Broken Teacups, and Broken minds

by Fargosis

Summary

Clarice Starling requests that her friends Hannibal Lecter, Margot Verger, and Barney Matthews all come and join her one day. Nobody is quite sure as to why she has asked them to come, and they all hold their own preconceived notions as to why she has invited them out.

Notes

Based on a tumblr post I made a little while ago
please remember to comment and kudos!
The invitations had been simple enough. Crudely so. Clarice Starling had just simply informed them individually that she would like them to meet her at the address given. None of them had been informed that the others would be there, but they all immediately recognized each other’s’ cars when they pulled in one after another.

The lot was almost completely deserted, save for a worn abandoned barn. A few years back this lot was home to a small farm family, and when the fields caught fire one especially dry summer, they just couldn’t afford to stay. The land was cheap and the structures badly destroyed, it would have cost the banks more money to restore the house and barn and resell than to abandon it all together and allow nature to take its course.

Margot stepped out of her car, to her at least this made quite a bit of sense, it seemed these days Clarice couldn’t go anywhere or meet with anyone without turning it into a humiliating tabloid article. If she had something to tell her without infernal an abandoned building out in an area so rural the only news was passed via mail and word of mouth. Quiet towns isolated from the rest of society were hard to come by in modern America, but leave it to Clarice to find one and make her own little private sanctuary.

Hannibal frowned when he saw the lone building. For a master of hiding in plain sight, acquainting in such a closed off location was almost nerve racking. If something, anything went wrong, his only form of escape would be his vehicle. There was no other human structure, let alone town, that was within running distance, and the closest town was solely inhabited by Paranoid Peters, tired of being mocked by others for their tinfoil hats, living off the grid in preparation for the apocalypse they were so certain was just as close as Winter’s first frost. No phones or transportation to a larger, more bendable town. Clarice had never asked Hannibal to meet with her since his escape 10 years ago, and he prepared himself for an ambush. His handy-dandy crossbow sat menacingly in the back of his car, and for more convent uses, his jaw was still quite well-practiced in the art of human vivisection.

Between caring for patients in the BSHCI and studying for his nursing degree, Barney Matthews did not exactly have free time in spades, but, none the less, he had had plenty of exposure throughout his life to cheesy horror. And given the location of this meeting, his knowledge of Clarice and her psychological profile, and the given that he was the only black person at this location currently, he was a smidge nervous. Hannibal’s presence did not ease those nerves, but it did not add to Barney’s concerns. He trusted Hannibal to a degree, and Hannibal trusted, and respected Barney back. In their 7 years together the two of them had grown miraculously close, forming the type of bond Barney and his fellow nurses long since excluded the possibility of only to Nurses who worked with children. Their relationship was special, to say the least. And in a way, Barney’s relationship with all three people, Margot, Hannibal, and Clarice, was very unique, as he was unarguably the most mature and functionally adult of the four. He took a sense of pride and responsibility with that, the same way an older child takes pride and responsibility when left with children younger than he. Barney peered over at Lecter and the two of them shared a respectful head-nod in acknowledgement.

Hannibal was thankful he wasn’t facing Clarice alone.

Hannibal did not, however, share any sort of acknowledgement between him and argot. She was still unsure of her relationship towards the man, still bitter, still conflicted. And Hannibal respected that. He held no conflicting thoughts or bitterness towards the young woman, nor did he towards neither Barney nor Clarice.
That wasn’t entirely true though.

In some respects, Hannibal did, harbor conflicting thoughts on Clarice Starling. Not rival thoughts of fondness and distaste, but of concern and confidence. Jack firmly held Clarice’s mind in his iron fist, and he had taped into the weaker circuits of her brain and taken advantage of what he could. It disgusted Hannibal to no end to watch such an astounding young woman, so dedicated and full of potential, her entire life ahead of her, struggle against forces working inside her, controlled by an outside force with an unforeseen agenda. Like a puppet fighting against her strings, but only becoming more entangled.

The three entered the barn together, Margot opened the door and Barney levered a stone by the door to keep it open.

The barn was dimly lit by the light emitting from the holes and cracks left by rot covering the walls of the barn. The small individual tracks of light coming from all directions melted together on the dirt floor. The barn consisted of only one, large, barren room. on the off-center of the floor sat Clarice Starling.

Margot turned around, knelt over, he head protruding out the door and out the barn, threw up.

Alert to the sound of her friends’ footsteps, Clarice turned her attention to the barn door. She smiled brightly at her guests;

Barney shook his head in disappointment and melancholy, he had heard stories about situations like this before, but this was his first time experiencing it first-hand.

Hannibal’s heart sank within him. He had been wrong. He had been very wrong. And he knew that now, his conflicting thoughts were brought to a halt by Clarice’s behavior here. He knew now. He knew. There was no time now for regrets or remorse. All he could do now was, out of obligation to his friend, sit down with her and offer whatever kind of comfort or support she needed. So that’s what he did.

Hannibal sat down across from Clarice in the dirt, she wore a very old looking nightgown and was by all appearances, barefoot. She smiled and giggled at him when he joined her, she had quite the array of stuffed animals and dolls, all with their own little plastic teacup.

**Tea cups.** The metaphor Hannibal had chosen to describe his own psychological circumstance, now serving as quite the symbol for his dear Clarice’s psychosis.

Clarice giddily leaded over to Hannibal and pretended to pour her make-believe tea into Hannibal’s miss-matched teacup. He couldn’t quite say what must have brought this breakdown on. The tea set was old and mismatched, reeking of being tastelessly purchased at some run-down charity store.

But it was quite obvious that Clarice was far beyond taste now. Something that, in her previous life, tormented her relentlessly, was now a completely non-issue, one her delicate mind could not even try to comprehend at this point.

Behind Hannibal, both Margot and Barney had left. Margot had driven home in disgust, and Barney stood outside the barn, asking about the arrangements necessary to move Clarice from this barn to a home. Not the BSHCI, not by a longshot. She could not be left by herself, not like this, but she had not committed any crimes, and there was no evidence yet that proved she was a danger to herself or to others in her current mentality.
Hannibal faked a small smile for Clarice. She was giggling out the side of her mouth as she sipped her pretend tea and served it amongst her dollies, so it was assumed that any sort of dialogue with her was out of the question. Still, Hannibal made a strong effort to take an active part in her little game. She had invited him here, to this play-tea party, and it would be rude of him to ignore the invitation of a friend. Despite how disturbing it might have been, Clarice appeared to be having the time of her life, and right now, that was all Hannibal could ask for.

Every so often Hannibal looked over his shoulder at the open barn door. Margot was long gone now, but Barney still remained, waiting for Hannibal assumedly. Hannibal bowed his head in apologies to his infantile hostess, and excused himself from the social circle to have a chat with Barney.

Barney frowned empathetically at Hannibal as he emerged from the barn. He couldn’t even begin to imagine how much Hannibal must be hurting right now, even if from all outwardly appearances the man was still just as impenetrable as ever.

“I’m so sorry Doctor-”

“That’s quite alright Barney,” Hannibal retorted sternly, but not angrily. There was no need for him to take his frustration out on Barney. Barney was a good friend, and had done nothing wrong.

Barney wasn’t quite sure if was surprised by the doctor’s outburst. He expected Hannibal to be emotional after what they both witnessed, but perhaps Barney had not expected Hannibal to be quite so open about it. If ‘open’ was even really the right word for how Hannibal was expressing his discomfort. Barney stood there with Hannibal and shuffled a little awkward in the silence. It had grown somewhat darker since they had first entered the barn. The afternoon blue had fallen alongside the sun to the stars of early dusk that pinpricked the now indigo sky. Hannibal stood adjacent to Barney out in the night, he took careful time in restoring his calm façade, harnessing and tightly bottling any and all emotions that might have been conjured within him during his ‘play’ session with dear old Clarice.

“Doctor Lecter,” began Barney, it didn’t matter how uncomfortable Hannibal was, or how stoic he wanted to appear to the younger nurse. They both knew Barney was smarter than that, that he knew Hannibal and how his mind worked better than that. But right now, that was not their main concern. Right now they were responsible for the child minded woman sitting inside the barn behind them, playing with her dolls, who at one point served as an inspiration to the good doctor. “I’ve called up an old college pal of mine, and…” Barney paused for a minute, swallowing back his sympathy for Clarice Starling for a minute, “and he said he and his coworkers can come out here and take Clarice in. They work at a nursing home—not an asylum, but she’d be taken care of and watched after,” Barney struggled to hold back tears, just shaking his head in disappointment, not disappointment with Ms. Starling, just disappointment with life. Barney may not have known Clarice as well as Hannibal had, but he knew enough about her to see the full weight of the tragedy in this situation.

Hannibal looked at Barney in shock. “a HOME!? Barney, this is Clarice M. Starling we’re talking about, we cannot just…Look, I’ll take her back with me and:-

“I’m afraid I can’t let you do that Dr. Lecter” Barney snapped sternly. Hannibal was slightly taken a back, it had been many years since Barney had asserted himself in front of Hannibal.

“I know I’m not a doctor Hannibal. But this is my area of expertise. You are a
psychologist; it is not your occupation to care for the mentally ill. You have no experience with these types of situations and we both know that. I do, it’s what I’ve been doing for the past 17 years. So please, Dr. Lecter, let go of your feelings and ego for one evening before you do something that’s more harm than good for Clarice.”

Hannibal nodded, Barney was right. Hannibal should have more faith and trust in the professional opinion of the man who had cared for him in his own time of need. Anything good enough for Hannibal would be good enough for Clarice he supposed.

Hannibal bit back his own sorrowful tears. He should have been able to prevent this, he should have known. Jack Crawford was a despicable man, but Hannibal had never… he hadn’t expected… no. This was still his fault, he might not have officially been Clarice’s psychiatrist, but he considered her well-being his responsibility all the same. Hannibal knew well the toll that Jack, the bureau, her father, the media; just…everything was taking on her and her mind. Hannibal should have seen the warning signs. There must have been warning signs foretelling this. Why didn’t he catch them!?

“When…When will they be here?” Hannibal asked

“They should probably be here in less than an hour now,” Barney responded.

Hannibal store into the barn, at the 35 year old woman sitting in the middle of it, happily holding a pretend tea party with her dollies, she didn’t have a care in the world. The picture tugged on Hannibal’s heartstrings in only the cruelest of ways. Barney sympathetically, gently placed his hand on Hannibal’s shoulder.

“Hey, I know you’ve been trying to push it from your mind, but I think what your doin’…spending time with her like that. That takes some guts man, I respect that.” Hannibal nodded to Barney.

“Thank you” and Hannibal walked back in and sat down again with the FBI agent. His mind drifted back to their first few meetings. To when he knew that this woman, this amazing, amazing woman, was someone he didn’t want to see leave his life. In some ways, she had. This little lady he was playing with, she wasn’t the same woman. In his heart he knew it wasn’t Clarice Starling, and yet it was. She had the same ice blue eyes, except this pair sparkled just a bit more in the starlight, it was the same coral colored smile, although now a little wider…and brighter. Mesmerized by the beauty and innocence emanating from her, Hannibal carefully reached out and brushed a few hairs out of Clarice’s face. She looked up from her toys at him in confusion, wondering why her friend had lightly touched her. Hannibal immediately pulled his hand back in regret. He shouldn’t have done that. It was wrong of him, it was inappropriate of him. Hannibal had crossed a boundary of privacy that she was not aware of, one that she did not have the knowledge or power to grant him permission to.

Hannibal decisively tried to make up his rude gesture the best he could. He brought the plastic teacup up to his lips and pretended to sip from it. He grinned at her when he put the cup back down, as she watched him curiously with wide, glistening eyes.

“The tea you made tastes wonderfully Ms. Starling!” He proclaimed gleefully, trying to sound convincing within her pretend world. Clarice’s face brightened instantaneously and she erupted with delighted laughter. Hannibal realized he, in that moment, wanted nothing more than to scoop Clarice up in his protective, loving arms and never let her go. He loved her, no matter what happened, no matter whom she was or what she became, he would always love her. And he knew that now.

Hannibal turned his attention away from Ms. Clarice Starling to the sound of tires
outside the barn. He stood up and left to see as Barney’s friends piled out of the van.

“And she’s inside the barn?” Barney nodded in response to the nurse’s question.

“What’s her temperament like right now?” Another asked.

“She’s harmless, playful. Docile. She won’t give you any trouble if you speak gently to
her,” Hannibal answered. Boy, he thought. *If only these poor fellas knew who they were really
talking to, these poor saps would probably just drop dead on the spot.* The mental image amused
Hannibal, but he was still grateful for their arrival and their services.

Two of the nurses stayed with Hannibal and Barney with the van doors open. The
vehicle was set up so that Clarice would be safely strapped into the back with a small window to
the other half of the van where the nurses would be. One nurse would stay in the back with
Clarice to watch over her. Usually docile patients were allowed to be kept awake, however this
trip back would be so long that they would sedate Clarice immediately after getting her strapped
in.

One of the nurses rubbed the back of his neck, waiting for his colleagues.

“So…” he asked awkwardly, “how long have you known this woman?”

“I’ve only known her for maybe a couple of months if that,” Barney answered.

“An eternity,” Hannibal whispered, only to be elbowed in the gut by Barney. Perhaps
now was not the greatest time for romantic metaphors about destiny.

“And she only just started behaving like this…today?” the nurse asked confused,
scratching his head.

Barney nodded in confirmation “Yeah, and it’s a damn fine shame. She was a brilliant
woman, I wish I had gotten the chance to know her better…but from my understanding she’s had
a real tough life up until this point, perhaps this was just a terrible coincidence or perhaps her
breakdown could have been prevented if not for peer negligence.” The other two nurses shook
their heads sympathetically. Hannibal tensed a little.

The two nurses emerged from the Barn, walking with Clarice between them. She was
hesitant and unsure about leaving her tea party, but she agreed when the nice men let her bring her
favorite doll. The nice nurses helped her up into the van. Clarice looked over her shoulder and
smiled when she saw the friends she invited to her tea party. She smiled at them, and held up her
doll and made it wave ‘goodbye’. Barney and Hannibal waved back before the nurses closed the
door. Hannibal clutched his shirt. He thought he felt his heart break. Barney’s colleague walked
over to the two of them before driving off.

“Thank you again for coming out here,” said Barny.

“Thank you for looking after her while we were on our way, I imagine it must have
been a heck of an experience. Hannibal nodded solemnly.

“Oh!” Barney exclaimed, suddenly remembering some important information. “This
woman friend of ours she’s had a…bad history with the media, do you think there would be any
way for you and your organization to keep her registration on the DL? I can send you any
information or contact information you need to keep everything legal,” The nurse was a little
surprised, Barney’s request seemed pretty silly. It wasn’t exactly like any news company was
publishing rumors about their nursing home, but he supposed he could make such arrangements
for a fellow classmate.
“Of course Barney, I’ll email you later,” The two nurses shook hands and then, he and the van were gone. Off to whisk Clarice away to the last place on Earth anybody had expected her to wind up in the extent of her promising, yet down spiraling life.

Hannibal let out one final sigh and turned to Barney once more.

“Barney…Thank you…for making that final request. I know she would have appreciated it if she were herself, and I appreciate it as well,”

Barney nodded in acknowledgement to the doctor. “I hope you don’t think I’m just sending her off somewhere, she’ll be waited on hand and foot and will have routine therapy sessions to monitor her progress. These things have been known to be temporary.”

_Don’t you dare get my hopes up you sick bastard_ was the first thing that flashed through Dr. Lecter’s mind, but he instead thanked Barney one last time before the two of them climbed into their respective cars and drove home, under and indigo sky pin-pricked with stars.
Barney pulled his car into the parking lot of the hotel. It had taken some time to figure out where Hannibal was staying, of course he had to be well hidden in order to evade the authorities, but Barney knew better, Hannibal didn’t want to be unfindable right now. Or even possibly ever. No, Hannibal had definitely left subtle clues for Barney to come and find him. He had kept a notebook to decipher it all, and if he was correct, Hannibal was in room 214. Barney walked past the check in desk and stood waiting for the elevator. It had been a long day, Clarice had a mental breakdown of which he and Hannibal had been witness to. That had had to hurt from Hannibal’s perspective. Barney knew Hannibal far too well for Hannibal to deny it.

But how did Barney feel about it? In his years he had watched and took care of so many similar situations, people with worst mental breakdowns, people more damaged than Clarice, he had grown numb to the whole process. It to some degree had become work, that didn’t necessarily mean Barney didn’t see these people as, people? Did it? He knew Dr. Chilton didn’t consider or treat their patients as people. Barney also knew that there were other nurses who felt the same way as Dr. Chilton. Hannibal had been a patient at the BSHCI, his placement there obviously was of no intention to make Hannibal ‘better’, but Barney had sworn an oath that he would do his best to help heal any of the people admitted to the hospital, murderers, rapists, perverts, the comatose, cannibals, everyone.

But Barney never knew these people before they were patients. Hannibal might not have left intensive care via legal means, but he was not the first patient of Barney’s to leave. Hannibal hadn’t even been the first patient for Barney to consider a friend. But Hannibal had been the first patient to remain close to Barney even after he left. And Clarice was the first time Barney had been acquainted with someone before they lost their marbles.

Hannibal was by technicality, no longer Barney’s patient, and Barney was still trying to find his foothold with Hannibal, he knew more about Hannibal and his psyche than most people knew about their loved ones. Either way, Barney was prepared to see Hannibal in a low state, and was prepared to give Hannibal whatever support he needed. That was the responsible thing to do, both as Hannibal’s friend, and as his old caretaker.

It took a long while for Hannibal to open the door and let Barney into his hotel room. It had taken a long while for Hannibal to hide the fact he had been lying pathetically in bed all night.

“Good evening Barney,” Hannibal greeted stalely, he could hide emotion with ease faking emotion was much more difficult. Not that Hannibal was even sure what the proper emotion for this situation would be. “I hope my instructions were in good order?” Barney shook Hannibal’s hand and stepped inside, Hannibal hid his surprise at the gesture. Not that a handshake was inappropriate, just that Barney had always remained a respectful distance away from Hannibal physically, going out of his way to avoid contact and touching.
“It was no trouble,” Barney politely replied, despite the difficulty it had taken to track Dr. Lecter. “Although next time, a simple phone call or email would suffice just fine,” Hannibal smiled at the light teasing.

“Of course,” he nodded. “Although you did find me in good time,” Hannibal pointed out. Barney shrugged.

“We make time for what’s important to us,”

“Am I important to you?” The idea was rather cheesy and sentimental, but Hannibal had always taken great pleasure in poking fun.

“What was important was getting over here to make sure you didn’t do something stupid or dangerous-“

“Oh Barney, how you worry about me,” Hannibal teased “You know I would never-“

“I meant dangerous to somebody else, to the public,” Barney scolded. Hannibal cracked a little, caught in a somewhat awkward position of conversation.

“You know I would never-“

“I know,” Barney stated, slightly amused by Hannibal’s attempt at reassurance. He spent so much time fussing over other people’s psyche, but Barney, and Clarice, had since figured out that it was all a distraction Hannibal used to ignore the fragility of his own psyche. He couldn’t hold up a mirror and look at himself honestly. He had far too many mental barriers to prevent that psychological catastrophe. Barney had to wonder though, if at some point Hannibal did let his guard down, and for one fleeting moment fully see not just who or what he is, but why he is, if the inevitable mental breakdown would at all resemble the one their mutual friend Clarice had the day prior.

Barney waltzed over to the opposite side of the bed from which he and Hannibal conversed. The room was awfully small. A cot was folded up in the corner. Barney wondered if Hannibal had expected Barney to stay the night with him. The thought sent chills down his spine. He had spent many nights for many years watching over Hannibal as he slept, he sure as hell wasn’t okay with them switching roles.

“So…how have you been fairing?” Barney asked as he sat down on the bed. “What happened yesterday was pretty harsh,” Hannibal bit the inside of his cheeks. He still hadn’t fully determined what the best answer would be, despite knowing now for hours he’d have to answer.

“I’m glad to know that she is getting the care she needs, and I hope the best for her in her time of need,”

“Do you think we gave you the care you needed?” Barney asked. He wasn’t exactly poking the bear, but he was stalking the cave. Oh to be a nurse and gain more insight into the mind of a famous killer than the doctors who have studied him for years. Oh what a dream.

Hannibal smirked. So Barney wanted to get a pry at ol’Hannibal? Fine, let him, he could let it slide, for a friend, besides, he was only trying to help.

“You did all that you could have possibly done for me Barney, and you already know just fine how I feel about Dr. Chilton,” Barney chuckled lightly, yeah, yeah he did know.

“I mean, I know how much she means to you man, that couldn’t have been easy for you, I don’t know Clarice well and it’s my job to handle these types of situations and these types
of people and even I-

“What do you mean these ‘types of people’?” Hannibal snarled at Barney. Oh, now this was a bit of an interesting development.

Barney held his hands up in defense, “My apologizes, I didn’t mean to make a derogatory comment about the mentally ill.”

“Take it back!” Hannibal demanded, practically frothing at the mouth.

“Take what back?” Barney asked innocently.

“TAKE IT BACK RIGHT NOW!” Hannibal cried.

“Okay! Okay! I take it back!” Barney exclaimed, defeated.

“She’s not one of them!” Hannibal insisted, his eyes began to sting and his throat felt swollen and sore. Visions of Clarice cooped up amongst Dr. Chilton’s less…sophisticated patients flashed through his mind sporadically. It was torture, he felt helpless and trapped, it was worse than his own flashbacks of his time under Chilton’s care.

“Hannibal?” Barney brought his hand up to Hannibal, hoping to bring him back to his senses. Still anxious about touching the good doctor. Barney placed his hand on Hannibal’s shoulder, and Hannibal threw himself into Barney’s arms. Hannibal was sobbing now, and Barney’s blood ran cold. There really weren’t any barriers left between them were there? Not that he wanted to suck Hannibal’s dick or anything. Many conversations had been shared between them, nothing as personal as this, but much more personal than anyone had talked to Hannibal at the time. This was probably a huge breakthrough for Hannibal, to be expressing such intense emotions with a trusted friend.

“She’s not one of them!” Hannibal cried repeatedly. Barney sighed empathetically and placed his arms around Hannibal, patting the older man’s back sympathetically.

“No she’s not,” Barney sighed in agreement. “She’s going to get better, you’ll see,

“This is my fault,” Hannibal cried, “I-I should have seen the signs!”

Barney shushed Hannibal and tried to calm him down again by gently petting his hair, “No, no, this ain’t anybody’s fault”

Hannibal whimpered at the loving gesture, burying his face into Barney’s shirt. “This is all Crawford’s fault,” he mumbled childishly. “He always pushes her too far mentally,”.

Now Barney didn’t know anything about this crazy FBI conspiracy theory Hannibal had cooked up, but it was obvious that Clarice Starling was generally over worked and negligent of her own mental health. Hannibal felt unusually soft against Barney, so small and so fragile. It was surprising just how much Hannibal had apparently been keeping bottled up as he continued to cry and cry. It didn’t seem like he would tire out any time soon.

Although that should have been expected, he really did love Clarice, didn’t he. They had only been introduced to her a little more than a week before Hannibal escaped, but in that time, Barney had heard plenty about her from Hannibal. Dr. Chilton had just assumed that any feelings Hannibal had for Clarice were just infatuation, obsession with the first potential sexual being he had come into contact with in almost 8 years. But that hadn’t been the case. When Hannibal first started to talk about her, he only discussed her tactics and persistence. But slowly over the course of a few days, up until the night he was transferred, Barney watched as his
descriptions of her became more and more elaborate and poetic, and how Hannibal started to include details he wouldn’t have addressed earlier the week, about how the way her eyes sparked, or how silky her hair looked as it delicately rested against her shoulders.

“She’s going to be okay Hannibal, we can go visit her tomorrow, okay?” Barney asked, tired and growing more desperate to calm Hannibal down, seeing as it was now obvious he wasn’t going to cry himself out like he had originally hoped for. Hannibal sniffled and continued to cling to Barney. So Barney continued to sit there, holding and comforting Hannibal until he was finally tired enough to call it a night. Barney stood up and headed towards the door when he felt a tug on the back of his shirt.

“Stay with me?” Hannibal seemed smaller than usual, so dependent and needy, Barney just couldn’t refuse him at this point, finally defeated by the cannibal.

Barney hadn’t expected himself to sleep in the hotel’s cot that night, and he was right.

Because Hannibal let him take the King-sized bed instead.

Chapter End Notes

short chapter! Next one will be much longer though, and there are plenty more on the way!
Chapter Summary

Hannibal finally gets to visit Clarice in the institution and check up with how she is doing.

Chapter Notes

Wow! it sure has been a while since I last updated! To all those worried this story had been abandoned! Worry no longer! 2 girlfriends, 30 pounds, and a new computer later and I’m back with the third chapter to this epic narrative! I have most of the plot laid out and while I still don’t have an accurate chapter prediction yet, let's just say you might want to think about getting a snack in the mean time, I don't know what the longest Hannibal fanfic is, but in the end, this might just take home that title.

The following morning was still and silent. Hannibal had politely offered Barney breakfast, but he had politely refused. There was just something...perverse about eating with Hannibal, and the night prior had more than pushed the boundaries of their relationship. Instead, and just as politely, Barney had washed up a bit in the bathroom and left before Hannibal had the chance to offer a cup of coffee. On the drive over to , Barney tried not to think about whether or not he was now officially Hannibal 'the cannibal' Lecter's accomplish. The sky was pretty and blue, and Barney was filled with an anxious hope that today would provide some sort of relief for Hannibal, at the very least they'd both be able to see how Clarice was fairing from last they saw her.

A black Bentley pulled up into the parking spot parallel from Barney's own car, and he watched the good doctor make his appearance.

"Nice seeing you again Barney."

"Feeling's mutual," Barney nodded toward Hannibal and the walked up to the hospital side by side.

An icy breeze blew through the trees, a remnant of the last few dying breaths of the winter half of March, transitioning to spring. The two men stepped inside the hospital, into the front ‘waiting’ room, escaping the outside chill. Hannibal was cold. The room was small and blue, with an open composition leading to wide connecting hallways that fragmented off like ice. A woman stood behind the front desk.

“Excuse me,” Barney approached the desk, and Hannibal took a seat in one of the small blue chairs surrounding the room. There was a wheelchair bound older man in the corner, Hannibal didn’t hold eye contact. The woman behind the desk looked up from her facebook page on the hospital’s outdated computer and up at Barney

“How can i help you?” visitors weren’t rare, and the front desk assistant was in good practice.
“Yes, uhm, do you have the room of a Ms. Clarice Starling by chance? Admitted two no...three
days ago?” Barney grinned politely, it was the least he could do.

The woman reluctantly closed her facebook and brought up the hospital roster and scrolled
through the patients by last name. If only everyone could be a Mr. or Mrs. Anderson.

“Room 131, hallway on the left, then take the first right, can’t miss it.”

“Thank you,” The woman sighed once Barney had turned away, ready for the inevitable future
patients to grace her presence

“Hannibal, hey” Barney tapped Hannibal on the on the shoulder, and the older man turned his
attention to Barney. “I got the room number, 131, c’mon.” Hannibal stood up from his chair and
followed shortly behind Barney. Nurses and Doctors bustled through the hallways, delivering
medication and extra blankets to the other patients. Barney took in a sense of nostalgic contempt at
the sight, every nurse in a constant cycle of checking on patients, although this hospital was much
quieter and cleaner than the BSTHCI The sight of one off syringe lying on a hand cart caused
Hannibal’s stomach to drop, intensified by each step taken. While room 131 wasn’t exactly a long
walk, it was still excruciating for Hannibal. Barney stopped in front of the door labelled 131.

“Well, here we are,” He said with almost a chuckle, beaming down at Hannibal, who could only
manage a meager half smile. The room was a little dark, the curtains were closed, Hannibal
gasped and sighed when he spotted Clarice sleeping in bed. It was late for her, or at least, the
Clarice Hannibal knew, to still be in bed, but drowsiness wasn’t an uncommon side effect for most
medications. Barney watched back from the door as Hannibal entered the room, cautious not to
disturb Clarice. Thin stripes of light peered in from the closed blinds and fell over Clarice,
reflecting in the form of a million stars caught in Hannibal’s large maroon eyes as he watched with
fascination over Clarice. She was safe. She was okay.

Clarice turned and mumbled in her sleep, before slowly opening her eyes. Hannibal froze,
anxiously waiting for Clarice to react to his presence. Clarice sat up in bed and tiredly rubbed her
eyes. Hannibal stepped back, ready to give her a respectable amount of space. She didn’t
immediately get out of bed, she turned to be completely facing Hannibal and giggled softly,
bouncing a little on the bed. Hannibal took a step closer.

“Good morning dear, did you sleep well?” Clarice nodded, she sleepily began to gnaw on her
sleeve. “And have the nice doctors and nurses been good to you?” another nod.

A nurse stepped into the room, “Oh sorry sir, Clarice has an appointment with the psychiatrists, I’m
afraid you need to leave now,” Hannibal nodded stiffly towards the nurse and turned around to
leave the room..

“So, she seemed to be doing okay,” Barney said as he and Hannibal started to walk back to the
doors.

“Well at the very least they’ve subdued her, it’s not like she’ll be throwing any more tea parties,”

“Man how even did she drive out there? She seemed pretty-”

Hannibal’s head snapped back up at Barney “ don’t say it! ” he hissed

Barney held his hands out in defense “Okay, okay, buddy I just mean she-”

“She’s not.” Hannibal and Barney remained silent, walking to their own cars and driving away.
Hannibal went back to his hotel room and ordered lunch, although he only picked at his chicken
salad. He lied back on his bed, the muscles in his back shifted uncomfortably against the over sized mattress. Perhaps he’d sleep on the trundle bed again tonight. Originally Hannibal had only planned to stay here a few days, but given the new circumstances that had unfolded recently, he couldn’t in good conscience bring himself to leave town. After pondering on it a bit, he sat back up in bed, his hair messy from the static of the sheets, and went back down to his car in the parking lot.

A few fluffy clouds began to roll in as Hannibal drove, and the predictable soft bumps and sensations of the drive soothed his nerves. Or at least most of them. The parking lot outside the pharmacy was practically barren, in the entirety of the lot only perhaps 2 or 3 other cars resided. Hannibal sighed, while there was usually safety in numbers, the lack of a crowd would make what Hannibal was about to do a heck of alot easier.

The doors dinged as Hannibal walked through them, and he tuned out the obnoxious radio music playing over the speakers, he wanted to focus on the task at hand. He braised through the aisles until he found what he had been searching for and pushed a couple into his basket. The easter sales were just starting, and pastel rabbits dotted every aisle. Funny, bad things always seemed to happen to Starling around this time of year, didn’t they? In any other circumstance the idea of sending Clarice a plethora of easter lambs would’ve sounded quite amusing, but nobody needed that type of risk right now. Even if a crueler man could argue it a justifiable form of associative memory therapy. No, Hannibal would not do that. He couldn’t do that. For then he would be stepping on the feet of the dreaded thing that feeds on tears.

Hannibal had nearly been done shopping, his basket pleasantly full. He had never been a light shopper. He was too indulgent for that. Too…. generous to himself and others to ever walk away from a store with less than or equal to the exact amount of things on his original shopping list. No, he had nearly been done, when he had spotted the finishing touch. It was a little pricier than the other objects in the basket, but Hannibal paid no mind.

“Is this everything sir?" The cashier behind the counter asked. Hannibal quickly added a tube of chapstick to his heap on the counter. He had been meaning to buy a new one.

Hannibal stood alone in the bathroom in his hotel room. Had he really allowed himself to go out looking as he had? He thought to himself as he combed his disheveled hair, wrapped up in a complimentary towel before taking his shower. He needed to make one last drive down to the institution Clarice was staying in before the day was over, and he certainly couldn’t afford to make a bad impression the hospital staff. They may just well think he was one of theirs! He eyed the razor on the sink and wondered if he should shave. He wondered if it would even matter. He couldn’t remember the last time he allowed himself to sport facial hair, despite it being an excellent form of disguise. He had shaved whenever he could, strictly out of the refusal to allow himself to deteriorate to the level that the rest of Chilton’s prisoners had. And then of course the day after his escape he had given himself a full body manscaping in his hotel room’s bathroom. Removing the armor he had adorned in protection from the thing who feeds on tears. Was he even capable of growing a beard? He distinctly remembered some of the larger boys that had picked on him before his uncle took him in had been just starting to sprout stubble. And they hadn’t been any older than he. Just another layer of dissonance between Hannibal and his peers, Hannibal picked up the razor before placing it back down, it didn’t really matter either way. He hadn’t any shaving cream.

Hannibal, with his things gathered, and his face clean, made his way back down to the parking lot and climbed back into his car, this time setting his sights on the institution. The sun was now just starting to duck down below the horizon, and the streetlights all flicked on as Hannibal drove
underneath of them. It was an odd time of day, with just a shawl of darkness spreading over the towns and cities and countryside, and the people and animals that inhabited them. Hannibal once more parked his car outside of the hospital, and gathered his things in the gift bag and carried them inside.

“Excuse me but may I please see-“

“Sorry, visiting hours are closed,” The woman behind the counter responded, focused completely on her game of solitaire.

“Yes, but i need-“

“I’m sorry doll, there’s nothing I can do, it’s just policy.”

“Please, I need-“

“Sir, all of our patients are kept on a consistent schedule to better ease their treatment, so no, your visit will just have to wait!” she was now growing impatient with this man.

“I need to deliver this package to Ms. Clarice Starling,” Hannibal did his best not to raise his voice, he was not in a position where he could fight or argue with the hospital’s staff, if he did, he may not see Clarice Starling ever again.

The woman sighed. “Alright, i’ll make sure this gets to her asap, just write your name down so I can tell her who sent it,” She pulled up the file on Clarice Starling to copy down the room number.

“Oh, please, that won’t be necessary-” the woman raised an eyebrow at this.

“What are you? Some sort of stalker you don’t want her to know about?”

“Oh no, please , it’s not that, I just don’t think our Ms. Starling is currently in any state to be recognizing names,” Well, she had to give him that, it wasn’t exactly like any of their patients were going to be receiving any academic awards any time soon.

“Alright, alright, could you at the very least tell me how you know her?“

“We’re….friends,” it wasn’t exactly the most accurate way to describe their relationship up until this point, but considering recent developments, it wouldn’t be right for Hannibal to think of her as anything else.

“Friends?” The man seemed a little too old to be interested in making ‘friends’ with the young woman whose face showed up under Clarice Starling in the systems computer. Maybe they had two Clarice Starlings.

“Weuh….we used to work together, she was something of a student to me,”

Whatever. “Alright, I’ll tell the girl it’s from one of her old work friends,” The woman printed off the slip and clipped it on the gift bag for delivery.

“You don’t suppose I could deliver-“

“No.”

Hannibal bit his tongue “Fair enough,” and turned to leave, well at least he knew that Clarice would get the gift anyway. With his hands in his pockets, Hannibal left the hospital and returned
to his car, clouds masking the stars above him as he drove back to the hotel, where he would lie in anticipation of the delivery. Alone in his room with hopes that the woman called Clarice Starling was alright.
Hannibal, Barney, and Clarice get to spend some quality time together.

He still wasn’t used to the king sized mattress. The narrow bed in his cell had barely been wide enough for him, he had had to lie perfectly still on his back at night, in the first few nights he had awoken on the cold cement floor several times. Now he just felt small. Too small in a world too big for him. Hannibal clung to the sheets, as though the mattress would swallow him whole if he wasn’t careful enough. He remained like that only but for a moment when the room’s phone rang. He hadn’t ordered a wake up call.

“What seems to be the matter?” he had expected it to be some sort of complaint from the front desk, that he had used a bad check, or a bill he had paid with had been to discovered as forgery.

“Hannibal?”

“BARNEY!? ” Hannibal choked on his own spit in utter shock.

“Is….is everything okay?” Hannibal rolled over and sat up in bed, his legs dangling off the edge. He hadn’t thought that the phones in the hotel rooms were callable, but Barney had visited only a few days ago hadn’t he? He simply could’ve called the front desk and asked to be connected to room #437.

“I...yes, I don’t suppose why it wouldn’t!”

“Oh, alright, glad to hear you’re doing okay. Hey uhm...I only called because you seemed pretty shooked up the other day when we visited Clarice, and I know his whole turmoil has been emotionally taxing,“

“Oh please,” Hannibal scoffed, as though Barney hadn’t held him days ago while Hannibal wailed and wailed like a newborn. “I’m a big boy now Barney, I don’t need you hovering over and taking care of me anymore,”

“Fine, I was only going to offer to go with you to visit Clarice again today,” Barney struggled to remain patient with the doctor, he knew that this was hard for him, but at the very least he could show the slightest drop of appreciation for Barney’s concern. He could go on living very well and not give a damn about Hannibal, it wasn’t like he was being paid to do this sort of thing anymore.

“Thank you, I’d... appreciate the company,”

“Okay, I’ll come pick you up in an hour,” Barney hung up the phone and sighed. Hannibal was very needy, and right now he needed Barney’s utmost patience and support. He could provide that for him.

Hannibal stood up and looked at his bed, the sheets were in disarray after his morning fussiness. Whilst he knew perfectly well a cleaning maid would come as soon as he left the room and clean up the mess, Hannibal refused to lose his sense of personal responsibility and decided that, while he waited for Barney, he would clean up the hotel room. As he worked, Hannibal remembered his
She sat curled up in bed with the tissue boxes, going over and over every last letter and photo she and Robertas had ever exchanged. She had been like this for some time now and Hannibal felt abysmal. The maid came twice a week to the estate, but she wouldn’t come until Thursday. It pained the young Hannibal to see Lady Murasaki so broken up, he swallowed his own grief over the departure of his beloved uncle Robertas and decided that something had to be done about all this. It would be intrusive and disrespectful for Hannibal to enter and clean the master bedroom where Lady Murasaki resided, and the on-call chef always kept the kitchen very clean out of sheer respect for his job and work space, but the sitting room….Perhaps if young lecter tidied up the sitting room, he could persuade Lady Murasaki into leaving the sanctuary of her bedroom, and venture downstairs into the common area. So that’s what Hannibal did. He washed the windows, beat the rug, dusted the drapes and chairs and hanging paintings, he polished the tables and replaced all the now wilted flowers with fresh ones, plus extra. It had taken some convincing but Hannibal was eventually able to lure Murasaki out of her bedroom and downstairs to see the sitting room.

“Look Lady Murasaki!” He had exclaimed. “I have cleaned the whole sitting room just for you, I left no spot untouched!” He had watched as Lady Murasaki’s eyes slowly lit up as she looked around the room before contently settling down in her arm chair, still distraught over Robertas’s untimely death, but now awake and alive to the world around her. Hannibal was so proud of himself and excited, at long last she was finally out of her room!

“Just wait here!” he had exclaimed “I’ll go and fetch us some tea!”

“Hannibal?? HANNIBAL?” Barney picked Hannibal off the floor and shook him back to consciousness

“…Barney? When did you get here?” Hannibal was still drowsy, he did not remember blacking out.

“Jesus fucking christ, when you didn’t respond I had asked a maid to borrow his master-key and I just found you lying on the floor mumbling something, with your hands completely mangled and cleaning supplies lying about. Hannibal sat up and looked around, his hands both had a dull stinging.

“How...how long have you been here?”

“Only about 10 minutes,” Barney shook his head. “How are you feeling?”

Hannibal looked down to inspect his hands, they had both been cleaned, presumably disinfected, and wrapped up in medical tape and paper towels. Not bad.

“I’ll...be okay, thank you Barney.” Barney patted Hannibal’s back reassuringly.

“Do you still feel up for going to visit Clarice?” Barney asked, Hannibal really shouldn’t be going anywhere until he could use at least one hand again, but Barney knew that he had no way of stopping Hannibal from seeing Clarice, nobody did.

Hannibal nodded slowly “Yes, please?” the inflection in his voice made it sound more like a question than a declarative statement, asking Barney for the permission to go and see Clarice. His eyes were bright and wide in anticipation, desperately begging Barney for the allowance to go see Clarice. He would do anything.
Barney slowly started to stand up, “alright, c’mon then, don’t want to miss visiting hours,”
Hannibal smiled up at the larger man, appreciation radiating from within.

“Here, let’s get you cleaned up,” Barney helped Hannibal stand up and walked him into the
bathroom. The fall had messed up Hannibal’s usually neatly combed hair, and his face was a bit
scruffed up. Hannibal didn’t protest against Barney’s touches, as he rubbed Hannibal’s face down
with a washcloth, or when he combed Hannibal’s hair for him. Barney had frozen up after
washing Hannibal’s face, like the fussy mother of a messy child, how foolish did he have to be to
to place his hand so close to Hannibal’s mouth? To invade his personal space? He hadn’t even
thought of it until after the fact. Hannibal only looked at him, displaying no disapproval or
readable malice towards him. So Barney had continued. It was very relaxing to have somebody
else comb his hair, and it helped ease Hannibal’s nerves. He pressed into Barney’s gentle
predictable touch, breathing along to the larger man’s rhythm. It was incredibly immature of him
wasn’t it? To allow another to step in and assume responsibility for his appearance and personal
hygiene. Hannibal and followed closely behind Barney down to his car in the parking lot below.

“Are you...really okay with driving me?”

“Well I sure hope you weren’t planning on driving yourself,” Barney looked down at Hannibal’s
bandaged hands. “But is this really the most intrusive thing either one of us has done? Riding in
the other person’s car?”

Hannibal shook his head and smiled in agreement, no, no this wasn’t the most intrusive thing. In
the past week alone they had broken more sacred barriers than this.

The car ride felt longer than it had the day prior. Maybe it was the lingering feeling of uncertainty
from riding in another man’s car. Maybe it was the shame from being found on the floor,
incapable of even the simplest act of nest keeping. Or maybe it was the anticipation of seeing
Clarice, especially after yesterday, it would not be completely honest of Hannibal to say he
couldn’t care less that he didn’t get to see Clarice receive her gifts from him the night before. They
had been perfect, and he desperately wanted to see Clarice indulge in perfection. Finally, after
endlessly drifting under the open sky, Barney pulled the car up into the institution’s parking lot.

“Hold on,” Barney said, before unlocking the car doors, stopping Hannibal. Barney licked his
thumb and rubbed it over the corner of Hannibal’s mouth. “Missed a spot”. Hannibal stopped,
locking in place, staring daggers through Barney, who instantly regretted his mistake. It had been
too sudden for comfort, no time had even been allowed for Hannibal to stop Barney or give
consent if he wanted to, complete disrespect for his power over his own body in such a simple
gesture. Barney quickly reached behind him and unlocked the door, letting Hannibal and himself
to go free.

If he hadn’t restrained himself, Hannibal would’ve ran into the building, past the receptionist,
down the hall, and right into Clarice’s room. But he couldn’t, even though nobody suspected him
or his identity, he was hyper vigilant of the impressions he made on people. This was the first time
ever he had been in a mental hospital with an outside-looking-in perspective. He couldn’t afford
even for a moment’s haste for someone to even slightly doubt his mental well being. The
memories of the thing that feed on tears were too strong and too traumatic for Hannibal to let that
happen.

“Let me guess,” the woman at the receptionists desk raised an eyebrow after watching Hannibal
walk in. “You’re here to see Ms. C Starling?” she sighed and pulled out the visitors registry. “Just
sign here and don’t let me stop you.” Hannibal eagerly threw his false name down on the
clipboard and watched impatiently as Barney wrote down his before heading down the hallway.

Clarice seemed more awake than she did yesterday, although Hannibal may have just arrived later
today than he had yesterday morning. She smiled at Hannibal when he walked in, Hannibal’s biggest fear was that the remnants of her anti-social nature would lead her to fear himself and others in this lower functioning state of mind.

“Hi sweetheart,” Hannibal spoke warmly and calmly to her, trying so desperately to be a thing of comfort to her. Clarice made a happy babble sound

“You remember your dear ol’ friend Hannibal don’t you?” He knelt down to be eye level with her as she sat on the bed. She looked deep into his eyes, and he back into hers. Thoughts and memories buried deep away in Clarice’s mind sparked and she struggled in her attempt to draw information and create connections between them. In the end he remained nothing more but an entanglement of blurry memory fragments in her mind.


“Did you like your gift basket?” Hannibal looked over and spotted the stuffed lion he had purchased sitting up on top of the dresser. While he was a little disappointed that one of the nurses had apparently placed Clarice’s toy out of her reach, he did appreciate the symbolism, of the lion, and in turn him, watching down over and protecting Clarice Starling. Clarice nodded in response, she stood up and opened the drawer on her nightstand, presenting Hannibal the two dolls he had bought for her. She handed him one. Hannibal took the cheap plastic doll from her and cracked a soft smile, ignoring the pain in his bandaged hand. Mischa had owned a few dolls, and while most of their time together had been spent playing make believe outside in the forested area surrounding Lecter castle, he did remember playing dolls with her on more than one occasion. Hannibal got down on the floor and Clarice followed him. He wasn’t exactly sure how this would work seeing as Clarice didn’t appear able of speech, but he should’ve thought of that when he had bought her the dolls. Hannibal reached deep into the crevices of his memory of playing dolls with Mischa for Barbie plot inspiration

“Oh Princess Penelope! We simply must get ready for the ball!” Hannibal said, in the best girl voice he as a 63 year old half-Italian-half-Lithuanian man. Clarice rolled back, clutching her doll, and laughed and laughed. Hannibal’s face beamed up as he watched Clarice squeal in delight. The two of them spent quite some time lying together on the floor playing and laughing, but it was starting to get late and Hannibal didn't want to keep Barney waiting, it would be incredibly rude after everything Barney had done for him.

“I'm sorry my dear, I had a marvelous time playing with you today, but I'm afraid it's time for me to leave,” Hannibal handed back the doll to Clarice. Clarice placed both of her dolls aside and raised her arms up over her head and made grabby hands at Hannibal. She wanted him to hug her goodbye before leaving. It saddened him a little, he would not, could not hug her. It would be taking advantage and wrong, she was in a compromising mindset and Hannibal took topics like consent with utmost seriousness. Not wanting to disappoint, however, he quickly took the stuffed lion off the dresser and placed it in her arms as compromise. She instantly hugged the soft toy but looked up to Hannibal in confusion and disappointment. She had wanted a hug, not this. Hannibal knelt back down to her level.

“Now Clarice, I know this doesn't seem like anything but an ordinary stuffed animal. But it is so much more! This lion is a symbol of our friendship, and through it, I will always be with you. And as long as you always have it with you, I will always be watching over and keeping you safe. Do you understand?” Clarice clutched the lion close to her head and nodded, she understood well. Her smile was beautiful, well, she in her entirety was beautiful but her smile especially. Hannibal wouldn't do anything to make it be. He reached out to brush the hair out of her face but stopped himself. No. He wouldn't, couldn't dare touch her. Flustered, he jumped up and left her room.
“Fairwell my sweet Clarice,”

“Excuse me,” a tall blonde man tapped Hannibal’s shoulder. Hannibal turned and addressed the man, he appeared to be a nurse. “I wouldn’t suppose you were the one who left my patient the gift basket?”

“Why do you ask?” Hannibal raised an eyebrow in inquirey, he already didn't completely trust the staff here.

“Well, while it was a very kind gesture, I must ask you to be more considerate of the nursing staff here.”

“I beg your pardon?!”

“While toys and trinkets are just alright, sir I must ask that you refrain from giving any of our patients here food, we uphold full responsibility for keeping all of patients in top physical condition and we don’t appreciate offerings that may compromise their condition,”

“Wait—is this about the sno balls?!”

“Mm, yes, Clarice like the rest of our patients are kept on our strict diet regimen and it is absolutely critical for their treatment that it not be compromised!”

“Oh please, a little bit of sugar never hurt anybody. And I know a thing or two about strict patient diet regimens and routines and let me tell—” Hannibal had been about to yell when he remembered that he was to be on his best behavior, the fear of being hauled off and thrown into one of the little rooms here. Being questioned as to the state of his well being, being questioned if he was even in the position to be making decisions about his own life, let alone somebody else’s.

“Well let me tell you sir that we pride ourselves on the condition of our patients, and will not risk any compromises—” if hannibal’s fists didn't sting to high heaven he would've knocked this smug motherfucker out on the spot. Sno balls were her favorite, did their patients’ happiness mean nothing? Barney had been allowed to remain Hannibal’s nurse for so many years because he had seemingly always yielded the best results. Dr. Chilton had just assumed that Hannibal for whatever reason had imprinted on Barney; when in reality it was nothing more than the fact that Barney was the only one to ever give Hannibal any positive reinforcement.

Hannibal had tried to smile for the nurse, he really had. But instead he only grimaced towards the taller man and grunted under his breath “I’ll make sure it doesn’t happen again,” before moseying on past him, Barney lagging behind.

With Hannibal now out of assumed earshot, the nurse pulled Barney, someone a coworker had tipped him off as a fellow psychiatric nurse, to the side.

“Excuse me, but, what's with the little guy?”

“What?” Barney asked, in disbelief.

“I mean, visiting her everyday is a nice sentiment, but come on, we’re both nurses! When are you gonna tell him?”

“Tell him what?!”

“Y’know….it’s not worth it, what is he? Her brother? Boyfriend?” The blonde doctor raised an accusatory eyebrow. “Not like she’d even know what to do with ‘it’ anymore, then again—” Hannibal’s head nearly snapped back on it’s axis, he charged full force, face crimson red from the
fires of hell, his still bloody fists clenched, ready to strike, ready to kill. By sheer reflex, and years of training plus experience alone, Barney grabbed Hannibal by the shirt collar and hauled him over his shoulder, knocking the wind right out of him.

“You’ll uhm….have to forgive us, he’s uh, very sensitive about this,” The other nurse didn’t exactly look panicked, more shocked than anything, shocked Hannibal had heard him from about a room’s distance away. But he didn’t know Hannibal, he didn’t know the beast and what he was capable of, he didn’t know that his life should have been flashing before his eyes. Barney turned and proceeded to carry Hannibal out of the building like that, over the shoulder, as though he were a sack of flour, before plopping him down in the passenger's seat of Barney’s car.

Just as Barney hadn’t immediately unlocked the doors when the two had arrived at the hospital, Barney wasn’t in any rush to start the car either. Scowling at the dashboard and steering wheel in front of him, refusing to make eye contact. Hannibal clutched his arms, adrenaline fading. He didn’t like being held down, picked up, carried, tossed around like a hunk of meat. He trembled terribly in his seat, angry and scared at the same time. How dare that nurse, how dare he. Barney finally broke and turned to look down at Hannibal, and for a moment it seemed like their minds had telepathically connected.

“I’m sorry about what happened back there, you know I’m just as disgusted as-”

“I know,” Hannibal responded, not looking at Barney.

“And if i could’ve I-”

“I know,” Hannibal sighed again.

“But you can’t just-”

“Mhmm,”

“Because if-”

“Uh huh,”

“And I know it-”

“I know,” Hannibal nodded slowly, before finally turning to look at Barney. Not sure if he wanted to thank him or apologize, he was still shaken up about being carried like that. Barney started the car, and the two remained silent for the rest of the car ride back to the hotel, street lights illuminating the road ahead.

Both men were quite when Barney parked the car in the hotel’s parking lot. Hannibal turned and looked at Barney, unsure as what to express or convey to him at this time. He settled with placing his hand lightly on Barney’s thigh. Barney didn’t resist. He trusted him. They trusted each other, at least, with each other. Hannibal soon found him unsure of himself once more and quickly left the car, watching as Barney pulled out and drove away. Hannibal walked himself back up to his hotel room, and lied down on his bed.

He felt very small.
How things ought to be

Nightfall crept slowly and quietly overhead, like a storm. Hannibal took shelter under the covers, pulling them up well over his head. He was very tired from the long day. Sleep wasn’t easy, but with a tired mind and heavy eye lids, Hannibal leaned back into the pillow and gradually began to sleep.

The mattress shifted underneath of him, he rolled over. Somehow he had managed to kick his feet out from under the massive comforter and pulled the in closer to his body, and suddenly there was no blanket to be had at all. No matter, in a fit of restlessness he must have kicked it off the bed. He just wanted to roll over and fall back asleep. But of the life of him, he couldn’t. Try as he might, Hannibal Lecter could not fall back asleep. Groaning in annoyance, Hannibal sat up in bed, only to find that he must have knocked his pillows off to, as they were nowhere to be found. Hannibal kicked his legs over the side of the bed, ready to walk over to the hotel room’s small kitchen area, maybe all he needed was a glass of water. That’s when it hit him. No mattress, no pillows, no blanket. He was back in the Baltimore State Home for the Criminally Insane. His blood ran cold. He couldn’t see his breath but he felt as though he damn well should have. The sound of leather loafers on stone echoed down the hallway. Only one person every wore leather loafers in the BSHCI, Hannibal’s face turned sickly pale. The footsteps grew louder and louder and Hannibal lept down to the floor and in panic, he began to desperately claw and scratch where the stone walls and floor met.

“Good afternoon Hannibal,” Hannibal froze up and his hands Dr. Chilton smirked and leaned back on his heels, looking, to Hannibal, like the smug son of a bitch he was. Without saying anything, Dr. Chilton flung open the cell door and walked in, with two burly nurses materializing behind him, guarding the door. With each ear pounding footstep of Dr. Chilton, the room and world around Hannibal bleed down the walls and dripped down the floor away into the endless abyss below him. Hannibal was thrust back, he hit something hard and solid, but at the same time he was flipping backwards over and over, growing appropriately nauseous. A cold breeze hit his bare chest. And then he was grabbed. Hands all over him, under his clothes, grabbing his wrists and ankles, caressing his face, stroking his hair. Hannibal clenched his jaw, and still the hands forced their way in, fingers in his eyes and hands crawling into his mouth and down his throat. He was choking. Despite their prodding at his eyes, he could still see just fine, as the hands were invisible after all. He wasn’t pinned down to anything, the solid surface behind him had also apparently melted away into nothingness. Despite this, no matter how hard he thrusted or tried to sweat the hands away, nothing changed, the hands were there and not there. He was screaming, hands flying in and out of his mouth, he could feel them crawling around in his guts and lungs, he was dead and not dead. No noise echoed forth from his agape mouth, perhaps this was the cruel answer to the age old question ‘if a tree falls and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?’ If a cannibal screams in space and no one is around to hear, invisible hands will crawl down his throat and his insides. And then he was drowning, spinning and being pulled down and back by the hands, he tried to ‘swim’ through the darkness and away, but the further he seemed to get away, the further back the hands seemed to pull him. Suddenly, he found he could swim no longer, if by the will of the hands or out of his own fatigue Hannibal was not sure, and then the hands thrust him back into a wall. Hannibal took a bad blow to the head, and it burnt dully, he closed his eyes upon impact.

And then he opened his eyes, and he was back in his cell, Dr. Chilton gone. He was trembling, but he couldn’t explain why, the hospital was the same temperature it had also been, the tempature that he had grown accustomed to. His vision focused itself, and Barney was there now. Not with him of course, well, no really. He was on the other side of the glass, as he always had been. As he always was. As he always would be.
“Supper time Hannibal, hope you’re hungry,” Barney picked a dinner tray off of the cart and slid it in to Hannibal, who graciously accepted the meal from his long time friend. It looked like it was supposed to be cheap macaroni and cheese, but really looked more like a yellow blob that reeked of kraft ‘easy cheese’, a product that in Hannibal’s mind ought to not legally be allowed to call itself ‘cheese’. As he looked down into the cheesy abyss that laid on his tray he couldn’t help but feel as though something….wasn’t right. While the hospital usually didn’t serve man n cheese, there had recently been a company merge, between the organization responsible for providing school lunches to the foster homes and schools in the Baltimore area, and the organization that had been responsible for producing the meals served in the BSHCI and other prisons, for the benefits of delivering more diverse meals to prisoners and providing children with food in a more cost efficient manner. But it wasn’t the food that was the problem, had...had Barney called Hannibal by his first name? He, for the past many years, had always exclusively referred to Hannibal as ‘Dr. Lecter’, a small sign of respect that Hannibal had always greatly appreciated, especially that now as he grew older and weaker many of the nurses had taken to calling him ‘Mr. Lecter’ instead, although he wasn’t sure if it was the product of passive disrespect or an order from Dr. Chilton that Barney didn’t mind defying.

“Barney?”

Barney turned back around, he had been on his way to deliver dinner to Mr. Grigsby

“Yes Dr.Lecter? Is something wrong?” he asked.

Hannibal paused, ‘Dr. Lecter’ same as he’d always been, as he was, as he always would be.

“No Barney, everything is normal, thank you,” And Barney turned back around and carried on with his duties. And Hannibal Lecter sat back on his bed, tray of food in his lap, with the satisfaction that everything was the way it should be.
Mac and Cheese

Chapter Summary

Hannibal eats some mac and cheese

While he wasn’t used to being served cheesy pasta in the BSHCI, Hannibal was still hungry and took a bit of the macaroni and cheese up to his mouth to eat. The skin on Hannibal’s skeleton melted away when the cheese hit his tongue, which promptly scampered out of his mouth and away into the corner like a rodent. Hannibal screamed and pulled at his eye holes, seeing both the bone fingers inside his skull, but was also blinded by the unfathomable pain of having one’s own hands feeling around inside one’s head. Slowly his jaw began to melt sloppily from the top of his skull and he let out a torturous screech, shattering his skull and what left remained of him floating through space.

Hannibal shot up in bed, sheets and shirts soaking in sweat. He rolled over and pulled up the hotel’s phone, he did not want to be alone.

“Barney!”

“What uh..who the hell is this?” He sounded groggy and confused, Hannibal turned over and looked at the digital alarm clock sitting on the hotel’s nightstand next to his bed. It was 3:00 in the morning. Of course Barney had been asleep. Hannibal had, and he was too tired now to feel any embarrassment

“I need mac and cheese,”

The florescent lights in the diner flickered, highlighting the bags under the over-worked waitresses eyes.

“Here’s your macaroni and cheese sweet heart,” Hannibal nodded his thanks to the middle aged woman. He found that he wasn’t very hungry. He pushed it to the side slightly and took a sip from his coffee

“Hannibal I swear to god you are not leaving this diner unless all that mac and cheese is in your stomach or smashed all over your face.” Barney grumbled. He still couldn’t believe Hannibal made him get out of bed at 3 in the morning and go down to Hannibal’s hotel and drive his pasty ass to the only place in town that served mac and cheese at 3 in the morning. Hannibal managed a small smile for Barney, he was right afterall, only a complete nutcase would drag their friend out of bed and make them go out for mac and cheese.

“You should know that i am eternally grateful for this Barney,” Hannibal, for Barney, ate a big forkful of mac and cheese. Why mac and cheese. He didn’t even like macaroni and cheese, let alone when it was cheap and undercooked as so often diner food was.

Barney sighed. “Look, I know what’s going on has been real tough for you, and my heart weeps with you Hannibal, it really does, but you cannot keep doing this, I’m a psychiatric nurse Hannibal, not a psychiatrist. Now, I know you don’t want to hear this but have you considered
“No.” Hannibal slumped down in his seat, very much like a bratty child.

Barney sighed again, “Alright, I knew you were going to say that, maybe it would make you feel better if you went down to the nursing home and talked with one of her nurses, have you considered that? Perhaps it’ll put your mind at ease once you know her exact treatment plan, you did list yourself as her emergency contact or guardian or whatever, right?”

Hannibal nodded, there was no one else, in his mind, more qualified to care for Clarice in this time of need than he.

“Good, than there isn’t a doubt in my mind that they’ll be happy to lend you a copy of her artilery. Now eat your mac and cheese.”

The road was empty as the two men drove away from the diner, Hannibal sluggishly leaned back in his seat, the adrenaline from his night terrors subsiding and leaving him exhausted. Barney rolled his eyes.

“Yeah, sure, you’re the one who’s tired,” he groaned. Street lights were the only source of light on the long open road, blocking out the natural light from the stars up above. By the time they arrived back at Hannibal’s hotel the sun was just about to start to peck at the horizon.

Hannibal turned to look at Barney, the implications of what he had done that night were beginning to set in. Yes, Hannibal was a nut for making his friend take him out in the dead of night for mac and cheese, just because he saw it in a dream he had, but how sane was the friend who agreed to drive out for mac and cheese in the dead of night?

“Thank you, but,” Hannibal started, looking up at Barney. “Excuse me for asking, but why exactly did you drive me out? I hope you don’t assume i am the type to throw a temper tantrum when i don’t get my way,” Hannibal chuckled, trying to hide the weight of the situation with a light dose of comedy.

“Well, Dr. Lecter, allow me to answer your question with another question, why on earth did you call me at 3 in the morning and tell me, and i quote ‘I need mac and cheese’?”

“Comfort food?!” Now there was a shock.

Hannibal sulked again, he didn’t like being this honest with others, especially on matters that could damage his impenetrable reputation. He went silent.

“Did you have a nightmare?” Barney asked, shot in the dark. While many of the medication Chilton had Hannibal take were completely for the purposes of experimentation, but there were a few that, if Barney had the authority needed, he would’ve kept Hannibal on. Hannibal turned away from Barney in the car seat. He didn’t want to admit any sort of weakness, and he certainly didn’t want to discuss them.
“Was it about the hospital? Or Chilton?” Hannibal hadn’t exactly been treated well by Chilton. Hannibal looked over his shoulder, checking Barney out for any signs of mockery or disrespect, and all he found was concern. Still silent, Hannibal climbed gently over the buffer and placed his head in Barney’s lap, feeling very fragile and helpless.

Barney stroked Hannibal’s hair and sighed, annoyed by how routine and predictable this had become.

“Hannibal, sweetheart, Barney didn’t even look at Hannibal, this was getting way too ridiculous. Hannibal whimpered. “Look, you’re my friend and I want to support you in your time of need, but this has got to stop, man! I can’t be expected to come pick you up and drive you wherever at god knows when, you have a problem. You need help. Now I am going to sit here with you until you’ve composed yourself enough to go back to bed, but I don’t want to be hearing another phone call from you tomorrow….today. Do you understand?” Hannibal bunched his hands up in Barney’s sweatshirt and nodded quietly, throat still too choked up to talk.

And so they sat there, Hannibal weeping quietly, too quietly for Barney to know, until, finally, Hannibal sat up. He didn’t say anything but he looked quickly once at Barney, still unsure as to why he had come to his aid. Feeling very silly and embarrassed about the whole ordeal Hannibal tried to give it some thought as to what he could do for Barney to make it up for him, what someone like Barney and in his situation would like. He had tried gifting the nurse money before in the past, but had consistently been refused, no matter what Barney’s financial situation was at the time. Hannibal thought back on the dream that had…’inspired’ him to call Barney, about how safe he had felt with Barney, about how safe he always felt around Barney. Hannibal climbed over the buffer and sat up in Barney’s lap, and kissed him softly. It was…disappointing to say the least. Before the new circumstances, Hannibal had deeply confused feelings for Clarice and this whole ordeal had forced him to repress half of those emotions, creating an emotional canyon within him. It would have been so perfect if Hannibal could’ve filled that hole with his dear, dear, friend Barney, really the only other option for affection within Hannibal’s life. Of course, he knew Barney was straight, or at least claimed to be, but it was much more realistic to presume that a straight man could love another than a lesbian would love a man. And it would’ve answered so many questions Hannibal had if Barney loved him, he knew he loved Barney. In a way. He also loved Clarice and Margot in a way, but he was never very good at defining his feelings towards others, and could only work with assumptions when it came to love.

Barney didn’t move, he didn’t push Hannibal off, bite him, touch him, or kiss back. He let Hannibal do what he needed to do, to get whatever this was out of his system, and when Hannibal was done, he just glared back down at him.

“I think you should leave,” was all he said to Hannibal before driving off.

Hannibal, once again, was left feeling very small. Perhaps Barney would get a little more than he wished, and would never hear from the cannibal again. Hannibal was very tired when he woke up, exhausted from the active night. To be perfectly honest, Hannibal was starting to tire of the hotel room, while it was much better than his cell, he desperately missed being able to cook his own meals. The ‘kitchen’ in the room was laughable, a small spread of counter, a microwave, and a mini-fridge stocked with sodas and beers, 1$ each. Hannibal showered and dressed, he could eat after he had a talk with Clarice’s nurses.

One thing Hannibal may have missed more than his kitchen, was his car. Hannibal stood at the corner outside the hotel and waved his arm out for a taxi
Hannibal pushed through the glass doors to the rehabilitation center, leaving behind the bright light from the sun just poking over the horizon. The cheap grey carpeting squished slightly under Hannibal’s weight, and the waiting room that he had walked through now several times before was painfully silent. Hannibal turned his attention to the front desk, and the woman he was now acquainted with who sat behind it, needles shot down Hannibal’s body when his eyes met her unbreaking stare, that he could only assume she had had since he stepped inside.

“Excuse me, “ Hannibal started, hoping to break the uncomfortable awkward silence. “I was wondering if i could meet with whichever nurse has been assigned to Clarice Starling? I’m her emergency contact and would like to-”

“Sorry dear, but I don’t think we can arrange for that,”

“What?” Hannibal wasn’t completely surprised, but he was caught off guard, having no alternative plan for once in his life.

“I’m afraid I must ask you to leave sweetheart,”

“Leave!? I’m sorry but is there a problem? I will have you know that as her companion and guardian I have the utmost duty to Clarice and I will.” Hannibal was grabbed from behind by two security guards, he squirmed in their grasp as they walked him outside the facility

“Unhand me!” Hannibal demanded, kicking his legs in hopeless desperation, to no effect.

“I'M Clarice’s guardian! I am responsible for her! You can’t keep me away from her!

“Well I’m sorry but maybe you should have considered that before attacking your Clarice’s nurse, but I promise that you and your Clarice will be reunited eventually and we promise that she will be cared for adequately.” The two guards dropped Hannibal in the middle of the parking lot, and returned back inside, not taking their eyes off of him the meanwhile.

A large weight dropped in the pit of Hannibal’s stomach, and it churned as the implications of what had taken place set in. Hannibal sat their in the parking lot, panic beginning to set in. He had to see Clarice again. He couldn’t just leave her alone with those….those….

Feeling exposed and overwhelmed, Hannibal crawled into the bus stop covered bench. He didn’t want to be caught making a scene, and certainly not outside of a mental facility of any kind.

Birds fluttered through the blue sky, cars gently pulled down the street, people got on and off the bus, and Hannibal stayed on the bench, his mind racing. He couldn’t just leave her alone with those….those…. monsters! Feeling exposed and overwhelmed, Hannibal crawled into the bus stop covered bench. He didn’t want to be caught making a scene, and certainly not outside of a mental facility of any kind.

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Birds fluttered through the blue sky, cars gently pulled down the street, people got on and off the bus, and Hannibal stayed on the bench, his mind racing. He couldn’t just let those monsters win, it didn’t matter what they were doing to Clarice, Hannibal knew that now, they would never show her as much respect or love that she needed, that she deserved, the love and respect that Hannibal knew only he could provide, the love and respect that Clarice would need to recover to her proper self. That was it then! Hannibal would have to step up and take full responsibility for Clarice and her psychological recovery. He was a therapist after all, he could do it. He’d just have to get to her somehow…

Hannibal called down a cab and visited a small hardware store he had spotted on one of the days Barney had driven Hannibal, if he was going to break Clarice out, he’d need proper equipment. The sky was darker now, the sun lower in the sky and clouds blocking it out, a storm was definitely in the brewing. Hannibal wasn’t in the store for very long, and the large cashier seemed surprised when all Hannibal needed was a flathead screwdriver.

“I just have some repairs to make around the house this weekend, and I recently noticed that I appeared to be down one screwdriver,” Hannibal slyly explained. The Cashier chuckled, then rolled his eyes and handed Hannibal back the screwdriver, not even seeing the point in asking
Hannibal returned back to his hotel room, now very proud of himself for outsmarting the hospital staff, but he had only little time to gloat, for he would have to go out again that night and break Clarice out. But for now, he could rest. With the beginnings of a plan in place, Hannibal felt as though a heavy load had been removed from his shoulders, finally able to breathe peacefully for the first time that day. He turned the screw driver over in his hands, funny how such a small thing would play such a big role in his plans. An odd little evolution of the wedge, wasn’t it? Hannibal sighed and leaned back, he would see his dear Clarice again oh yes he would. But then what? The hotel room was much too small to adequately house both of them, and the price of staying for so long would eventually add up, Hannibal had no idea how long it would take to help Clarice fully recover to her precious state, but it would definitely be after hotel staff grew suspicious of Hannibal’s extended stay. He would have to find a safe house for the two of them, Barney was out of the question, not only was there no way that he’d ever be alright with Hannibal hiding out in his apartment, especially after recent events, but Hannibal doubted that Barney’s apartment would provide sufficient space either, although he had never visited. At the time being, it didn’t matter. Once Hannibal broke Clarice out he’d have several days if not weeks to find an alternative shelter.

With the sun now ducking down past the horizon, businesses flickering on their lights one by one, the time was finally right. Hannibal crept down to the hospital, he remembered Clarice’s room number, she was in the eastern wing of the hospital. He peered in through several windows until he finally found her room, marked by the stuffed lion sitting on top the dresser. Using his screwdriver, Hannibal carefully wedged it in between the window and window sill and forced it open.

Clarice was laid down in bed when Hannibal stepped in through the window, careful not to make any noise.

“Anniba!” Clarice proclaimed, recognizing Hannibal instantly. Hannibal smiled warmly down at her.

“Hello dear, would you like to come with me?” He asked softly, careful not to wake anyone. As the inmates in the facility were nonviolent, security was much lower, there weren’t even cameras in the bedrooms. Hannibal held out his hand and was pleased when Clarice took it, and even more so when she allowed him to scoop her up. She was so innocent and trusting, naive to the horrors of which Hannibal had caused. Now with Clarice in his arms, Hannibal carefully stepped back outside the window and placed Clarice down in the garden lining the building. Hannibal carefully closed the window, and took Clarice’s hand.

“It’s very important that you stay very quiet my dear, can you do that for me?” Hannibal asked nicely. Clarice nodded. Hannibal ran briskly with her across the parking lot, weaving in and out of the parked cars of those still working at the hospital as not to be seen, the moon shining overhead. Hannibal hurried Clarice over to the side of the road and paused for a moment to check on her. Clarice had always been an athletic girl, and was in fantastic physical shape, a brisk run across a parking lot wasn’t even enough to cause her the need to catch her breath. Hannibal touched his hand to his own sweaty face, solemnly acknowledging his own frailness form age, that would only grow worse with each passing year. But one day too Clarice would stand in his position, sure he had never quite been as athletic as she was now, but he had never particularly been out of shape either. Hannibal took off his coat and wrapped Clarice up in it, it was a chilly night, and he had already promised himself that he would do everything in his power to keep Clarice happy and healthy. This was the first step.

When their cab came, Hannibal politely helped Clarice in, while she was still very much child
minded, her ability physically appeared to take no damage, as she kept her balance with ease.

“Stanford Hotel on Maple Street please,” Hannibal asked the driver. He looked over at Clarice and smiled, the satisfaction of fulfilling his believed duty to Clarice setting in. Hannibal couldn’t stop smiling as he leaned back into the leather seat of the cab. Hannibal looked back over at Clarice, her eyes half closed, slowly being lulled to sleep by the smooth motions of the cab.

Excitement and the endless possibilities of what came next bubbled through Hannibal’s head, the anticipation of delving into the crevices of Clarice’s mind, becoming her truest companion, caring for her, and tending to her every need was very pleasant despite the layer of anxiety it brought as well. Hannibal thought back to his aunt Muraski, the pride and fulfillment he had felt in caring for her during her period of grief and devastation. He looked forward to rekindling those emotions.

Once the cabbie dropped Hannibal and Clarice off, he did the best he could to quickly rush her into their hotel room. Clarice sluggishly followed behind Hannibal, still holding his hand. The front desk man, obviously noticing Hannibal walk in with his new found woman friend in the dead of night, gave Hannibal a cheeky smile and wink. Hannibal scoffed and had to stop himself from taking the desk man’s business card. Once back in the room, now with Clarice, Hannibal became aware of how small his hotel room truly was. After years of living in a closet of a cell, any room larger than a bathroom felt like a palace to Hannibal, but now faced with the prospects of a roommate, his perceptions was quickly brought back down to reality. He allowed Clarice to lie down and go to sleep on his bed, it was the least he could do for her, but something would have to be done sooner than Hannibal had expected. There just simply was no way that they would manage living together in such cramped quarters. Hannibal had to find somewhere else for the two of the them to live, no, he needed to find someone who could be willing to hide them, Hannibal had just kidnapped Clarice after all, someone who could appreciate the need to break the law for the greater good. Hannibal paused and grinned, perhaps it was time he gave Margot a visit.
Hannibal stood over Clarice, who had curled up and fallen asleep on the bed. It was pretty amazing, all this build up of anxiety over Clarice, and now, here she was, sleeping safely and peacefully, the way he was determined to keep her, for she was his angel. As the night proceeded onwards, Hannibal pulled up the hotel room’s arm chair and fell asleep next to Clarice. In the morning Hannibal found that he was faced with a new problem he had not yet taken into account. Food. For the past few weeks Hannibal had almost exclusively eaten out, the hotel not providing a sufficient kitchen to prepare even the most basic of dishes. But Clarice, Clarice was in no position to be going out, both for the sake of her safety, and her pride. While Clarice was very much child-minded at this point in time, she very much was not a child, and Hannibal wanted to do his best to respect her rights and concerns as an adult, as she would eventually be one once more and would definitely have questions for Hannibal as to the nature of his treatment of her, and Hannibal knew that anybody in her situation would be devastated to be seen in public. It would be incredibly demoralizing and most unladylike-like. Hannibal scolded himself for not stockpiling on precooked meals, he just couldn’t bring himself to allow Clarice to go without a good breakfast, she was too precious. He also couldn’t just leave her in the hotel room, he wasn’t terribly well acquainted with her psyche at this point and didn’t know what she would or would not do when left alone to her own devices. Hannibal then realized what he needed to do, he didn’t want to do it, but he had no other options.

“Hey….Barney?” Hannibal asked meekly over the phone, once the ringing subsided

“Hello Hannibal,” Barney sighed, waiting for Hannibal to tell him he needed him over there right then.

“Could you uh...come over?” Hannibal’s pitch raised. The slight annoyance in Barney’s voice was clear, and he had already told Hannibal that while he cared, he wasn’t exactly thrilled about running all these errands for him. Hannibal knew he was pushing his luck by asking for something so soon afterwards.

Barney rolled his eyes, not that Hannibal could see. “Fine. Give me 10 or 15 minutes and I’ll be over there,” Barney hung up the phone. Hannibal listened to the ringing. He promised himself that he would make this all up to Barney, as soon as circumstances changed and he could withdraw from one of his several bank accounts. Hannibal placed the phone back on the receiver, he turned around and sighed, looking at Clarice. ‘Don’t worry sweetheart,’ thought Hannibal, ‘I’m going to take good care of you.’. Hannibal walked back over to his armchair and watched Clarice, as he waited for Barney to show up.

A little while later a knocking on the door started, and stole away Hannibal’s attention from Clarice, who squirmed slightly at the noise. Hannibal answered the door, and was met by a very beaten down looking Barney Matthews
Barney sighed and asked the inevitable question, “Alright...I’m here, what do you need from me?” Hannibal was really starting to exhaust him.

Hannibal did his best to perk up, hoping that any positive he exuded would be reflected in Barney. “Thank you for coming over on such short notice, I do really appreciate this from you, you know, and i just needed-”

“Wait... Hannibal, who the fuck is that?” Barney pointed to the woman curled up on the hotel bed. Did Hannibal go out and meet someone or had the Clarice circumstance fucked him up so much that the prestigious Hannibal Lecter M.D, had taken to buying prostitutes?

“Oh, Clarice? uh, that’s why I needed you to come over, you see, last night i snuck into-”

“You snuck into the hospital and kidnapped Clarice!? Let me repeat that-” Barney looked up and noticed Clarice shifting around in bed, he held Hannibal’s wrist and lead him out of the hotel room and into the hallway, closing the door behind them, not wanting to wake up Clarice.

“You snuck into the hospital and kidnapped Clarice!?“ Hannibal store daggers through Barney, not appreciating his tone, even if he was his, so to say, best friend.

“I can’t believe this! I can’t believe you!” Barney threw his arms up in the air. “Jesus fucking Christ Hannibal! What the fuck were you thinking?!” Hannibal looked down at his feet, face hot with anger, he didn’t like being scolded as though he was a child.

“How are you going to take care of her? Sure you can feed her, but how are you going to treat her medically? You have no access to the American psychiatric system, or are you just going to steal drugs too? You have no staff, hope you’re ready to be a daddy Hannibal, cause you can’t just call someone else to come and watch her when you get tired-”

“-that’s why I called you,”

“Excuse me!?”

“I said I called you over because I needed somebody to watch Clarice,” Hannibal was growing agitated, if it wasn’t for their past relationship, Hannibal might have threatened Barney.

Barney scoffed.”I can’t believe you Dr. Lecter, after all that fussing and puffing in my direction about Clarice, and you’re already trying to shove her off on me-”

“I need you to watch her so I can go out for groceries.”

“...what?”

“I just...I need somebody I trust to watch her while I stockpile food for us- for her, until i can get us somewhere better than...here.” Barney sighed, no way in hell he would be blamed for compromising Clarice’s recovery.

“No, you stay, and I’ll go out and pick up your groceries. But this is a one time offer, okay? After this I’m not doing shit for you, and your damned fucking lucky I don’t drag your ass down to the police right now myself.” Hannibal nodded his thanks and crept back inside his hotel room.

Clarice was beautiful when she slept, at least to Hannibal, despite her messy hair or old worn out hospital-provided pajamas, she was beautiful, at least to him. Hopefully, she wouldn’t wake until Barney returned with the groceries so Hannibal could prepare Clarice the type of high quality
breakfast she deserved. He didn’t even want to think about what muck she had been fed in the hospital prior.

Alas, not everything we hope for is meant to be, and Clarice did soon stir and wake from her slumber. She slowly sat up on the bed and rubbed sheepishly at her eyes. Hannibal gazed over her in intrigue, absorbing every slight twitch and movement she made. Slowly opening her eyes, Clarice beamed when she saw him, comforted by the warm and familiar face. She reached up towards him and giggled. Hannibal hesitated, he didn’t like touching Clarice when she was like this anymore than he absolutely had to, but pondering on it for a moment, he came to the conclusion that, her touching him was much different than the other way around. And so, Hannibal held still as Clarice reached out and touched Hannibal’s fingers out of curiosity. Hannibal relaxed and his muscles eased from their cat-like, alert, and tense default state they usually held. Giving in to her desires, Hannibal sat down on the bed with Clarice and let her poke and prod at him. Clarice squealed in delight when Hannibal rolled over in submission, allowing her to climb all over him. She especially enjoyed pulling his hair.

Not too long after, a knocking was at the door once more, and Hannibal sprung forth from the bed and swiftly rushed over to the door, doing his best to fix his shirt and smooth his hair back into place.

“Thank you again Barney,” Hannibal happily took that paper bags full of groceries from Barney, before Barney turned around and walked out. Stupidly Hannibal had not mentioned what types of groceries he had needed from Barney, but the result was still good enough. Hannibal scoured through the bags, in search of something that would make an appropriate breakfast for Clarice, and settled on bread and peanut butter, there was no need to be spoon feeding her applesauce like an infant. Clarice was still a grown adult woman, and had the teeth to match, and with the natural instinct to chew, Hannibal wasn’t too worried about the possibility of her choking on a piece of food. Daintily Hannibal spread out a small amount of peanut butter on a piece of wheat bread with one of the cheap plastic spoons Barney managed to buy for him.

“Clarice,” He called, pleasantly surprised to see that she had retained enough to know her name, even if she couldn’t yet verbally communicate as articulately.

“Clarice dear, please, you’re breakfast is ready”.

Clarice looked up when she heard her name, and made her way over to the other side of the hotel room to where Hannibal was, and sat down at the table. Hannibal smiled pleasantly at Clarice, and she grinned back at him. Hannibal placed the bread down in front of her, slightly annoyed that he didn’t have any plates to serve her breakfast on. Clarice picked up the bread, getting peanut butter all over her fingers, but with the restraint and maturity to not smear it everywhere. She kicked her feet with her newfound energy from her long rest as she ate, and Hannibal couldn’t help but chuckle slightly, despite the horrifying implications, it was an absolutely adorable sight to behold. He laughed again when she was finally finished, peanut butter messily smeared around her mouth and down her chin.

Hannibal picked up a napkin “You seem to have spilled some of your breakfast silly girl, here, let me help,”

Clarice’s face scrunched up in slight discomfort as Hannibal wiped her clean.

“There,” he said “all better”. Clarice blinked, surprised by the sudden napkin and lack of napkin in her face. She looked back up at Hannibal and outstretched her arms, as she slumped over in her

“No, not ‘dada’” Hannibal sternly corrected. Clarice pulled back herself, disappointed and confused. Clarice’s expression made Hannibal wince, how could he have snapped so willingly at her? Someone so precious to him. Clarice’s happiness was the most important thing to Hannibal, second only to her health and safety.

“No, no! It’s okay! It’s okay! ‘Hannibal’” Hannibal pointed to himself, “remember?” he asked her. Clarice looked up and store long and hard at Hannibal, fuzzy ideas buried deep within her mind fought to connect and form coherence, finally, she responded

“Anniba”
And just like that memories of the fair haired little girl who had long ago also called Hannibal by the same name, the blues and pinks and yellows of her old dresses fluttered across Hannibal’s eyes and he felt as though he was in a daze, the large dark shadow of a dear danced around the room and finally leaped through him, snapping him back to reality, where Clarice just looked at him from across the table. Finding himself in an awkward situation with somebody incapable of explaining what about it was so awkward, Hannibal looked for something to say.

“Clarice, dearest, would you...like to help me put the groceries away?” It wasn’t very difficult work, the hotel only had 2 cabinets and a mini fridge, which were both barely large enough to hold everything.

“Can you put everything in this bag into the mini fridge Clarice?” Hannibal almost instinctively wanted to kneel down when talking in such a manner, ironic, as Clarice had a few inches on him. Clarice, always one to prove herself, nodded, and began placing the groceries into the mini-fridge best she could. It was comforting for Hannibal to see Clarice perform semi-physical tasks competently. A small child does not have the same bodily control or understanding of their ROM as an adult, and it was good to know that this was a trait Clarice had maintained. Hannibal turned his attention away from Clarice and back to the groceries for but a minute, but quickly regretted it, when a large crash followed by a pained whine.

Turning around immediately, Hannibal found Clarice knocked back on the floor, jar of applesauce shattered on the floor. Hannibal nearly screamed in horror, quickly doing what he could to get Clarice off the floor and back in the chair. She cried a little.

“Shh...sh...everything’s okay! Everything is going to be okay!” Hannibal patted Clarice’ shoulders reassuringly, his eyes darted around the room, scanning for where there might be a first aid kit, not being able to see an obvious location of one, Hannibal began to frantically search around the hotel, as Clarice’s cries grew louder. The bathroom yielded no results, nor the nightstands, or the hotel dresser, Hannibal was growing anxious, Clarice was in pain and Hannibal still had not yet done anything to truly aide her. Thinking fast, Hannibal grabbed several napkins, they’d work well enough as make-shift band aids, but they weren’t water proof, and Clarice was in desperate need of a bath. A bath. Hannibal shuffled awkwardly, of course, as an ex-surgeon, Hannibal had no trouble in removing all connection and pretext from the human body of another, seeing it as merely another cut of meat, but he knew that Clarice, and most of humanity, did not share his perspective, and that undressing or even viewing Clarice while undressed. Perhaps the bath could wait. Hannibal helped ease Clarice into the bathroom. One he had calmed Clarice down and had her sitting on the toilet, Hannibal picked up a hand towel and ran it under warm soapy water. With the towel now good and wet, Hannibal gently brought it to Clarice and began to do his best to wash off the applesauce. Clarice whined when Hannibal brought the towel into contact with
anyone of her cuts. With her body now void of applesauce, Hannibal moved on to treating her cuts.

“Clarice darling,” he started, “Could you wash your hands for me please?” Hesitantly, Clarice turned the faucet on and washed her hands, over lathering with the soap bar. Once she was finished, Clarice sat back down on the toilet near Hannibal, and Hannibal began his work. He thought about the thread he had from his own self-plastic surgery bag, but none of Clarice’s cuts were large enough to need to be sewn up. And the pain killers Hannibal did carry were far too potent for Clarice, both in terms of her many minor injuries, and her inability to deal with the side effects of the drugs themselves. Over the course of the few weeks from the ‘incident’ Clarice appeared to have

“There, all nice and clean,” Then, Hannibal herded Clarice back into the kitchen where he used several napkins as make-shift bandages to patch up Clarice’s cuts the best he could. While she was a very good patient, she squirmed when Hannibal got too close to any one cut, remembering the sting from when he dabbed the washcloth over them. When they were all done, Hannibal scoured the cabinets and the mini-fridge for any sweets he might use to reward Clarice for being such a good patient. He settled on a small packet of pop tarts. Clarice happily ate the sweets, as Hannibal watched from the other side of the table, the revelation that Hannibal may be in slightly over his head slowly sinking in.
Intrusion

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Clarice hit the road.

Chapter Notes

My apologies for the lengthy hiatus, as a pre med Physics major and Research Assistant on a particle accelerator I cannot say for certain what the future update schedule for this fan fiction will be, but please rest assured knowing I have FULL INTENTION of completing this story as I originally intended for it to be completed, with a potential length of roughly 30 chapters at roughly 90k words.

“We’re checking out,” Hannibal announced, catching the lobby bellringer off his guard.

“So soon? Could i at least offer you in our complimentary breakfast buffet in the-”

“No.”

Hannibal handed over the keys to the room and nodded his thanks to the bellringer, and lead Clarice out the revolving doors.

The drive was long and….winding. If he was completely honest with himself, not that he ever truly was, he wasn’t completely sure where they were going. Well, he did know, as a matter of fact, where they were going, just not exactly where that was. Luckily for the both of them, Clarice had still been fairly tired when Hannibal rushed them out the door, and the only real sound that accompanied the soft hum of the motor were her quiet sleepy murmurs. Even when on the road Hannibal couldn’t help but be compelled to watch her, looking over her like a hawk, picking out every last detail of her tangled brown hair, peach speckled face, and the grey sweater Hannibal had lovingly wrapped her in. He only hoped that he could find their way before her fatigue faded.

The farm was quietly tucked into the valley of rolling green hills, in the same way one might expect to find an old run down New England cabin or barn, though this home was very much in tip top condition, the owner wouldn’t have had it any other way. Hannibal pulled up the lilly lined driveway that lead up to the colonial styled garage. The entire property resembled a ski lodge, with generous splatterings of stone and wood paneling decorating the modern manor. Hannibal smiled to himself, sure it was pretty and quaint, but he couldn’t help but imagine the little fit Clarice would have thrown at the sight. Maybe some time in her headspace would do her some good, help her come to terms with whether or not she embraced the eccentricities of bourgeoisie living, or the humble hard worker patriot persona so many of her kind seemed to idolize and claim to follow, no matter how short they fell.

Now, came the hard part. Time hadn’t exactly been on Hannibal’s side when this whole little getaway had been planned, and so the residents didn’t quite know he was coming, or that we was there at all and hoping to. Taking one last look at Clarice, still asleep in the car, he braced himself
and marched up to front door.

‘Welcome’ read the mat under his feet, somehow, Hannibal felt as if the sentiment wasn’t sincere. His knock on the door was followed by quite the commotion, series of barks and scratches, yelling and thumping. In a blur of white and brown, Hannibal was knocked back onto the front porch.

“BAILEY! You get back-- Ohmygoshareyouokay-!?!” An arm extended down and helped hannibal back up to his feet. He looked down and sneered at the rambunctious shepard, he had never particularly cared for the things.

“I am so sorry about him I-- Hannibal?” Margot’s aluminous blue eyes sparkled with recognition, before fading away to just simple acknowledgement. “....Hannibal,” she repeated, the name heavy and metallic in her mouth. But not bitter. Never bitter.

“Margot,” Hannibal smiled awkwardly, rubbing his palms against his slacks, exciting the wretched dog even more. Silence. Margot rubbed her hand over the door frame.

“It’s…..it’s good to see you,” she turned her gaze away and head downwards. Hannibal sighed and rubbed the back of his neck. Yep, this was about what he deserved.

“So,” Margot clapped her hands together loudly, alerting the dog, in a desperate attempt to break the silence so menacingly hanging over them, “What brings you here?” how did you get here may have been a more appropriate question, but Margot was quite aware where Hannibal stood in terms of rudeness.

“What? I’m not allowed to drop in and visit my favorite lit-” Hannibal stopped mid sentence, ‘little’ wasn’t exactly an appropriate descriptor anymore. He could still remember her though. The skinny little girl with the honey-sweet plaited pigtails, he couldn’t stand within 5 feet of her, she wouldn’t have allowed it. Poor thing couldn’t sit right and wouldn’t stop pulling at the skirt of her dress. So small Hannibal thought she would break in his arms, she certainly broke his heart after all.

“Come in and sit down dear, we don’t bite here,” Hannibal had quickly scolded himself internally, now was not an appropriate time for such jokes. Now could not have been a worst possible time. It was clear her caregivers wanted her to nail the first impressions, summer was only just around the corner and here she was dressed for midnight mass. Hannibal had avoided working with children up until this point in his career as a psychiatrist, although he had operated on children before when he worked as a surgeon. That had been different, less personal. Fast, easy, in and out. Clean stitches and precise incisions. Psychology was different, it wasn’t so clean. In fact it could get quite messy. He knew that better than most.

“Your caregivers told me your name was Maggie…? Is that right dear? Please, come sit down,” she didn’t move. She just stood unwavering in the doorway to his office Hannibal had heard stories and testimonies before about and from people who claimed they couldn’t stand being in therapy, absolutely hated it, but now here was Hannibal starting to feel uncomfortable. This was his first child psych patient and he was doing an abysmal job by the looks of it.

“Ma….Margot” The girl whispered, turning away from Hannibal’s gaze and looking down at the carpet.

“What? Margot is it dear?” Hannibal’s smile grew wider in his pitiful attempt to try and make the situation all the more comforting for the poor girl...for Margot. God, it would have been so much easier if she wasn’t blonde. She snuck a quick peek back at the man, the windows behind him
illuminating him in a heavenly halo. She quickly looked away again and nodded for ‘yes’.

“Please come in and sit down dear, I’d like to talk with you,” very hesitantly, Margot stepped into the light where Hannibal could see her better, and slowly settled herself down on the sofa. The poor girl, Hannibal couldn’t see it when she stood by the door but she was positively shaking like a leaf. His stomach dropped, this was just getting worse and worse.

“Margot, honey—” she wasn’t sitting straight either. He thin lanky body hunched over crookedly and she leaned forward off the cushions, her weight instead shifting onto her knees.

“—sweetie it says in your file you live on a big farm?” Margot nodded shyly, good, she was responsive.

“My family kept animals when I was your age. Do you have a favorite?”

“...Butterscotch..” she mumbled.

“Who’s butterscotch?” Hannibal kindly asked.

“Mm...he’s a horse,” Margot responded, allowing herself an extra moment to glance at Hannibal. Hannibal nodded, watching as she shifted uncomfortably in the seat she had only just sat down in. The gears in his head whirling away.

“Margot? Would you like to go on a walk with me?” Margot looked up at Hannibal and for the first time all day, gave the faintest hint of a smile.

Personally, Hannibal was very proud of his garden. Well, he didn’t plant or tend to it per say, but he certainly managed it and supervised the work his gardeners did. The tulips bloomed vibrantly, dotting the garden and enrapturing the bushes of roses, peonies, and azaleas. Magnolias guarded the perimeter of the garden, only enforcing the perspective that this place was a protected sanctuary.

Instantly, Hannibal noticed a difference in Margot. She was less hesitant, louder, more direct and courageous. She explored every inch of the garden, under Hannibal’s watchful eye. Together they tied daisy chains, her fingers were thin and nimble, perfect for tying small knots. Hannibal watched as she threw small rocks into the pond, trying in vein to skip one. Carefully, Hannibal approached.

“Mind if I intrude?” Margot relaxed her stance and looked up at him curiously. She was standing much straighter now too, that was a good sign. Gently, Hannibal wrapped his fingers around her wrist and held it across her body. She was so small, Hannibal could’ve snapped the poor thing’s arm and left her for dead in the water. But he would never.

“Here, now steady your aim, weight on your left foot, and flick it!” Hannibal guided her hands through the motions, and Margot’s face lit up when the stone skipped gracefully along the water’s surface before sinking with a satisfying splash. Seeing as she was beginning to loosen up, Hannibal lead Margot back up the bank and around the stone path.

Margot’s memories were...graphic to say the least. There were reasons Hannibal tried not to scout minors as patients. She wasn’t yet at an age where she could comprehend or even understand the full weight of what had been done, but in so many similar cases, was there ever such a time? She was a strong little thing that was for sure. Margot had explained all the little things she had learned to do to try and alleviate what she could. Propping up the knob to her bedroom with a chair, overalls instead of skirts and tights, as much as her family disapproved. Any little thing she could do that would’ve made it that much more of an inconvenience she had done. But sometimes...most
of the time… she had learned it was just easier to take the chocolate.

“I don’t think my family loves me,” Margot said all of a sudden. Hannibal raised an eyebrow at this, from the sound of it, it sure seemed as though they definitely did not. At least, not as a child should be loved. Perhaps some part oh Hannibal believed he could do better.

“Really?” Hannibal feigned surprise for her sake, not wanting to worsen any wounds.

“Yeah, they think I’m different” she said nonchalantly, rocking back and forth on her heels as she rested against the decorative fencing.

“Different?” Hannibal asked again, this time out of a real genuine curiosity. Margot had, psychosis aside, had seemed perfectly ordinary to him. Sure she was shy and finicky but those seemed more symptoms than inherit traits. Most likely her years of abuse had lead to claustrophobia and her behavior outside much more indicative of her nature. She liked to run and play and make flower chains and skip stones, she liked horses and the color blue and being outside, and hated itchy dresses. All perfectly ordinary.

“Yeah…cause I’m weird. Don’t do things the right way or think the right things,”

Oh. OH.

If Hannibal’s blood had been brought to a boil when he had read over every disgusting word of how this poor girl had been treated in her file, well than he was positively steaming now. Lovingly, as tender as he could, Hannibal took both of Margot’s hands into his, knelt down and store her dead in the eyes.

“Margot, sweetie? There’s nothing wrong with being weird, but you’ll never be as weird as me,” He hoped it would stick with her. He really did.

“--On my favorite success story?” Hannibal said with a sly grin. Margot smirked and shook her head

` “Oh really I’m your favorite?” Margot’s relationship with Hannibal was complicated, unfulfilled, empty almost. But still, she would have been lying if she said she didn’t completely mind having him drop in.

“Why of course, who else would be?”

“Clarice in the car?” Margot nodded, looking over Hannibal’s shoulder to try and sneak a peek at his car.

“How did--”

“Barney said something about how you might be coming ‘round with her,” Margot responded.

“He….h-he did?” Hannibal was completely caught off guard. Last he had spoke to Barney they were not on the bestest of terms. Almost more surprising than Barney mentioning him was Margot staying in touch. She nearly completely dropped off the face of the earth once Mason’s death was chalked up to be the work of the good doctor.

“Yeah said you….took her from the hospital? I don’t know. Hey. I just made a pot of coffee hows about you bring Clarice on inside and we sit down and have a nice chat? Y’know, old time’s sake and all,” Margot winked and playfully punched Hannibal in the arm before walking back inside.

Hannibal wasn’t sure she meant it to hurt this much.
The interior of the house was just as lovely as the exterior. Hannibal sat with Clarice on the refurbished blue couch by the electronic fireplace.

“Not enough lumber to justify a traditional fireplace?” Hannibal remarked as Margot handed him a cup of coffee.

“Oh shut up!” She chuckled, handing Clarice a glass of water before settling on the more modern white couch nearby.

“So, where is the little woman off now?” Hannibal teased, although his curiosity was genuine. For all the praise he had heard he still had not yet met Judy, and he looked quite forward to doing so.

“Oh she’s just out at the store with Morgan, they should be back any minute now--” Margot looked down at her own coffee, an unnerving thought washing over her. “--Hey that reminds me Hannibal don’t freak out if Judy--”

“Mama!” The front door swung open and the tiny pitter patter of feet against the hardwood floor was followed by the thunderous barking of the dog again. Clarice huddled against Hannibal and covered her ears, distressed by all the commotion.

“Margot--they were out of onions so we--” The tan woman’s eyes landed dead flat on Hannibal and she dropped the bag of groceries, frozen in place, hand clutching her chest. Morgan happily scampered up into his larger mommy’s lap.

“Margot”

“Yes Judy?”

“He’s--He’s--”

“Judy this is Hannibal, he was my therapist growing up. Andthewholereasonwe'reabletobetogethernow” Margot forced through a large, TV smile of a woman desperately trying to defuse a situation that could so easily end in the catastrophe of the century.

“HE’S--” her voice cracked as it raised several octaves,

“--and he’s our guest !” Margot interjected. Taking a deep breathe, as she realized this was a battle of numbers she clearly wouldn’t win judging by the three people staring at her, Judy quietly and calmly marched over to her wife, snatched the toddler from her lap, and proceeded to sit with Morgan at the kitchen counter, as FAR from that….that MADMAN as she could.

Hannibal sighed, so much for first impressions.

“Well……” He started “I see you’re doing very well for yourself,"

Margot nodded solemnly, “Yeah….no we’ve been good, just fine,”

“That’s….that’s good” Hannibal’s voice trailed off, He held Clarice close to his side and drummed his fingers against his knee. The hair on the back of his neck stood on ends as Judy watched him from across the room with hawk like eyes. He would’ve thought by now that he’d be much more accustomed to being watched/

“Yeah….so Barney mentioned that you two might be looking for warm beds--”
“Absolutely not!” Judy squawked. Perhaps more of the Verger madness had been passed on to Margot than she’d like to admit.

“Judy!—excuse us a moment Hannibal,” Margot stood up and lead Judy out into the hallway, away from where Hannibal or Clarice could see or hear. Hannibal puffed air through his nose and bit his lip. Maybe this arrangement was less of a sure thing than he had anticipated.

“Excuse me darling but have you completely lost your mind!? First you let that--that criminal into our home and now you--”

“I know--” Margot ran her hands over her hair, pushing it flat against her scalp, “I...I know, this isn’t good,” Judy nodded angrily in agreement. “I don’t….I don’t exactly want him here either pudding. But that;s his thing y’know--you don’t get to choose if he is or isn’t part of your--”

“Margot we’re both grown ass women, and we have worked hard and tirelessly to build this life together, he has no right to--” her tone made Morgan start to fuss, Judy quickly cut herself off to soothe the toddler.

“--I know, god I know this is so fucking dumb,” tears welled up in her eyes for reasons she couldn’t completely articulate, “I...I don’t even give a shit but I just can’t not like, y’know” Using her free hand, Judy wiped her lover’s face.

“Yeah….okay fine,” Judy sighed “But i still don’t want him here, you’re allowed to tell him no”

“I know, but like, fuck he’s not gonna stop with this Clarice shit. It’s probably best that he’s somewhere where others can intervene,”

“Fuck….okay fine, just….fuck Margot,” Judy sighed defeated.

Margot frowned ad placed her hands on Judy’s shoulders, “Okay look, maybe we can convince him to leave Clarice here, and then we can take her to like a hospital or something, and then we can forget this ever happened.

“Alright,”

Hannibal looked down at Clarice and patted her shoulder. “Doing alright sweetheart?” she nodded quietly, still adjusting to the new environment. His attention was drawn back upwards when Margot stepped back into the room.

“Alright Hannibal, you two can stay,”

Hannibal immediately perked up “Thank you Margot, I really can’t express how--”

“Hannibal it’s fine, really” Margot said coldly. “Clarice used to like live on a farm or something right?”

“Uh, yeah, why?”

“We have a barn and pastures in the back, think she might wanna go out and see the animals?”

Hannibal smiled his appreciation, thanking Margot with her eyes, “Well that sounds alright to me, doesn’t that sound nice Clarice? Would you like to go out and see the nice animals?” Clarice just looked back up at Hannibal with an empty expression. Hannibal frowned, he thought she had been making such good progress, he could only hope that this was just a symptom of her being
moved to a new environment with new people and new stimuli.

Behind the house was a large deck overlooking the sloping landscape, that flattened out to a fenced pasture with paths leading to a barn proper on one side of the property and a large rustic stable, very similar to that of Muskrat farms, down the other.

“Guess somethings never change huh?” Hannibal grinned, Margot had said she liked horses after all.

Margot shrugged “Eh I never really minded rural living--” if Clarice were in her right mind she would’ve slapped the shit out of Margot for trying to claim her 3 story manor overlooking private industrial level factory pork farming was ‘rural living’. “--just the people I was livin’ it with”. Truth be told Hannibal was rather euphoric Margot had come out of such bad a situation as good as she did. She was tough, that was certain, and she sure as hell never stopped swinging”.

“So are you trying to live self sufficiently or are you in the commercial game?”

“Oh well we use what we can, sometimes we sell our animals live, and we sell our sheep wool, not that we need the money.” Hannibal nodded, in understanding.

“It’s not exactly like we wanted to move into a slaughterhouse;”

Hannibal chuckled “I would imagine,” There was a certain looseness to Margot that Hannibal could appreciate, the ability to find humor and joy even in bleaker times.

“Yeah, y’know Judy’s a vegetarian and--”

“--and I’m the antipathy of a vegetarian right?” Hannibal frowned

“Hannibal you eat people, that tends to be a turnoff for most” Margot snickered. Hannibal rolled his eyes.

“...So Clarice huh?” Clarice turned up and looked up at Margot as she followed asides Hannibal.

“It’s not like she isn’t here Margot,” Hannibal corrected, he looked over his shoulder and back down at Clarice. Okay...she wasn’t the same woman she was...that she was supposed to be...but she was still there right? Right? Right!? **RIGHT!!**

The Barn was large and painted to match the manor, the door was heavy and Margot had to prop it up with a rock for Hannibal and Clarice to follow her inside. It was impossible for a barn to be clean, Hannibal would admit, but at least it was organized, and at least Hannibal’s nose wasn’t completely annihilated by the smell of animal.

“Yeah we have the sheep just over here,” Margot turned and smiled at Clarice “you wanna go pet the baby lambs dear?” Clarice perked up and looked her in the eye, recognizing the word, something deep inside of her shook furiously. No as though someone had lit a candle in the dark,no, but instead as if someone had suddenly flipped on and off the lights.

The Sheep mostly wandered around their pen, with a few laying against the fence near the food and water troughs, barely noticing as Margot undid that gate and walked in with Clarice.

“Go on sweetheart, they’re plenty friendly.” Margot patted Clarice’s shoulder, and the brown haired woman knelt down and felt the soft wool pelt of one of the sheep under her hand, her eyes widening at the familiar softness.

“Lamb,” She gasped, the hair stood on the back of her neck as the screams rang through her ears
“...Yes sweetie, nice lamb huh?” Margot smiled awkwardly. The sheep looked over its shoulder at Clarice and Margot, its long ears wiggled in delight at the pets. Hannibal, sensing something was very wrong, slowly stepped towards the pen

“Everything alight ladies?”

Clarice’s breath was rapid, her heads slowly moving back and forth, her hands shook and her lip trembled when hey eyes met Hannibal’s

“W-Where’s my daddy?”
Hurricane Hannibal

Chapter Summary

Margot introduces her pride stallion to Hannibal and Clarice.

“Don’t worry sweetheart your daddy is right--” Margot turned to Hannibal, who quickly shook his head and crossed his arms, signalling ‘NO’. Margot bit her lip and her mind raced. “Come on sweetheart how about we go wash up insider and go play with Morgan. Doesn’t that sound nice dear?” Clarice quietly nodded her head and stayed close to Margot as she lead her out of the sheep pen. Hannibal watched from the side and said nothing as Margot lead Clarice out of the barn, he broke his glare once startled by the sudden metallic twang of blood. He had bit right through the lining of his cheeks in frustration and dimmed rage.

‘No’ he thought to himself, for once halting the very impulsive and irrational train of thought. This was good. This was why he had brought Clarice here in the first place. She was going to be much happier and healthier here than back in the hotel, and so would he. It took a village afterall, and Margot and Judy both had more child rearing experience than he did. Clarice was about functioning on the same mental wavelength of Morgan after all, Yeah, this was good. Things were going to be okay.

Hannibal followed slowly behind the two women back up to the house, not speaking, just observing. Margot was taking very well to Clarice, and in return Clarice extended the same trust she had with Hannibal. Bailey barked and jumped around once Margot was back in the ouse, earning an angered grunt from Margot.

“Did you two have a nice time out in the fields?” Judy asked, she was sitting on the floor with Morgan who was playing happily with his blocks. Margot looked down on her family as they sat happily together and couldn’t help but smile, this was something Hannibal couldn’t disturb. Soft mid day light poured in from the sunroof, draping itself over the mother and child. Judy’s eyes seemed to twinkle and the rays of sun glistened as a halo around Morgan’s soft hair. Margot smiled back at her wife and tapped Clarice’s shoulder

“Why don’t you play nice and i’ll get you some juice, sound nice dear?”

“Uh huh” Clarice nodded solemnly, she remembered sheep….and a farm, she was pretty sure she was on a farm. Something about an uncle? Was that who Hannibal was? These must have been her Aunts than….or maybe her cousins? Hannibal seemed old enough for Margot to be his daughter. Yeah that made sense.

“And a glass of Pinot grigio for me love!” Judy called to Margot.

“Thought all those parenting books said ya won’t supposed to be drinking ‘round the kids,” Margot teased as she carred in two sippy cups of juice. She hadn’t been sure whether Clarice was ‘old’ enough for a glass but didn’t want to take the chance. Clarice seemed to be getting along just fine with Morgan, although her small block castle indicated that sh was perhaps not so toddler-minded as first presumed.
“You two having fun?” Margot sat down adjacent to Judy and let her curl up against her.

“Mmhmm…” Clarice responded shyly, still a little weary and unsure.

“Everybody playing nicely?” The sliding glass door to the back deck opened and Hannibal stepped in, standing awkwardly at a distance from the others, hovering over his darling Clarice. Judy instinctively pulled Morgan up close into her arms and turned away from Margot.

“You know it’s getting late I think I’ll put Morgan down for his afternoon nap”

“Not tired!” The tiny two year old cried in protest.

“He’s right, it’s only like 2:30” Judy silently scowled at Margot before marching down the hallway, fussy toddler in tow. Hannibal sighed and sat down defeated on the couch, as Margot watched on over her shoulder. Confused Clarice turned between both adults seeking answers than weren’t there.

“Why she go?” Clarice finally asked, big tepid eyes Hannibal couldn’t bare to look at.

“Some people just don’t like us---some people just don’t like me” He self-corrected. Trying to tie Clarice into Judy’s hangups would only cause more trouble and tension, and that was the last thing Hannibal needed Clarice getting dragged into. And so the three of them sat in quiet, the weight of Judy’s departure sat heavy over their heads. Especially difficult for Clarice, who couldn’t wrap her mind around why her friend and playmate had to leave, just because Hannibal had come inside.

“So….” Margot started “How have things been?”

“Alright,” Hannibal responded, distant.

“Barney says you two were living in a hotel room…?”

Hannibal sighed, “It was the place I was staying when I first went out to visit Clarice. I didn’t know where else to take her.”

“Than why take her at all? I mean Barney had said that the place he checked her into was--”

“I don’t care what Barney says!” Hannibal’s voice cracked as his breathing deepened. “I don’t care what Barney says….she didn’t deserve to be there. Alone and scared and looked after by strangers who don’t care Margot. They don’t care about her Margot! They were never going to treat her right!” Hannibal was out of breath and sweating, intensely staring deep into Margot’s eyes.

“Hannibal….” Margot sighed, unsure of how to handle this. “You know she wasn’t…she isn’t… “What!? Say it!, Go on!” Hannibal was seething and on the verge of tears.

“She isn’t like you.” Hannibal’s eye twitched and he was left frozen, violently biting his lower lip to control him. Clarice, scared and confused, sought comfort in Margot’s embrace. Hannibal held still as he watched and blinked his tears away.

“I’m….I’m going to bed,” Hannibal stood up and stormed off.

“Shhh...don’t worry sweetheart,” Margot soothed Clarice, cradling her in her arms. “Hey those hospital pajamas can’t be too comfortable, come on I bet we can find you something nicer to wear.” Clarice nodded tearfully.
Margot was several sizes larger than Clarice, and tended towards indulgences in high quality formal wear, but she and Judy had plenty of cotton shirts and jeans for working in. Clarice had picked out a particularly bright yellow shirt and surprisingly didn’t need much help to pull it on, although Margot helped with her fly.

“There, that’s a lot better isn’t it?” Clarice smiled up at Margot and nodded in agreement. She was much shyer and nonverbal without Hannibal around it appeared.

“Come on, I think Morgan should be getting up soon, maybe Judy would like to join us for a family movie.”

Hannibal stood in the doorway of the guest room he had been pointed to. It was...strange to have his own room for the first time in weeks. Much nicer than the hotel, he had a dresser and a queen sized bed and a writing desk. He didn’t like the grey paint, it was too similar to the grey cinderblock walls of the hospital, but the cozy layout was familiar and comfortable. It was nice. He had spent many sleepless weeks now looking after Clarice and it was slightly thrilling to take a little break from her, from everyone. He hadn’t had a good sleep in nearly a month, just a quick nap and he would go and try to talk over his outburst with Margot. Hannibal slipped under the heavy comforter and happily curled up under the covers, gripping the large pillow underneath him with his head snuggled against it. He was asleep in moments.

There was only one window in the guest room, and when Hannibal woke up, refreshed and snugly, the orange light rippled in between the blinds. Hannibal pulled himself out of bed and sat on the end as he dressed himself

“Wonder how long I was out for--” Hannibal yawned as he stretched. “I only meant to get a couple winks,” It looked like the sun was setting. Hannibal frowned, he had hoped to win Judy over with a five star dinner. Perhaps he could win her over with some famous Lecter Marjolaine. Once Hannibal was dressed he stood up and stepped out into the hallway where he was faced with the unmistakable smell of bacon.

“Morning sleeping beauty!” Margot called as Hannibal stepped into the kitchen. Breakfast? Had he really slept until the next morning?

“Oh Margot! You really didn’t have to cook for Clarice and I, you know I would’ve happily--if someone had only just woke me I--”

“It’s okay Hannibal, I know” she stated cold and flatly, pushing the bacon and pancakes onto a plate for Hannibal.

“Thought you said Judy was a vegetarian?”

“Doesn’t mean I have to be,” Margot turned down the stove and brought her own plate over to the table, where Judy and Clarice were already eating.

“Oh dear, here let me you help you--” Hannibal reached out in an attempt to help Clarice cut her pancakes before being slapped away by Judy, who gasped audibly, surprised by her own reflexes Hannibal just store at her.

“I’m--I’m so sorry I didn’t mean to--” Judy took a deep breath and collected herself “--I just thought maybe you should let Clarice do it herself,”

“Yeah” Clarice responded, not looking up as she shoved food into her mouth, “can do it” Hannibal was a bit taken aback, but accepted her refusal and took his seat. This was about her and
her recovery after all, it wasn’t about him.

“So I thought maybe we could try and go back down to the barn again and see the animals, does that sound good Clarice?” Clarice nodded eagerly, mouth too full to talk. Hannibal turned to Margot in shock.

“I’m not too sure how smart that would be, I mean with the way she reacted the other day and--”

“Relax Hannibal, she liked, it helped, maybe she just needs to be reintroduced to familiar things in order to recover. She seems much better than she did.” Hannibal found he could not disagree.

“Fine, but at least let me help with the dishes,”

Hannibal buried his face in his coat, trying to block out the musky smell of wood and shit in the barn. He couldn’t wrap his head how someone like Margot put up with this.

“Hmmm….I know you’ve seen the sheep already, how about you help me feed good ol’ Butterscotch?”

Clarice nodded with a simple “Ok”

“How about you Hannibal? You’ve seen my horses before?”

“I’m fine watching, thank you” He forced a polite smile for Margot before slinking behind the woman. Yeah, he had ‘met’ the Verger herd before, and the more he mulled it over the more he wasn’t so sure letting Clarice get close and personal was a very good idea, even if she had lived with horses once before.

When Margot had left Muskrat farms she had abandoned or sold most of the animals and original equipment, but not the horses. No, the horses had always hers. Butterscotch had been a present as a foal from Molson, and when Mason hadn’t taken to him he was pushed onto Margot, and it had been love at first sight. Aside from Morgan, Butterscotch was Margot’s pride and joy. At 15 hands Butterscotch was a strong and stride American Quarter that had proudly carried Margot through several horse shows in her adolescence, and now he served as guardian to the manor, Margot and her family, and his harem of mares.

“Isn’t he a beauty?” Margot smiled proudly, almost teary eyed as she presented Clarice with the stallion. “Careful now, don’t spook him, he’s a sweet thing but horses spook easily,” For a moment Clarice had turned to Margot, almost surprised, almost about to retort that she had handled dozens of horses before and of course she was going to be careful, but she couldn’t as much as would have.

Slowly, Clarice reached her fingers towards the magnificent beast, whose head turned away initially in disgust with the stranger, before being blossomed into a curiosity once it spotted his beloved master standing besides her. Gently, the horse bent down and sniffed Clarice’s hand, not permitting touch, before stepping back and watching Margot for further direction.

“He’s just being shy, doesn’t know who you are, here, give him and apple,” Margot tossed the fruit and Clarice caught it like it was nothing, impressing Hannibal, further sign of her steady recovery.

Cautiously, Clarice leaned against the fencing and offered Butterscotch the apple, the horse sniffed it before snatching it from her hands, but not pulling away, instead letting Clarice dainty press her hand against his nose.
A wide grin stretched across Margot’s face “See? What did I tell yeah? He likes you! Just gotta give him some time is all,“

Hannibal rolled his eyes, sensing the sarcasm and irony emulating from the crotchety old man Margot looked over her shoulder and caught glimpse of him leaning against the furthest barn wall.

“Oh come on Hannibal! Can’t stay on the sidelines forever!”

“I find no disadvantage to my position at this time thank you!” Hannibal called back smugly.

Margot scoffed “Oh quit being such a baby and get your butt over here!” Begrudgingly Hannibal wandered over towards the horse stalls. Clarice shuffled aside and let Hannibal walk up closer to Butterscotch.

“Nice horsey” Hannibal snickered, cautiously reaching out his hand towards the animal. Butterscotch took a step back from the gate and store Hannibal in the eye before throwing his head back and huffing in Hannibal’s face. Hannibal stepped back in surprise and watched as Butterscotch circled back to the back of his stall. Not one to be overdone by a horse Hannibal took another step forward in curiosity, as the horse was now turned away from him. Butterscotch’s ears perks and the horse thrashed back around and raced headfirst towards Hannibal, throwing himself at the gate, smashing through the wooded restraints and gnashing its teeth at Hannibal, who was violently thrown down in the dirt. Clarice shrieked out in silence as her heart raced in fear and the air was pulled from her lungs.

“HEY! EASY!” Margot cried out as she quickly grabbed Butterscotch’s bridle, and pulled harshly as he stomped and clawed his hooves at Hannibal’s face. Hannibal yelled and groaned in pain as he struggled to keep his arms crossed over his head. Finally, after much struggling on the part of Margot she managed to pull off and settle the rebellious stallion, although he still snorted and nicked at Hannibal as she held him back.

“How about you two head back up to the house? I need to get this fella secured down and restrained.” Hannibal, eager to get himself out of this crazy hell hole, gladly complied, grabbed Clarice by the hand and walked her towards the house. Overwhelmed by the scenario and a new web of memories Clarice has been stunned into silence but now that she was out of the barn and away from the horse she began to cry.

“Aw no--shhhh shhh it’s okay now sweetheart” Hannibal stuttered anxiously, of course she was going to cry, she had just watched her caretaker and favorite person get mauled by a horse! “I’m just a little scraped up darling, I’ll be okay” Hannibal reassured desperately. Fat tears slid down Clarice’s cheeks faster than she could wipe them away.

“Hey hey now,” Hannibal stopped in the middle of the trail and placed both hands on Clarice’s shoulders, looking her right in the eye. “That was pretty scary huh?”

Clarice nodded, biting back more sobs.

Hannibal smiled warmly “Yeah it was pretty scary, and Margot is going to make sure it doesn’t happen again. Okay? We trust Margot to do the right thing right?” Clarice nodded tearfully.

“Well okay then, now we’re going to go get cleaned up and put today behind us, okay?” Again Clarice nodded quietly.

“Okay then, you’re a tough girl, you know that?” Finally a smile began to blossom on Clarice’s face as she sniffled and wiped the last of her tears away.
“Yeah, I know”

“Okay” Hannibal wasn’t sure what else he could say, so he just returned her smile and patted her on the back. It was becoming harder and harder for him to restrain himself around her.

“Margot? You back so---OH MY GOD!” screamed Judy when she saw the battered and bloody Hannibal pull himself up into the kitchen.

“Had a little incident with one of the horses,” Hannibal smiled teasingly before he felt something hard in his mouth. Politely covering his mouth with a paper towel Hannibal spit out what must have been at least a spoonful of blood along with--oh fuck--it was a tooth. After running his tongue around his mouth he quickly realized it was his top left lateral incisor. Just perfect.

“Got a washcloth?” Hannibal looked up at Judy, again huddling in the corner, back turned and inspecting Clarice for any signs of injury. Hannibal’s brow furrowed and his fist clenched as his patience began to unravel. There was only so much he could take. “Don’t bother with her! No need, she’s fine!”

Judy’s head snapped like it was on an axis and she glared knives through Hannibal, there was only so much she could take as well. “Don’t you fucking dare,” Judy slammed her hands down on the counter before approaching Hannibal for the first time since he had arrived. “Margot’s told me all about you so don’t you try and pull this shit with me--I know exactly who the fuck you are and you are one fucking lucky son of a bitch that I LOVE and RESPECT my wife enough to let her take pity on you and put a roof over your head. But this is still my fucking house and you are going to respect that!”

Something very cold and dark and familiar ran over Hannibal, his pupils dilated, his hair stood on ends, and his fingers cold, “And now what, pray tell, is that supposed to mean?”

“Oh don’t act like you don’t know. You’re like a hurricane! You blew into Margot---I mean Clarice’s life and you act like you have all the solutions to all of her problems when you can’t even acknowledge all the problems in your own--and you just have all this overflowing love you so generously share--and then and then--”

“--I blow out…” Hannibal mumbled, finishing the analogy. Suddenly he felt very alone.

“Just...just hand me the washcloth.” Without saying anything Judy handed him the washcloth, and so Hannibal began the process of washing out and cleaning his cuts. Winching in pain as the fibers from the cloth rubbed up inside of him.

“Mind telling me where the medical supplies are?” Hannibal called after Judy as she lead Clarice down to Morgan’s playroom

“Hall closet first door on the right!” she called back, already gone with Clarice from view. Hannibal frowned.

“Thanks…” he mumbled.

Margot was a good few heads taller than Hannibal, almost as tall as Barney, and so it shouldn’t have been so surprising when Hannibal found the first aid kit sitting out of his reach. He had tried standing on his tip-toes and jumping to no avail. But, there was also a broom within the closet and so Hannibal had taken to the beloved tactic of children everywhere, poking high up shit with a broom and hoping it fell.

“Need some help there shortstack?” Margot asked as she stepped in behind Hannibal.

“Shortstack?” Hannibal snorted.
“You’d prefer fun sized?” Margot teased.

Hannibal chuckled “it’s been awhile since anyone's attributed me to being ‘fun’,”

“Yeah well, eating faces doesn’t qualify by most people’s definitions,”

“And what about your’s?”

Margot paused “I...think you have your moments” she responded

Hannibal grinned up at her “This wouldn’t happen to be one of them?”

“Depends?” She smiled back, lips pursed mischievously.

“How mad you are when I do THIS!” Margot suddenly grabbed Hannibal from around his knees and hoisted him up. Startled Hannibal instinctively reached out at the shelves to support his weight and managed to grab the first aid kit before Margot placed him ever so daintily back on his feet.

“You could’ve asked me” Hannibal seethed, still shaken up and dizzy.

“Yeah,” Margot shrugged coolly, “But where would the fun in that have been?”

For the treatment of Hannibal’s injuries Margot had suggested they sit out on the deck together, it was a lovely day, the fresh air would be good for his cuts, and he wouldn’t muck up their nice couch cushions, patio furniture was made for wear and tear after all.

“So, that how Butterscotch welcomes all your guests?” Hannibal asked as he dabbed himself with disinfectant.

“Eh...You know he can be a little aggressive,”

“Cleary.” Hannibal frowned and rolled his eyes. Margot smiled and laughed awkwardly.

“He just likes looking out for me is all, think’s it’s his job or something,”

“Ah, he thinks you're part of his harem,” Hannibal teased, picking up another cotton ball.

Margot laughed back “Yeah same lady who was bottle feedin him as a babe, real sexy stuff,”

“Careful now Margot, our furry friend might be a follower of dear old Freud” He snickered, followed by a burst of Margot’s playful giggling. Hannibal watched with intense fascination as Margot leaned back into the bench and threw her head back, the way her eyes closed softly and she hugged her sides during the apex of her laughter. It dawned on him that...while very few people could properly claim so, Margot had been through hell in back and now here she was, angelic and perfect. Holy and whole.

Quietly Hannibal picked up the roll of bandages and began wrapping what he could, and Margot’s laughter subsided and she too took in his view.

“I….I really can’t apologize enough for what happened today,” Margot pulled in her knees and leaned against them, watching Hannibal for his response.

“Margot, really, it was quite alright no need for apologies. I was the one who ignorantly ignored Butterscotch’s personal boundaries and got too close. It was like you said, he was only trying to
“protect you and your family”

“Still…” Margot sighed “shouldn’t have let it happen, you're my guest after all”

Hannibal paused and licked his lips, feeling the newly crafted gap in his teeth. “Margot,” he finally said “Why did you take me in?” It was a fair question considering everything up until now. Hannibal hadn’t asked for her permission or even called ahead with to inform her of his plans. He just showed up unannounced, blew into town, just like a hurricane.

“Because….” I don’t know. I couldn’t say no. I don’t know how to tell you no. I wanted you here again. I missed you. “--it was the right thing to do. You needed help….and besides, couldn’t let you just wander out god knows where with Clarice like--”

“Margot” Hannibal said sternly, cutting her off. He rested his hand on hers and squeezed in snugly. “I...I need to ask you something, and I know it--”

“--Hannibal--”

“--I know it’s a hard question to answer, but by god I need you to tell me and I need you to be honest--” The conversation he had with Judy rapidly raced through his mind

“--Hannibal…?” Now Margot was starting to worry, and so he squeezed his hand back, careful not to further irritate the bandaged wound.

“Margot….do you love me?” Hannibal’s face burnt deep umber and he could hardly stand to look at her in the eyes, but by god did he force himself to. Because he had to know, he had to, and such he searched with every ounce of strength he had in her eyes for even a glimpse at the truth.

“H-Hannibal you know I’m--and Judy--!!”

“You know that’s not what I meant!” Hannibal’s face was growing redder by the second and now even Margot was starting to turn a bit rose herself.

“Hannibal you...you know and…” Margot began to stutter before sighing and swallowing down her rising anxiety “I...I...I love you, Hannibal...if-if that’s okay with y-you, you I mean, I wouldn’t want to--”

“--no...no it’s okay” Hannibal responded, turning his gaze downwards. He suddenly felt very heavy at the thought of young Margot standing in his office in her good sunday dress.

“Do....” Margot trailed off, looking down at her hands, struggling to find the courage she was so known for, “and...what about you?”

Hannibal perked up for a moment and turned to look at Margot, ‘what about me?’ he repeated the question over in his mind. Did he love margot? His heart panged and his stomach tied itself in a knot while his nose began to run, his lower lip trembled, his hands were shaky and his eyes were fogged over and all he could remember was how small and fragile her wrist had felt in his hand when they were skipping stones.

“Yeah…” he whispered to himself, Margot turned to him quizzically, not hearing what he had said.

“...I think I do. I love you...I-I mean I think I do. I do--I...I love you Margot,” And with that the tears that had been welding up in his eyes fell with all the joy and pride he had felt for her in secret. In a mix of surprise and disbelief Margot began to half laugh-half sob as tears ran down her cheeks and she pulled Hannibal in close to her. Hannibal wrapped his arms as far around as they
would go and kissed her cheek before resting his head in the crook of her neck. Hiding away from Judy and Butterscotch and Clarice and just indulging in the moment for nobody but himself, safe, and warm, and loved.
Dr. Lecter's wild ass Wednesday

Chapter Summary

Hannibal seeks out some answers to some questions but finds different answers instead.

Whatever doubts Hannibal may have had had been completely blown away by Margot’s confession earlier in the day, now he just had to win over Judy. Judy the vegetarian, he thought to himself as he rummaged through Margot’s kitchen. What were some vegetarian dishes he knew? He didn’t have access to any of his cookbooks, and he was never going to win dear Judith over if he couldn’t cook something she could enjoy. Think Lecter think. Well at the very least he could get a vegetable soup started for the entree. After washing off the cutting board Hannibal set to chopping potatoes, carrots, celery, tomatoes and green beans for the broth. The broth shimmered nicely and the aroma quickly filled the small space, it had been a while since Hannibal had been given the chance to properly cook in a proper kitchen, and he lavished it so. Hannibal looked over his shoulder and glanced at Clarice and Morgan playing on the living room floor with dolls, he couldn’t help but smile, he knew this was a good idea.

Margot smiled when she walked into the kitchen “I can’t believe you went through all this trouble, and I didn’t even bring wine!”

“There’s still a bottle of Merlot in the fridge,”

Margot chuckled and kissed his cheek “I’m kidding,” Hannibal found himself quite flustered when she walked away to get Morgan and Clarice washed up for dinner. He knew they had meant what they said earlier but...wow

It wasn’t long before Margot and Judy walked in and sat down in dining room. Out of begrudging respect Judy had dressed up a little more than Hannibal noticed she usually did. She wore a nice white blouse and black skirt and had tied her messy brown hair back. Given the farm and Morgan Hannibal couldn’t blame her for saving white for more formal occasions. Although the contrast between her and Margot’s presentation was a little disheartening, as Margot hadn’t changed out of her shirt and jeans she had worn all day. They were close, it wasn’t a big deal to have Hannibal, her good friend, cook. And he had to agree, he just wished that Judy would have as well. Still...Margot adorned this bright goofy smile that was incredibly contagious, and whatever disappointment Hannibal felt, he did not give away.

“Ladies, ahoj brause!, dinner is served” He grinned smugly, holding up the dishes like he was an Edwardian strongman at the state fair. Margot couldn’t help but giggle, she had heard much of the showmanship of the infamous Lecter dinner parties but she had, for better or for worse, never attended until now.

“We open our meal with a fine organic Minestrone, now this is not the original recipe that my dear mother, bless her spirit, served me as a boy, but it is a fine enough recreation from memory and improvised ingredients”

Judy rolled her eyes as Hannibal dragged on, out of boredom she turned to face Margot, who seemed to be attentively half listening for the sake of politeness as Morgan squirmed in her lap.
“Yeah I know right?” she whispered playfully to the toddler, who gave an appreciative babble, reaching out his tiny arm towards other mommy.

Margot giggled as she tried to settle her stubborn son. “Shh….Mr. Hannibal is trying to explain the meal” Judy scrunched up her nose and stuck her tongue out at Morgan

“Pff that’s boring” Morgan squealed in delight before copying his mother’s expression and blew a loud raspberry, earning a laugh from Margot, who quickly covered her mouth. Perturbed by the sudden interruption of his lecture on the history of the use of potatoes in Italian dishes, Hannibal stopped mid sentence and turned to the couple.

“Is everything--”

“--Oh! Sorry Hannibal, don’t mind us!” Margot could barely contain her laughter as Judy continued to make funny faces towards her and Morgan, each earning a delighted squeal from the child. “Don’t let us get in the way of your…..thing, we’ll be good! Promise!” Judy smiled at Hannibal momentarily before returning her attention to the adored toddler. Hannibal’s mouth opened slightly, but nothing came out, and his mind drew to a crawl. What was he doing? He quietly finished serving the Minestrone into saucers before taking his seat adjacent to Clarice, eyes still glued on Margot and Judy.

The couple laughed happily together, taking turns holding Mogan as he squealed for their attention, hardly touching the food. Not that Hannibal could blame them, he too suddenly lacked an appetite. What a waste. He turned to Clarice who ate quietly, only one at the table to do so, but even she too had her attention firmly planted on the family sitting at the opposite side of the table. Once again, Hannibal couldn’t blame her.

After sometime had passed, with Margot and Judy trying and failing to get Morgan to try the soup, and Clarice having finished, Hannibal quietly cleared the table. He hadn’t even bothered to serve the main course, it would have been pointless. He scrapped the food into the trash, leaving Clarice’s portion to be heated up later if she became hungry. This had all just been a waste of time. Discouraged, Hannibal slunk off into his room early. He stopped momentarily to watch as Margot played happily with the Vergers, Margot was rolling on the floor giggling as Clarice and Morgan climbed over her. At least Clarice was having a nice time. Hannibal shut the door behind him and finally allowed himself to breath, his shoulders fell and his head was very light. Slumped against the wall Hannibal saw his reflection in the adjacent mirror. He looked pathetic, his hair sat close against his forehead and his shirt had become untucked. Standing up to fix himself, Hannibal stepped closer to the mirror to gain a closer look.Opening his mouth, he ran his tongue over where Butterscotch had kicked out his tooth. There, as clear as day, the gap between his incisor and canine. He would have to see a dentist about getting it replaced, at least for cosmetic reasons. He didn’t like the thought of people knowing he had lost part of himself. That he was incomplete. Hannibal laid down on the guest bed and curled in on himself,pulling the blanket overtop of him.

In the morning Hannibal woke once again to find that Margot and Judy had eaten without him, and were now sitting with Morgan and Clarice in the living room.

“Well good morning sleepy head!”

“And good morning to you Judy,” Hannibal responded tiredly.

“Why’d you nod off so early last night? You missed a great game of sorry.” Margot snickered. Hannibal rolled his eyes, yeah, sounded real enticing. Of course, it was just another in a list of family activities he had failed to participate in.
“Yeah uh sorry if we ruined your dinner, you seemed pretty peeved last night, but you know how kids are,” No Judy, no he didn’t know because you wouldn’t let him within 10 feet of Morgan. So no, he didn’t know how kids could be.

“It’s fine” he said coldly. “Hey Margot, do you think you could do a favor for me?’

Margot perked up “Yeah uh sure, what do you need?”

“Do you and Judy think you could watch Clarice for me today?” Hannibal asked politely

“How is that different than what we’ve done everyday since you’ve arrived?” Judy responded snarkily. Margot elbowed her in the arm.

“I just….I need to spend some time out of the house by myself, there’s something I need to do,”

“Hannibal you’re not going to--”

“--No! I mean I wouldn’t… I wouldn’t ask you to watch Clarice just so I could….it wouldn’t be proper,” Margot nodded solemnly.

“Can we at least ask where you’re going?” Judy asked, bouncing Morgan on her leg.

“I…I’m not entirely sure yet.”

While it took Hannibal a while to found the nearest town, he found the library rather quickly. Of course, Margot and Judy had their own computer, but Hannibal wasn’t lying when he said he needed some time alone.

Clarice had never told Hannibal more than she was from rural Virginia, and of course the lamb story, but in the digital age that was all anyone needed anymore. Obituaries for last name ‘Starling’, Gender: M, 300 results, Obituaries for last name ‘Starling’, Gender: M, Location: Virginia: 25. Now lets see, Clarice was 36, 37 in December, her father died when she 9 and it was 1995, so 1967 had to have been the year of death. Obituaries for last name ‘Starling’, Gender: M, Location: Virginia, year: 1967, results: 3. Bingo, now he just had to read through the three and determine which was his man.

Clyde Starling age 77, owner of Starling Shoes on mainstreet? No, he was a security guard.

Michael Starling age 56 died in farm equipment accident? No. That wasn’t how he died.

Joseph Starling, age 27 pronounced in St. Peters hospital Monday night 7:36p after being shot during an attempted robbery. Bingo, that was him. Joseph eh? Doing a bit more digging online Hannibal was able to find both the name of the town and address of the local trailer park. Now came the dirty work.

The drive out to Virginia was long and tiresome, Hannibal usually enjoyed driving, even the occasional interstate road trip, but after the night before the open road felt less like a reminder of his unwavering freedom and more like a remind of his inescapable loneliness. No matter how fast or far he drove, he was still by himself.

‘Small town America’ had never quite appealed to Hannibal. Bunch of immigrant hating ass backwards bible thumpers hanging ‘round in Walmart a having strictly missionary intercourse for the purpose of producing more sister daughters to have strictly missionary intercourse with in Walmart. But this town was sad, condemned buildings and boarded up windows hidden by trees as far as the eye could see. Even the trailer park seemed deserted, save for an old timer lounging easy in his rocking chair. Hannibal parked by the entrance (didn’t exactly seem like the cops came
“Excuse me sir--” Hannibal found himself met with the barrel end of a particularly unfriendly looking shotgun.

“Got some nerve comin’ round here” The old man replied, his cigarette bobbing with his lip.

Hannibal swallowed “I was just looking for some help--”

“Get your ass in your car boy, turn around and keep drivin. That’s all the help you need,” he grumbled. “Ya’ll city fucks sit up so high and mighty in your fancy New York duplexes, where was my help huh? Where were y'all when they took my car took my wife--”

“I’m just...I’m just looking for this lady okay? I’m not trying to start any trouble,” something changed behind the old man’s eyes and he lowered his gun

“Fuck….didn’t think I’d see the day…..yeah….yeah I’ll help ya. Looking for Ms. Starlin’ right?” Hannibal’s hair stood on ends when he heard the old man say her name...even if he didn’t mean….her….

“Yeah…” Hannibal nodded slowly, “Yes, thank you”. The old man took a while to stand from his chair, mumbling about how he couldn’t believe this, but Hannibal didn’t speak up as he was lead to one of the mobile homes.

“HEY MARYANNE!” The man yelled “YOU’VE GOT...You’ve got uh.....yeah just uh....don’t startle her too much son. Don’t know if her heart could take it.” The man smiled sorrowfully at Hannibal, patted him on the shoulder reassuringly, and walked down the steps heading back towards his own home.

“Lord bless…” The old man mumbled to himself, not that Hannibal could hear. Hannibal took a deep breath of composure before trying the door. Hannibal had had his fair share of first meetings with the parents and mothers of past….well...Clarice wasn't his lover was she? He wondered how much that would change how the conversation went.

“Uh...Ms. Starling?” Hannibal quietly closed the door behind him as he stepped into the main living area. A lone woman stood parallel to him, staring at him like a deer in the headlights.

“I uh...I...guess you heard...” Hannibal mumbled awkwardly.

“You...” She gasped, slowly walking towards him, arm outstretched. Her fingers cupped his cheek for a moment before pulling away, an intense stare in her eyes before she slowly shook her head. “No...no....you aren’t…” She quietly cried with her head hung low.

“I--I’m sorry...?” Hannibal wasn’t sure how to comfort the older woman. No, older wasn’t the right word, she looked to be no older than he. Christ….Hannibal was becoming more and more uncomfortable with his relationship to Clarice the more he thought of it.

“No,no it’s okay, quite okay.” Ms. Starling took a step back and ran a hand through her hair, trying to get a grip. “Company is company, and company is more than welcome,” She said with a little smile. From the looks of things, Hannibal presumed she didn’t receive company very often. It appeared as though the whole town rarely received company. “Please, go ahead and sit, would you care for some tea?”

“Yes, thank you, tea would be lovely.” The kitchenette was no more than a nook tucked away in the corner to Hannibal’s right, with only a loveseat, chair, bookshelf, and old TV for a ‘living room’. Hannibal sat down stiffly in the chair and Ms. Starling soon brought over a charming old
fashioned tea tray.

“Always liked tea…” she said absently, not specifically addressing Hannibal. “I’m sorry for how I acted, when you came in. Most days it’s just me and my books and chores...I had a family once and as crazy and impossible as it sounds I wish more than anything for the day--”

“--entropy decreases…

“...and time reverses…..” She finished. Perhaps out of shock she let her own teacup slip from her hands, breaking the intense silence between them as it shattered on the floor. Hannibal jumped. “Oh bother! You must excuse me, damn shaky old hands.” She quickly scrambled to the broom closet to clean up the mess.

“I know how you feel…” Hannibal whispered.

“What was that dear?” Ms. Starling asked as she threw away the pieces of the broken glass.

“I….” Hannibal squeezed his eyes shut, trying to make thoughts into words without making memories into thoughts. “I-I have also lost my family,” he finally said.

“Oh my!” Ms Starling gasped, covering her mouth as she sat back down. “I’m so sorry to hear that, but I know how hard it can be, life after marriage,” she quietly placed her hand over Hannibals, and for a moment he squeezed her’s back, seeking something he knew he couldn’t find before withdrawing.

“No,” he said with a soft shake of the head “No I-I never married.” Saying it outloud truly made him appreciate how alone he was. It wasn’t even legally recognized and Margot had still married happily at 27, most of his old colleagues and peers were well on their way to being grandparents themselves in the coming years. Except Chilton, Hannibal made damn sure that.....monster.....that was the word...never married. He wouldn’t have made a very good father.

“Oh?” Ms. Starling broke Hannibal from his trance

“I...I...I...when i was little,” was all Hannibal could manage. Ms. Starling frowned and leaned forwards a bit, it was clear he was still in great pain over what had happened.

“I’m...very sorry,” she finally said with a deep sigh “I can’t begin to imagine how that must feel. You’d have to ask my daughter about that, she was the only one old enough to remember when our dear Joseph was taken from us,” her voice cracked at the mention of his name, as though she might cry. Hannibal searched his pocket for a handkerchief to offer and found none.

“Your daughter!” Hannibal exclaimed “Yes--i’ve--that’s why I’ve visited.”

Good heavens now Maryanne was sure she was gonna cry, she covered her mouth in shock as her eyes began to water.

“Yes yes yes, Clarice she’s--she’s--she’s.....” fuck how was Hannibal supposed to explain this, to her own mother nonetheless!? “...She’s not well at the moment I’m afraid.” Ms. Starling began to sob.

“No no!--shit--I mean...she’s getting better, I’m….I’m taking--MAKING sure she is well taken care of. I promise, she’s actually been making great progress. Ms. Starling sniffled and wiped at her eyes, smudging some of her mascara slightly.

“I’m--I’m terribly sorry Mr….?”
“Verger, please. Hann--.. Hans Verger.”

Ms. Starling offered a soft smile in return “Maryanne, Maryanne

Ms. Starling sniffed. “Well I’m terribly sorry Hans, I just….I don’t hear from Clarice...well truthfully I haven’t heard from her since I had to--” Now it was Hannibal’s turn to offer a hand of reassurance, Ms. Starling looked up at him as he squeezed her hand

“I promise when all of this is behind the both of us I’ll make sure she gives you a ring” Ms. Starling smiled at the man, tears still flowing down her face,

“Bless you, bless your heart,” she squeezed Hannibal’s hand back and let out a soft chuckle. “It’s funny, she’s always been like this. Never cared for me like she cared for her father,” she said with a sigh. Hannibal looked down at his tea and frowned, he wasn’t at all surprised. “I used to try and sit her down at the kitchen table with all sorts of textbooks, numbers have always been my fortitude you see, and try and explain to her the beauty of a triangle or how our sun was just another star dotting our ever expanding galaxy, or the poetry of Dickinson, but she could never sit still. Always just wanted to run outside and play with her daddy.”

“She’s…..mentioned him to me before yes,” the thought occurred to Hannibal that Maryanne very well didn’t know about the lambs incident, or if she did she would have only have heard what her brother had to say about it. He felt very lucky and very sad all at once.

Maryanne smiled warmly at Hannibal “That sounds like her alright, sounds like my Clarice,”

“You’d be very proud of her---I mean---I think anyway” Hannibal really didn’t know all that much about Maryanne did he? For all he knew there could be a damn good reason Clarice never kept in contact, Hannibal personally tried to avoid the bible belt when he could after all.

Maryanne just simply sighed “I’m already proud of her, smarter than I ever was.”

“How do you say?” Hannibal took a sip of his tea. Now his interest was piqued,Ms. Clarice M Starling was one of the smartest women Hannibal had had the pleasure of meeting, clever, well-read and fast on her feet, it was a dangerous combination to say the least. However, the apple never fell far from the tree, and Hannibal had desperately hoped Clarice had taken more so after her mother, assuming she was a shallow-diving bird.

“She got out” Maryanne stated flatly, hands holded neatly over her lap. “Never let anyone get in her way, grabbed life by the horns and took what she wanted, education, career, I couldn’t be more proud Mr. Verger,”

“Am I to presume Joseph was the same?”

With a giggle Maryanne softly shook her head “That rockheaded son of a bitch took everything from me’

Joseph had been sweet, real sweet, and the two of them had been the sweetest couple in all of Ridgeback county, or at least the sweetest couple in West Ridge high. They had dated for a little more than a year, and Joseph had fully intended to take Maryanne to prom. That was, if he could squeeze in the time what with his big dreams of the police academy and all. Maryanne always giggled when he told her about it, she was enamoured by his dreams. ‘Honest and modest and just big enough’ was what he’d call it, and she would agree it suited him. Even if personally she didn’t think he’d be a very good officer, too sweet and gentle. Maybe he’d make a good crossing guard. Once she had told him she thought he would make an awfully kind Librarian or school teacher.
“Nah” he had laughed with a shake of his head, “I ain’t go the head for all that learning junk, not like you my little nerd-bird.” He called her that quite often, nerdbird, at first it had been a little bit embarrassing but Maryanne supposed nicknames usually were at least a little And he had never meant any harm by it either.

Of course, Maryanne had a life outside of Joseph as did he a life outside of her, and she loved books. Specifically books about space and mathematical and scientific theory. Oh how she had loved numbers. Little nerd bird indeed, she had to have been the smartest, or at least, hardest working girl in her math classes. How the teachers loved her, sure her friends teased her a little, but it was a happy time. Then, like clockwork, just as everyone had predicted, the scholarships and college acceptance letters had started rolling in. Her parents were farmers, and while her older brother had a college savings and very well could have gone, he had opted instead to invest it into large scale farming, that’s what he had said anyways when he had moved out.

At first, it had been a little surprising and overwhelming but as the school year continued on, and football games became indoor basketball, it felt more like an eternity laid between dear Maryanne and the future, exciting but nice to know she had time to say goodbye to the town she had grown up in and the friends she had made. All but one.

Valentine’s day had been very special that year, Joseph Starling had put in a few extra hours at the corner store to make sure of it, red roses, chocolates, and one of those pink teddy bears always on display that time of year. Sure, it had been a little more affordable with his employee discount but the display had meant the world to Maryanne, especially when the night had been topped off with a picnic under the sunset. Of course, equal exchange and all, the next few weeks Mary hadn’t seen nor heard hide nor tail of her dear Joe. Finally, Maryanne had decided enough was enough and had decided to march on over to the Starling’s in search and demand of answers.

Mrs. Starling was a portly woman who spoiled her only son greatly, and with his adorable doofy face Maryanne couldn’t blame the woman, yet still there was a level of tension between them. An older woman who was clinging desperately to her baby, and was convinced nobody could ever love or care for him as dearly or properly, and a young woman coming into her own ready to grab life by the horns and take whatever the hell she wanted. And right now she wanted to see Joseph.

“ Oh it’s you,” Mrs. Starling sneered after she opened the door.

Maryanne rolled her eyes “Joseph isn’t home is he Mrs Star-- I mean Ma’am?”

“Upstairs” The woman grumbled, letting Maryanne in. “Honestly you have some nerve coming around here missy after the depression you bestowed upon my poor sweet Joey”

“Depression!?” Maryanne exclaimed, was that why he had been avoiding her!? “He didn’t fail the SATs did he?” Maryanne couldn’t think of anything else anyone could’ve been sad about right then. Mr. Puxatony hadn’t spotted his shadow, spring was around the corner, and baseball season would be starting up again soon, and Joey was a very good first baseman.

“He’s been sulking for weeks! Now I don’t know what you did Ms. Byrne but if I were you I’d get my little caboose up there and fix it!” Maryanne, partially ignoring the woman’s harsh tone rolled her eyes and ran upstairs, the wooden steps creaking beneath her weight.

The Starlings had, as long as anyone had known, been painfully poor, Living in the same old run down house that had been built by Joseph’s however-many-greats grandfather when the plot had been originally purchased. The soil had since been worn down past its nutrients and produced nothing but weeds and wildflowers all around. Mr. Starling was a town drunkard and Mrs. Starling often resorted to extorting money from neighbors. But, as she had reminded everyone in
Ridgeback, they had been here longer than anyone and had helped mold the foundation for the
community they saw before them today, and that commanded respect. And money.

And just as Mrs. Starling had said, Joseph was curled up in his bed facing the wall.

“Joey!” Maryanne cried, rushing over to his side immediately. “Oh Joey why didn’t ya tell me
somethin’ was the matter?”

Joseph pulled back the covers and sat up, finally facing Maryanne. “Oh Annie!” He cried, pulling
her into his arms “I know you musta’ thought I was actin’ like a big dumb wuss!”

Maryanne pulled back a little to look up at Joseph and shook her head “Goll Joseph you know I’d
never!”

Joseph sniffled and stroked Maryanne’s hair, his hands warm and taught. “It’s just...Valentines got
me thinkin’ and all about how much I love ya--”

“--Awww! Joey--”

“--And how I don’t know what I’m gonna do once you’re gone!: He cried

“Aww Joey...You know I never--” Maryanne cut herself off. She had been the one who had
boasted about not knowing where to go to college. New York, Massachusetts, even Virginia state
started to sound all too far.

“I just...I don’t know, I’m worried about what’s gonna happen when you go off to one of your
fancy shmancy universities with all them fancy college fellas and forget about poor ol me here in
Ridgeback.”

Maryanne pulled back and gasped in shock “No! Joseph! You know I could never! Not in a
hundred lifetimes!”

“Still....” Joseph sighed “I could never ask you to give up your dreams, but maybe--” Joseph
squeezed Maryanne’s hand “..You could wait a year? I mean...just until I’ve finished the
academy, and then we could move together where ever you wanted to go to study. And I could
work while you’re in class and then instead of a crowded dormitory sharing a bathroom with a
bunch of other girls you could come home to me and a nice house after a hard day in class . And it
could just be the two of us and--”

“Joseph...I don’t know if I could--I mean...it’s a lot to think about Joseph....”

“I know…I just...I ain’t ready to lose you Annie,” Joe cried softly, tears falling down his eyes.

“No,” Maryanne wiped the tears from Joseph’s eyes and kissed him deeply, “I ain’t ready to lose
you either, and I’m gonna prove it to you right here right now.” Maryanne had fully intended to
save herself for marriage, and she would have assumed to same from Joe, but...if she didn’t think
she could live without him, and he didn’t think he could live without her...than it was kind of like
they were engaged already….right?

Prom came and went without much notice from Maryanne, she was too tired, not that her dress fit
anymore anyhow. Sure the baby bump wasn’t obvious but she had still put on a couple inches. As
soon as her father had found out, and one angry phone call later, she and Joseph were ‘officially’
engaged.

The wedding wasn’t much, some of Maryanne’s friends congratulated her on finally ‘tying down’
Joseph. Joseph was supportive enough, but it was hard to remain optimistic after he failed his
police academy entrance exam. Out of kindness he had been offered a higher paying job as a security guard at the same corner store, and things were alright. With Maryanne's college fund and Joseph’s steady employment they had been able to move into a small house.

And then the baby came. She was beautiful…no she was perfect, the only thing that could have pulled Maryanne’s attention away from her studies. And when she held that happy giggly little princess, Maryanne knew it had all been worth it.

And now here Maryanne sat, and what had all the sacrifice gotten her in the end? Joseph was gone, and so was Clarice, and so had he boys. All that was left now were her books. Not that she had the money to do anything with them or go off to college anymore. All of it had been eaten away by bills after Joe had been shot. Hannibal shuffled awkwardly in his chair, he had finished the last of his tea and Maryanne had been very quiet up until now.

“Hans?” she finally spoke up

“Yes Maryanne?”

Maryanne reached out and held Hannibal’s hand tightly, as tightly as Joseph had on that fateful evening. She had so much she needed to let him—needed to let somebody—needed to let Clarice know and she couldn’t find the words as hard as she tried. Words were never as easy as numbers. So instead she just hoped. She looked at Hannibal with all the desperation that had built up over the years and hoped he would understand what she meant.

“Tell Clarice...this life, this life she has chosen of long nights and hard studies and unforgiving work, please tell her it is worth it, it’s worth the sacrifices she has made,” even if her mother was one of them.

And Hannibal knew, and in a hushed stern voice rasped by implication, Hannibal responded “You have my word Maryanne.”
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

After a really long day Hannibal goes home to rest

Chapter Notes

Sorry this one is so short, the 'turning point' of this fic is rapidly approaching and draining a lot of my energy as I write it, and I thought it would be best to try and divide it from one very very long chapter into 2-3 smaller chapters so they can come out more rapidly. Thank you again!

The drive back to Margot’s was dark and quiet, almost automatic. The sun had set by the time Hannibal was back in Maryland, with the black night sky pricked with small white stars. The low hum of the engine eased Hannibal’s mind. He had gone looking for insight into Clarice’s early life, and while he now had the chance to reunite a sad middle aged woman, he had wished he had rather not gone.

Slowly, his car pulled to a stop in Margot’s long winding driveway. He sighed as he stepped out of the car, the cold night air stung his face. It had been a long day and now he just wanted to get some rest.

“Oh...there you are” Margot turned to face Hannibal, she was sitting in her chair and cradling Morgan.

“Uh...I’m uh…” Hannibal coughed into his hand “I’m uh sorry, I didn’t--I didn’t mean to be so late…”

Margot deeply inhaled, the disappointment painted on her face. “Hannibal you know I would never--I would never ask you to do something unless I really---”

“Margot I--”

“--let me finish, Hannibal...Judy and I understand how important it is to you that Clarice be well taken care of during this time...but we’ve been talking and,...we think maybe it would be best if we took over Clarice’s care,”

Hannibal’s eyes widened and he stepped back, a mix of shock and terror “Absolutely not,”

Margot sighed and nodded, she expected this “It’s just something to think about Hannibal maybe take some time for yourself.” Hannibal didn’t need to think, he already knew that he was the only person capable of taking care of her, and with that he stomped down the hall to his room and burrowed himself in the covers. He didn't need to think to know he needed sleep.

In the morning Hannibal treated himself to a shower, just standing under the water, he hadn’t had the chance yet to purchase his own toiletries, and after the night before he didn’t feel comfortable
‘borrowing’ anything. Fitting with the rest of the house the shower was large and very modern, a welcome change from the hotel bathroom he had been resigned to. Once he was done, without a robe to speak of, he carefully dried himself down before dressing himself, he carried the towel out with him though, not wishing to offend either hostess.

“Mornin’ Dr. Lecter” Margot yawned, it may have just been that she was still tired, but it irked Hannibal that this was the first time she had called him by his formal title in years. He had assumed their earlier confessions had eroded such barriers between them.

“How do you like your eggs?”

“Over easy, if you please,” he responded “I’m surprised, I would’ve expected dear Judith to be awake by now;”

“Oh she’s been up a fair while, she took the kids down to the farm to feed the animals, and I thought i might as well feed ‘em when they get back,”

“The kids?” Hannibal asked, curious.

“Oh you know, Morgan and Clarice,”

Hannibal stiffened “She is not a child Margot,”

“Might as well be…” Margot mumbled under her breath as she fixed Hannibal his plate. Hannibal pretended he hadn’t heard her.

“So…” he began, as far as he was concerned Margot’s little comment had negated any need for polite formalities, “about last night,”

“Hannibal--” Margot sighed in annoyance, rubbing her temples as she finished off the bacon, “You know I don’t….ugh….look, you know I’d never, y’know….I’m not offering this to offend yeah or anything,”

“Than why--”

“It’s just an offer Hannibal. You know I do worry about you,” Margot gave Hannibal his plate, it smelled heavenly. Hannibal hadn’t eaten since breakfast the day before. Maryanne had subdued his appetite plenty.

“You don’t think I can help her,”

“You know that’s not it, Hannibal--”

“What!?"

“I just...I don’t think this arrangement is the best for you--”

“Well I can manage just fine thank you very much!”

“Hannibal, I don’t think this arrangement is best for anyone !” Hannibal’s hair stood on the back of his neck, but he just quietly sulked in his seat and ate his eggs.

“I must say Margot, you’ve grown into a marvelous chef Margot, did your mother teach you to cook? Or was it the live in cook on the Verger estate, or was it that nursemaid of yours preparing you for a life of--”
“Hannibal.” Margot said firmly, refusing to chase him down his ever winding rabbit hole. He knew damn well what he was doing and she knew damn well he did.

“If Judith has decided that I am no longer welcome here Margot you can just tell me,”

“God fucking damn it Hannibal can’t you act your age for once--this has nothing to do with Judy, and besides, it’s not like you ever asked anyways--.” Margot clasped her hand over her mouth, she didn’t–no, she hadn’t meant-- shit.

Hannibal’s breath hitched and he choked back a sob, not looking up at Margot from his plate.

Fuck.

“Hannibal–hun, you know you are welcome to stay as long as you like it’s just…” Margot’s voice trailed off, she rubbed her neck and turned away from Hannibal, trying her damndest to phrase this as delicately as possible. “It’s just...you’re not very….responsible?”

Hannibal pushed himself away from the table, not looking at Margot as he blinked away tears. This had all been too much recently and he didn’t need, care for, or appreciate this particular brand of harassment.

“Hannibal!”Margot called out as he sulked out of the kitchen, eliciting nothing more than a faint groan from the older man.

Feeding the animals was never a particularly easy chore, the horses were easily spooked and the chickens always made a mad dash towards whoever entered their domain, but still udy wouldn’t have traded this life away for another. Even Clarice, the adult-turned-child daughter she hadn’t expected nor asked for had grown heavily on the tanned woman. From her and Margot’s approximation Clarice was operating at the level of a child several years older than their Morgan, which was definitely welcomed in the stables.

“Steady now Clarice, don’t let em bother yeah” Judy instructed, watching over Clarice from outside the goat pen as the rascally animals pushed and shoved against one another, and Clarice, in attempts to make a b-line to the trough.

“Come on Clarice, show them you’re the boss,” Clarice made a confident step between two billies, regaining her balance after nearly being tipped over.

“I think I got the hang of it!” Clarice beamed up at Judy as she hopped in between animals and piles of dukey, while she couldn’t particularly recall it in any meaningful manner Clarice had grown up in rural farmlands dealing with much more unruly animals of both the quadrupedal and bipedal variety, and those insitics were nothing but coming to fruition.

“That a girl! Come on, let’s go get washed up--Margot should have breakfast ready and waiting by now, Judy held the gate open for and closed it behind Clarice, carrying Morgan in her garms as Clarice happily skipped ahead.

“Morning love,” Judy swept in through the back door and kissed Margot on the cheek, met with only cold stoicism and unease. “Something the matter?” She asked as she turned to wash her hands in the kitchen sink. Much to his delight, Morgan was placed asides on the island

“Clarice sweetheart, why don’t you go wash up in the bathroom? I think Hannibal is in his bedroom he might appreciate some company,“
Clarice smiled “sure thing,” her southern accent gentle breaking through after several days of being suppressed by a babyish slurring.

Once Clarice was out of sight, Margot turned to face her wife, “I uh..spoke to Hannibal about the ‘offer’,”

“What offer, oh you mean--!?"

“Yeah, he uh, he didn’t take it very well,

“Oh…” Judy said sympathetically, turning to pick up Morgan so he didn’t fall into the sink “well I expected as much, tiger’s never gonna change its stripes and all,”

Margot sighed, running both hands down through her hair as she leaned over the island. “I know, it’s just…..what am I supposed to do Judy I--”

“Come on Maggie, we talked about this,”

“I know but just...please, just a little longer, I know….I know I can get through to him, I have to. I have to do this Judy, please---please, you’ve got to try and understand I--”

Judy sighed “okay."

Hannibal Had been lying on his bed, counting ceiling tiles when Clarice stepped in. Quickly, he scrambled to his feet and patted down his hair admiss his attempt to appear presentable

“Oh uh, good morning Clarice,”

“Margot said you might like some company?” Clarice sat down on the end of the bed, looking politely to Lecturer for a lead in the conversation

“Hmpf well our Margot sure has been saying a lot lately hasn’t she?” he sulked. “Clarice dear?”

“Yes?”

“You think I’m responsible don’t you love? I’ve taken good care of you haven’t I?” Hannibal smiled a soft oily smile and held her hand firmly Clarice perked up and crawled closer to him on the bed

“Yes of course!” she eagerly agreed, cuddling up against Hannibal in attempts to both comfort him and prove the sentiment. Hannibal massaged her shoulders.

“Of course they mean well but you wouldn't wanna be looked after by anyone else would you Clarice? After I’ve done such a good job looking after and taking care of you, and after all the fun we’ve had right dear?”

“No!” she cried out, looking at him with her big blue eyes “wanna stay with you,” she yawned as she curled up closer against him. Hannibal kissed her forehead and wrapped his arms around her.

“I know dear,I know,” Hannibal sighed lovingly as he relaxed his muscles “And I’m gonna make sure nobody ever tries to take you away”

Clarice’s mind comfortably eased back into the familiar hum of confusion, no longer focusing or grasping at memories she couldn’t make sense of. Hannibal was her rock, her guide, she didn’t need to find her way through the darkness as long as he was there, he reminded her of that, and
she was grateful for it. In a series of blurs in and out Hannibal had set up a wondrous tea party for the two of them and all of her favorite toys. The layout was lovely.

Hannibal grinned, choking back a cackle “More tea my lady?” he held out the plastic tea kettle, happily adding the sounds necessary to keep this fantastic illusion for dear ol’ Clarice. Hannibal talked more, but Clarice couldn’t hear him, her focus on the toys surrounding her at the table. A small white stuffed lamb sat across from her, and made her hair stand on ends. Why….? The sheep in the barn weren’t….weren’t right. Now Hannibal…no…no…now her papa was offering her some--…no…no that wasn’t right either. Papa….Pappa…he----he wasn’t…..no Papa was dead. She knew it. If in this confusing mess of a reality she now faced she could at the very least take comfort in that one fact. Papa was dead. He wasn’t coming back. This wasn’t papa/

“H-Hannibal?” Clarice graciously rubbed her eyes, trying to make sense of what now befell her.

“Yes sweetie pie? Care for some sugar in your tea? Would you like one lump or two?” Clarice was still too confused and hazy to scream once she was met face to face with her, albeit she was still taken aback. Where…where was she? Information slowly began to click into place as she stood up from her seat and headed towards the door. Poor Dr. Lecter, he didn't even noticed when she left, the poor man, she though, he must be losing his mind. How pitiful.

Once outside the room Clarice walked down the hall, leaving Hannibal alone with his mad ramblings. The poor oaf. Clarice soon found herself in the middle of the living room. A very young boy babbled happily, pointing to her. He sat with a woman roughly Clarice’s age on a couch, in the back was an open concept kitchen with a familiar looking man…no…woman.

“Did you two have a nice talk?” The woman on the couch asked, setting down the toddler and beginning to approach her. Clarice instinctively took a step back.

“What’s the matter sweetheart? Would you like a juicebox? Or a snack?”

Clarice’s mind froze up and she just kept stepping backwards as the strange woman continued to penetrate Clarice’s personal bubble. She quickly back up into the corner of the room and fell over backwards.

“Oh my goodness dear are you alright?” The woman got down on her knees and offered Clarice a hand up, and the woman from the kitchen rushed over.

“What happened? Clarice sweetie are you okay?” She asked, towering over both of them, good fuck how did she know her name!?

“I think...he...might’ve spooked her and she fell,”

The larger woman sighed, “Oh come on Hannibal would never--”

Clarice’s lip trembled at his name, she was hyperventilating now, like a trapped animal, cornered, confused and scared. She reached for her gun only to find herself garnished in the clothing of another.

“What the fuck,” She spat, much to the shock of the other two women who instantly took a step back much to Clarice’s content. “What the fuck is this shit. Who are you and where the hell am I!”? Clarice demanded, jumping to her feet. She may not have had….any of her trusted artillery on her but she still had her wit and moxie and she would be damned if they failed her not of all times.

“Fuck,” Margot whispered, this was the Clarice she remembered from the manor and the investigation. “Alright…alright Clarice lets just calm down…it’s…it’s been a long week I know”
“A WEEK!? These sick fucks had kept her…god knows where for a week!?”

“Stay away!” Clarice defensively went to shove Margot only to find herself ineffective against the hard wall of steel and protein shakes.

Judy began to hyperventilate slightly as the room felt as though it was shuddering.

“Clarice...please calm down, you’re safe...lets get you some water and a blanket and we can talk this--”

“NO!” Clarice cried in a panic, winding back and punching Margot in the jaw hard enough to knock the woman over in surprise. Hearing the commotion, Hannibal emerged from his room.

“What’s going on here girls!? Is everything okay I thought I heard--” he was cut off by Judy’s screams in pure rage as she made a charge at him, only to be stopped by Margot swiftly ducking in and picking her up off her feet and holding her away from Hannibal.

“I’LL FUCKING KILL YOU!” She cried, tears running down her cheeks. She had completely had it with the good doctor and after what he had seemingly done to Clarice, and the hell he had brought upon their home, she was ready to give him a piece of her mind. The only thing that swayed her brutal force having been the crying from Morgan, just as scared, confused, and overwhelmed as anyone else in that moment, but nearly 5 times as vulnerable. Margot, committed to remedying the situation, refused to dop Judy as she continued to kick and struggle in an attempt to go protect Morgan.

“Damn it Margot!” She spat, “let me go!”

“What the fuck is going on!?” Clarice demanded “I’m FBI and I can get you sick fucks detained so fast your life sentences will end before your whiplash does!” She continued to shout, only continuing to rile up Morgan, who was now absolutely petrified. Hannibal quickly made his way over to try and sooth Morgan

“DON’T YOU FUCKING LAY A HAND ON HIM!” Judy screamed, lunging forwards as Margot struggled to hold her as she thrashed wildly about. I surprise Hannibal jumped back,

“No wait--! Please I’m just trying to help--I can...I--”

“I’ve had about enough of you!” Clarice snuck up from behind and instantly pulled Lecter down into a choke hold, the man gurgled and coughed underneath of her weight but put up little of a fight.

“Clarice!” He cried out in shock, after everything he had done for her and this was how she treated him!? Just moments earlier he had been her papa. So much for that wild goose chase. He absolutely could not believe her, how could she not remember!? How could she be so cold and heartless towards him!? He was her savior!

Seeing as the two resident crazy people were busy distracting one another, Margot dropped Judy back onto the floor with a sigh. Judy quickly rushed over to hold Morgan and scooped him up into her arms before escaping to the master bedroom. Not wanting to place him at anymore of a risk than she already had.

Margot let out a sigh and took out her cell phone, she had really thought...she had really hoped that it wasn’t going to have to come to this.

While she waited she prepared a glass of water and a blanket for Clarice, doing her best to talk her down whilst the FBI agent kept Hannibal pinned to the floor.
“Yeah they had signed you in to some low-security care facility, but apparently Hannibal had--” Margot was cut off by the doorbell that echoed throughout the large open-concept area, “--That must be him,”

“Thank you so much for getting here so quickly, I just...I don’t know what I would of done without yeah y’know?” Margot pulled Barney down into a warm sloppy hug, it had been longer than usual since they had last met up, mostly thanks to Hannibal, and the stress from the past couple weeks was starting to wain on Margot.

“Where ’is he?” Barney asked, stepping inside. Margot pointed down to Clarice, happily laying on top of the exhausted cannibal. Barney sighed and ran his large hand over his face. Hannibal flinched and froze up once he spotted the man.

“Clarice, you remember Barney don’t you?” Margot turned to Barney “she’s basically fine now just a little slow on the whole faces and names thing. Can’t blame the poor thing, really,” she whispered into his ear. Barney offered Clarice a warm smile, which she quickly returned as she began to climb off of Hannibal and back onto her feet.

“It’s good to see you again Barney,” Clarice extended her hand but was rejected as Barney Hannibal up to his feet. Hannibal knew he had no choice but to cooperate. His mind rushed with memories of him and Barney in that dreaded institution, in a private cell he had earned with good behavior. That wouldn’t be waiting for him now, he knew that much. Tears began to drip from his eyes faster and faster, his lip trembled. Maybe now he’d finally get the chair, as so had been once whispered about the possibility of. After everything he had done to poor Margot and Judy and everything he had put them through, he deserved it. He didn’t fight as Barney began to carry him outside, only sobbing.

“No...please...” he cried weakly, “I’m sorry! I’m so sorry! I can be good! I can be good! I’m sorry!” He wailed, he really was sorry. He had never meant for any of this, but now he was too weak...too tired from a lifetime of fighting to prevent what was happening now, the inevitable. All he could do was dig in his heels and cry as Barney lead him out into his car, not even carrying him at this point.

Hannibal flopped over in the back of the car, keeping his head up so he could memorize the blue sky and green trees before he receded into his memory palace. He held Clarice with Mischa, both too precious, not the same but almost becoming one. He thought of the BSHCI, the outer layer, the cityline trees planted outsides, the large sprawling parking lot. He wondered when he would recognize the city area around the hospital. It was not as if it were in Margot’s backyard. In is attempts to remember, to ready himself without letting the bad and the good in his mind meld into one, Hannibal quickly fell asleep and was jolted away when the car pulled to a stop.

“You awake Hannibal?” Barney called into the back of the car. Hannibal sat up slowly, this wasn’t the hospital. On both the right and left of the car were small town houses.

“Where...where are we?” Hannibal asked groggily, rubbing his eyes.

“I...live here Hannibal,” Barney responded awkwardly, stepping outside of the car and walking around to help Hannibal out. Hannibal graciously took his hand and tiredly leaned up against Barney as he walked him into the house. Noticing how groggy Hannibal was, Barney set him down on his couch in front of the TV. “Just...sit and wait, I’ll get you some tea and ready your bed.” Barney had agreed to this arrangement with Margot a few days ago, once Hannibal was beginning to make himself a handful. And Barney and Margot had both agreed that the situation at
hand was terrible on everyone, but that neither wanted to see Hannibal in a facility. It wouldn’t be
good for him. He needed someone who would properly take care of him, and no one was better
prepared for the task than Barney Matthews. Once the tea was finished Barney walked back into
the living room, only to find Hannibal curled up and peacefully asleep. With a shake of the head
Barney sat down besides him and stroked his side, leaning back and closing his eyes himself.
They both had a long road ahead of them.

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