you?” Stiles nodded in reply. “Eating is something that every human being must do. It is like breathing. It is like sleeping. However, humanity places special emphasis on meals. We have ritualized eating to the extent that it has become more than just a shared necessity; it has become a sacrament for life. When we sit together and eat together, we acknowledge the struggle to fully live and we celebrate that for one night, at least, we have won that struggle.”

Jack and Will were used, obviously, to the doctor’s attitude toward meals. Jack offered a silent toast in response, and Will shot Hannibal an appreciative glance.

Lydia wasn’t as used at to it as others. “If you don’t mind me saying so, that almost sounds reverential. When did you first get interested in cooking, doctor?”

“I was very young,” Hannibal replied. “It was a time of chaos and disruption. Though I was definitely born into the upper class, political upheaval can place even the wealthy in a situation of deprivation. Food was scarce, so the care and preparation of it became a matter of utmost concern.”

Stiles watched more than casual interest spark on the faces of Jack and Will. It must be, he guessed, that Hannibal didn’t talk about his life before Baltimore. They both knew he was an immigrant. Stiles suspected that Lydia was just that charming.

“Oh.” Lydia nodded absently as if searching for the right words to say. “You know, I always thought it seemed strange that difficult times tend to give birth to the best in us. It can be awkward when you realize that this beautiful meal comes from something not so happy.”

“It sounds like you speak from experience,” Hannibal questioned. “Did something beautiful come from your difficult times?”

Stiles narrowed his gaze and bit his lip at the psychiatrist. Why would he say that? The whole reason Stiles had agreed to come to the dinner was an attempt to smooth over the rough edges with Will Graham and Jack Crawford. He had told Hannibal that in their last session.

Hannibal sat at the head of the table with the tiniest smirk on his face. Stiles realized with a little irritation that he was fucking with them.

Lydia must have figured that out as well, because she did not back down. “My grandmother was institutionalized for schizophrenia when I was a little girl. Before then, we had had a very close relationship, and I had admired her ever since I had been old enough to understand what admiration was.”

Will Graham startled slightly at that pronouncement. Stiles figured his own situation wasn’t getting any better.

Lydia was crisp. If Hannibal wanted to be playfully cruel, she’d be more than a match for him. “It was a misdiagnosis, but it was not caught in time. Everyone here has at least some familiarity with psychological practice; you can understand how damaging such a thing can be.”

Stiles flashed back to Georgia Madchen, now in an oxygen chamber, and the fact that she had lost decades to an undiagnosed condition.
“It was very stressful as a small child to watch a vibrant, intelligent woman reduced to a helpless shell in a sub-par mental facility. However, I learned a very important lesson about the power of appearances. I determined then I would control how I was perceived.” She smiled. “It’s been very rewarding.”

“And very successful.” Hannibal smiled at her, openly. Oh, thought Stiles, the doctor liked it when you rose to the occasion.

Jack Crawford frowned at something on his plate. “I hope you don’t mind me asking, but what was your grandmother’s name?”

“Lorraine Martin. Yes, she was one of the victims of the Angel of Death at Eichen House.” Stiles found her hand under the table.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” the director replied and it was not an attempt to avoid a difficult topic but an overwhelmingly sincere statement. This is how the director maintained the fierce loyalty of his people. He took every murder as both a personal failing and a personal affront, even when there was no way possible to stop them, such as Brunski’s. Of course, Stiles though, it was also why he pushed his team so hard.

“Thank you,” Lydia said graciously. She rearranged her silverware before she continued. “Of course, I did, as many children are wont to do, take it too far. For the longest time, I was too afraid of being seen as abnormal, so I resolved to become the most normal girl my peers had ever seen. I created Lydia Martin, Queen Bee of Beacon Hills High School. You should have seen it; it was a breathtaking mask: beautiful and sharp-edged but vacuous.”

Stiles blinked rapidly and watched the others at the table through the corner of his eyes. He had no idea why Lydia was saying this at this time and place. She had everyone’s attention. Will looked like he understood what she went through – he probably did – and Jack and Hannibal were certainly interested.

“Luckily, I came across three people who were caring enough and strong-willed enough to make me regret that mask. There was a girl who wasn’t interested in making friends with the mask I wore and decided to be friends with the real me instead. There was a boy who taught me that it was far more important what I did for other people than what I was afraid they would do to me. And there was a boy who saw right through the mask to the person I was beneath, and he never gave up until I took it off and threw it away.”

“Sounds like good people to know,” Will interjected.

Lydia’s voice was flirtatiously light. “I know, right? I’m not letting the last one, at least, get away.” She leant over and kissed Stiles on the cheek.

Stiles felt a little giddy as he flushed to his hairline. Lydia’s elaborate compliment made him feel fizzy inside. He could also see how impressive it had been to the other guests.

Hannibal watched Lydia for a moment as if weighing something. “Forgive me for prying, but what of the other two friends of which you spoke?” Stiles giddiness evaporated; talking about Allison and Scott would most likely be a disaster. He tried to surreptitiously shake his head at Hannibal who even didn’t notice the attempt or decided to completely ignore it.

Lydia, however, responded with a pleasant smile and a cautious tone, as she had already forgiven the psychiatrist for bringing it up. Stiles wondered what she was thinking about. “My friend Allison was a victim of a violent crime while we were in high school. Stiles and I witnessed it.”
Stiles swallowed. Even after so many years, there was still a tiny voice in the back of my mind that blamed him for her death. It sounded stronger tonight, mostly because he had been working on that time with Dr. Lecter. It was closer to the surface.

Will observed almost automatically, displaying the lack of social graces that were unfortunately part of his reputation. “Allison Argent was Gerard Argent’s granddaughter, wasn’t she?”

“Yes, she was.” Lydia went on with her conversation. “She barely knew him, though. Allison’s father was estranged from his father; I don’t know the whole story, but my feeling was that Gerard was abusive towards Chris.”

Stiles remembered that Gerard had sent Chris on a gun deal with yakuza at the ripe old age of eighteen, alone. Yeah, abusive was a good word for it.

“And the other young man?” Hannibal asked. Stiles cut eyes at him; the psychiatrist should know better.

“Oh,” Lydia talked like nothing was happening. “That would be Scott. You’re putting him in jail.” She took a bite of her loin as if she had just commented on the weather.

That brought everyone up short, except for Hannibal. He chuckled. If Stiles thought he could get away with kicking him under the table he would. For some reason, it would just seem childish.

Director Crawford raised a fork in protest. “He put himself in jail, Dr. Martin. No society can survive if they tolerate vigilantism.”

Lydia paused to stare at the director. “I don’t think anyone here at this table would argue that. I certainly won’t. I will certainly argue that he is by far the best person I have ever met in this world, and that goes for everyone sitting at this table, including me.”

Stiles placed a hand on her shoulder. “Lydia, I think …”

Lydia turned to him, suddenly angry. “You never told them did you? You never told them what he meant to you?” Her eyes were filled with tears. “All that you were to each other? Everything you two survived together? And you were just going to let them think he was a common killer? How could you?”

Stiles felt the panic rise in him. Lydia’s outburst came from nowhere. What was she doing? He wasn’t used to being the person in this relationship who had to deal with emotional outbursts. “Lydia, it wasn’t like that.” He glanced at the others but they were politely looking elsewhere.

Lydia stood up and addressed. “Excuse me for a moment, would you please?” She gave a glare at Stiles and then stalked out.

When she had left, Stiles turned to them. “I’m sorry about that. I didn’t realize she was still that upset about it. She told me it wouldn’t be a problem.”

“She is very close to him, isn’t she?” Will offered. “It must not have been easy to pretend there nothing is going on.”

“We are very close to him. I haven’t … she was right, I haven’t talked about it. I didn’t think it’d be appropriate.” Stiles glanced at Jack and then back to his plate. “Maybe it was too early to do this.”

“Nonsense,” interrupted Hannibal. “It was a minor break in our dinner. If my estimation of Dr. Martin’s character is correct, she’ll return as if nothing had ever happened. Let’s continue with this
enjoyable evening.”

And so they did. Dr. Lecter was right. When Lydia returned, she acted as if the outburst had never happened. Stiles felt nervous and lost through the rest of the evening, and Will was far more solicitous of Lydia’s discussion. Lydia was just as witty and charming as she was before her outburst. She did, noticeably, not touch him where anyone else could see it.

It was after nine when they had given their goodbyes and head home. Stiles got Lydia her coat and they walked out to the car. “I think that went very well,” Lydia observed as Stiles opened the car door for her.

“You did? Even … Lydia, I know I haven’t dealt with it yet, but I didn’t realize you were that upset.” Stiles immediately wanted to bite the words back.

“I am upset,” She turned to look at him as he got into the driver’s side. “Oh, Stiles, do try to keep up.”

Stiles slid into the driver’s seat. “Uhm. I guess I’m not keeping up.”

“I did that on purpose. I am upset about what happened to Scott, but I certainly don’t blame them or you for what happened. The person who is responsible, who is at fault, is dead. This was for your benefit.”

Stiles wasn’t quite sure that he shouldn’t share some of the blame. He’d been struggling with Lecter’s observation that having Scott kill Gerard made things easier for him. “I don’t get it.”

“You can’t express to them how much you look up to or how much you care for Scott. It would be unprofessional. It would be you expressing admiration and love for a soon-to-be convicted killer.” Lydia explained in an irritated voice.

“We’ve gone over that, Lydia. I know.” He pulled the car out into the street.

“You can’t tell them what he means to you, but I certainly could. It isn’t unprofessional, because it’s just your overly-emotional girlfriend. Who would possibly hold that against you?” At his a-ha face, she smiled. “That was the plan for tonight wasn’t it? Now they have a perfectly good reason for you to care about Scott and to refuse to talk about what happened in high school.”

“You planned this?”

“We planned this. You just didn’t know about all the details.” She reassured him.

The car moved down the road, from one pool of light cast by the streetlights to another. Stiles took two hands in the wheel. “Do you think that they believed it?”

“Of course,” Lydia stated in the dark between the streetlights. “Because everything I said was the truth. The only artifice was how I said them and when I said them. I fooled you, didn’t I? I do suspect that Dr. Lecter realized what I was doing; you’ve told him about Scott haven’t you?”

Stiles actually hadn’t. Oh, he had told Hannibal plenty of facts about his best friend, but he had said precious little about his feelings. How could he share those when he hadn’t even confronted himself about what they were? Lying to your therapist was probably counter-productive.

So Stiles didn’t answer. He just kept driving.

“I am going to say this once and then I won’t mention it again. You need to stop putting this off,”
Lydia said. “I haven’t pushed, but you’ve been ignoring this since my graduation.”

“Yes, I’ve been ignoring it since you started something that didn’t need to be started.” He snapped. “Just like tonight.”

“We’re together now. What affects you, affects me.” Lydia replied as if he hadn’t snapped at her. Stiles was so grateful how thoroughly she got him. “It’s not going to get any easier, and now it’s beginning to affect your relationship with your father, and you don’t want that.”

“I know,” he lamented. The road kept going farther and farther into the dark. “Will you come with me?”

Lydia laid a hand on his arm. “Of course. I’ll go anywhere with you.”
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Compelled by his angry father, Stiles visits Scott in prison.

Chapter Notes

This story takes place between "Buffet Froid" and "Roti."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lydia sat at the Stilinski table across from the sheriff and let the easy memories of this place soothe her. She held a cup of hot coffee nestled between her hands and the heat seeped into her bones. It was, she decided, good to be back in Beacon Hills; it was good to be home. She was wearing jeans and a simple blouse and she had her shoes off; she was relaxed.

Noah Stilinski sat across from her in the kitchen on this quiet Saturday morning, but he wasn’t relaxed. Lydia could tell in the set of his shoulders, in the clamp of his jaw, that he was frustrated and angry and worried. He and Stiles held so many tells in common. He took a sip of his coffee absently and looked at the newspaper before him without really seeing it.

“Why didn’t you go with him?” Lydia finally asked.

“Why didn’t I go with who?” Noah answered, not looking up from his paper.

Lydia rolled her eyes. As if she hadn’t already mastered how to deal with the Patented Stilinski Evasion. “Why didn’t you go with Stiles this morning?”

“I didn’t want to.”

Lydia was so done. “And why didn’t you want to? Sheriff, there is a ninety-five percent chance that I’m going to be your daughter-in-law. Now, I know you and Stiles have this whole thing where you don’t talk about things that you absolutely should talk about, and I think it’s just as stupid when you do it as when he does it. Maybe it was okay for you not to talk to each other when you lived in the same house, but now that’s no longer true. If you two keep choosing to avoid talking about your problems, you two will destroy your relationship. You’ll spend years not saying things to each other, and suddenly one day you’ll turn around and you’ll have nothing to say to each other. I don’t want ether of you to suffer through that.”

“God. He found his own Claudia.” Noah shook his head. “How much do you know about what happened with Gerard?”

“Everything that Stiles knows, I know.” Lydia was almost completely sure about that.

“Then you know it was Stiles’ idea to kill Gerard.” The sheriff frowned at her like she was a potential criminal.
“I do, but I only learned that when he flew back east.” Lydia didn’t realize she would react so defensively to the sheriff’s disapproval. “And he didn’t force Scott to do it. You know the situation. No one wanted to do it, but it had to be done.”

“It doesn’t matter if they wanted to do it. They planned it together, and that makes it conspiracy. That makes Stiles a conspirator.” Noah said it as if he were condemning himself more than Stiles.

“Do you want to put him in jail?” She asked quietly.

“No! This isn’t about the law. It should be, but it isn’t!” Noah was not wearing his uniform or his badge. “I know why this happened; I wish there had been another way. But this isn’t about the law. This isn’t about blame. This isn’t about guilt. This is about responsibility.”

“Stiles understands that.” Lydia took a sip of coffee. “You should know he understands that.”

“Does he? Because he’s not acting like it. Do you know what I had to get him to come out here?” Noah scowled at her. “I had to threaten him with a search warrant.”

“He’s got work,” Lydia felt the need to defend him. “He can’t just …”

“He can’t just drop everything and visit his best friend who’s going to jail for years because of their conspiracy?” His coffee cup raps sharply on the table. “Bullshit.”

Lydia’s heart sunk into her stomach. She’d never seen the sheriff this angry; she didn’t want to go head-to-head with him on this. “It didn’t have to be now. It’s not like he’s not going to find Scott,” she said lightly.

The frown was immediate and disapproving. “I keep forgetting that as smart as you are, you don’t know everything. Next Thursday, Scott will be moved to Susanville. Violent felons don’t spend their entire sentence in a country jail, and that is what Scott is in the eyes of the law now: a violent felon. At the CCC, he’ll be in the general population, which means that if Stiles waited to visit him there, they’d be meeting in a room with guards, other prisoners, and their visitors. Not a good place for a heart-to-heart about this whole mess.”

Lydia took offense. “Are you saying that Stiles was stalling on purpose?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying. Stiles hasn’t seen or communicated with Scott since Scott was arrested, and I suspect it’s because he doesn’t want to talk about what happened with him. I understand; I’d want to avoid it as well. But it’s not right.”

Lydia snapped back at him. “You think he doesn’t care? You think this hasn’t tore him up? How can you say that?”

“I can say that because my son is a tremendously selfish young man. We forget that, because what he wants more than anything is that the people he loves and cares about to be safe and happy. When they’re not, he’s always hurt. He always feels terrible. It’s motivated him to do both terrible things and great things.” Noah shook his head. “But feeling badly over something isn’t the same as fulfilling your responsibilities. He’s confused those two things a lot, and that’s my fault. After his mother died, I let him get away with so much shit because he felt bad, and, honestly, because I felt bad.”

Noah took a deep breath to steady himself. “He’s avoiding talking to Scott because this may hurt as much as anything else that he’s ever done, and he doesn’t want to face what that may mean.”

“You’re being too hard on him,” Lydia said gently. “You’re being too hard on yourself.”
“No, I’m not. He’s not a teenager anymore. He’s been through more than he should, but no one can change that. But that’s not a free pass for the rest of his life. Now, he’s an adult, and this isn’t about him or his feelings.” Noah stood up and poured his coffee into the sink. “And I’m the person who has to remind him of the right thing to do. I’m his father.”

Even though he’d been here for two months, it still seemed strange that Scott had gotten so used to being chained to tables that he hardly ever noticed when he was any more. He could only resent it so much after all, he was dangerous. He leaned back in the uncomfortable chair giving himself enough room so the chains wouldn’t pull at him and waiting for Stiles to arrive.

It made him happy that he didn’t have to wear them when friends and family visited. He never wanted them to see him like that. It was already bad enough to have to look his mother in the face while wearing a convict’s jumpsuit.

The restraints were on today because this meeting had been set up as an interview and not as a visitation. There were advantages to doing it this way. If Stiles came, and there was no guarantee he would, they could talk as long as they wanted to, and they could talk privately. Scott need the privacy to do what he had to do.

Scott heard Stiles long before he reached the room. Even through the thick walls, he heard his heartbeat. It used to be comforting to him. Now it just made his heart beat faster.

A guard opened the door to let Stiles in, and Scott immediately could smell the anxiety. He noticed it immediately, because the last few times they had been together, his friend had been free of such things. His instincts flared, demanding to find a way to protect Stiles, but he squashed it down. Empathy wasn’t going to make this any easier.

Stiles, dressed as you would expect an FBI agent to dress, paused at the door. He looked so nervous that he might bolt and run. He took one breath and then another, but instead of running, he nodded to the guard, came in and sat down without a word. No, thought Scott, Stiles wasn’t that much of a coward.

“Hey.” Stiles’ voice was tentative and fragile.

Moments stretched between them, but Scott wasn’t in any hurry. He had done his fair share of waiting for Stiles. Anger surged up from the pit of his stomach, and while he welcomed it, he also grappled to keep under control. He had a right to be angry, but he didn’t want to run the risk of shifting. The special dispensation that Stiles had because they had cried together under the covers as children so long ago was gone. Used up. Vanished.

It could have been thirty seconds; it could have been hours, but it was most likely five minutes before Scott spoke. “The first week, I just assumed that you were too busy with the case to come.”

Stiles folded his hands on the table. He didn’t meet Scott’s eyes.

“The second week, I didn’t know what to think,” Scott said. “I couldn’t get anyone to give me a straight answer about where you were. It’s like they didn’t want to tell me, but I was just glad to see everyone, so I didn’t press it.”

Stiles sighed softly.

“The third week, I was feeling down. I had to force myself to go to visiting hours. I actually hoped no one would come, because I was having a problem dealing with what remained of my life. I’m
sure you can imagine what it felt like to make everyone drive down here so I could spend five minutes with each of them.”

Stiles didn’t reply to that. Scott shrugged with just enough purposeful movement in his shoulders that the chains rattled. “It wasn’t until the fourth week that I alpha-ed Liam into telling me where you were. I gotta admit, Stiles, I was kind of surprised that you’d gone back to Maryland.”

Stiles lifted his eyes to catch his gaze. “Look, I know I should have come back, but I had …”

“I know. You had work. You might be surprised that I know all about your work. Lydia told me a lot about it in the four letters she wrote me over the last two months.” Scott laughed bitterly; this had to be done. He’d never felt like he had acted this petty like this before, and it frightened just a little bit that he could pull it off. But then again, he never thought he’d be a killer, either. “She told me all about how it is such a great opportunity for you. She told me how hard you have to work at it. Oh, and she told me about your new best bud. What’s his name, Will?”

“I wanted to. I wanted to come.”

Scott closed his eyes. “I can hear you lying, Stiles.” He leaned forward without opening them. “It’s not that I don’t get it. You had important things to do. You were far too busy to visit me or write or talk to the pack or anything.”

Scott waited. Even his eyes shut, he could hear Stiles swallowing, smell the cloying stench of stress and misery. But neither of them said anything. Finally, Scott couldn’t take it anymore. “Say something.”

“What do you want me to say? I fucked up. Again.” There he was, the Stiles he knew. When cornered, he came out swinging.

Scott laughed aloud; it sounded fake and forced to his own ears. “You fucked up? How can you say that? You’ve gotten everything you ever wanted! You have Lydia. You have a career that’s not only exciting but prestigious. You have new friends. If that’s fucking up, we should all be so lucky, right?”

“That’s not what I meant, Scott. I know what I did.”

“Oh, you’re talking about how you ruined my life.” Scott made himself sneer. “Again. That’s different. First time you destroyed my life, you got me turned into a werewolf. Remember? While I was dealing with being a monster and putting everyone I loved in danger, you were trying to turn it into the first couple of issues of a superhero comic. You know, sometimes I lay in my cell at night and think – what if I had told you to take your whole you-can-do-something-that-means-you-have-to and shove it up your ass? What if I had just helped Peter in return for him leaving Allison and me alone? Would I be sitting here now, watching my life go up in smoke?”

Scott had to give it to him, Stiles was game for a fight. “You did that because that’s who you are. I just said the words.”

“No, I did it because you pushed me to do it. I went out that night because you wheedled me into going out there. I got involved because you convinced me I had to. You punished me when things didn’t go the way you wanted them to. You got your jollies paying junior detective while I got shot and poisoned and stabbed and ran over.” Scott had practiced this. He could make it convincing, but it was very hard. He wasn’t used to expressing his anger.

“It’s not like it was a picnic for me either.”
“Oh, yeah, I forgot that this is how it goes. People were lining up to turn me into their pet dog, but somehow you always managed to make it all about you.” Scott shot back. “Yeah, I do remember you got possessed. I remember I moved heaven and earth to make sure you survived it. I remember I refused to listen to anyone who told me that I had to kill you. All it cost me was the first girl I ever loved.”

Stiles’ jaw dropped. Scott winced inwardly. He had never said anything like that before, but he had to do it now. It’s the only way, he told himself.

“This right here? Right now?” Scott gestured with his hands. “It’s not about you. It’s about me. I know you sometimes get confused about that. So I get to say all the things that I’ve never said to you. That I shouldn’t have said to you. Because …”

Scott gulped air. This was getting out of control. He had to stick to the plan.

Stiles watched him and decided to take the diplomatic approach. “Scott, I get that you’re mad that I didn’t visit you before, but I’m visiting you now, aren’t I? Do you want to spend the entire visit yelling at me?”

“You’re right, Stiles. Let’s reminisce. We can talk about all the things we wanted to do in when we were in high school. I remember it well – all I wanted was to get a girlfriend, make first line, and become veterinarian.”

Stiles rolled his eyes. “You don’t get to do that!” Scott shouted at him. He glanced at the door to see if the guard would come in, but there was no sign of him. “You don’t get to pretend that I’m the unreasonable one here. You do realize that everything I wanted is gone. Everything. Kira’s been in the desert for six years. If she came back tomorrow, she’d have to wait until I get out. How likely will it be that we have anything in common? Will she still look eighteen? Will Noshiko tolerate her dating the clichéd older ex-con? You know most likely California won’t give me a veterinarian’s license even if I could scrape together the money to finish my degree?”

Stiles nodded in desperate agreement. “I know that. God, do you think I don’t know that? There’s nothing I can do about it.” He swallowed once more and tried to retreat into sarcasm. “At least you were first line.”

“Oh, you didn’t hear? After the allocution, they’re planning to strip Beacon Hills of the title for 2011.” Scott snorted. “Apparently, what I lied about doing is enough to vacate the championship.”

Scott saw the flicker of incomprehension on Stiles’ face. It struck him right in the heart. No matter what he thought was going to happen this day, he thought that it couldn’t have been this bad. Suddenly, being angry wasn’t as much of an effort. “You didn’t read the allocution? No, you didn’t; I can tell by your face. Do you even know who my lawyer is? You don’t even care that much?”

“I do care!” Stiles protested. “I care a lot. But there is nothing I can do about it.” He pounded on the table to supplement his punctuation. “There. Is. Nothing. I. Can. Do. About. It.” He took a deep breath and dashed his hand over his eyes. “So I pretended it didn’t happen. I did everything I could think of to make the idea that you were in here because of what I said go away. It was shitty, all right? I know that. But I also know that I don’t know how I’m going to live with myself, because I know you only did it because I told you to. I’m even going to a freaking psychiatrist. Do you think I wanted this to happen?”

“The thought crossed my mind once or twice.” There was the slightest moment when Scott thought
his senses had gone haywire, but all the signs were there. The thought had not actually crossed his mind, but he had said it to piss Stiles off. “And I’m not the first person who thought so, am I?”

“I swear, Scott, I swear to God I didn’t. I didn’t plan this. The only reason I suggested you was because you were the only person he’d allow to get that close to him. That’s all. I didn’t want to arrest you. I didn’t.” Stiles was panicking. “I’d do anything to get you out of here. I would.”

Scott bit the inside of his cheek. He told himself that this was going to be the tough part, as if the other parts of his plan had been easy. “You would? Would you … turn a blind eye?”

“What?”

Scott snapped the restraining chain like it had been made of licorice candy. “Turn a blind eye. Maybe I don’t want to spend three years in jail. There isn’t anything here that can stop me. I just walk out of here.”

“Scott,” Stiles glanced at the door. “You’d be a fugitive. And just because they couldn’t stop you didn’t mean they couldn’t try.”

“I’d be running for my life? Sounds like high school. But it would be better for the guards if they didn’t. What’s more blood?” Scott made his voice sound hard. “It’s not like I can be any more a murderer.”

“Stop it!” Stiles’ was getting frustrated. He was getting angry. That was good. “You’re not a murderer! You took care of a threat to the pack; you did what every alpha should do.”

“Yeah. Everyone’s been telling me that what I did makes me a great werewolf. Which is wonderful, except I never wanted to be one. And thanks to being one, what I did want I can never have. And why do you care if I protect the pack, when you’re planning to leave it?” Scott didn’t have to pretend to sound hurt; he didn’t have to exaggerate his fury.

“I wasn’t planning to, but these things happen.” Stiles mumbled his excuse. He didn’t realize who he was echoing.

“Well, other things could happen as well.” Scott stood up, no longer bound by the chains, and easily pushed the table to the side. Stiles blinked, but before he could react, Scott had him up against the wall. One hand on Stiles’ chest pressed him against the wall so he couldn’t move. The other hand grabbed Stiles’ arm and pulled his wrist close to Scott’s mouth. “I could always make it so you couldn’t leave.”

Stiles was brave, but he wasn’t without fear. Scott hadn’t pushed him up against the wall since the day after he had been bitten. Terror flooded the air.

Scott called upon the shift; let his fangs and claws; let his eyes burn red. “You know, maybe instead of you ruining my life, I should ruin yours. Then you’d know what it felt like. You know, everyone always thought you’d make a great wolf.”

Stiles eyes widened with shock and disbelief. His heart raced; his mouth opened and no words came out. Then, suddenly, his eyes narrowed. His pulse slowed. “Jesus, Scott, what the hell do you think you’re doing?”

Scott blinked and his eyes faded. He still had Stiles pinned up against the wall.

“You really had me going there,” Stiles chuckled shakily. “But you went too far. No matter how mad you are at me, you’d never use the Bite as revenge. I know you that well. Was this all an act?”
Scott tried to think of a way to rescue the situation, but he couldn’t think of any. It had been hard enough to plan this out. Only the truth was left. “Yes and no. You hurt me, but I knew why you were doing it. But …”

“But what?”

Scott hadn’t released Stiles, though he had become totally human in form. Now they were just pressed up against the wall. “I’d thought that it’d be better if I let myself get angry. If I got you angry. If I hurt you enough. I thought this would be easier if we hated each other.”

Stiles was no longer afraid; he was sad. “You tried to get me to hate you? What could possibly be easier if I hated you?”

“You know what this is.” Scott’s façade crumbled. He only could keep it up as long as the plan was intact, and the plan was in tatters. “You know what this is and that’s why you didn’t want to come.”

Stiles shook his head sharply. Scott remembered that Stiles was always good at denial.

Scott wanted to change the awkward press of his body into a hug, but he knew if he let go now, he wouldn’t be able to say what he had to say. He leaned his head forward so his mouth was so close to Stiles’ ear that no one else could hear. “You know this is good-bye.”

Stiles startled and thrashed, but he couldn’t move against Scott’s strength. “No, it isn’t.”

“How many days have we spent together in the last three years? Seven? Eight? How many weeks have passed where we were just too busy to talk or even send a text? There were a lot of reasons, but it doesn’t change the fact that I’ve spent more time acting like Theo’s parole officer than I’ve spent time being your friend. Now, with this? What are you going to do, spend your vacations at the California Correctional Center? By time I get out, you’ll be settled in your new life. You might even have a baby by then. I know you; you’ll be great at anything you do. Will you really want to risk what you have to be near me again? All I’ll be is bad memories. You know it. I know it. This is good-bye.” Scott couldn’t stop himself from crying, though he had promised himself he wouldn’t.

“No!” Stiles snapped and continued to struggle. “No. Let me go. You’re wrong. This isn’t … it doesn’t have to be like that.”

Scott released him and let him go, turning his back to Stiles. He moved the table back to its location and rearranged the chairs. “You always were good at lying to yourself, Stiles.”

Scott didn’t turn around even after he heard the door open and then close.

Chapter End Notes

I think I got the legal issues down correctly. Please correct me if I didn’t.
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Hannibal listens while Stiles talks about his trip to California. Stiles protects Alana Bloom during the hunt for Abel Gideon.

Chapter Notes

The action takes place during the Hannibal episode "Roti." I replaced generic FBI extra watching Alana with Stiles.

“I just walked out,” explained Mieczyslaw. “I didn’t walk out to prove a point. I didn’t walk out because I was mad. I walked out because I felt utterly helpless. I’ve felt like that before, and I hated it. I hate it as much as anyone could hate anything.”

Hannibal watched the lines of remorse etch themselves into the younger man’s face thrown into relief by the bright winter’s sunlight coming in through the office’s windows. Mieczyslaw Stilinski fascinated him because of the contradictions he exhibited both constantly and openly. In equal measure, he was unfailingly loyal to those he loved and deeply jealous of their time and attention. He was hardened to the vagaries of the life and yet sensitive to the toll they took on those around him. He was supremely confident in his own potential and yet desperately insecure about his own nature.

Hannibal possessed several different reasons for his continued interest in the young man. Mieczyslaw had drawn his notice because of the former’s unlikely friendship with Will Graham, and that was still a factor. The novice agent had been able to push past Will’s the carefully constructed walls of anti-social existence successfully. Hannibal had his own plans for Will, and those plans could only be enhanced by having more insight and access. Working with the young man gave that to him.

It was an intriguing bonus when Mieczyslaw revealed a much more complex and interesting story than Hannibal had first anticipated. Teasing out the mysterious secrets of his adolescence had revealed such a complexity of experience that the psychiatrist had had to conceal his unabashed glee. There was so much with which to work.

Hannibal was confident that he did not believe all that he had been told about werewolves and magic trees and ancient fox spirits, but one of the pleasing aspects of their time together was that Hannibal didn’t need to believe in that mythology to indulge his taste for complex psychologies. Whatever had happened in the past had left an indelible change in Mieczyslaw’s psyche. It did not take a psychiatrist to figure out that this man was different than others; it did take someone with his experience to understand the sheer possibilities inherent in those changes.

Mieczyslaw had a heart the burned like a flash fire. In love or in hate, it would consume anything that got near it. It had been ignited by the painful demolition of his mother; it was fed by a rage against a world that could take her from him in such a cruel way. Hannibal wondered how resistant would that best friend of his had to have been able to get so close and not be charred to ashes. Over time, Mieczyslaw had built a carefully constructed redoubt within his mind where others could stay,
but none of them should ever have forgotten that they were suspended over an inferno.

This nogitsune, or whatever traumatic psychological event it actually represented, had hollowed out the foundation of the redoubt and left a gaping chasm between the everyday mask that Mieczyslaw wore on the outside and the raging heart within. Mieczyslaw called it the Void.

Hannibal was delighted.

In one of their sessions, Mieczyslaw had told him about another creature named Theo Raeken, who had tried to draw the Void out by undermining his support structure and setting up a rather humdrum moral quandary. It was a brutish, direct plan: take away any reason to suppress the darkness lurking in the young man’s breast and then give him a reason to employ it.

Hannibal snorted mentally. Amateur. Drawing forth the Void from within Mieczyslaw’s psyche required patience, delicacy, and grace, like cooking a good meal. Theo Raeken’s clodish manipulation was like shoving gourmet food into a microwave. As he had told another amateurish half-wit, Frederick Chilton: “If force is used, the subject will only surrender temporarily.” The time and effort he would put into this effort would be as rewarding as the finished product.

“Do you commonly retreat from situations that make you feel this helpless?” Hannibal asked sincerely. He seldom felt helpless, so he did have a legitimate reason for asking.

“Oh, no. Not at all. Usually, my reaction to feeling like that would be to take it out on Scott. He’s so good for that, but it didn’t seem appropriate this time.” Stiles looked down at his fingers. His light tone tried to cover up his voice’s fragility. “Other options I’ve used in the past are pathetic crying and/or panic attacks.”

“Which option did you employ this time?” Hannibal asked. It was important to keep judgment out of his own voice.

“Oh, I went for the panic attack. It took me three hours to get home. Drive was only an hour.” Stiles admitted grimly.

“Let’s talk about the conversation that provoked this reaction within you. Do you agree with what Scott said to you?”

“Some of what he said. Most of what he said.” Mieczyslaw bit his thumb. “Because it’s true. I have almost everything I ever wanted. I have Lydia. I have this opportunity with the FBI. I’m not the weak link anymore. I’m good at what I do. My father might be mad at me right now, but I know he’s also proud of me. Where Scott was wrong … where Scott is wrong is that he thought that I wanted this to happen. He thinks … he thinks I’m done with him.”

“Your relationship will undoubtedly change.”

The young agent nodded. “Yeah. It will. Because no matter how much I wish it not to be, it is true that because of me he has nothing. I didn’t want to admit to myself that in the end in the very end, there is no way out of this for him. I can’t help but think that if I had never been his friend, none of this would have happened to him.”

Hannibal tilted his head to the side. “If you had never been his friend, his fate would not matter to you. I won’t try to persuade you to disregard your feelings about what happened and what may or may not be your responsibility to those feelings. My task, instead, is to get you to understand where those feelings arise from in your own mind, so you can decide for yourself whether you should act on them or not.”
Mieczyslaw jerked in surprise. “Is this about guilt again?”

“Yes. We have established that you are experiencing guilt, and we have established the context for that guilt in this particular instance. Now, you must determine if this guilt serves any viable purpose.” Contrary to what his personal psychiatrist might suspect, Hannibal did feel guilt; he just didn’t feel guilty over things that most other people would feel guilty about. He felt guilty about burning the roast; he didn’t feel guilty that the roast was an encyclopedia salesman.

“It tells me what I’ve done is wrong. I know that.”

“But you don’t need guilt to tell you when you have done wrong, do you? Guilt can be seen an irritant to the mind, like sand in an oyster’s shell. It creates pressure, like the pressure you feel right now. This pressure demands change.”

“Then it’s worthless guilt, because I’ll tell you what I told Scott – there’s nothing I can do.” Mieczyslaw said with fervor. It bore the stench of repetition. He had probably told himself this so often that he had come to believe it.

“Which version of yourself are you appraising when you make that judgment?” Hannibal asked carefully.

“What? I don’t follow.”

“We all create an image of ourselves in our own minds when we determine what we can do and what we cannot do, what we will do and what we will not do. There is the image of who we are at this very minute. There is the image of who we want to be. There is also the image of who we have the potential to be. When you say that there is nothing you can do, about which image of yourself are you speaking?”

Mieczyslaw stared at him trying to comprehend. Eventually he did. “I’m … I’m talking about the person right here in front of you.”

Hannibal gestured his acceptance with an open palm. “That’s perfectly reasonable. There is nothing that this version of Mieczyslaw Stilinski can do to help his friend. What about the image of who you will most likely become?”

The younger man blinked, falling silent. Hannibal sat back in the chair, waiting for the response and he was willing to wait for the remainder of their appointment. No matter what the response was, it would be enlightening.

“I’m not sure who that is right now.” The agent looked confused and worried. “Is that the problem?”

“The human mind cannot be likened to a math equation; looking for a fix to a problem is not profitable. You aren’t here to conform to any other person’s perception of yourself but your own. Thus, the importance of visualizing your own future; make an effort to describe him.”

Mieczyslaw studied the ground beneath his feet for minutes. Finally, he started talking quietly. “He’s poisoned. Every mistake he’s made since the day his mother died sit in his veins like bad cholesterol. He’s disillusioned. Every puzzle he’s solved has turned into another, harder puzzle. He’s jaded. He’s seen friends die and friendship wither.” The young man gasped. “Oh, god, what have I done?”

Hannibal continued to wait patiently.

“I just sat there and told you that I hated feeling helpless, that I had a panic attack because I can’t change a tragedy that happened to my best friend, and yet, what is my job? What am I planning to do
for a living? I am going to help catch serial killers. How many times do you think we’re going to get there in time? How many bodies of innocent people am I going to see?” He pulled a hand through his hair. “What the hell was I thinking?”

“You were thinking, if I remember correctly, that you have the talents and the skill to help stop these people as quickly as possible. You understood that every killer you stopped prevented more innocent people from dying and perhaps achieved justice for their victims.” Hannibal was very appreciate of the irony of this particular line of discussion. If he had less self-control, he would have chuckled.

“But there is nothing I can do about Scott, and it’s tearing me apart. If I couldn’t help him, how am I going to help people who don’t trust me like he does? How am I going to help people whom I don’t love as I love him? I’ve not fled Beacon Hills; I’ve chosen to relive it again and again and again.” Tears filled Mieczyslaw’s eyes.

Hannibal responded. “We call this catharsis. I would also describe it as self-awareness.”

“It’s a mess.”

Hannibal waited until Mieczyslaw calmed down. “You have achieved a realization about yourself. Will you be content with who you are becoming?”

“No,” the young man muttered. “I won’t damn well be content.”

“Your next step lies in creating a new future image for yourself with which you will be content.” Hannibal offered a sincere smile. “I will help you, if you allow me to.”

Before Mieczyslaw could give his permission, his phone rang. Apologetically, the young agent answered it. The director had insisted on constant contact, though Jack never abused it. “I’m on my way.” He turned to Hannibal. “I’m so sorry, but I have to cut our appointment short.”

“Is there an emergency?”

“Yeah. Abel Gideon escaped on his way to court, killing three men. He’s loose.” Mieczyslaw jumped up. “All hands are on deck. Thanks, doctor. I know I say this a lot, but I’m really glad you talked me into meeting with you. I think it helps.”

“Of course you have to leave.” Hannibal stood up. If Gideon was loose, he had his own work to do.

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Stiles leaned up against one of the walls in Alana Bloom’s kitchen; it was painted burgundy and had flowered borders. To absolutely no surprise, he found her entire house to be that warm and welcoming. The décor seemed to belong to the house of a beloved high-school teacher than a high-powered, nationally-recognized psychiatric authority. He felt at ease here, though he made an effort not to feel too at ease tonight. He was here for a reason.

“Here,” Alana pushed a cup of something steaming at him. “Have some hot chocolate. It’s pretty cold outside.”

Stiles looked down at the cup. It even had a tiny little dollop of whipped cream on it along with the faint scent of cinnamon. It was entirely too precious.

“Not a fan of hot chocolate? You don’t have allergies, do you?” She asked. Alana was being completely serious.
“Oh, no, no, no! Thanks for the drink.” Stiles smiled earnestly at her. “You’re just mangling my carefully cultivated self-image of being a big, bad FBI agent.” They both laughed at that. “The Cool Whip is especially emasculating.”

Alana walked out of the kitchen and into the room she treated as her study. “I thought you were more enlightened than that, Agent Stilinski.”

“Oh, ha. Ha. Fooled you. I know we’re on the clock, but if you call me that for all the time I’m with you, it’ll get awkward. I don’t mind if you call me Stiles.” Stiles kicked off the wall of the kitchen and followed into it. The study had wood paneling, a pot-bellied stove, and the feel of a place where a lot of actual work got done. “If I get in your way, though, just let me know. I’m here to protect you, not to get on your nerves.”

“Oh, don’t worry, I’ve never been known for being intimidated by a badge.” She sat down at the desk, looking at the work she had piled there. “Do you mind me asking who you pissed off to draw this particular detail?”

Stiles looked Alana in the eyes and she stared right back at him. “I volunteered.” It was not a lie.

“You volunteered for protective custody detail? I find that hard to believe.” Alana gave him a disbelieving look and then turned back to work on the article she was writing.

“I did!” Stiles protested. When Alana shook her head without looking at him, he went on. “I actually did. But one of the reasons I did it is because a certain profiler was worried about you, and I figured he’d feel better if someone he actually knew was watching over you. I also saw what Abel Gideon did …”

Stiles trailed off because he saw the clench and move of Alana’s shoulders. He saw how the hands trembled even though she was trying to hide them. He knew those gestures and he knew what they meant.

“Dr. Bloom. I mean, Alana.” He walked over to the desk where she was working. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” She replied, turning to face him with a half-smile on her face.

“Yeah, no one buys that when I say it either.” Sarcasm would always have its uses.

“I know it’s foolish to feel this way about Dr. Gideon. I’ve worked with mentally ill criminals before, some a lot more violent than him,” Alana admitted. “I know I followed all the standards of ethical behavior. I even followed all the suggested guidelines. My discussions with Gideon were conducted with the best effort I could give. And yet, I still can’t shake the feeling that I triggered all of this death. If I hadn’t convinced him that he was the victim of psychic driving, then he wouldn’t have …”

“Well, if we’re going to play this game, I’m going to make myself comfortable,” Stiles interrupted. He pulled a comfortable chair a little bit so he could be near the desk. “Don’t stop on my account; I want to hear this. You’re in Stiles-country now.”

Alana lifts an eyebrow at him. “We are, aren’t we?” She hadn’t been involved with his therapy, and she hadn’t been in California, but she knew everyone who was. She must have been told something. “Will told me that I had nothing to do with it.”

“Will was trying to make you feel better.” Stiles chuckled. “I want to make you feel better as well, but I won’t do it by pretending what you’re feeling doesn’t have any validity. People think that minimizing our involvement in something somehow makes us feel better. It doesn’t make me feel better, and I’m guessing it doesn’t help you either. The truth is that you had everything to do with it,
but that doesn’t mean what you did was wrong. Abel Gideon, as Dr. Carruthers said, was a narcissist
with periods of violent psychopathy; he was convinced he was the Chesapeake Ripper, and he acted
on that belief.”

Alana was seemingly touched, but she was in the mood to argue with him. “Which meant I should
have been more careful about what I said, knowing it would affect the outcome.”

“If it wasn’t you, it would have been someone else. Dr. Chilton destabilized the mental state of a
violent narcissist; you were trying to correct his malpractice or error or whatever you call it. You
were trying to defuse a walking time bomb. That it went off before you finished it doesn’t make it
your fault.”

“I can still feel bad about it, can’t I?”

Stiles nodded enthusiastically. “I’d be a hypocrite to say that you couldn’t. With me, feeling bad
about things I have no control over is virtually a hobby. But let me ask you something; do you still
think you can help people like Gideon?”

Alana nodded. She already understood what he was getting at it. “I’m not giving up. When did you
get so good at this?”

“Mostly, I’m parroting what Dr. Lecter talks about in our therapy sessions.” Stiles winked.
“Seriously though, and no offense, I’m wondering why you need me as a sounding board.”

“Let me tell you a secret about psychiatrists. We’re pretty crazy.” Alana winked right back. “It’s
overconfidence, most likely. We’re so confident that we’ll see the fault-lines in other’s psyches, we
miss them in our own. Even Hannibal has his own psychiatrist.”

“Well, good!” Stiles let the conversation die; he felt confident his point had been made.

Alana turned back to her work and Stiles settled down to wait out the shift. Protective custody was
one activity where you wanted nothing to happen. You didn’t want the bad guy to show up. The
best protective custody for the one protecting was for it be dull and boring. Here, with the heat from
the little wood stove and the rather delicious cinnamon-laced hot chocolate warming him towards
sleepy oblivion, was the best type of nothing happening.

Of course, because this was his life, the gunshot jarred him out of his slight stupor. He was on his
feet in moment, gun drawn and ready, and trying to usher Alana to a part of her house that wasn’t in
direct line of the windows. He would have been proud of his reaction time and competence if he
hadn’t been scared shitless.

“No!” Alana didn’t let him pull her away. “That’s Will. Will’s out there!”

Stiles took control of the situation. He was a trained agent. “Take your phone, go to your bathroom,
lock the door, and call 911. Have them send police and an ambulance.” There was a thrill when
Alana did exactly what he told her to do.

The night was cold and the snow glittered blue under the crescent moon and the lights from Alana’s
house. His breath fogged up his face, but he didn’t stop until he came to the two bodies lying in the
snow.

Stiles knelt down and checked Will’s pulse. It’s there and it seems strong, but – and this freaked
Stiles out like nothing else – Will was burning up and he was sweating, even in the bitter cold. He
found Will’s gun. The barrel steamed in the snow; Will had fired.
Stiles went over to Abel Gideon. The man had been shot as well and was unconscious, but the wound did not look fatal. This man killed his wife and her family at Thanksgiving dinner. This man killed a nurse in the most horrible of ways, gouging out her eyes. This man killed an ambulance drive, an orderly, and a security guard to escape, pausing long enough to cut out their organs and hang them on a tree. This man drained every drop of blood from a psychiatrist for the crime of trying to help.

Stiles pointed his gun at Abel Gideon’s face. There would be no witnesses. He stayed there for ten seconds. Twenty seconds. Thirty seconds.

“No.” Stiles regretted the word the moment it came out of his mouth. Abel Gideon was mentally ill, but that didn’t absolve him from the responsibility for his actions. He had come here to kill Alana Bloom because she had tried to protect him, tried to help him.

He examined the scene. It looked like that Abel Gideon and Will had arrived from two different directions. There didn’t seem to be sign of a scuffle. Abel Gideon didn’t have a weapon on him.

A generous, pro-law enforcement stance would be that Will saw Dr. Gideon approach the house and shot him to prevent trouble. A justifiable shooting.

However, there was a lack of evidence. Neither Alana nor he had heard Will call out to Abel Gideon to stop. With no signs of a struggle and no weapon, there was an argument to be made that it was a vigilante action. Stiles didn’t think that any FBI agent or prosecutor would throw Will under the bus like that.

But then again, he didn’t think Scott would be sitting in the California Correctional Center in Susanville either.

“Fuck that,” Stiles told himself. His voice echoed out in the night. “No more taking chances with other people lives.” Stiles took of his jacket and laid it by the unconscious criminal’s feet. Then he took off Gideon’s shoes, carefully resting them on the jacket. Then he took off his own shoes and put on the doctor’s. They didn’t fit, but that was okay. He staged it that Gideon was rushing towards Will in the snow. He weighed less than Gideon, so he leaned on the foot prints heavily. Then he carefully replaced things back into their appropriate positions.

He suspected that the team at the BAU could possibly figure out his manipulation, but only if they looked for it. And he’d be there to make sure that didn’t happen. No one was going to punish Will for protecting Alana Bloom from a monster.

Stiles smiled to himself. It was a good trick.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

Lydia visits Will Graham in the hospital; Scott adjusts to prison life.

Chapter Notes

This takes place during the episode "Releves."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lydia Martin was the second person to visit Will Graham in the hospital after he had been admitted with an extreme fever. Stiles had asked her to do it as a favor, as if she wasn’t going to go visit him anyway once she heard the whole story from Stiles. In preparation, she had gone with Stiles to Will’s house in Wolf Trap when it was his turn to feed the dogs.

While there, she had thrown together a bag for him. Stiles, mid-feeding, had stared at her. “What are you doing? That’s like his underwear drawer.”

“When you’ve been in a hospital as often as I have, Stiles,” she observed primly, “you get a feel for what you miss the most while you’re there. You miss your own clothes. You miss your own toiletries. You miss your own things. The cheap crap you are given in a hospital makes you feel slightly off, like you’re a different person. Given what you told me about what he’s been going through, I think I’ll pick up some of his real things before I visit him.”

Stiles smiled, widely. “You’re amazing, Lydia Martin.”

“You’re just picking up on that now?” She clucked her tongue. “Finish feeding the army.”

Once she had arrived in Will’s room at the hospital, she settled down to wait for him to wake up. She unpacked the bag carefully and placed the items on the end table where Will could see when he woke up. Will needed his rest, but it was no burden as Lydia had learned how to wait patiently. She opened an e-book on the tablet that she had brought with her and started to read.

It was nearly a quarter of an hour before Will opened his eyes. “Hello. I didn’t expect to see you here.”

Lydia placed the tablet to the side. “Everyone at your office is thinking of you, but they’re really, really busy. Since my office hasn’t figured out how to keep me busy, I’d thought I’d come and see how you were doing.”

Will offered the tiniest of tiny smiles as he glanced over at this table. “First, a renowned psychiatrist brings me chicken soup and now a genius mathematician brings me my toothbrush. I’m feeling special.”

“You should feel special,” Lydia replied. “We special people need to stick together.”
Will pushed himself up along the bed so he was sitting. “Don’t take this the wrong way, but I’m a little surprised to see you here. We’ve only met once.”

“You’re important to Stiles, and Stiles is important to me. It’s an application of the transitive property.” She replied. “Also, I have a lot of empathy for you.”

“You do?” Will raised both eyebrows.

“Yes. From what I was told, you had a 105-degree fever. It caused you to lose time and suffer hallucinations, but no one can tell what’s causing it.” She nodded to make her point. “You may not have read about this when you investigated me – and I know you did investigate me – and Stiles may not have told you this, but when I was a sophomore, I ran around the woods of our hometown naked for two days. The best the doctors could come up with was an undefined ‘fugue state.’ I understand how disorienting it can be to know that there is something wrong with you, but no one can actually tell you what’s wrong.”

A shadow passed over Will’s face. Whatever had happened to him during that time had indeed unsettled him. Lydia thought he was probably wondering what she had wondered, so long ago: what if it happened again?

“Did they ever figure out what caused it?” Will inquired.

“Eventually, I figured out what was happening.” She chuckled. “It happens a lot less often, nowadays.”

“It’s still happening?” Will raised his eyebrows.

Lydia gave Will her best don’t-worry-about-it smile. “As I said, it happens a lot less often, but it is still going to happen. Some things you can’t recover from.” She left it at that. She certainly wasn’t going to explain about being a banshee or the possibility that her two-day adventure in the woods around Beacon Hills could also have been exacerbated by an undead werewolf who had hitched a ride in her psyche.

“I hadn’t thought about that.” Will observed ruefully, his head bouncing a little from side to side. “I was seriously hoping to be done with lost time and fever dreams.”

“You know that depends ultimately on the real cause. I know I can’t avoid them; I’ve made my peace with it. There was a time when I suffered as a depressing piece of bourgeois Americana until I looked deeper.”

“Hidden depths?” Will guessed.

“No, I’m still bourgeois, just not depressed.” Lydia’s thought went back to her grandmother. Every time she grew despondent about her powers as a banshee, she thought that at least she had control. At least she could grow, where her grandmother spent years trying to recapture it, only to have one last horrifying vision before the end. “If you’ll forgive me for being vulgar, it’s part of me now, like crow’s feet and cramps.”

“Are you trying to cheer me up?” Will gave her a genuine smile.

“Well,” Lydia drawled. “That’s usually what one does to friends who are in the hospital, don’t you? Do you feel better?”

“Considering I don’t remember much of the last twenty-four hours before I was brought in, I’m feeling a lot better. I suspect they’ll be releasing me the day after tomorrow.” He screwed up his face.
“You consider me a friend?”

“Why wouldn’t I? I told you about the transitive property! When you’ve known Stiles as long as I have, you’ll come to trust his instincts about a person. He thinks you’re worthwhile as a human being, so I believe that we’re going to be fast friends.”

Teasing, Will states: “I don’t get a say in this?”

“No.” Lydia gently mocked with an eye roll. “You’ll find your life is so much more improved when you understand that me getting what I want is better for everybody.”

“Fair enough. I’ll just take your word for it. Now, since we’re friends, I’m going to ask you. How are you doing?”

“Fine.” She answered to his disbelieving face. “You’re talking about California? Hmm. It looks like I walked into that one didn’t I?”

“You did.” Will said quietly. “I’ve thought about what you said at dinner a great deal.”

“You have? I was just …” Lydia didn’t think she should tell Will she was just trying to give Stiles cover. “I wasn’t trying to blame you.”

“You weren’t? It certainly sounded like it.”

“You did what you thought you had to do. Stiles did what he thought he had to do. Scott did what he thought he had to do.” She explained. “Not every tragedy can be avoided. The only person to blame for it is quite dead, and I, personally, am glad he is. What I said at the dinner was an outburst of regret; not an accusation.”

“Then tell me about this friend of yours. I’d like to hear more of him.”

Lydia studied Will’s face. She hadn’t prepared for this question. “I’m going to have to ask you why. You know we have secrets that Stiles and I keep between us.”

“Did Stiles ever tell you about Minnesota?” Will asked. In his voice, there was a nearly hidden tremor that Lydia almost missed.

“He told me some of it.” Lydia bit her lower lip. Now this twist of the conversation made sense to her. “He told me he was worried about how you would be after that happened.”

“Do you think that your friend … Scott … is more dangerous now? I know you haven’t spent that much time with him, but you did talk to him. Is he … changed?” Will tried to make it sound like an innocent question, but she could see the tension behind his eyes.

Lydia rubbed one leg with her hand. She needed to figure out how to say things without saying things that couldn’t be said. “You have to understand something about Scott. This wasn’t the first time someone tried to put him into this position. There’s been a long line of people who tried to make him to kill, and he always found a way not to take that step. It was sort of his … his line in the sand.”

“Isn’t that everyone’s line in the sand?” Will suggested.

Lydia shook her head. “Scott has a condition that predisposes him to violent behavior. He is also very competent when it comes to fighting. If he wanted to, I think that he could kill anyone I know. But if you knew him as I know him, you’d know how important not killing was to him, and how terribly it must have torn him up to finally kill someone.”
Will tried to process that. “It was that important?”

“You could say it made him what he is today. That’s why no one in Beacon Hills wanted to talk to you after Gerard Argent’s death. We all know what that bastard had done and why he had done it.” Lydia reached over and took Will’s hand. “What you did to that man in Minnesota … I don’t know the details of the case, but Stiles told me that you had no choice. To me, that means you did the same thing that Scott did, and I know what doing what he had to do to Scott. I don’t know what it did to you, but you can’t let the evil of other people taint you. There’s a difference between killing and murder.”

Will grasped her hand lightly and then let it go. “I can see what he sees in you. I wish it was as easy as telling myself that.”

“Oh, I know it’s not easy. Some of us carry scars from when we were younger than we’ll never forget. Just because it happened to you when you were older doesn’t make it any less real. I know you can’t see it, so I’m going to have to ask you to trust me.” She smiled as if they were talking about the weather. “I hope one day you get to meet Scott. Then you can see for yourself.”

“I hope I get to meet him one day as well.” Will yawned.

“That’s my cue to leave. Visiting hours are almost up anyway. I’ll come again if they don’t let you out of here soon. You need to visit us; I can’t promise anything as fancy as Dr. Lecter’s meals, but I’m not a bad cook.” She waved to him and left the room.

Lydia walked away from the room and toward her car. She was glad she could help, and she wished she could tell Will that killing someone like that man in Minnesota was something from which he could return. She had met a lot of killers in her life and she had met a lot of people who killed. They weren’t always the same.

Suddenly, she stopped. Lydia had meant to go to the elevator and out to her car, but instead she had found herself in a strange room. It was an advanced ward; standing in the middle of the room was a high-tech oxygen chamber. Inside, there was a sleeping woman. Lydia had no idea how she got there.

She opened her mouth and screamed.

The sound of roaring flames, and then silence. Nothing but silence.

###

It was no surprise to Scott when it occurred to him that movies and television shows tended to misrepresent life in prisons. They needed to grab ahold of the viewer’s attention and keep it focused long enough for the story they wanted to tell to unfold. The truth, on the other hand, was that life in prison was just a hair’s breadth away from unbearably boring. Scott had already learned almost everything he needed to learn about living in prison and it had only been three weeks.

The idea that he’d be here for at least another seventy-five weeks and possibly much longer simply could not find any place to rest inside his skull. The very thought of it brought his claws out when he was alone; even in public he sometimes struggled to control his heart rate. Everyone at home was sure that he’d get time off for good behavior, but he wasn’t so sure about that. He’d already figured out five ways for him to escape this place without hurting anyone, and the thought of it gnawed at the back of his skull. Full moons were going to be an absolute bitch.

Scott couldn’t say that prison was completely misrepresented in the media. While it had been three
months since the last riot and almost a year since the last death – this news did not make him feel better -- the culture inside the prison was still one steeped in violence. While overcrowding was not so much of an issue as it had been, there were still thousands of men with very little to do and no freedom locked in together. He shared a dorn room with twenty other men. An old timer had told him that there was a time when they were triple bugged and this room held sixty.

Scott had decided to keep his head down as much as he could. He had learned how to be intimidating when he had to, but that wasn’t the goal here. He told himself that aggression wasn’t his natural state, and he wasn’t looking for any trouble. Eventually, because this was his life, trouble found him.

It started on his thirteenth day at Susanville in the cafeteria. He had been eating lunch – prison food, while nothing to write home about, wasn’t as bad as he had thought it would be – when he became aware of someone shouting at him. He blinked and looked over at him, but he didn’t understand what the guy was saying.

“Sorry, I don’t speak much Spanish.” Scott gave the other inmate his best ‘let’s be friends!’ smile. It didn’t work.

Scott had met enough dumbass supernatural hotspurs who were looking for someone to fight with to be able to spot a non-supernatural dumbass hotspur who was looking for someone to dominate. He had to be ten years older than he was, and by the casual way he acted, this was, to the other man, a way to relieve the boredom.

“You don’t care about your heritage?” The inmate demanded.

Scott didn’t actually know how to answer that. It seemed to him like a have-you-stopped-beating-your-wife sort of question – the type with no right answer. “We didn’t speak it at home.” It was his best attempt to avoid antagonizing the guy.

The inmate wasn’t going to let his fun get away from him. “So you’re just a big pocho, aren’t you?” He put a hand out and pushed at Scott. Scott let himself roll with it, ignoring the slur.

“I’m not.” Scott didn’t think he had many sore spots, but there was always one he could never get over. People always seemed to think they had a right to define him. How to be a werewolf. How to be a human. “No one but me gets to determine how I embrace my heritage.”

“Maybe out there,” sneered the inmate. “But in here?”

The inmate reached out a hand to push him again and Scott grabbed it. He had moved so fast that the other man was stunned. He had wanted to keep a low profile, but this wasn’t because he was afraid. The truth was there wasn’t a single person among these four thousand inmates who could really hurt him. He, on the other hand, could definitely hurt any of them.

“In here, too.” Scott twisted the hand and started to crush it, but he was careful enough not to break any bones. This man was going to have a huge bruise. The inmate yanked his hand back but Scott saw the look in his eye. He had offended this guy’s pride.

Scott hoped that would be the end of it. It was not the end of it.

He was never in any real danger. First, he heard them coming; they still had no idea with what they were dealing. They held a conversation going over their plan right outside the shower room. Scott could clearly hear them even with the water running. While the sense of smell was far less useful under these conditions, the hearing still worked.
Second, the other inmates using the shower facilities while he was suddenly vacated the place. The veterans knew something was up and if you weren’t an idiot newbie, you followed what the veterans did. Scott didn’t leave when they did. It was best to demonstrate that this type of bullshit wasn’t going to have the desire effect. Pretending to be oblivious, he kept on showering.

Three of the Spanish Inquisitor’s – it was a good nickname, Stiles would have been proud – friends came up behind him. They were going to grab him by the arms while the other one was going to prevent him from leaving. The inmate he had angered was going to face him from the front.

The only thing that concerned Scott a little was that the Inquisitor had a shiv. It wasn’t very big, but he didn’t really want to be stabbed and have people watch him healing. He let them grab him, but he wasn’t going to act scared.

“Don’t do this!” Scott asked. “All because I don’t speak Spanish?”

The Inquisitor snarled at him in Spanish and held up the shiv threateningly. Scott estimated that the only way it could hurt him is if he stood there and let him cut his throat. That wasn’t going to happen. He waited until the man stopped shouting, to see if there was one last chance to get out of this without violence.

There wasn’t. The inquisitor wanted his submission. So, he hit the Inquisitor with the guy holding his right arm. He literally hit a guy with another guy. Stiles would have loved that as well.

Scott, for his part, was proud that he didn’t extend his claws, let his eyes glow, or even growl. That would have caused rumors, and if there was something that spread like wildfire through the prison, it was rumors. He did slip up once. The inquisitor stabbed him in the chest with the knife after he had hurled one of the attackers out of the shower room.

“You stabbed me!” Scott exclaimed, kinda stupidly. He’d been stabbed before, and this was a fleabite. He punched the guy hard in the face as it healed. He might have broken the man’s jaw, but he didn’t care. While the inquisitor moaned on the floor, Scott washed the blood off and got dressed.

It wasn’t an hour later when some middle-aged man approached him at the table next to his bunk. He seemed to command a bit of respect from the other inmates as they cleared out. “Good afternoon. Mind taking a little walk with me?”

Scott studied the man. His heartbeat was steady and he didn’t smell stressed, as well as he could catch the scent in this environment. “I’ve had a rough morning. Maybe some other time?”

“Better sooner than later, Alpha McCall.” The man pitched his voice low. Other inmates might have heard it, but probably not.

Scott got up immediately. “If you put it that way.” He followed the man out of the dormitory. Prisoners had some freedom of movement in the Level II section of the CCC. This man walked casually in front of him, and Scott relaxed a little. There was no else around.

The man was stocky and blonde, with gray hairs just appearing at the temple. He was in good shape, and he moved with the grace of someone who knew how to fight. When they were far enough away, he turned to Scott. “You did well this morning.”

“I got stabbed.” Scott replied. He didn’t know why he felt the need to denigrate his own performance.

“You were jumped by four half-wits in the shower. There’s not much even an alpha can do in that situation without letting the mask slip a little bit.” The man turned around. They were in the middle
of a hallway. “I’m not here to bust your balls for it. I’m here to introduce myself to you and to keep that shit from happening again. I’ve got a certain reputation among the prisoners; if they see we have a private chat, most people will leave you alone.”

Scott shifted nervously. “If that’s going to help me keep my cover, why didn’t you come sooner?”

“I really didn’t think you would want to talk to me, given our history.”

Scott blinked. “We have history? I don’t think I’ve ever met you before.”

“Oh, that’s right.” He laughed. “I’ve heard so much about you I forgot we didn’t. I’m Todd McCulloch. I’m the man who tried to kill Isaac Lahey at the police station after his father died.” He held out his hand.

“Oh.” Scott looked at the hand. Gingerly, confusedly, he shook it.

“Oh, indeed.” Todd winked.

Chapter End Notes

If I discover a name for the Argent assassin in "Shape Shifted," I will alter the chapter to reflect that.
Chapter Summary

Stiles and Lydia take steps in response to Lydia's first banshee scream in a long time.

Chapter Notes

This takes place during the episode "Releves."

“How many people could connect you to your scream?” Stiles asked crossing his arms over his chest. He didn’t want to flail and give Lydia a reason to feel nervous, though he felt terribly anxious. He fought the urge to pace through the living room, but he also couldn’t bring himself to sit down. Instead, he stood across the coffee table from Lydia.

Lydia, for her part, remained perfectly calm. “Honestly, it’s impossible to say. Even the patient in the oxygen chamber barely stirred in her sleep.” She squinted as if trying to remember the name.

“It’s pretty sound proof; that’s why they have the intercom on it. Her name is Georgia Madchen.” Stiles bit at his thumb. It felt foolish to be taken by surprise by the resurgence of the supernatural in their lives. It wasn’t as if they hadn’t talked about the possibility that his new line of work might trigger her abilities, but he hadn’t considered it happening where there were witnesses, and he certainly hadn’t considered how to integrate any information Lydia might discover into any ongoing investigation. He couldn’t just go to Jack Crawford and explain that his banshee lover had heard the approach of death.

“I can’t give any clue how many might have saw me go into the room; it was a full dissociative fugue. I haven’t had one of those in years. Now, after I screamed, I suspect at least two nurses on their way to the room saw me while I was trying to get out of there, but I can’t be sure if they were paying attention at all.” Lydia’s practical demeanor was remarkable. It had been so long since she had screamed that he was surprised that she could handle it with such aplomb. She tapped her finger on her chin while she leaned back on the couch.

“Okay, so we can’t rule out that someone may be able to connect you to the scream, but it might not happen; we’ll cross that bridge when we come to it. Given that, the two things that concern me the most right now is how do we use this information to stop what you heard and why did the danger to Georgia trigger your power?”

“I told you what I heard, and you know how that works. It’s what I need to hear: roaring flames. And then silence.” Lydia said speculatively. “I want to make it clear, I heard silence, not nothing.”

Stiles thought he understood the difference, but he gestured for her to go on. There was no harm in double-checking.

“Even when people consider their surroundings perfectly silent, there is still background noise. The
hum of lights; the whir of an electric fan; even the wind. Silence – this silence – was a complete absence of sound. All sound. I know it was important, but I can’t figure out why."

“It’s pretty unsettling that the roar of flames is the easiest to decipher. She’s in an oxygen chamber.” Stiles shuddered. “I’ve got to think of a way to get this information into the right hands. When you were in there, did the chamber look in good condition?”

“I didn’t have much time to take a good luck at the equipment, but this is one of Baltimore’s finest hospitals. If there is a flaw, it’s not going to be obvious.”

Stiles frowned at the difficulty of the situation. There was no reason for anyone to listen to him at the hospital. “Any ideas on how we can get people to check it?” Stiles scolded himself internally: why didn’t he have a plan for this? He had had months! Feelings that he and Dr. Lecter had worked hard to bury came surging up into the base of his throat. He had failed in California, and now it looked like he was going to fail again. He thought he was done with feeling useless. He thought about what Dr. Lecter had said, about imagining the type of person he wanted to be. He wanted to be someone who could handle this without panicking. So, he would become that person; he wouldn’t panic.

Lydia nodded; of course, she had an idea. “I was thinking of that on the way home. Can you manufacture a reason to talk to her? Once you do that, then when you do go to speak with her, you could ‘notice’ something wrong and get them to check out the machine. Aren’t you part of building a case against her?”

“That’s genius!” Stiles exclaimed. And just like that, relief surged over him in a wave. His ill-preparedness wasn’t going to hurt Lydia, because she was just as talented as he was. “I’ll have to bullshit a reason with the director, but it shouldn’t be too hard. I’m going to kiss you now!”

Lydia smiled at him. “If you must.”

Stiles awkwardly leaned over the coffee table to do exactly that. He overextended himself and fell down, his head bouncing on the cushion of the couch next to her. Laughing, he struggled to cross the table and get into a sitting position, so he could finally kiss her. “I must. I can’t arrange the interview tonight, but first thing tomorrow morning, I’ll write up a few questions and get permission to talk to her.”

Lydia did not deny him an affection glance, and his pratfall made her smile. “What brought this sudden ardor on? I know I am perfect and special, but that was an abrupt change in topic.”

“Whiplash.” He rested his head on her shoulder.

Lydia took hold of one of his hands and made a questioning sound.

“The last few months have been – to use the cliché – a whirlwind. It wasn’t enough to start a new high-pressure dream job with brand-new responsibilities and people just as challenging as I am. It wasn’t enough that the past came back with a vengeance in the form of a septuagenarian nutjob.”

“He was actually sixty nine, so not quite a septuagenarian.” Lydia corrected him.

“You know what I mean. It wasn’t enough that I may have inadvertently ruined my best friendship.” When she went to protest, he put a finger on her lips. “You know it’s true. With all this in my life, there’s been one constant. You.”

Lydia sobered then. She looked at him with wide eyes.

“No pressure. I’m just so happy to have you. No matter what happens next, no matter what it takes to
fix the mistakes I make, the fact that you’re still with me after all this time makes it bearable.” Stiles snapped his fingers. “That wasn’t very good, was it?”

“It was perfect, Stiles.” Her wide eyes seemed to get a little shiny.

“Yeah, but I also wanted it to be sexy. I was going to suggest we head to the bedroom.” He leered at her. “Would it be sexier if I picked you up in my arms and carried you in there?”

“Only if you wanted to give me a concussion, Stiles. You fell over a coffee table,” she teased. “But you don’t have to act sexy to turn me on or to get me to go to bed with you. All you have to do is ask.”

Stiles laughed. It was a bright laugh. “You don’t think I’m sexy?”

“Not what I said. You don’t have to act sexy at all; you are sexy.” She booped his nose. “Especially now that you were talking about it …” She slid off the couch and vanished into the bedroom. Stiles barely had time to recognize what she meant before he got up to follow her.

It was strange. When they had first gotten together, they had had an amazing amount of sex. Some of it was good, some of it was bad, and some of it was hilarious. As the years had passed, they actually had less sex, but to Stiles’ eyes it had only better. Now, he knew her, not just emotionally, but also physically. When they first got together, he would sometimes get so anxious about his performance that it turned into the sensual equivalent of a dentist’s visit. But now, he knew what she liked. He knew when she wanted to have sex, and he knew when she didn’t want to have it. He was confident and easy because he didn’t have to guess. It was so strange and so wonderful.

Stiles lay back next to her in the dark, hearing her breathe. He enjoyed these moments the most; it felt like a reward. His body relaxed and sleepy; her body did the same.

Finally, reality muscled its way back in and he said into the dark. “I almost forgot about the second question.”

“Mmmm?” Lydia hummed beside him. The only time she let her razor-sharp mind rest was in the afterglow.

“Why do you think you screamed for Georgia? You didn’t know her. You barely heard about her.”

“Oh,” Lydia replied. “I already know the answer to that.” She pulled herself up on one elbow so she wouldn’t be tempted to fall asleep before she could explain. “I had just established an emotional connection to Will Graham, and this woman must be important to him. I’m not quite sure why.”

“I know why.” Stiles replied. Empathy was a powerful force, and not just for the special investigator. Nothing quite felt as reassuring as knowing that there was someone who understood what you were going through, even if it was terrible. Georgia Madchen had lost her own image of herself to Cotard’s Syndrome; Will was losing his own image of himself with this mysterious ailment. Stiles, too, knew the isolation of not being sure who you were.

“The key is the emotional bonds between people. In the mythology, banshees were attached to certain families and screamed when one of them was going to die. But it’s not really tied to bloodlines; it’s tied to emotional connections, and nothing is stronger than the ties with family. When that mythology first appeared, human society was a lot more clannish. People were divided into ‘family’ and ‘not-family’, so of course it would appear that the power was focused only on blood relations. They were the only people who mattered.”

“And Georgia?”
“She may not have been important to me, but she was important to Will. I had just had a rather emotionally frank visit with him, and so I felt that her approaching death would be important to him. That’s how I was triggered.”

Stiles turned his head to frown puzzlingly at her. “But you said this was the first time you’d screamed in years. Why didn’t you scream for Gerard?”

“If I know the death is coming, I can choose not to herald it. I did hear that well-deserved end coming, but he was not worth a scream.” She shook her head. “I theorize it is something every banshee can do once they start to understand their powers.”

Stiles scrunched up his face. “When did you discover this?”

“Stiles, just because the supernatural has chosen to let us be while we went to college didn’t mean I let it be. I took the time to explore my powers systematically, especially since there was no one presently trying to kill us at the time. While Meredith was a great teacher, her approach she was very… intuitive. I prefer something with some scientific rigor.”

Stiles felt a little disgruntled. “Why would you keep this from me?”

Lydia’s tone in the dark sounded like she had raised one disbelieving eyebrow. “Because they aren’t your powers, Stiles, they’re mine. Boundaries, remember?”

Stiles felt in the dark for her hand and took it. “I remember. You know how much I appreciate you and them, but …”

“You’re nervous because of recent events. You’ll get over it.” She let her head hit the pillow. “Now get some sleep.”

########

Stiles Stilinski knew this wasn’t his fault. He knew that. He was not omniscient. He was not omnipotent. He had offered no terrible advice this time. There was no reason that he should feel any guilt over this; there was no reason that Lydia should feel any guilt over this. It was a terrible thing and terrible things happened. He had worked on this with Dr. Lecter during their appointments: the proper application of guilt.

However, when he looked at the charred corpse of Georgia Madchen, he felt the seeds of a panic attack at the bottom of his lungs. Last night, as he and Lydia had discussed in their own home how to use her warning to save the woman, a fire had started in her oxygen chamber. The results were more than horrible; she had died in fiery agony.

Somehow, even worse to Stiles was the look on Will Graham’s face. He was standing there in his pajamas and bath robe pulling an IV after him, and it looked like he was dying in agony as well.

_I couldn’t stop this_, he repeated to himself, _I couldn’t stop this. Don’t focus on what I couldn’t stop; focus on what I can stop._ It was a good lesson, and he would use it. For now, he waited until Director Crawford and Will left so the forensics teams could get to work. He wouldn’t be handling any of the material himself; he’d be recording and taking pictures while Jimmy, Beverly and Brian tore the machine apart.

While working, he thought about what Will had said about the impossibility of Georgia committing suicide. It didn’t make any sense that someone who had run around in the dark for months and years would kill herself immediately after finding someone who had been able to reach her, no matter the
terrible things she had done while in the grip of mental illness.

Stiles agreed. The idea of Georgia Madchen killing herself now was as ludicrous as the thought of him killing himself after the defeat of the Nogitsune. It wasn’t because guilt and recrimination weren’t powerful and destructive forces. Georgia had killed one of her best friends, and she knew it. Stiles had killed two dozen people, and Allison and Aiden had died because they had fought to keep him alive rather than taking the most effective route and killing him. Few people could understand the burdens that placed on you.

However, the whole reason it would be ludicrous was because both Georgia and he had had something else as well: hope. Even if Georgia hadn’t much faith in the efforts of doctors and medicine, she had extended a hand to Will Graham and it had been returned. He had had the pack; he had had Scott, who wouldn’t let him go no matter how many people told him he had to die. Scott had led others and worked with others and never abandoned him.

Suicide would be tossing that hope away. Georgia and he had survived so long without hope that giving up then would be like quitting a marathon five feet from the finish line. Suicide was a complex phenomenon, and it may have been arrogant of him to feel this sure, but his gut told him that she did not do this to herself.

For the rest of that day, he worked with the forensics team, who were in turn worked with the technician in charge of the maintenance and repair of the oxygen chamber. What police procedural television shows did not show you, what they couldn’t show you, was that forensic investigation was not fast. Oh, sometimes the clue might be staring you right in the face, but most of the time clues were only revealed by taking in every single aspect of the crime scene. Dismantling the oxygen chamber would require the entire team working all day and into the evening.

Stiles took the time while going back and forth and photographing everything to analyze the security layout of the hospital. No one there thought to hide anything from an FBI agent, so he learned pretty much what he would have to do to get where he wanted. He also lifted the security keycard from the oxygen chamber technician. No one noticed, and he’d drop it on the floor when he was finished.

The only real obstacle to his late night plans at the hospital was the phone call to Lydia explaining why he wouldn’t be home until very, very late. Stiles did not try to hide Georgia’s fate from Lydia, even though he’d experienced how Lydia reacted when her premonitions failed to save the person they were about. He was so worried about her that he almost ditched the plan until Lydia had coolly informed him that they would have plenty of time for him to comfort her after he got done what he needed to get done. She didn’t need him to hold her hand immediately. That was one of the things that he had had to adjust to in their relationship; her need to be able to handle things for herself.

After they finished for the day, it was nearly seven, and Jimmy Price suggested that the team grab dinner at a restaurant he knew nearby. Stiles thought about begging off of it, making the excuse that Lydia was waiting at home, but he needed to establish that he wasn’t acting strangely. If he didn’t give them anything out of the ordinary to remember, they probably wouldn’t even think of him at all.

After they all split the check and everyone else went home, Stiles parked his car in an alleyway about four blocks from the hospital, out of sight lines for any traffic or security cameras. He approached the hospital the same way. Everyone tended to think that you could make a web of security cameras that would catch everything, but that was simply not true, especially here. In the middle of an old and busy city like Baltimore, there are just too many corners.

Stiles walked the halls of the hospital like he belonged there; how you acted determined how you were seen. After all, he was part of an ongoing investigation and he had been there all day. That is why it had to be tonight. The people who counted, the employees who would notice things out of the
ordinary would never notice him. Tonight, he belonged here.

Breaking into Dr. Sutcliffe’s office was not difficult at all. Since it was a crime scene, the normal lock would be insufficient for security purposes as there were any number of hospital administrators who could get access. The FBI had placed a temporary lock on the room until it could be completely killed. Stiles had the access code and one of the keys.

The room was dark. Everything that needed to be processed about this room had been completed days ago, but as long as the case of Dr. Sutcliffe’s death was still open, the FBI wouldn’t hand the room back over to the hospital. Stiles’ instincts told him that if there was a clue to what had happened to Georgia Madchen, it would be in here. If it wasn’t an accident – and if it was he trusted the team to find evidence that it was – and if it wasn’t suicide, then it was murder. This was the room where she had supposedly killed the doctor, and if it was murder, then it might have something to do with that murder.

Contrary to what some people may believe, instinct was far more useful if you married it to logic and experience. Stiles examined the room systematically, using on his flashlight. The office was large and it would take more time, but it was better than someone noticing the light was on. From his initial sweep, the only thing he could tell was that Sutcliffe was rich, cultured, and an insufferable ass.

Fifteen minutes later, he was beginning to think his instincts were wrong until he opened a particular drawer in the filing cabinet. Inside were files for Sutcliffe’s patients during the last month of his life, arranged chronologically. Technically, these were patient files and legally off limits to law enforcement without a court order. Stiles snorted.

Dr. Sutcliffe was giving Will Graham an after-hours MRI the night he was murdered, but there was no file for that appointment. That did not bother Stiles that much, as the doctor might not have had a chance to make one. But just to be sure, he went to check Will’s first MRI.

There was no folder for that, either. Stiles cocked his head to one side; that was certainly odd. Further investigation showed no pull slip – the standard marker for when paperwork was missing from the drawer. Where did Will’s MRI scans go?

Stiles searched the room. No luck. There should be hard-copies of the images somewhere. It was standard procedure. He didn’t want to risk hacking into the hospital’s computer system; it wasn’t a rinky-dink hospital like Beacon Hills Memorial, and he wasn’t Danny. There was another place they would be – the MRI machine itself. After getting several in high school, Stiles knew how they worked.

Before leaving the office, Stiles searched Sutcliffe’s desk for the MRI control computer’s password. It was where people usually kept them. The floor was mostly deserted by this time, so he had little difficulty getting into the MRI room, booting up the computer, and looking for the files. That the first scans weren’t saved on the computer was strange, but the second MRI scans were not saved either. Stiles frowned and then checked the machine’s log.

The first MRI scan is recorded. The second MRI scan is not. Instead, during the time Will told them that he was getting a second scan, there was a diagnostic program run. So, either Sutcliffe was lying or Will had imagined it.

If Will had imagined it in his delirium, then it was a dead end. Georgia Madchen had killed Sutcliffe and then either died in an accident or through self-immolation.
If Sutcliffe had lied about the second MRI, then there was a reason he lied, and someone else knew he had lied. That meant a conspiracy.

Stiles knew what he preferred to believe.

Chapter End Notes

If I made the wrong conclusions about how hospitals or MRIs work, please let me know. I tried my best to research it.
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Scott gets to know the Argent hunter who tried to kill Isaac while behind bars. Stiles tries to follow his instincts to find the copycat killer.

Chapter Notes

Some dialogue is borrowed from the Hannibal episode "Releves."

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

From the tops of the nearby mountains, the clouds spread out across the sky like a slate-gray sheet. No sunlight poked through the overcast banks, but the threat of rain, while growing and shrinking with the passage of time, never got above ‘slight.’

Tonight, Scott thought. It will rain tonight.

His feet pounded on the grass as he ran, step after step, minute after minute. He circled around the exercise yard at its farthest possible constraints, so much so that he knew the guards kept an eye on him as he ran. He was sure that the guards and the other inmates though he was crazy. It kept him alone though. The other inmates shied away from the razor wire and the guards with rifles. He could run there and no one would bother him.

Exercise in the yard was turning out to be Scott’s best friend at Susanville. He found, after a few restless nights in the dormitory, that he had a lot of energy to burn off, more than he was used to having. When he was human, he had focused on conditioning to overcome his asthma, and he would frequently push himself too hard, wearing himself out. As a beta and then omega, his normal activities – school, work, lacrosse practice – and the constant running for his life had served to make a restful sleep something to look forward to. When he became an alpha in junior year, he had had even more energy, but that was easily sapped by all the things he had to worry about – betas, missed school, disintegrating relationships – even when the monsters weren’t crawling everywhere. College had been different. He only had to worry about the supernatural one or two weekends a month, but the grueling effort to perform in a difficult academic situation made what rest and relaxation he could get welcome.

Here he had nothing to do, just like everyone else. He could read, he could talk to others, and he could make friends. Maybe he would. One person had even asked him to participate in a role-playing game about monsters in a dark world. He had passed, but he had been nice about it. That left only exercise to burn his energy on.

He stayed away from the free weights. It seemed a shame to avoid the stereotypical prison exercise routine, but he knew that he would have to lift far too much weight for his frame to actually get any benefit from it. Some of the inmates who he saw working out took lifting very seriously, and they would have immediately noticed how much he could lift compared to what he should be able to lift.
So he ran, every day. Three times a week he also attended a yoga class; it was run by one inmate who had taught himself in an effort to break bad habits and, in turn, wanted to teach others. Scott found it very useful; he wished he had learned about it earlier. But he mostly ran.

One of the benefits of his efforts was the isolation. The lack of privacy in prison irritated, but the lack of solitude was damaging. Outside, he had becoming accustomed to walking around the world and concealing what he was, but there were times in the past when he could relax his guard and just be the wolf. But not here – there were humans everywhere. He imagined that this was what predators kept at a zoo felt like.

Another benefit of his long-distance hobby was the smell. If he thought that a heightened sense of smell was bad in high school, a prison was twenty-times as worse. Depending on which way the wind blew down off the mountains, he could smell other things besides men as he circled. Grass. Water. Sun-baked clay. He looked forward to it each day, unless someone visited him.

He would run for as long as he could, until his exercise period was done. It would have to do until he could leave. He thought about getting some sort of makeshift ankle weights to make it more of a challenge.

Rubbing at his face, he sat down on one of the benches just outside the entrance to the dormitories. The cloud still hung in the sky. He planned to wait until the last possible moment before going inside. Throwing his head back, he let the wind blow across his face; so relaxing was it that he almost didn’t hear the approaching footsteps. Almost, but not quite.

“Good afternoon, Mr. McCulloch.”

The man grunted and sits down. “You can call me Todd, you know. I appreciate the polite gesture, but … I’m not that old.”

Scott glanced over at the man. The hunter had perched on the other end of the bench. “Well, we’re not exactly friends.”

“We don’t need to be friends,” Todd answered. “But I’d prefer that we were. One of the toughest things for the last seven years has been having no one to talk to about the things that got us to this place. I’d imagine it’ll be worse for you.”

“Worse?” Scott has asked the question, but he could definitely see what the man meant. Here, there’d be no one here to talk about his instincts, no one to talk about his real past, or his hopes for the future. There would always be a veil between him and everyone else. He’d never really endured this type of separation between him and humanity. “I guess you’re right.”

Todd grunted in reply. “So, I do have news for you.”

Scott sat up straight and turned to face him. “Is it good news or bad news? I’m hoping its good news, because I’m a little full up on bad news.”

“Sorry. I have to say it’s a little of both.” The older man shrugged eloquently. “The rumor mill has you as a secret badass. Which I guess you are, but now everyone knows what you did to Chapel and his goons.”

“That’s his name?” Scott hadn’t thought to get the man’s name. He had just wanted him to stay away.

“Yep. That’s the good news, because people won’t think you’re an easy target. It’ll cut down on the bullies.”
“But …”

“But, it also means that any young desperado with something to prove is going to come gunning for you. As an independent badass, you’re the hottest gun in town that’s safe to take a shot at.” Todd chuckled.

“Fuck.” It made sense. Attacking a gang on your own would get you dead, good fighter or not. “You’re enjoying this too much.”

“Oh, does it seem like that?” Todd shook his head. “I guess it’s nostalgia. When I first got here, I was in the same position. I wasn’t interested in the games that get played in here, and I had the training to keep them out of my hair. I hurt enough people that people kept away from me, but I did have my fair share of desperados.”

Scott raised an eyebrow. Did this man expect him to start hurting people?

“Hey, just because I’m not a werewolf doesn’t mean I’m not dangerous,” Todd laughed, misunderstanding him completely. “Most criminals don’t really know how to fight. Those that do can usually tell who can really fight and avoid them. As long as you keep your eyes open, it’ll just be an annoyance for you.”

“I meant … look I don’t want to be a badass in here; I’m not interested in that, mostly because it could ruin my chances for parole. If some dumbass picks a fight and I hurt him, I could even get time added to my sentence.” Scott clenched his fist. “Fuck this.”

“You’re worried about your parole.” Todd actually intended to convey disbelief. “That’s cute.”

“What do you mean?” Scott asked, confused by the man’s attitude.

“Your step-father is Chris Argent. Do you understand the amount of pull he has when it comes to law enforcement? Honestly, I’m surprised you’re even in here at all.” Todd touched his chest. “My first parole hearing is in six months. I have no concerns about not getting out of here. Politicians, especially those who oversee law enforcement, listen to the Argents.”

“They do?” Scott had never spoken to Chris about it, but thinking about it now it had been convenient that the investigations into all the mass killings had been confined to Beacon Hills.

“Most people,” Todd began in a mockingly conspiratorial tone, “don’t want to think that people like you are real. They have enough on their plates with terrorism, cancer, mortgages and getting Bobby Jean into the best college. They want to be ignorant. All the hunting families have used this to get politicians to turn the other way.” He grinned nastily. “Once they look the other way, then you have a hold on them; you can prove they broke the law. Since politicians love nothing more than keeping their job, all you have to do is just apply the appropriate pressure. While it doesn’t work that well on police officers, prosecutors, judges, and parole board members are pretty malleable, especially when they realize their law-school training didn’t prepare them for wendigos.”

“If that’s true, why are you here?”

“Well, that’s pretty much your and your friends’ fault, Scott.” Todd answered. “Not that I hold it against you or anything.”

“Well, that’s good.” Scott smiled thinly.

investigation. Fifteen years was a pretty light sentence all told.”

Scott swallowed. If he thought three years was long, he can’t imagine looking forward to fifteen years. Of course, he could have gotten life if Peter hadn’t arranged that plea deal.

“The Argents may fight amongst themselves, but they take care of their own. I’ll be out of here in six months, give or take a few weeks.”

Scott wondered what he meant by the Argents fighting among themselves. “I guess I should be happy I’m only here for eighteen months. Well, seventeen now.” He ran a finger in a circle on the bench.

“How did you get caught?” Todd asked. “Probably rude of me to ask, but I have to know.”

“Gerard arranged it that way. He wanted to kill me or expose me. He didn’t expect me to kill him.” Scott answered, wincing. “I’m sorry, you probably liked him.”

Todd laughed, a loud and bitter laugh. “That fucker? He smiled at me and told me to go kill that Lahey kid, all while he was planning to become a werewolf. You don’t think that would piss me off? I gave up my freedom to do the right thing, and he was …” The man mastered himself. “Don’t think I’m going to dislike you for killing that … You can’t possibly understand how many good people he betrayed.”

“You’re right.” Scott hadn’t pried too deeply into the Argents. He hadn’t wanted to push Allison when she was alive, and he hadn’t pushed Chris since Allison had died. He had just been grateful for their help. For their presence. “Do you resent it?”

“Yes and no. If I was going to go to prison for this long, I’d have liked to do it for the right thing. But we are all prepared to go to prison. What we do is violent, and we can’t tell anyone.” He gritted his teeth. “Screw that old man.”

“Why not? Why not reveal us to the world?”

“I hunt because I want my children, if I have any, and my brother’s children, and my neighbor’s children not to be afraid of the night. But my neighbor could be someone just like you; yeah, I heard stories about you even in here. And your children should be able to go to school and the mall and the movies and not be afraid.” He nodded when he saw the disbelief in Scott’s eyes. “Yes, I took the Code seriously. And before you argue that maybe revealing werewolves to the world wouldn’t become a disaster, think about it – perfectly human black children get gunned down by the police due to fear of them carrying toy guns. Werewolves? You’d be extinct in a year.”

Scott stood up. “Guess I never thought about that. I’ve only known two hunters well. You were prepared for prison? Seriously?”

“We all are. Hunting isn’t something you do to get wealthy or famous. It’s a dangerous, terrible responsibility. Do you know why Argents kill themselves when they’re bit?” Todd closed his eyes as if he were remembering the lesson.

“Because you hate the idea of being a werewolf?” Scott remembered what that was like, to hate what you were.

“I’m sure that’s why some of them do it. My mentor tried to teach it to me this way. If you were bit, she said, where would you belong? Would a werewolf really belong among other hunters? Not likely. How could you work with all of your colleagues watching you for the first sign of being out of control? And would an Argent hunter belong with a werewolf pack? Could you imagine the
tension between wolves, knowing that one of them used to hunt their kind? No, there’d be no place for an Argent werewolf anywhere. They’d be destined to become omegas – desperate and unstable.”

Scott feels like snarling at him. For a time, he was an omega, no matter what Derek said. He wasn’t either of those things.

“She went on to say that the Code requires our deaths. When we’re bit, most of us are already killers. It’s an occupational hazard. Does anyone think that if a person trained to bring death became desperate, unstable werewolves, she demanded, do you think they would suddenly stop seeing killing as a solution? The moment we are bitten, we become what we were trained to defeat.” He shook his head in fond nostalgic appreciation. “She made everything so clear; I always listened to every word she said.”

“She sounds,” Scott said carefully, “like a formidable lady.”

“You should know,” Todd replied with a shallow grin, “you dated her daughter.”

Scott caught a glimpse of a guard out of the corner of his eye. It was time to go inside. He gestured to the hunter and they started to walk into together.

“You’re interesting, I’ll give you that,” said Scott. “And there are worse things to do then hang out with interesting people. But there is one thing you should know about me.”

“And that is?”

“I did have a hunter in my pack. An Argent hunter, so maybe you might want to consider that your mentor was wrong.”

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Stiles was tired. He had spent the last day with Jimmy Price and Brian Zoeller, along with two interns, putting together an exhaustive recreation of Garrett Jacob Hobbs’ travel patterns in connection with his victims as the Minnesota Shrike. The evidence against Abigail was formidable; his daughter had been with him every single step of the way.

Stiles listened while the senior agents listed the evidence they had discovered. The train tickets. The hotel reservations. The attendance at college orientations. It did sound pretty damning even to him. In a certain way he was proud of him and the rest of the team, they had displayed an exemplary amount of skill. They had combed through a mountain of data and discovered a noticeable pattern. He should be happy.

He was not. His gut wouldn’t let him be happy.

Director Crawford took the evidence and began to craft a scenario the painted Abigail Hobbs as an accomplice in her father’s crimes. Then the scenario expanded to make her the copycat killer.

Stiles found he couldn’t agree. He couldn’t, but he didn’t say anything. His instincts told him that this was wrong, that the girl might be an accomplice, but she wasn’t the copycat.

Brian expressed a form of disbelief from his side of the desk. “Then why kill Sutcliffe? Or the Madchen girl?”

Jack Crawford put things together in a way that was familiar to him. “Because she has a taste for it now.” His pause hung heavy in the air. “Or because she wants to impress someone new.”
Stiles could see the way that the director’s train of thought was heading. It was clear that it started in his much expressed suspicion of Abigail, one that now seemed pretty much confirmed. She was hiding something. It went through Will Graham’s leap that the copycat had killed the two girls in Minnesota, Georgia, and the doctor. It was true that Abigail had the method and motive, and the connection was through Will Graham, her surrogate father.

Still, Stiles could not shake the feeling, deep in his gut, that this was wrong. Not about the relationship between Abigail and her father, but the idea that she was the copycat killer. He had no words to express it, and he had no evidence to confirm it.

He stood in the back of the room as the three of them talked over the evidence, and there was a burning on the tip of his tongue, a desire to speak out and guide them away from the conclusions they were making. The effort not to speak was nauseating. Suddenly, he felt like he was back in the library in high school, trying to convince the pack that Theo was evil and knowing that he had no real proof.

But these weren’t a pack of teenage monsters; these were professionals. Two of them barely tolerated Will’s empathic leaps and poetic explorations of crime scenes; they wouldn’t give unfounded guts credibility. Director Crawford trusted in his primary investigator’s abilities, but he couldn’t trust like that in Stiles’ instincts. Not yet. Stiles had not yet proven himself.

He hadn’t had time.

Stiles needed to find more than just his instincts to bring to the director. Excusing himself when they were done, he immediately went back to the office. Proof was going to be difficult to find. He burned through his work as fast as possible, sending an e-mail to Lydia to explain why he wasn’t going to be home tonight.

Once he was done, he drove out to the mental health facility where Abigail was kept. He wouldn’t have permission to talk to her, but he could check out the security cameras and the visitor logs by pretending he was on official business. If he could find evidence that disproved Abigail’s ability to kill Dr. Sutcliffe or Georgia Madchen, he could go to the director with his feelings.

The place was pleasant and actually quite beautiful. The staff was professional and friendly. He was always surprised when he found out this is how most mental health facilities were. He persuaded the night supervisor to let him look at the check-in logs. They weren’t covered by patient-client confidentiality. Not every place for the mentally ill was a badly-run hellhole.

He was scouring them for the days when he heard the lightest of coughs behind him. Stiles turned around to come face to face with Freddie Lounds.

“Agent Stilinski. Do they leave novices like you unattended?” She coupled that verbal jab with an insincere smile. God, Stiles would admire her sass if it wasn’t directed at him.

“Well, you know, budget cuts and all. When you get so much bad press, you tend to lose support from the people in charge.” It was a weak riposte, but he wasn’t really interested in getting into a fight with the press.

“That is a hazard,” she replied. Lounds had a winter coat and was carrying a briefcase. “I’m curious what you are doing here.”

“Curiosity is a good virtue to have,” Stiles replied, intending to end the conversation. The last thing he needed was to get angry and say something that would end up on Tattle Crime.
“I was here to have a meeting with Abigail Hobbs, but she, it turns out, may have run into a hazard of her own.” The journalist’s voice was teasing. “But then, you know this.”

“What?” Stiles turned to face her.

“Or maybe you don’t know.” Freddie Lounds had the best mock surprise face. “I’m sorry for the spoilers.”

Stiles for a moment almost went for intimidation, but he knew that it would be a terribly bad idea. He wanted to know what she wanted. “Off the record, what do you want?”

Freddie Lounds nodded. “Off the record. I want an interview with your friend. He’s turned down every request I have put in to talk to him. Vigilante stories are very well received. I’m sure he might reconsider if you talk to him.”

“So, what are you going to offer me if I do this for you?” Stiles gritted his teeth.

“What you’re here for when I can tell that you aren’t actually here under anyone’s authorization,” Freddie Lounds suggested. “Answers.”

Chapter End Notes

I tried to research all I could about life at the California Correctional Center, but it seems that for obvious reasons they don't like telling people their schedules.

This concludes the episode "Releves."
Chapter Summary

Stiles and Lydia head towards Minnesota to find Will and Abigail.

Chapter Notes

This takes place between the episodes of "Releves" and "Savoreaux." Lydia's vision has dialogue from "Savoreaux."

They were twenty minutes west of Cleveland on I-90. Few people other than desperate truckers traveled at two a.m. on a toll road, so they were able to make good time. The flickering green glow of the dashboard lights and the stereo made everything look alien and lonely. Low guitar music danced around the edges of Stiles’ ears. He set the volume to keep him awake but not loud enough to wake his passenger.

Lydia shifted in her sleep in the passenger sheet; she moved her arm maybe a half inch in a gentle reposition. Stiles marveled that she could sleep like that; he had always thought of her as too refined to fall asleep with her head wedged between the car seat and the window. He locked this memory away someplace special.

Apparently, her adjustment hadn’t been enough; her eyes slid open and he watched her from the corner of his eyes as she established where she was and what she was doing. He didn’t speak to her; he hoped that she would return to her sleep, but it was not to be. “Stiles,” she finally spoke, “I haven’t asked, but is there a reason we’re driving to Minnesota rather than flying?” Lydia’s hair was mussed and messy, and she turned her head as if she was trying to untwist her neck. “If it’s as big of an emergency as you think, we can afford the tickets.”

Stiles knew he owed her a more thorough explanation, but part of him had been gratified that she had come along without much protest. After his at-turns frustrating and illuminating conversation with Freddie Lounds, he had rushed home, called off work for the next few days, and piled himself and Lydia into a car with nothing much but the clothes on their back and a sense of urgency. He had insisted that they leave immediately, though he couldn’t express why.

“Driving gives me plausible deniability,” Stiles replied as he stifled a yawn. “If people ask where I went, I can say that we went on an emergency trip, you and me. It has the benefit of being true, and I can certainly make it sound like further questions wound not only be unwelcome but rude. As long as we pay for everything in cash, it won’t be easy for someone to stumble on where I went.”

“So you need to get to Minnesota in a hurry, but you also need people not to be able to find out that you went. Great, so I am essentially helping you establish an alibi.” Lydia fished into her purse for a brush.

“Well, no.” Stiles replied as he began to pass a tractor trailer. She was here for a lot more than that.
Lydia gave him a look from the other part of the seat as she began to brush her hair. He’d seen that look before, when she was silently demanding an explanation.

“Okay, so yes but not just yes. It will give me an alibi, but that’s not the only reason you’re here. I need all the help I can get, and you have resources the FBI doesn’t.” Stiles took a moment to slide his eyes off the road and look her directly in the eyes. “I’ve told you that I’m working in the dark here. I need an extra pair of eyes and your skills.”

“You told me that you were working on a hunch, and that you needed my help. Which is fine, but you still haven’t explained what exactly you are hunching about or why it is so important that you needed to drag me with you across the country at this time of night.” When Stiles didn’t move to answer her right away, Lydia frowned. “That was a not-so-subtle hint to tell me about your hunch, Stiles.”

“When I say it out loud, it sounds a little paranoid.” Stiles admitted.

Lydia reached over and play-punched him lightly in the shoulder. “Do you really think I would mock you? Or disregard your feelings? After all we’ve been through?”

“Hey, it sounds paranoid to me!” Stiles protested. “Actually, it doesn’t sound paranoid; it sounds plausible and it sounds dangerous, but an outside observer could think it was paranoid, and I’d rather not go down that road again, thank you very much. I’ve learned my lesson; back up my instincts with proof. Now, tonight, I think that Will is obsessing over catching the copycat killer, and I think he believes he can get the copycat killer to come to him by taking Abigail Hobbs to Minnesota.”

“You know him better than I do. Why would he think that?” Lydia bit her bottom lip in the dark. She didn’t mention the one thing that both of them understood: this seemed a little reckless and irrational on Will’s part, if Stiles supposition was true.

“We know that Garret Jacob Hobbs was the model for two murders by a copycat, who has demonstrated significant knowledge of Hobbs crime. We, our team, figured out that Hobbs was hunting other girls in an effort not to hurt his own daughter; the copycat must have understood this as well, which is why Marissa Schurr was chosen. If Will is right in his believe that the same copycat who murdered Boyle and Schurr also murdered Madchen and Sutcliffe, then the copycat’s had to have been watching him closely as well ever since the first killing, as Will is the only connection to all four of the victims.”

Lydia followed his line of thought easily. “To an outside observer, if Will takes Abigail to Minnesota, it implies that he’s discovered something important. Something a copycat could very likely be concerned about. Okay, I understand now; Will may have placed himself and this girl in danger. My next question should be pretty obvious to you. Why didn’t Will go to his team? Or just to you? Why do it by himself?”

Stiles’ frown was deep enough that Lydia let him have as much time as he needed. She trusted Stiles enough to wait until he found a way to answer. “Will must suspect that the copycat has ties to the team.”

Lydia sighed meaningfully and irritantly. She was about to present a problem to him, and he had enough of them right now. “You realize that this means that to Will, right now, you’re a suspect.”

Stiles turned so hard to face her that he swerved the car into the other lane. “What?” He got the vehicle back under control; Lydia waited until he was settled down before she continued.

“Think it through, Stiles. It’s a possibility that he suspects someone connected to the investigation is
the copycat. You’ve insinuated yourself into his life; remember, you told me that you two even have had a fight about exactly that. Thanks to all that mess with Gerard, he knows you have a secret criminal past that you won’t talk to anyone about. Yes, you’ve started earning the team’s trust back, but all of them know that you are keeping secrets. And remember, the very first case in which you participated was the first of the copycat killings. It’s not unreasonable for him to think that you are a viable suspect.”

“Shit.” Stiles couldn’t argue with any of her reasoning, and it left a bitter taste into his mouth. Will was stressed, unstable, and frustrated. He couldn’t demand that Will just believe especially with the weight of the evidence. “I’ll just have to convince him that I’m not.”

“Just don’t yell at him and then expect him to believe you,” Lydia pointed out.

Stiles gritted his teeth. She could get under his skin; he had to remember that. “Was that really necessary?”

“Yes. You’ve done it before, and you were wrong to do it then. I’m just reminding you.” Stiles had told Lydia everything. Now he was wishing he hadn’t. “You’ve grown a lot, but you are still you, and when you think you’re right, you take doubt as a personal affront. Just like you are doing right now.” She emphasized.

Stiles realized he was angry. He took a few deep breaths to calm himself down.

“Stiles, you have to accept the possibility that he might not believe you. You have to accept the possibility that your very presence might make him believe you are the copycat killer.”

“So, what do you want me to do? Turn around and go back?” Stiles demanded.

“Would it be so terrible a thing to get some official help for once? I know we grew up having to avoid the police and the law as much as possible, but this isn’t the same thing.” Lydia reasoned. “Maybe we should go back and talk to Director Crawford about what you suspect.”

“But what if Will’s right? What if the copycat killer is connected, somehow, to the team? Telling them would just spoil Will’s trap.”

“Yes, it might. And maybe it should be spoiled, Stiles. Will’s not in the best of shape right now. You told me he’s been hallucinating and losing time due to the fever. They still don’t know what caused the fever, so there is a chance he could still be hallucinating and losing time. His judgment could be seriously impaired.”

Stiles gritted his teeth, because part of him knew that she was right. Will seemed on his way to recovery, but he still admitted that he was unstable. Baiting a killer to come after him with only the company of a teenage girl was not the most practical play in this instance. On the other hand, if he did take Lydia’s advice, he would have to explain to Director Crawford how he had developed his own suspicions about the copycat killer and how he had found out that Will had taken Abigail. The first explanation would require admitting an abuse of power. The second explanation would require him admitting that he had made a deal with a journalist. Director Crawford didn’t like Freddie Lounds any more than he did; he’d certainly be in all sorts.

And right now, Stiles didn’t even want to tell Lydia the deal he had made. “It could be. I just …”

Lydia waited for him to speak as the interstate rolled smoothly under them.

Stiles decided to be honest with her and honest with himself. “You know I’ve experienced things very, very similar to what he has. Experiences when I couldn’t trust my own senses. Experiences
when I felt I was isolated. And because of that, I know what it’s like to need to prove that you’re right. I know how important that can be in going forward. The rest of the team doesn’t understand that; they don’t have the frame of reference. I can do things for him that the rest of the team can’t.”

“Such as jeopardizing your career to support a kidnapping?” She asked, lightly.

“Technically, he’s Abigail’s guardian. Unless he coerced her into going with him, it’s not kidnapping. And, hey look, in addition to knowing what he’s going through, I can … bend.” He laughed. “I can be more flexible than the others on the team. I’ve had a lot of practice.”

“It’s your life, Stiles,” Lydia finally said after considering his words for a few minutes in the darkness of the car. “I’m with you, no matter what. I just hope you know what you are doing. Now pull over. I’ll take the next six hour shift.”

###

Snow crunched beneath their feet. It was late-winter ground cover; snow that had fallen, melted partially, and then refrozen. Patches of it were no longer snow at all, but porous ice. It was hazardous to walk, even on the sidewalks and driveways.

Lydia hated this time of the year; she wanted it to pass quickly so Spring would come. Beacon Hills never got much snow; there were light snowfalls of an inch or so maybe twice a year, most likely in late December or early January, and that was it. The odd heavy snowfall had been a time of wonder and days off school, but by the time the tail-end of winter had pulled into town, it had been drab.

In her years at Cambridge, she had seen a lot more snow, but it made her hate late winter even more. Dirty gray snow piles and patches of black ice were all she saw hiding among dead trees and mud. It was depressing. It was annoying.

Minnesota would have more snow than either of those other places, but even here the thaw was beginning to change its consistency. She maneuvered across the yard, managing to keep her balance even in these heels. Stiles never understood her uncanny skill with maneuvering in such shoes, but she had practiced, practiced, practiced. Still, this wasn’t a social event. Maybe she should have brought a pair of sneakers.

Stiles had parked the car down the road some distance in order to minimize suspicion. Together, they walked down the wooded street, looking like nothing but a couple enjoying the outside. Someone with a suspicious nature might wonder why they chose this neighborhood on this day, but that would be a remarkable coincidence, especially since the neighborhood had a reason to be famous. Lydia saw the home that Stiles pointed out as the Hobbs’ house. Graffiti had been scoured off the front door and the garage door, and there was still police tape covering the entrances.

Stiles produced a key with a flourish; he must have gotten a key to the house from the ongoing investigation. He sprinted up to the front door to open it the house up.

Lydia paused as she followed his approach the doors. She heard long, slow, wet breathes being taken, and they were neither hers nor his. As she stood there, the breathing slowed and slowed, soon to stop, as a life expired. She bent over slowly to try to pinpoint exactly where it was occurring.

Stiles had entered the house; she could hear him talking to an empty room before he noticed she hadn’t come in yet. “I’m sorry,” he began, “I know you’re tired …”

Lydia had tilted her head to one side focusing on one particular spot on the concrete of the porch; she knew that someone had died here. She reached out with one hand and touched the black ice covering
“Mrs. Hobbs.” Stiles announced from nearby. She looked up and saw the regret collecting on his face. That wasn’t going to work for her; he couldn’t feel bad every time her powers activated.

“Quit it. This is who I am, Stiles. You’re not making me do anything that I haven’t done before and that I wouldn’t do even if you were in my life. I know I can help people. You aren’t exposing me to death; you’re helping me give it meaning.” She tried to sound reassuring as she stood up. “This death happened last fall, didn’t it?”

“It did.” Stiles explained to him what had happened. She nodded and then motioned him to go back into the house.

Stiles led them inside. The house was split-level and the décor of the walls favored golden brown and rough wood. Too rustic for Lydia’s taste, but the place had a nice feel to it. It had once been a home. She shuddered at the idea of the owner being a serial killer. But she had learned that there was darkness everywhere, even in houses such as this. She remembered Julia Baccari and how one act of brutality had made her capable of terrible darkness; her hand touched her throat, absently.

The house was empty. Even the furnishings had been removed so it was just walls and carpet and floors. And, of course, the coppery, bright smell of fresh blood.

“Wait,” Stiles said. He drew his gun, standing in front of her. Lydia decided that she’d let it slide; he was in law enforcement, after all. She would never tell him this, but whenever he acted all big-time agent, she was a little turned on. She pushed that to the side; this was not the place nor the time.

“You smell that, right?” Lydia asked instead. Both of them knew that particular odor. It was one that would never leave them, as they had experienced it coming from their loved ones. Their lives were not like other peoples’.

The pair of them crept towards the source of the smell. It was in the kitchen, the same kitchen where Garrett Jacob Hobbs had met his end. A pool of red spread on the floor and decorated the counters in morbid gore.

“Oh, God,” Stiles muttered. She could tell when he was distressed. He thought they had come too late, that perhaps the copycat had caught up with Will and Abigail. She reached out and laid a hand on an arm.

“Yes, that’s a lot of blood,” Lydia said with heavy emphasis, “but that’s not conclusive. You don’t know whose it is, and you don’t know if that means someone is dead.”

“The blood from last Fall was cleaned up long ago.” Stiles kept his eyes fixed on the scene before him. “Can you hear anything? Can you tell who it was that died here?” Stiles asked in a faint voice, as if he hoped she couldn’t.

“Maybe.” Lydia reached into her purse and pulled out her smart phone. “Let me have a moment.” She brought up a file she had saved on it and pressed play. “Make sure I don’t accidentally step in any blood.”

Stiles recognized the recording and his eyes grew wide; she understood why he had that reaction. It was the sounds from vinyl album on the record player in her grandmother’s lake house. During junior year of high school, it had helped her find the first cypher key for the dead pool. When she had begun to pursue her own research, Lydia had made a recording of it, since it was designed to trigger banshee abilities.
Stiles smiled and shook his head. “Dr. Martin, you are a genius.”

“I know. Hush now. Let me concentrate.”

Her eyes closed as the faintest of sounds reached her ears. Something being cooked on a now-cold skillet. Plates being set on a table that no longer was there. Glass clinking. A phone ringing. A man speaking in an insistent whisper. A commanding whisper.

“See?” Lydia Martin turned to Stiles. “See?”

“That was Garrett Jacob Hobbs.” Stiles told her. “Do you hear anyone else?”

The sounds cascaded around her. Gunshots. People working. People crying. The cacophony threatened to overwhelm her and it muddled the details, but she could tell what had happened and what hadn’t happened. She muttered to herself something she overheard “I know who I am; I’m not so sure I know how you are any more.” And then, suddenly, there was silence. Utter and complete, swallowing up everything else until she could hear nothing, not even the sound of the recording or her own heartbeat.

Stiles was up on the balls of his feet when she opened his eyes. He was focused on her so intently that he looked he was ready to grab ahold of her. Patience was not his strong suit.

“No one else.” Lydia turned the recording off. “No one else died here but that man. I heard snippets of it, but when I try to focus on what I need to know, all I get is silence. The same silence I heard outside that woman’s oxygen chamber.”

“It has to be the copycat, but if you’re sure no one else died here, what is this?” He gestured at the blood. It’s too fresh to be from last Fall. This has to be someone else’s.” Stiles scratched at the back of neck.

“The solution is simple. Whoever’s blood it is, Stiles, they’re not dead. Not yet.” Lydia said firmly. “What do we do now?”

Stiles chewed the inside of his jaw. He had to move carefully. Obviously, something was going on, but he wasn’t quite sure what. “Okay. I’m going to take a sample of the blood, but then we’re going to go check out the local hospitals and hotels. You up for that, or should we get some sleep?”

“I slept in the car, Stiles. Let’s find Mr. Graham.” Lydia tossed her head to show how awake she was. “Let’s go save some people.”

Chapter End Notes

I read somewhere that I shouldn't use italics to emphasize words, so I've stopped. Let me know if you want them back.

I want to clarify the timeline, because fans of "Hannibal" might be wondering where this fits in. It is on the same day that Abigail left Will at the cabin and after Abigail and Hannibal have their conversation at the Hobbs house in "Reveles." The beginning to "Savoreaux" would be the next morning.
Chapter 30

Chapter Summary

Scott gets scolded during a card game. Stiles makes an unpleasant discovery during a session with Dr. Lecter.

Chapter Notes

This takes place during Savoreaux

Todd McCulloch laid out the cards triumphantly out on the table. Another victory. “Gin.”

Scott slapped his cards down flat in a gesture of pleasant frustration. “I’m really glad I decided that I didn’t want to play for money. What’s that, twenty games in a row?”

“Twenty-three. Not that I’m counting or anything.” Todd winked at him. Their companionship had evolved exactly how Todd said it would. They were the only two people here that belong to their world and thus they slowly drifted towards each other. Loneliness was a powerful poison, and the only antidote for it was understanding.

“You aren’t stacking the deck. I’ve shuffled. The cards aren’t marked; I looked,” Scott said in mostly mock irritation. He was nettled by his apparent helplessness when it came to the cards.

In response, the hunter picked up the cards, flourished them, and started shuffling them in a showy manner. “Another game? I promise I’m not cheating.”

Scott stuck out his tongue, which was not a very mature adult thing to do. Before he answered, however, he glanced at the clock on far wall. “Sure. I’m always up for more humiliation.” He watched the man shuffle the cards, though he really didn’t think that Todd was cheating. “So, is your ability to kick my ass a product of hunter training?”

“Well, the training did include surveillance, observation, and self-control. But my ability to own you at gin rummy has a far more mundane explanation. Two mundane explanations, actually. First, I’ve played a lot of cards in here.” Todd grimaced in emphasis. “Second, you’ve got a terrible poker face. You can’t bluff worth shit.”

“I can bluff!” Scott protested.

“No, seriously, you can’t.” Todd countered. “I’m sure you probably can when it’s important, but when you’re relaxed, your face is as open as a cheap Las Vegas hooker.”

“Gross. That was gross. And untrue.”

“Oh, sorry. I was unaware that you had a lot of experience with cheap Vegas hookers to be able to tell whether your face resembles one.”
“I don’t!” Scott laughed. “And if you do, I don’t think it’s something to boast about.”

There was nothing else to do, so they started another game. Scott turned his head forcefully away from the clock on the wall. Watching it was only going to make time creep by. Besides, he was having fun with the card games. He always did.

Scott remembered the summer after their freshman year at college. The pack had gathered at his house as a sort of informal welcome-back party. It had been low-key, slightly mundane, and totally wonderful. After they had eaten and talked, everyone but Stiles, Lydia, and Liam had left. They all had lives back then, other places they could have been, but those three wanted to be with him that night.

They had ended up playing cards; it had been penny poker. Lydia had rolled them in Texas Hold ‘em, five-card draw, seven-card stud, and any variation that anyone at the table could think up. Stiles had turned to wink at everyone before declaring that they should have played strip poker. It turned out that not only could Lydia bluff better than any of them, she had a talent for counting cards and, surprising absolutely no one, calculating probabilities.

“You here, buddy?” Todd asked. “Because what you just did is … cheating.”

“Oh? Oh!” Scott folded his hand. “Sorry. My mind was wandering.”

“I’ll let you win if it’ll get your mind back in the game.” Todd said offhandedly. This provoked a laugh from Scott. “Though I’m assuming that you’ve got visitors coming today?”

“Yeah. My mom and dad.” Scott’s stomach fluttered like Jennifer’s moths.

“You don’t sound particularly happy to have them vising you,” Todd observe as he dealt out the cards.

They sat in silence without playing for a few minutes until Scott looked up. “It occurred to me a few days ago that I’ve got to be an incredible disappointment to them.”

“You?” The hunter scrunched up his face. “You’re joking right?”

“I think people in our world forget what it’s like to be in their world.” Scott picked up the hand that Todd had dealt him. “My mom. My dad. They’re not really a part of this. Sure, my mom got kidnapped by a darach and almost eaten by a wendigo and my dad got stabbed by an oni and punched by a berserker, but those are incidents. They’ve touched the supernatural; they’re not part of it. Not like I am. Not like you chose to be; you couldn’t stop now if you tried, could you?”

McCulloch shook his head. “I’ve been sidelined for seven years, and no, I couldn’t.”

“I imagine what the next door neighbors think. What they think about the boy who snuck out of the house at all hours of the night and then had grown men and women, armed men and women, sneaking in. What they think of all the missed classes. What they think of the trips to the hospital. What they think of the damage to the house – do you know how many times my mother had to replace the windows?”

“My mother didn’t sign up for this. My father may have left and fuck him for doing so, but what right did I have to ask him to come back?” Scott frowned as he looked at the ten of spades in his hand. “Other parents don’t have to worry about things like this. They don’t have to lie to the authorities. They don’t have to keep ancient remedies discovered by ancient druids in a Tupperware bowl in a freezer. They don’t have to visit their murderer son in prison.”
Todd snorted. “Look around you. There are a lot of people here, and everyone one of them had parents. You’re not unique.”

"And how many of those parents are disappointed? And I was supposed to be unique. I was supposed to be different." Scott ran a finger over the card. “But I’m just like all the others.”

"Wow. You’re an idiot.” Todd throws the cards down. “I thought I was going to get to spend time with a mature adult alpha and not a self-absorbed arrogant man-child.”

Scott looked up. “What?”

“Don’t ‘what’ me. You committed a crime; you’re getting punished for it. I committed a crime; I’m getting punished for it. Both of us,” Todd pointed at Scott and then pointed at himself, “knew what we were doing. Both of us thought we were doing what we had to do. What makes you think that you’re any better than me? Your title?”

Scott opened his mouth to answer it, but Todd went forward angrily and directly.

"I know and you know what you did to get that title, to get that status. Who cares? You emptied that clip into Gerard because he pretty much forced you to do it, and that doesn’t erase anything you’ve done before. You’re a still True Alpha. You’re still the person who saved all those people, who is still saving all those people. But it goes both ways -- the fact that you are who you are doesn’t erase that you did empty a clip into Gerard Argent. Who the fuck do you think you are?”

Scott put up a hand to get the hunter to stop so he could apologize. He didn’t understand where this was coming from.

"No one. No one gets to be perfect. That’s not how this world works. And for you to sit here and think that you’re better than me because you failed at being perfect? Such an asshole.”

"I don’t think I’m better than you.” Scott protested. Even though this guy had tried to kill Isaac, he still didn’t think he was better than him. >

"You’re certainly fucking acting like it. Oh, my mommy and daddy will be so sad because I was only a fucking superhero ninety-nine percent of the time rather than one hundred percent of the time. Boo hoo, boo hoo.”

"I’m not a goddamn superhero.” Scott gritted out. He always hated when Stiles tried to treat him like one. “I … I don’t understand. Why are you so pissed off because I’m upset that I killed someone?”

"I’m not pissed off because you’re upset because you killed someone; I wouldn’t want to be anywhere around you if you didn’t get upset when you killed someone. I’m pissed off because you think that you have to hold yourself to a higher standard than me or any other motherfucker in this prison. In fact, you asshole, you should be excusing yourself more than me or anyone else here. You’re a fucking werewolf – you’ve got an instinct to kill. But no, you’ve got to be all noble and shit.”

Todd reached out and yanked the cards out of his hand. It seems that they weren’t going to play anymore. “You’ve never asked me why I became a hunter. I became a hunter because I was like your friend Stiles. My best friend got bit by a werewolf, but unlike you, he couldn’t control it. He got angry and he killed another friend of ours on his first full moon. We didn’t know what was happening. And then, he killed another person trying to cover it up. The next full moon, he killed one of his parents. And every time he killed, it became easier for him to do it.”

"So you hated him."
“No! I loved him. I watched one of the people I loved best in the whole world lose a part of himself every time the moon swung into the sky. He was still my friend, but by the time it was all over, he didn’t even recognize that what he was doing was wrong.” Todd tried to pretend he didn’t have tears in his eyes. “And you sit here and feel sorry for yourself, because you carefully and methodically made a decision to kill in order to protect others. *Fuck you.* Why did you get to be a True Alpha and he gets to be a monster that had to be put down like a rabid dog?”

“I didn’t ask for this!” Scott shouted, loud enough that others looked at him across the room. “I’m so damn tired of people coming at me like I wanted this crap to become my life. And it has become my life. It’s everything now.”

“No one gets what they want in life, so suck it up, princess!” Todd hissed. “Be sad because you’re in here with assholes like me. Be sad because the price you had to pay was too high this time. But for God’s sakes, stop with the woe-is-me, I’m-a-killer shit. You’re not a monster, you’ve never been a monster, you’re anything *but* a monster, so stop calling yourself one, you unbelievably selfish dipshit. Believe me, when you become a monster, *I’ll let you know.*”

They stared at each other over the table for a good five minutes without talking to each other.

“Dude,” Scott finally said. “That was way harsh.”

Todd shrugged. “Ehn. What can I say? I have a lot of buried feelings.” He shuffled the deck again, but plainly this time. “Did it work?”

“I don’t know. I guess I could sigh dramatically and find out. That rant was pretty entertaining.”

“I got plenty of them.” Todd put the cards down. “Seriously, though, quit it.”

Scott turned away and towards the window. Honestly, he wasn’t sure he’d ever forget how much it had felt like a betrayal of … everything, really, when he pulled the trigger on Gerard. He’d lived so long with the need not to be what others wanted him to be – what Peter and Kate and Deucalion and the nogitsune and even what Gerard wanted him to be – that he forgot that there was a possibility that he would need to be that. He had feared it for so long, and now that he had done it, things felt off.

But that was Todd’s point, wasn’t it? The only person painting Scott McCall as evil or corrupted was Scott McCall. His family didn’t think he was corrupted because he had done that. His pack didn’t. His friends didn’t. Even the State of California didn’t think he was a murderer. They called it voluntary manslaughter.

I am never going to get exactly what I want, Scott thought to himself. And maybe I just have to learn to live with that.

######

Hannibal Lecter had an ability to speak bluntly and directly without being the slightest bit impolite. He began to speak the moment they sat down in his office. “I can see that you are upset, Mieczysław.”

Stiles tried to consciously mimic that same tone. It seemed appropriate. “Shouldn’t I be upset? Aren’t recent events something to become upset about?”

“It is only normal to experience strong emotions when a friend and colleague has been accused of serious crimes, including murder.”
Stiles Stilinski was not fidgeting. He was not nervous. His hands were steady and his mind was clear and focused. He had grown up a lot, he knew, but he only felt this crisp, this sharp, in one of two situations. The first was when someone he cared about was in danger. The second was when he was so furious he forgot to be insecure.

This was one of the few times he was feeling them both at once.

“Will Graham is not the copycat killer.” He gritted out from his far too comfortable seat. It had been a long day since he had gotten back from Minnesota. Will had been arrested while he drove back. He clenched his hands around the arms of the chair.

Hannibal Lecter simply looked at him from the other chair, as if he were waiting for him to go on. For the first time in a long time, Stiles wanted to punch him in the face.

“Will Graham did not kill Abigail Hobbs.” Stiles felt like he was spitting out glass shards and razor blades.

“You feel this strongly, even though it is contrary to what I am being told your own team has found in terms of evidence.” Hannibal looked at him through hooded eyes.

“Yes, even though. Look, I don’t care what they found. Evidence … evidence can be faked.” Stiles knew exactly how that sounded, but he was finally trusting his own judgement and he certainly trusted Lydia’s abilities. “I know Will Graham, and I know he didn’t kill anyone other than Garrett Jacob Hobbs.”

“Knowledge is the recognition of reality as it is presented. We first became acquainted because you knew that your friend Scott McCall had to be the one to kill Gerard Argent. Do you still know that?” Hannibal sounded so sure of himself.

Stiles paused what was going to be a scathing and not particularly complimentary reply and took a deep breath instead. Getting angry at his psychiatrist was not going to be productive. It wasn’t like Hannibal had a motive to be insincere, even with that gut punch.

“Hmmmmm,” Stiles said out loud. Hannibal raised an eyebrow a fraction of an inch.

“I don’t know within one-hundred percent surety, just like I didn’t know back then. If anything, California told me I can know nothing about this with perfect surety.” Stiles willed himself to be calm. “But no one can live if they’re constantly waiting for that one-hundred percent, can they?”

“In this I agree with you,” Hannibal replied. “But there is knowledge and there is belief. What do I know? I know that I am here. I know that you are here. The evidence of my senses tells me that this is true.”

Stiles laughed. “You’re saying I’m letting my desire for Will to be innocent overcome my knowledge of what is real? Let me ask you this, instead: am I here? Is Agent Mieczyslaw Stilinski of the F.B.I. here? Or is Stiles, the boy who ran with wolves here? Or is the emptiness that I keep locked away here?” Stiles argued back. “You are the one who told me that there were different images of myself. What do your senses tell you?”

“I did.” Hannibal paused. “Are you arguing that there is not an image of Will Graham that could have killed five people because he had confused himself with an image of Garrett Jacob Hobbs?”

“An image of him that could do this does not yet exist.” Stiles breathed that phrase as if it were the oxygen he needed to live. “My skill and knowledge as an agent, my understanding of him as a friend, my instincts about him as a person who has seen people and creatures who could kill so
wantonly – they all agree. Could he eventually become someone who could do that? Yes. But he hasn’t. Not yet.”

Hannibal actually leaned forward with enthusiasm. “You’ve never spoken like this before. You sound as if you have reached better grasp of your potential. Tell me what each of these images are telling you about Will? About yourself?”

“As an agent, I say bullshit.” Stiles shook his head back and forth. “Will Graham didn’t have the time, the strength, or the familiarity with Minnesota to find a stag’s head, steal it, put it out in the middle of a field, mount Cassie Boyle on it with the skill he did it. Those were the acts of someone who knew what he was doing; someone who had did it before. There is no evidence earlier than Cassie Boyle.”

“That is not a provable hypothesis, Mieczyslaw, and in this instance the burden of proof must remain upon you. The evidence gathered by others indicates a strong possibility that Will did indeed do those things.”

“I don’t need a perfect refutation; I need only a reasonable doubt.” Stiles held up his hand. “Yes, I know, I know, I’m a law enforcement officer. My job is to accrue the evidence that indicates guilt and let the defense attorney handle things like that.”

Hannibal didn’t say anything to that. He didn’t have to.

“What do you think, Dr. Lecter?” Stiles asked suddenly. Instinctually.

“My views on this matter aren’t what is important here. You are treading onto dangerous ground. I am sure you understand this. An objective, outside observer, such as the federal examiner, might be inclined to see your beliefs here as indications of unprofessionalism.” What Hannibal said was true; even agents that had worked closely with Will were supposed to treat him as a suspect now.

“Your views are important to me.” Stiles said quietly. “Do you think that I am acting irrationally?”

Hannibal watched him from the other chair. One hand shifted from his lap to the arm of the chair. Stiles was struck by the economy of the movement. Hannibal was calculating; he never did that before. When Stiles had challenged him, it always seemed that Hannibal had anticipated what he was going to say and had something insightful to share in reply. Not this time, apparently.

“No. Mieczyslaw, you can be rational and still be wrong.”

“I’m using, doctor, what you’ve taught me to use. My own instincts, my own perception, and the benefit of exposure to something incalculably old and completely uninterested in worthless preconceptions of virtue or order. And right now, it is telling me one thing.”

Hannibal seemed intrigued. “And what would that be?”

“I can see it all now. I stood in the field with Cassie Boyle and said it. I watched Will Graham sit in the orange jumpsuit and collapse and felt it. Every memory, every instinct is telling me the same thing.” Stiles leapt up in agitation. “This. Is. A. Trick.”

“Then what you must do is find the trickster,” concluded Hannibal with the smallest of micro-smiles. He’s proud of me, Stiles thought.

And that was it. The world swooped around Stiles’ head like he was getting dizzy. But he wasn’t getting dizzy. It was always a rush when the various, seemingly disconnected clues rearranged
themselves into possibility.

There was another person who had a connection to every target of the copycat killer.

There was another person who knew Dr. Sutcliffe was examining Will Graham for a physical cause of his instability. Someone who could have noticed the false scan. Someone who could have removed the files.

There was another person who knew Abigail Hobbs well enough to fake her death in her own house and make it look like murder.

There was another person who had access to Will’s house and could have messed with his fishing lures.

There was another person who knew Will’s deepest fears and could have used them against him.

The person who was sitting in a chair across from him in this room.

Stiles had not the slightest bit of evidence. If he brought it to someone else, he would be laughed at, and he knew what that felt like. If anything, Theo taught him the truth of his father’s words: “evidence trumps instinct.” He would have to get that evidence.

Stiles plastered on his best fake smile as he resumed his therapy session with the copycat killer. Actually, that wasn’t true. The smile eventually became real.

Hannibal wanted him to embrace what the Void could do? Stiles thought. Well, Dr. Lecter, let me show you what the Void can do.
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

Stiles testifies at Will's trial while trying to find evidence against Hannibal.

Chapter Notes

This takes place during the episode "Hassun."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nothing. It could be a pronoun meaning not anything or no single thing. It could be an adverb meaning not at all. It could be an adjective meaning having no prospect of progress or of no value.

It sounded worthless, but Stiles Stilinski had learned a new perspective a long time ago; what wasn’t done could be just as powerful as what was done. Emptiness held possibilities. If you created a space where nothing was, something would move to fill it. If you created a space in peace, strife would come. If you created a space in order, chaos would come. As much as he would have preferred to forget the lesson he had learned, it was true and it had stayed with him.

He sat in the hallway outside of the court room, waiting patiently for his turn to be called to take the stand. Any minute, the bailiff would bring him in to testify for the prosecution, and he would walk inside in this good suit and look everyone in the eye, even the defendant. He knew that the prosecution was going to ask him rote questions about what had occurred while he and Will worked together on cases. Ms. Vega was going to ask him what he knew about Will’s home and non-work activities. He wasn’t even close to being a key witness in the case; there were people with greater reputations and stronger credentials. His testimony wasn’t even going to be unique; he was being called simply as confirmation of what other people observed.

Stiles wasn’t bored during the long wait, because he had an endless number of things to think about in preparation for his testimony. Having a clear goal was much preferable to stumbling around in the dark, but, on the other hand, having a clear goal and not being able to make much progress towards it was like a piece of fiberglass worming its way under your skin. The last few days had been very frustrating.

Stiles hadn’t been able to make use of FBI resources because he didn’t have the same access that Price, Zeller, or Katz did. He’d have to submit a request and that would be most assuredly blocked because Director Crawford stubbornly refused to hear anything that sounded remotely like Will Graham’s ‘Hannibal Lecter did it’ defense. This meant he couldn’t get access bank records, telephone records, or anything that could have given him something real.

This obstacle had reduced him to going through all the old case files when he could find time during work. His hope was to find something concrete, something that would confirm his instinctual realization that Hannibal Lecter was the copycat killer. So far, he had found nothing that couldn’t be dismissed as coincidence or confirmation bias. He had to find something that would be able to overcome the unhealthy skepticism at the bureau for anything that Will had said in his own defense.
His last day off had also been frustratingly unproductive. He had waited until Dr. Lecter had gone home for the night and then carefully broken into his office. He had searched it as thoroughly as he could, but he hadn’t been able to get into the locked cabinets where the doctor kept his appointment notes. He couldn’t just bust into them, and they had thwarted all his attempts to pick the lock. Of course, he would not have been able to use anything he found within them as they were confidential for both the patient and the psychiatrist, but they could have pointed him in a direction of solid evidence.

His next step would be to break into Lecter’s house, but that would have to wait until the confluence of two important things: another day off and a time when Lecter wouldn’t be there.

The whole damn investigation drove him into a distracted agony. He was sure he was right, and when he was sure he was right, waiting was torture. The revelation he had in the office during his last appointment burned like a clear star in his brain.

This was like fucking Theo during senior but only a thousand times worse. Then, he had tried to demand that his friends listen to him when he had nothing to go with but a gut feeling, rampant paranoia, aggressive shouting, and a single dodgy signature. The teenager he had been had taken that frustration, mixed it liberally with anxiety over the end of childhood and trauma-born insecurity and turned it into something that could have destroyed every single person he cared about. It didn’t matter that he had been right; he had turned that insight into something even more damaging because instead of focusing his energies on proving it, he had taken it as an accusation of worthlessness and allowed it to consume him.

Stiles had grown because of that trauma as well. He had stopped looking at Scott to justify his existence and started acting like someone who understood that Scott and others disagreeing with him didn’t equate with disregard. Because of that growth, he knew that his gut feelings weren’t good enough for people like Director Crawford or his co-workers, so he had to back it up with at least something concrete. This time, the only evidence he had was the same type of gut feeling, questionable but not unethical therapeutic practices, missing medical files, and some bad-touch informal-adopted-parent crime-scene hijinks. Nothing that convinced him that Hannibal Lecter was the copycat killer was admissible in a court of law. In fact, sharing the information he had with another agent might be enough to get him brought up on charges, considering he had broken protocols and a few laws to get some of it.

He plucked at the sleeve of his jacket; the suit was amazing comfortable and he thought he looked very believable in it. Of course, it was Lydia who had bought it for him for court. She had reminded him once again that his taste in clothes was terrible and that she was the only one authorized to buy him clothes.

That morning she had asked him what he intended to do. He’d explained to her that he only had a limited number of options. Depending on which ones he took, he might destroy his career. Depending on which ones he took, he might send Will Graham to the federal death chamber.

“You’ll make the right choice, Stiles,” she had said without a trace of hesitation. She had kissed him good bye and sent him on his way. He wasn’t so sure she was right, but it was nice to have one person who believed he would. He felt in his jacket pocket for a folded up piece of paper that was an e-mail he had printed off yesterday. Make that two people.

Stiles:

I read somewhere that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. I wonder when exactly I lost it.
When this all started, and I know you remember this, I stubbornly clung to the idea that I could be normal again if I simply refused to change. I insisted I was going to be able to have what every teenage boy had: a chance to find love, a chance to be the cool guy, a chance to choose the life I wanted to live. Even when it became obvious that I wasn’t ever going to be normal again, I clung to the idea that I wasn’t going to be what everyone else told me that I had to be. You know what I’m talking about there, too.

I made decisions. I took actions. I reaped consequences. Some of those consequences were good; some of them weren’t so good. What I am, what I did, who I did it with, they are all a part of me now. They can’t be changed and I don’t think I would want to change them if I could. But part of me always thought that if I was good enough, if I did the right thing, if I never made a mistake, I would eventually regain the choice that I lost that night in the Preserve.

When we went to college, it looked like I was going to get that choice back. It looked like I had done enough, I had suffered enough, I had won enough, that I would get to choose the life I wanted. I forgot Deaton’s lesson about regression to the mean. When you and Lydia got an opportunity that you couldn’t pass up, it hurt. It hurt a lot, because the life I wanted always included you. It always will.

Being in this place is now my life. What I hadn’t realized is that I did get what I want: I chose this life. I did what I did because it had to be done, and because I don’t want to be the type of person who would order or even ask someone to do something so terrible. You didn’t do this to me; you just gave me advice. I just needed to make that clear. I did this, and I’m going to pay the consequences.

But I guess a part of me thought that if I did it, you’d come back. That was wrong of me. That was selfish of me. I guess I tried to make you feel guilty about you wanting to choose your own life. That was also wrong of me. You’re going to be great at whatever you choose to do, as will Lydia, no matter how far away you are.

You’re always going to be my friend, even if we never see each other again. Nothing can change that.

Scott

Stiles carefully folded the paper up and slipped back into his jacket. When he had embraced Dr. Lecter’s suggestion that instead of pretending that the Void had never happened he integrate it with the rest of his identity, he had been afraid. He had been afraid of what he could become if he did so. He had been afraid of what his father would think. He would be afraid of what Scott would think. Now he knew that Scott would understand.

That made the decision easier. When he was called to the stand, he could put his career first or he could put Will’s future first. He now knew, though in all honesty he had always known, what Scott would do. And, like it or not, thousands of miles away or not, Scott was his alpha.

Eventually the bailiff did call him into the courtroom. Everyone was so still and expectant, but at the same time, so very, very calm. It didn’t feel like a trial; it felt like a formality. The certainty in the room grated on him. He swore his oath and quelled the flame of nervousness that coursed through his being. He wasn’t having second thoughts, but he was aware of the sheer number of people who were going to be puzzled or irritated or both at him.

The prosecutor was offhandedly preparing her questions by reviewing her notes. At the defense table, Will Graham and his lawyer sat in silence. Will was watching him intensely. Stiles resisted the
urge to smile or to indicate in any way his intentions, because Will wasn’t the only one watching. Behind the prosecutor’s table, Director Graham sat in monastic tranquility next to a quiet seething federal inspector. In the back of the room, he saw Dr. Lecter and Dr. Bloom watching him carefully.

Watch carefully, doctor, Stiles thought to himself, silently.

“When did you first meet the accused, Agent Stilinski?” Ms. Vega began.

“I took his class on profiling at the FBI Academy. I enjoyed it a great deal.” Stiles also had thought that Will was an anti-social kook, but it was important he not share that particular observation. He let it slip into nothingness.

“You began working for Mr. Graham and the BAU before you completed your training, wasn’t that right?” The prosecutor had that blandly neutral tone that meant she was working up for something.

“Yes.”

“Because Mr. Graham requested that you be assigned to the BAU?”

“Yes.” Stiles felt something settle in his stomach. He focused on the prosecutor’s body language. He needed to anticipate where she was heading with this line of questioning.

“Do you know why he did this?”

“Mr. Graham said I had unique insight into profiling and crime scene analysis and he wanted me on the team.”

The prosecutor looked over at Will. “Given his reputation, that was a pretty significant compliment. You worked with Mr. Graham and the team since then? What did you do for them?”

“Yes, it was a compliment, and I have worked with team since then when I could. I’ve only been an agent for a few months, so essentially you could say I was a glorified gopher. I transcribed Mr. Graham’s crime scene notes, helped maintain the chain of evidence, provided material support …”

“Would you say of the entire team, you spent the most time with him?”

“That would be accurate. Considering it was mostly being his chauffeur or his travel companion, I can’t vouch for the quality of the time …” He offered a smile. No one laughed. “Tough crowd.”

The prosecutor went on and on, methodically laying out the times they had worked together. Stiles didn’t have to think too hard for these questions. In this, the truth was his ally. Or, more specifically, some of the truth was his ally.

“Agent Stilinski,” Ms. Vega finally said. “You were staying in the same hotel with Mr. Graham on the night that Cassie Boyle was killed.”

“I was. Yes.”

“When was the last time you saw him on the night she was killed?”

“Around ten.”

“And the next time you saw him?”

“Around eight the next morning.”
“In your professional opinion …” Stiles liked that. He liked being asked his professional opinion. “… could he have left the motel, killed Cassie Boyle, and return before you saw him again?”

“Not a chance.” Stiles held his breath after that pronouncement. When they had gone through the testimony before, they had worked out that there was enough time, mechanically.

Ms. Vega was obviously thrown by the answer as was most everyone in the room. Kade Purnell was throwing eye-daggers at him. “During our earlier talks, Agent Stilinski, you agreed that it is possible to go to the necessary locations in that amount of time.”

“Well, it’s possible,” smiled Stiles in the most irritating fashion he knew. “I could do it. But there was no way Will Graham could. He has a terrible sense of direction, and he didn’t pay attention while we were driving around the countryside. Could he have located the place from where the stag’s head was stolen, located Cassie Boyle’s house, killed her, taken the body and the stag’s head to the field, and mounted it in one night and in the dark? I doubt he could pick her up. Have you seen Mr. Graham? He’s tiny.” Sarcasm made a pretty good offense as well.

The courtroom stilled. Stiles leaned back casually; he was in so much trouble.

“Mr. Stilinski, I’d like to remind you that in our previous discussions, we discussed Mr. Graham as the most likely suspect.”

“I was told to consider Mr. Graham the most likely suspect, so I did.”

“Your Honor,” said Ms. Vega suddenly, “I’d like to ask permission to treat Agent Stilinski as a hostile witness.”

The judge nodded his assent. Stiles knew this was coming. This meant that Ms. Vega could now ask him leading questions.

“Agent Stilinski, isn’t it true that you took care of Mr. Graham after he shot Garrett Jacob Hobbs? And isn’t it also true that he was in a traumatic state?”

“Yes, I did. He was covered with blood. That’d put anyone into a traumatic state.”

“Would you say that you have an emotional connection to Mr. Graham that goes beyond being colleagues?”

“Yeah. We’re friends. That happens.”

The prosecutor frowned. Ms. Vega hadn’t been prepared for this. Stiles’ testimony was supposed to be supporting other testimony, not undermining it. Various people in the courtroom’s audience were so angry that they were planning Stiles’ death.

And that is how the interrogation went. Stiles’ answered every single question as truthfully as he could, but he just left things out. When asked about evidence, he gave simple, unconvincing answers. When asked about Will’s mental state, he described it but he did not analyze. He gave the appearance that he didn’t agree with the prosecution’s case without actually saying it. Will’s lawyer had this look on his face that he wanted to ask Stiles out on a date, while Ms. Vega struggled to get her line of questioning under control. It wasn’t a deathblow for the prosecution’s case by any stretch of the imagination, but it was a crack in the foundation.

Finally, she attempted to undermine his credibility. He knew this was coming. “Agent Stilinski, while you were working on the case in California, you and Mr. Graham were able to apprehend the suspect in the vigilante slaying of a suspect serial killer, who turned out to be one of your oldest
friends. Neither you nor Mr. Graham were authorized to be part of that operation; entering the crime scene in violation of the rules of engagement. Why did you do that?"

“I violated protocol because of emotional attachments to the suspect. Mr. Graham came with me to make sure I was safe.”

“Neither you nor Mr. Graham were reprimanded for that action.”

“No. We weren’t.” Stiles knew what was coming next. He understood why she was doing this. Instead of painting him as an accurate observer of Wills actions, she was now trying to paint him as his partner in crime. It was the only way to recover from the damage he had just caused.

“Are you aware of any other violation in protocol that you and Mr. Graham indulged in?”

Here was the crisis point. If he lied and said that he didn’t know of any other violation, then he could never even share the evidence he had found with others without being guilty of perjury. If he told the truth, he was certain to be fired and any evidence he had believed to be suspect. He knew that this question and this answer was going to happen the moment he decided to defend Will Graham.

Stiles leaned forward and said in a calm voice. “I refuse to answer that question on the grounds that I might incriminate myself.”

And that, Stiles thought, was that.

Will’s lawyer declined to cross examine him, stating with the biggest shit-eating grin he could manage, that he didn’t think it was necessary.

The first person who met him outside of the courtroom was Jack Crawford. Contrary to what he expected, there was no undercurrent of raging anger. There was the cold steel of disappointment, but there was also a sort of cautious respect. He wasn’t only dismissive; he also wanted to know. “What was that I just listened to in there?”

Stiles felt an old familiar joy; he had always tried not to sass his superiors in the FBI, but now he could. It’s not like he could do his career any more damage. “I answered those questions to the best of my ability. I think, all-in-all, I did pretty well.”

“Did you think,” Crawford replied slowly, “that you are doing Will any favors? Do you think that twisting your answers like that is going to help him?”

“I didn’t twist anything, Director Crawford.” Stiles replied. “Nothing I said was untrue. If the spirit of my answers didn’t help the Bureau’s drive to convict Will, that’s hardly my fault.”

Crawford rolled his eyes. “I am sure what you said is the truth, and I am sure it was nothing but the truth, but I’m also sure as hell that it wasn’t the whole truth. But I’m not the one you have to worry about.” Stiles followed his eyes to see Kade Purnell on a collision course with him.

“Jack, what the hell is this?” She started without preamble. “Why are your agents determined to do the defense’s job for them? Are they unclear on what our role is in the judiciary?”

Before Jack could answer, Stiles interrupted. “I think I did a pretty good job, all things considered.”

This did not settle her at all. “You’re suspended. Turn in your badge and gun.”

“I need him on the cases we’re working on.” Stiles never thought the director would defend him like that.
“Find someone else,” the inspector snapper. It looked like she was close to suspending Jack as well. “We can’t begin a review of his behavior until after the trial is completed, or it looks like witness intimidation, but I don’t want him to be anywhere near this case.”

“Fine,” replied Stiles, turning and walking away. “I love paid vacation.” He couldn’t shake the feeling that he might have been walking away from his career, but that was okay. He had done this, and he was going to pay the consequences.

Chapter End Notes

I am as much a lawyer as I am a psychiatrist. If I’ve blundered, please feel free to offer concrete criticism.

Also, I thought that there would only be two chapters, but I was premature. This was far longer than I thought. The end is near though.
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

There is a bloody confrontation as secrets are revealed. Who will survive?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Bureaucracies were the same all over the world and all through time. Their stated purpose varied depending on the institution they supported, but their functional design never varied – at the base, they were all made to protect themselves. Every manager and every supervisor may have had many goals, but they all shared one goal in common. In actually, it was less a goal than a commandment: Thou Shalt Cover Thy Ass.

If you worked within a bureaucracy and played by its rules, then you were protected by that bureaucracy. There was protocol; there were guidelines; and there were chains of command. These things worked to minimize your culpability for your own errors or the errors of your superiors or the errors of those you supervised. Flexible and arcane, the system allowed you to deflect and redirect and obfuscate faults until the person who was mad had no more stomach to pursue it. A bureaucracy was a shield against responsibility, as long as you were loyal.

Stiles had chosen not to remain loyal. The FBI had expected him to tow the party line and help convict Will Graham, and he had not only refused, but he had also given the defense a big present wrapped in a bow. The powers that be weren’t going to do anything more than suspend him after his testimony but before Will’s trial was over. If they fired him, it would look like witness intimidation, and that opened a whole new can of worms for the defense. Such an act could cost someone their jobs, especially if they couldn’t prove that his testimony was false or suborned.

And they couldn’t. Nothing that Stiles had said was false. It was how he had testified that had done the damage. Neat, huh?

Still, the actual official review was bound to be punishing, even though it would come much later. Instead, the forces of bureaucracy moved with their grinding efficiency to punish him for his transgressions. He had had to turn in his gun and badge. He had had to fill out forms for every piece of evidence he had touched during the trial in order for them to be reviewed. It had been tedious and time consuming, and Stiles had done it gladly.

He felt better than he had since before Gerard Argent died.

He felt so good that he hummed as he left the elevator in a parking garage a few blocks from the courthouse. It was a cold, blustery night, and the wind whistled through the open edges of the parking garage, picking up sheets of snow and pushing them through. He picked up his pace; it was after one in the morning and as it was he wouldn’t get home until nearly three. It was ultimately fine; he was on indefinite vacation, depending on how long the trial took and then how long the review board took after that.

Stiles tripped the fob for the car as he approached it and stopped dead in the tracks. On this particular model, opening the doors automatically brought up the headlights to give the driver a location for the
Standing in the glow created, completely unexpectedly, was Hannibal Lecter.

“Good evening, Mieczyslaw.” His voice was smooth as it always was, but there was something strange and menacing about it. There was something strange and menacing about the way the psychiatrist was standing. Stiles tensed. He knew when a predator was moving nearby.

“Good evening, Dr. Lecter. What can I do for you?” Stiles offered up his best smile. He wasn’t wearing his service revolver; they had taken it when they suspended him. But he had another licensed firearm in the car’s glove box. It had wolf’s bane rounds, but he guessed those would work on a normal human just as well.

Stiles chuckled openly. Given the inherent weirdness and the undercurrent of danger in this situation he was beginning to suspect that Dr. Lecter wasn’t a ‘normal’ human at all.

“I was present this morning when you gave your testimony at Will’s trial. It intrigued me.” Hannibal moved slightly so he was now standing at the front left corner of his car.

“Intrigued?” Stiles took a step forward because he was sure of nothing more at that moment but he wanted to get in the car. The part of him that was sensitive to the flow of evil around him knew he was in a vulnerable position. “That’s weird. I thought it was pretty predictable, if you asked me.”

“Predictable? Not to the people who worked with you, and, surprisingly, not to me.”

“Come on, doctor.” Stiles inched closer to the car door. “We’ve discussed in our sessions the lengths I will go to protect those I care about, haven’t we?”

“We have.” Hannibal seemed taller to Stiles tonight, taller than he’d ever been before. Maybe it was a trick of the light – the reflected headlights, the parking garage’s fitful luminescent bulbs, or the half-shrouded moon in the clouds. “I have to admit that I have found inspiration in someone so willing to ignore the conventions of the world around them for the good of another individual. Yet, you also convinced me that you had moved beyond the recklessness of your high school years.”

“Was my testimony reckless?” Stiles asked cautiously. His hand slid out, away from his body, slowly and casually – or so he hoped it seemed – for the door handle.

“That is a question that I asked myself as I sat in the courtroom.” Hannibal didn’t move but his voice was arresting. “I imagined what you would do if you were confident that Will Graham was innocent of the murders with which he has been charged. You have no actual evidence that clears him, or you would have presented it already. Thus, this must be an instinctual declaration.”

Stiles opened the car door. At the slight widening of the psychiatrist’s eyes, he stopped. He had to convince both himself and the doctor that he wasn’t afraid. “It is. You don’t think he’s guilty either.”

“No, I don’t.” There is the hint of cold humor in that statement. “However, if it was only instinct, you would have faith that eventually evidence would be discovered that would exonerate him. Your possible sacrifice of your career would be unnecessary.”

Stiles opened his mouth to answer but then shut it. He was beginning to see what the psychiatrist was getting at. He didn’t want to give away what he knew.

“I know how important this career is to you, Mieczyslaw. It satisfies your desire to make up for the mistakes of your past. It satisfies your need to have your father be proud of you and have your friends respect you. It negates your fear of your own weakness when compared to the supernatural
creatures you believe exist. So I had to ask myself, why would you go to such an extreme?"

“Maybe I’m not as confident that evidence is to be found as you think I would be.” Stiles replied. He did not glance at the glove box. “Evidence doesn’t always exist.”

They stood in the nearly empty parking garage. A particularly strong gust of wind howled around the corners of the building. Stiles wasn’t cold; he realized that adrenaline was keeping his heart pumping. Dr. Lecter didn’t look like he was cold either.

“Or there is another possibility.” Dr. Lecter added lightly. “You believe you has figured out who the copycat killer is, and you believe that they would be able to suppress any such evidence before it came to light. That would necessitate extreme measures.”

“If I knew who the copycat killer was, wouldn’t I tell someone?” Stiles played his final card.

“Not if you could not back it up with evidence that anyone would believe. I recall that you had a similar event that was very unpleasant. Senior year, wasn’t it?” Dr. Lecter’s eyebrows lifted a moment. “So, the question remains. Do you believe you know the identity of the copycat killer?”

Stiles looked Hannibal straight in the eyes. Hannibal returned the gaze. No more lies were possible.

Stiles moved first, starting to lunge into the car to get to the glove box, but Hannibal was fast – so goddamn fast! The psychiatrist threw his entire weight on the car door catching Stiles’ right arm in it. Stiles heard and felt his ulna snap and it drew a cry of pain from him.

But Stiles had been hurt before, so it didn’t stop him from recognizing that these next few seconds might be the most important of his life. Instead of trying to free himself by pulling on his busted arm or trying to inflict damage on Hannibal, he instead used his left leg to momentarily push Hannibal off the car door and then stagger back. Pain laced up through his wounded arm, but he was free. He could move.

Hannibal looked down at the footprint on his expensive overcoat. When he looked up, there was only mild annoyance. He sprang after Stiles so quickly that he Stiles could only get his left arm up in defense. Stiles wasn’t as helpless as he had been in high school. He had taken plenty of close-quarters combat training at both the D.C. police academy and Quantico. He knew how to defend himself. He stood his ground and swung his fist at Hannibal’s midsection. While punches to the head might knock the opponent out, if he hit the bone wrong, he could deprive himself of his other arm. His instructors would have been proud.

Stiles thought his relative youth would put him in good shape. Hannibal was fast approaching fifty if he hadn’t reached it all ready. By all accounts, this should place him at a disadvantage, even with Stiles’ busted arm.

Stiles recognized when the universe had pulled a fast one on him; age wasn’t going to be a factor in this. Hannibal was all over him with a blow to the face to disorient him, a matching punch to the gut that Stiles barely blocked with his healthy arm. But while Stiles managed to deflect that punch, Hannibal, as if he was turning the dial on a stove, reached out and twisted his right arm. Stiles howled as the ends of the broken bones ground together.

In that moment of debilitating shock, Hannibal managed to wrap one arm around Stiles’ neck. Only with a desperate speed of his own was the younger man able to put his left hand between Hannibal’s arm and his own throat. They spun and struggled. Eventually, Stiles stomped on Hannibal’s foot hard enough to make him let go. In return, he got his head bounced against the trunk of his own car.
For precious seconds, Stiles lost track of his opponent and then found him again when the felt the blade of a knife slide into his back, up under his ribs. He coughed in pain and felt the blood fill his lung. With as much effort as he could, he pulled himself of the knife and staggered away.

“It is unfortunate that your intuitive capabilities revealed me at this stage of your development, Mieczyslaw.” Hannibal observed this without remorse. It was like he was commenting on the price of asparagus. “In time, I fully believe you would have embrace the mindset that your delusion of the nogitsune had given you. You would have been able to comprehend and appreciate what is happening on your own.”

“Not sorry … *cough* … to disappoint.” Stiles took a few steps back. He tried to stall with words when he figured out to get his ass out of this mess. Fighting looked like a less and less valuable option.

“As much as I was hoping for you to grow, even I can’t have everything I want. Sometimes you just have to prioritize. My priority at this time is Will. This means I have to trim the fat.” Hannibal remarked taking a few steps toward him. Stiles stepped back, hit an icy slick, and fell backwards. He landed on his broken arm and nearly bit through his tongue to stop from screaming. It wouldn’t do him any good and it would probably please this killer.

“It’s a pity that I won’t be able to take the proper care with you as I should. I regret that.” Hannibal shook his head. “You’ll simply have to disappear, abandoning your life due to the pressure of your secrets and your unstable nature. But don’t worry; I won’t mistreat you.” Moving quickly, Hannibal pinned Stiles to the ground and brought the knife up over his abdomen.

Stiles tried to get some purchase; he tried to draw a deeper breath. He couldn’t.

Hannibal lowered the knife slowly, bushing it into the flesh. “The Japanese have historically believe that the seat of the soul is in the stomach. In your honor, I believe that the best meal will be trippa alla Romana. It’s a traditional Sunday meal in Italy; tripe served with onions, garlic, and a lovely sauce.”

Stiles put together the cases he had been working on and Will’s observations. He had to know. Fighting off the pain of the knife, he exclaimed. “You’re the Chesapeake Ripper. Ha!” He coughed up some blood. “But you … you need to know two things.”

Hannibal paused the descent of the knife, even as blood welled up under it. “Yes.” In a perverse way, he said it as a compliment to Stiles. He liked to be recognized. “What two things should I know?”

“First …” Stiles gasped for air. “The supernatural … not a delusion.”

Hannibal turned his head slightly to one side. The look on his face showed Stiles that the killer was intrigued by what he was saying. Stiles assumed that by this point very few of his victims were talkative.

“Second …” Another struggling breath. “I’ve … best girlfriend … whole world.”

Hannibal barely ducked away from the kick that was aimed at his head.

###

Lydia had no idea how she got to the parking garage, but she had somehow managed to drive all the way to Baltimore, park her car, and climb the stairs.

Usually her fugues were terrifying. She felt like a puppet who couldn’t her strings. She had become
better at managing them and better at controlling them but there were still instances where she went so deep that it felt like she had blinked and woken up in another world. This was one of those times.

And this time, she wouldn’t have it any other way. She had seen Dr. Lecter pin Stiles to the ground. She had seen the knife and the blood. She didn’t know why, and she didn’t care. She slid off her heels; the concrete was going to be hard and cold, but she was going to have one shot at this.

She didn’t scream; as powerful as they were, even focused like a bullet, they could do damage and Stiles looked like he had had enough damage done to him.

The psychiatrist moved like few people she had ever seen. Fast and assured. He managed to sense her kick at the last moment and rolled out of the way and onto his feet. Lydia didn’t stop. Thank God she had asked Parrish for those lessons.

She attacked with a flurry of kicks and punches. They were powerful, but unfocused. She needed him off balance so he couldn’t bring the knife to bear, and she needed him to get far enough away from Stiles so she could scream without hurting him.

It didn’t take long for the older man to recover. Hannibal had obviously not expected her, but he seemed to be able to think on his feet. He lashed out with his knife and she stepped to the side. It cut through the edge of her coat, but it didn’t hit any flesh.

Lydia snarled. “That was my best Valentino!” And with that, she punched as his knife hand, adding the power of her scream to it. Hannibal spun away from the blow and the knife clattered across the rooftop, sliding underneath one of the few other parked cars on this level.

Strangely enough, Hannibal immediately disappeared between two SUVS. Lydia thought it smart; he obviously had no clue what just happened, so he retreated to reconsider the situations.

“Stiles!” She ran to him and knelt. She wasn’t afraid of being surprised. She now knew that the overwhelming silence she was hearing was her powers clueing her into the psychiatrist’s real nature. There was no way he could sneak up on her now. He could move quietly, but he couldn’t quiet his own intentions.

“Lydia …” He gasped. “You gotta …”

Beacon Hills had taught her, taught all of them, basic first aid. Stiles was in a bad way. He needed a hospital and he needed it now. “What I have to do is get you out of here.”

“He’s … he’s … still here.”

“Yes, Dr. Martin. I am still here.” The weird silencing effect was in full force at Hannibal’s words. She whirled around but she couldn’t see him. She pulled her cell phone out of her coat pocket.

“Well, I don’t care, Dr. Lecter. I’m going to call the police and an ambulance. If you get in my way, I’ll show you exactly what I’m capable of.” She scanned this floor but she still couldn’t locate him.

“I am afraid that I won’t allow you to call anyone. I may not know your capabilities, but I know mine. We could engage in violence, but how long would that take before we reached a resolution?” He sounded confident. Lydia knew that she wouldn’t surprise him again. But without knowing where he was, any fight was a risk. If she got another fight with him, she might be able to win, but if it took too long Stiles would bleed out.

Stiles grabbed at her sleeve with a bloody hand. “He’s … Lydia, you have to run. Go.”
Lydia ignored it. She wasn’t going anywhere, and neither was she going to let Stiles die. “Why haven’t you fled? You have time to get away. I’m not going after you.”

Stiles clutched at her and made inarticulate sounds.

Hannibal’s voice floated over the cars. “I must admit, Dr. Martin, you surprised me. Mieczyslaw told me about banshees, but he neglected to put a name to them or to tell me that you were one of them. I assume my guess is correct?”

“Yes. If Stiles told you about them, then you know what we can do. You know that I’ll hear your approach no matter what precautions you take, so you should just leave.” Lydia tried her best to be intimidating. She brought the phone up in her hand.

“That’s true. He told me that banshees can predict the death of those to whom they have a personal connection. Are you predicting his?”

Lydia looked down. Yes, she could sense Stiles’ death coming, a scream perched beneath her chin. She wasn’t a medical doctor, but her sense told her she was running out of time. “What do you want?”

“Knowledge that at least in one thing Mieczyslaw was not suffering from delusions makes me recalculate my plans. I’d like to go home and think about it.”

“What?” Lydia was shocked but then realized what he was going on about. “In return for our silence, you’ll let me get Stiles medical assistance.”

“As clever as you have always been reported to be, Dr. Martin. As an added inducement, I promise to keep the information I gathered from Stiles on the supernatural a secret. I understand now that some of you went to great lengths to keep it that way. I respect that.”

Lydia gritted her teeth. Hannibal Lecter was offering a deal: silence for silence. She glanced down at Stiles who was pale as a sheet. She could feel the tension in her own throat. “A deal then. We don’t say anything about you to anyone, and you don’t say anything to anyone about us. How do I know you’ll keep your word?”

“I always keep my promises, Dr. Martin.”

“How do you know we’ll keep ours?” Lydia couldn’t help but challenge.

“Because I know you as well as he does, and neither of you would sacrifice others for revenge.” Hannibal sounded so reasonable. “Tick, tock, Dr. Martin.”

“Okay.” Stiles wasn’t able to speak but he watched her face. “Fine. It’s a deal. But don’t think about coming after us later. There’s no way I’ll not be able to hear you coming. I mean it. Don’t come to our neck of the woods, Dr. Lecter, or I’ll show you some real monsters.”

“I have no doubt. You may call the police and the ambulance. I would suggest going with a mugging story. It matches the evidence.”

Lydia dialed. She had made deals with the devils before, and for far less of a benefit. She wasn’t going to scream for Stiles, and if that mean that a killer got away, she’d fine a way to deal with that.

Chapter End Notes
This takes place the day before the ear is delivered to the court in "Hassun."

Only the epilogue is left.
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

The Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The highway sped away from the dry and dusty terrain. The fall sky vaulted over them like a turquoise dome. The first formations of migrating birds inched their way under it. Stiles Stilinski was uncomfortable. The physical discomfort was slight; he was used to it by now. The emotional discomfort grew every mile they drove.

Stiles turned his body slightly to face Lydia in the driver’s seat. He tried to sound sure of himself, but it just sounded plaintive. “I should have been there. I should have helped.”

Lydia rolled her eyes half in fondness and half in irritation. Without taking her eyes off the road, she challenged him. “Remind me again, Stiles, how long you were in the hospital recovering from near-fatal stab wounds?” This was an old argument.

Stiles crossed his arms. “Fine. But … look at this.” He gestured at the tablet he held in his lap. Lydia made a disappointed noise and so he brought up the screen so where she could glance at it.

Lydia snorted in derision. “One of these days I am going to figure out why all FBI profilers read Tattle Crime. It’s like actors reading TMZ.” She skimmed it slowly, so she wouldn’t drive off the relatively straight highway. “So?”

“I could have prevented this, Lydia. The only person who knew before me was Will.”

“Remind me how much evidence you had about that asshole when you were suffering non-fatal stab wounds? I’ll agree with your self-flagellation if you had something solid.”

Stiles exasperated blew a raspberry back at her for her tone. “I still didn’t have anything admissible in a court of law.”

“And then when you managed to fully recover, what did you have to do?” Lydia didn’t seem in the mood to listen his concerns. She wasn’t actually mad, but she was exasperated.

“I went through my review.” Stiles muttered. It had been very difficult with a lot of meetings in a lot of offices with a lot of people who had all went to the same school for ‘how to look disapproving.’

“And you survived it by the sheer size of Jack Crawford’s balls.” Lydia snapped back caustically. “He basically risked his job for you to keep yours.”

“And in my appreciation, I quit his task force!” Stiles remarked angrily.

“Because I asked you to do so.” Lydia answered the outburst quietly. “And I didn’t do it lightly and I didn’t do it out of spite. I asked you to do it so you would be safe.”
“It would have been …” He trailed off. Yeah. There had been deaths. And stabbings. And a goddamn defenestration. “Why should I be safe when they weren’t?”

The miles sped past. Stiles could tell by the way she gripped the steering wheel and the way she held herself that Lydia was struggling not to simply yell. She was trying to form words that would convey her meaning but also the passion behind it.

“You weren’t safe, Stiles.” She said at last. “You nearly bled out on the floor of a parking garage. I almost screamed for you; do you have any idea how that makes me feel? I asked you to quit the BAU and move back to California to keep you safe from a serial killer that had fooled the entire FBI.”

She took a deep breath before she continued. “No one deserves to be in danger, Stiles, but the people who got hurt and the people who got killed were not hurt by you and not killed by you. Could you have maybe found a way to stop Hannibal Lecter earlier? Maybe.”

“I think I could have. Which means the responsibility for what he did is also on me. The blood he spilled is on my hands as well.” Stiles let those words spill out and realized it was absolutely the wrong thing to say.

Lydia’s look could have killed him. Right there in the passenger seat, stone dead. “You need to go back to school, if you actually think that’s how responsibility works. You did what any reasonable person could do, just as all of our friends did in high school.” She gave him a glare. “Unless, you think having a better idea in hindsight makes one guilty?”

“No. No.” Stiles knew exactly what she was talking about. He’d listen to her worry that she hadn’t done enough to save Allison. “I know it doesn’t.”

“Good. Responsibility is accrued when you take an action that purposefully enables an event to happen. The actions we took were meant to protect you and me from a terrifying man who had every reason to want us dead. We were much safer in Sacramento than in D.C.”

“I know that.” Stiles did know that.

“Have you been unable to help people since? Are you still an FBI agent?” Lydia demanded. “Is Hannibal Lecter now locked away at the Baltimore Hospital for the Criminally Insane? All those questions are answered by yes. The good guys won, Stiles. Again. Be content.”

“I am content.” Stiles offered her a weak smile. “That’s why I said yes when you asked me to marry you.”

“You’re happy, but you’re not content.”

Stiles mentally sighed, but he decided to go for humor. “But he got to go Europe. I wanted to go to Europe.”

Lydia laughed at him. “Now that’s more like it.” She pulled off the highway. They were near their destination.

Stiles’ frustration came from the dark place in his soul, the one where he was never enough to stop bad things form happening to the people he care about. The place where he was never smart enough or powerful enough or good enough to make things right. It was a place that everyone had, sequestered away inside them, but it was a place of childhood nightmares. He was old enough to not need to visit that place.
Stiles didn’t have to go there. There were places in his mind where he saved people’s lives. Where he brought the bad guy to justice. Where he survived everything they could throw at him. To keep moving forward, he had to be in those places.

It was easier, because there were people who lived with him in those places. His father. Lydia. He even got the odd note from Will Graham and Jack Crawford. Those places was where they wanted to see him, so these are the places he wanted to be.

It was easier for places like the one where they had just arrived, on days like today. Lydia put them in the parking lot and he opened the car door. He frowned as he got out.

“Will you need it?” Lydia asked.

“Yeah.” Stiles brought the cane out from the back seat of the car. “Sitting too long always makes me shaky.” The physical therapists assured him that he’d be back to full mobility in six months. Stiles pretty much was mobile now, but he did need the cane for stability sometimes.

They worked their way across the parking lot and up to the doors of the center. Stiles felt like this was the end of a part of his life and the beginning of another. It felt like going out to the woods to see a dead body. It felt like the first time he kissed Lydia. It felt like graduating high school. It felt like the day he had been called on in class at Quantico. One chapter ends and another begins.

The story could be good, or it could be bad. Or it could be both. No one gets to be perfect.

As they walked into the administration center, Lydia took his free hand. She gripped it tight. He gripped it back. It seemed that this chapter had the potential to start off in a good way.

The doors open, and the man they were waiting for stepped out between the prison guards and back into freedom.

Lydia smiled widely but Stiles leant jauntily on his cane. “Hey, sexy. Long time, no see. We heard you needed a ride home?”

From the smile they got in return, it looked like the chapter was going to start off in the best way.

THE END

Chapter End Notes

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