Summary

Will's only getting more conflicted as his relationship with Hannibal keeps shifting. Alana and Freddie aren't helping, and then there are the Vergers...

Notes

From here on in, it's one chapter per episode, right through to the season's end...

Thanks to crystalusagi for sterling beta work!

See the end of the work for more notes
Light spreads from the ground floor windows into the damp chill of the evening.

He pushes the buzzer and waits, tension rising through his muscles with each tap of a sole on hardwood.

They’ve made no arrangements tonight, but there’s a welcoming warmth in Hannibal’s words when he opens the door. “Come in, Will.”

Will’s hands go to Hannibal’s shoulders, pushing him back into the house and up against the wall, kicking the door shut behind him.

Hannibal’s eyes show shock for only a moment, gleaming in the dim light of the hallway. “Anger can be a very destructive emotion when left to fester,” he says. He dips his head closer to Will’s ear, and his fingers curl tight over his wrists. “Better to let it out.”

Will twists his right arm in a wide circle, dislodging Hannibal’s grip, presses forward to hold him by the throat. He’s squeezing with just enough pressure to be uncomfortable, because he needs to see.

Hannibal doesn’t flinch, his pupils widening and the corners of his mouth curving into a smile. “Is this how you paint your colours across the sky?” His lips stay parted, his tongue pressing forward to edge across his lower lip and then retreat. “Don’t ever hold back, Will. Not with me.”

Will hears what he means, hears ‘Don’t be afraid of yourself,’ and ‘Don’t be afraid of me,’ and he’s never been afraid of Hannibal, even when he should have been, and that isn’t now.

Hannibal’s hand comes up to Will’s wrist again, but he’s not tugging him off, only holding him in a grasp slightly tighter than Will’s on his neck. Rain loud on metal, Hannibal in wet wool, half-sprawled over leather and a luxurious blanket, whispering, teasing, “I might not even pull away.”

He won’t back away; Will knows it, and that’s why he’s got this. He matches Hannibal’s smile, slow and mocking, and says, “I didn’t come here to paint. I came here to study.”

Hannibal’s mouth closes, briefly, and when it opens there’s a layer of saliva glistening damply over the pink. “I’ve always been willing to discuss the less conventional forms of therapy.”

Will’s fingers clamp down harder, and there’s an instant tightening of the grip on his own wrist. “My study takes the form of practical experiment over theory.”

Hannibal’s breathing is noticeably deeper, a whistling note harsh under his words when he speaks. “Participation in your own experiment makes you an unreliable observer.”

Will has to laugh then, genuine, the mockery aimed purely at himself. “‘Unreliable’ might have been the defining word of my career.”

“We’re not talking about your career, Will. We’re talking about something far more important to you than laboratories and lecture halls.” There’s nothing left of Hannibal’s smile, only the liquid black of his eyes. “Far more personal.”
Hannibal’s made everything personal, bitter and bloodied by murder; personal is why he’s here, listening to Hannibal wheeze under his hand, and it’s why he’ll stop, why he’ll do this right, and not Hannibal’s way.

He releases Hannibal’s throat, his hand at his collarbone pinning him to the wall while the other slides down behind the bulge of his tie and tugs, hard. The silk glides beneath his fingers, stretching loose round Hannibal’s neck as the knot pulls thinner and tighter until it snags. Hannibal’s grip stays tight on Will’s wrist the whole time, and the lines deepen round his eyes, but he moves with him and doesn’t resist. “That tie was handmade in a Milanese design house.”

Will lifts his eyebrows and leans in closer. “I thought you wanted me to act on my impulses,” and he pulls the twisted loop up over Hannibal’s head and tosses it aside.

“It appears we have already passed that particular phase of your experiment,” Hannibal replies, releasing Will and tilting his head back to the wall, stretching out his throat to show the red marks of Will’s fingers.

He’s flushed, breathing hard and open-mouthed, collar half turned up and his hair in straggling disarray from the drag of the tie, and Will wants to wreck his perfect, lying exterior every way he can.

He drops his head below Hannibal’s jaw, lips and tongue sucking over the bruises, and his hands tug at the button of his suit. Hannibal’s fingers intertwine with his, holding him, stopping him, and he breathes in slow and says, “The bedroom, Will.”

Will drags the edge of his teeth over the lightly stubbled skin, and smiles when Hannibal twitches. “Where doesn’t matter. I could have you right here in your entrance hall.” The words tumble out, and now it’s exactly what he wants to do, shove Hannibal down to the floorboards, half-dressed and undignified, fuck him on all fours, this beast concealed beneath tailored suits.

Hannibal presses him gently away, until there’s distance enough that Will’s looking at him, and says, “I didn’t anticipate your arrival this evening. The condoms are upstairs.”

There’s a second when Will’s tempted to say he doesn’t care; his life’s already so fractured, what the hell’s one more risk to take? But his persona would care, this man standing here in the hallway who’s supposed to savour his future, and they’ll definitely need lube, so he lets go and takes a step back. “Get them and bring them here.”

Hannibal tilts his head a half inch, studying, before he nods. “I’ll be back directly.” And then he’s walking away, and Will’s listening to the tap of his probably Italian soles along the hallway and on the stairs.

He’s standing alone, surrounded by dark wood and the muted glow of the table lamp, the slow drip and trickle of the defrosting freezer vibrating in his ears, and the restless, seething thing in his gut spreads outwards and twitches through his hands, until they curl and dig into the wool of his pants.

He takes one more breath, the air rushing into his expanding lungs, and then his feet are moving, towards the stairs and up.

He catches Hannibal when he emerges from the bedroom, grabbing his forearms to push him against the wall.

Hannibal’s tongue is there again, always his tongue, so very mobile, around his words and maybe other things, and Will thinks a lot about that tongue. “Did you change your mind about the
Will presses his shoulder in to keep Hannibal where he is. “This isn’t so different.”

He lowers a hand to the single button of Hannibal’s jacket, and he doesn’t unfasten it so much as drag it through its hole.

He shoves the wool aside, moving through to the waistcoat, and Hannibal seizes him by the wrist. “I’d appreciate it if you didn’t sacrifice all of my clothing in one evening.”

Hannibal’s words are as mild as ever, but there’s more behind his grip, and in his eyes, finally there’s the challenge he needed to see, and Will grins at him with teeth and tongue. “So stop me.”

He tears his arm away, making a grab for the fabric before Hannibal’s fingers are back and tightening over his skin, and then everything’s fast, grappling, pushing into and against each other, twisting past and around each other. Brushing over a button then dragged away, seizing it and feeling it pop, the crushing, bruising clench of Hannibal’s hand on the bones of his wrist as he snatches for the next. It’s physicality and force and pain, and Will surges into it, into the mockery of violence, sensing it there leashed and constrained, because Hannibal has a weight advantage, but he’s not using it; he’s pushing within a limit, instead of going all out to win, and Will rips the last of the buttons from the waistcoat, hears it bounce and skitter metallic over the floor. The cloth falls open to expose his shirt, and Will presses his body in, Hannibal to the wall, himself to Hannibal, touch, contact, all the way down.

Hannibal’s hard against him; they’re hard against each other, breathing in and out of each other, and Will grabs his hair and seizes his mouth, and they’re kissing wet and messy and fierce, Will shifting around and pulling Hannibal after him, till his own back’s against the wall, with Hannibal in front of him. He shoves the layers from Hannibal’s shoulders, jacket and waistcoat sliding over his arms, and Hannibal shakes them loose to puddle on the floor. Will tears away from the kiss, his hands still at Hannibal’s shoulders, pushing down, pushing harder, his fingers digging deep over shirt and muscle and collarbones –

Hannibal’s a rock, resisting the pressure, the light from above shafting along one cheekbone. “Is there something you’d like to ask of me, Will?”

“You’re going to suck me now,” Will tells him.

Hannibal tilts his head a half inch and raises one eyebrow. “Perhaps you’ll explain to me why I should?”

Will leans closer and breathes warmth over his ear. “Because you want to.”

Hannibal’s face brightens in amusement. “As it happens, I do,” he agrees, and then he’s fluid, sinking down to the carpet, his hands drifting over the lines of Will’s ribs and waist.

Will brushes over his cheek with the back of his hand, the light touch odd after all their exertion. “It’s your choice how,” he says. He doesn’t mean the blow job, he’s determined to have that, and Hannibal won’t say no.

Hannibal looks up at him with the edge of a smile. “It always is.” His hands flow at Will’s belt, at buttons and zipper, touches that tease through the fabric as he pushes everything aside to free his erection. The air’s chill after the warm damp gathered inside his underwear, and Will takes a quick breath, then another, sharper, as Hannibal’s fingers wrap around his shaft.

Hannibal’s on his knees, his face flushed beneath the light sheen of sweat, a few strands of hair drifting towards his eyes, his lips only an inch from where the fluid gleams at the tip of Will’s
cock. There’s a rush of *greed* through Will’s mind, Hannibal’s for him, his for Hannibal, it doesn’t matter in the flood of it, in the softly sweeping pressure as Hannibal’s tongue slides forward and licks over his head, because Hannibal’s choice is to take him bare, no condom, and Will’s watching the liquid stretch thin, clear and clinging, connecting his cock with Hannibal’s mouth.

Will’s hips sway forward, and Hannibal’s lips part to let him in, surrounding him with delicious, sucking heat. Hannibal’s fingers stay at the base of him, stabilising, and his tongue is as mobile as Will’s imaginings, circling around his glans, pressing up along the length of the vein, lapping at the sensitive flare of his head. Will has fingers in Hannibal’s hair, curling and combing through the residual stickiness of the product he styles it with, unexpected, unpleasant, and he wants it washed clean and soft, how it was the night they skinned Randall Tier. Hannibal’s mouth works all over the tip of him, licking, tasting, before he slides further, down and down to meet his hand, taking Will’s cock over the back of his tongue, and heat flares in Will’s gut, electricity sparking through his balls. Everything’s tingling and ready with Hannibal’s movement, everything swelling and tightening, and he grips Hannibal’s head to hold him and pulls his hips back. “Stop.”

Hannibal’s eyes slant up to question from beneath ruffled hair, the tip of Will’s cock still pressed between his lips. “I’m not coming this way,” Will tells him, and Hannibal laps his tongue over his slit one last time, then releases him from both his hand and his mouth. Will’s cock bobs up to lie against his shirt, Hannibal starts to rise from the floor, bringing one foot beneath him, and Will grabs his shoulders to keep him down.

He leans in, adding weight to the grip. “I’m going to fuck you instead.”

Hannibal blinks slowly at the crudeness of it, then drops his darkened eyes to Will’s cock, inches from his face, swollen with blood and glistening with saliva. “I have no doubt,” he says, “and no objections. I’m merely suggesting we make ourselves more comfortable while you do.”

The vision from the entrance hall flashes through Will’s head again, dramatic and starkly detailed, and his lips part as he bends closer, slow emphasis poured through every word. “I don’t want you to be comfortable.”

Hannibal’s eyes wander along the thin carpet, stretching over the floorboards the length of the hallway, before he smiles back up at Will. “Then I imagine our hardship will be mutual.” His arms sweep round to wrap behind Will’s knees then jerk sideways, dragging his legs out from under him, and Will’s off balance and falling sideways, clutching harder at Hannibal’s shoulders to stop himself smacking full length into the ground. He ends up sprawled half over him and half against him, winded, annoyed and viciously horny, with Hannibal already tugging his shirt open. “Though perhaps I should return your sartorial attentions first.”

There’s a glint behind the humour, something reflective and antler-sharp, but Will’s the one with his dick poking out, so he shows a flash of teeth and says, “Good point,” and gets to work on exposing more of Hannibal, unfastening the layers until he can tug everything down past his hips.

Hannibal’s as hard as he is, and almost as wet, the sweaty musk of his arousal thick in the air. Will takes a moment to let the desire wash into him, feel it tangle into and elevate his own, one single long breath of it, and then he grabs Hannibal round both shoulders and hauls himself sideways with a twist, using his weight to drag them both crashing to the floor, with Hannibal beneath him.

The impact knocks the air from Hannibal’s lungs, and there’s that razor-flash in his eyes again, and Will knows before he moves, he knows and he’s ready for him, he’s always ready for anything this man can do. And when Hannibal pushes to roll them, to pin Will beneath him, Will uses the momentum to keep them going, twisting till he’s on top again, and they’re close enough to the wall now that the trick won’t work twice.
“It seems you have me where you want me,” Hannibal says, a little uneven now between breaths.

“Almost,” Will tells him with a grin, and he pushes up onto his knees, grips Hannibal’s arm and flips him onto his stomach. It’s easy because Hannibal isn’t resisting now, that repeated pattern of challenge and pause, fight and cede. Will feels the absence of contact over every inch of his skin, air crawling around him instead of pressure and heat and sweat, as Hannibal draws his own legs beneath him, his ass pressed up and back and offered to Will. And then Will’s looking, looking at Hannibal, Hannibal as he should be, no luxuries, no leather, no Bordeaux wines or thousand thread sheets, just the man himself, raw and exposed.

“The condoms are in my right pocket,” Hannibal says into the stillness, and Will goes digging into the slack material hanging above his knee to find their supplies.

He doesn’t take his time – neither of them wants time. He pops open the lube, coats two of his fingers thickly, and presses between Hannibal’s cheeks and in, steady, uncompromising. Hannibal sucks in a sharp breath, then lets it out slow, shifting back to meet him, bearing down to part more easily around him.

His fingers slide inside Hannibal, and Will uses them, curls and twists them, making Hannibal feel him and desire him, and Hannibal lets him do it, wants him to do it, a shattering complexity of emotions crystallised into this simple coherence, this moment of what he can have, needing everything he can have.

He reclaims his hand and rolls a condom onto his cock, careful, steady, as his lungs suck in air, rasping and uneven. He’s too restricted, he has to move, and he toes off his shoes, shoving his pants and boxers past his ankles and kicking them away. He coats more slick over the latex, clasps sticky fingers onto Hannibal’s hip while the other hand steers himself in.

He’s not gentle. This thing isn’t gentle, it can’t be, with someone like Hannibal, with someone like Will. He doesn’t start slow and let it build, he takes.

He feels himself rising, smiling, on the inside, and sees himself split and darken, one antlered figure fucking roughly into another and grasping tight enough to bruise, because he can’t ever look at the creature inside Hannibal without his own responding to the call. He fucks him, and fucks him, and Hannibal’s beast presses back to meet him, no hesitation, no denial of what they are, and what Will’s claiming, of what they share. And Will’s soaring, and brutal, with a growing rack of tines that spreads from his spine to the walls, to the ceiling, but he wants to share it, he wants that, and he loosens one hand, sliding it past Hannibal’s hip and along his skin to his erection.

In this position, with gravity’s pull, the curve of Hannibal’s belly is obvious, the softness of middle age and the indulgence of rich food and wine under the line of hair, and Hannibal’s abruptly, undeniably human beneath him. Human when he gasps and shivers as Will’s fingers wrap around his cock and slide the foreskin along his length, human in the layer of sweat that binds wherever their skin meets, human in the red flush across his hip where Will’s grip has left him marked, and it’s the man, not the monster, who breathes ragged and arches and comes in spurts through Will’s hand. And it’s Will, not the twisted figure, who fucks on into his steady, willing partner until the build of it overwhelms him and he orgasms buried in his body.

There’s that moment, there always is, when the world is divided, hanging between the fierce, perfect urgency of sex and the reality of two sweaty, messy people leaking fluids. When it ends, and the truth reasserts itself, Will lifts himself away from Hannibal’s back and disentangles them, easing himself out, removing the condom and tying it off mechanically. It’s too much effort to stand, so he shuffles around till he finds support, leaving the limp sack of latex on the floorboards by the carpet’s edge.
He’s sitting with his back to the wall, looking at his reddened knees and the bruises on the skin of his forearm; his shirt’s hanging open and he’s still wearing socks. There’s no anger left in him, and nothing else to fill the spaces, only a hollowly echoing absence.

Hannibal slides into place beside him, becoming his mirror, still fluid and graceful when he’s crawling in his own hallway.

They’re both breathing a little hard, and Hannibal’s hand is on his thigh, not moving, just resting, a weight that’s warm and solid on his skin. “Would you care to stay for dinner, Will? Cooking for one is inefficient; I always have extra available.”

The house is awash with the aroma of roasting meat and herbs, and it’s been there all along, but it wasn’t important till now; now he’s remembering that lunch was more about coffee, all he could stomach before he went to see Freddie, and the sick emptiness curled beneath his ribs is at least partly physical. “I can eat,” he says mildly, and his eyes linger on the hand, on the thick lines of veins and the long fingers that match the ache in his wrist.

He wonders how much dinner’s suffered for the delay, and he’s surprised when Hannibal doesn’t immediately climb to his feet to check on it. When Hannibal doesn’t move at all, only turns his head to look at Will more directly. “Your meeting with Ms Lounds left you with a great deal of residual hostility.”

_The squeak of the leather sofa beneath him as she talked about Abigail. “Even if I let this story go, I will never let that go.”_

_“Trust me, Freddie. Neither will I.”_

He stares straight ahead, at the opposite wall, his face quiet and his voice eerily light. “She has that effect on a lot of people.”

“Indeed she does.” Hannibal’s amused and teasing, with a smile Will doesn’t need to see, and it’s not even subtle, what Hannibal wants.

He came here to remind himself of what Hannibal is, and why he’s doing this. Sometimes it’s spectacularly easy.

Hannibal shifts his hand, laying it over Will’s, and Will looks down to where his fingers have already spread, interlacing between Hannibal’s, because sometimes it’s really not.

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It’s strange to be teaching again.

Teaching belongs to a life that was normal, and mildly boring, when his only responsibilities were to grade his students and walk his dogs. He’s not sure if that life was inevitably erased when his encephalitis started, or when Jack walked into his lecture hall and asked to borrow his imagination. He knows it vanished more than six months ago, and it can’t come even half way back.

If Kade Prurnell had her way, he wouldn’t have made it within fifty miles of Quantico, but after he was released, she was obliged to reinstate him. Anything else would have opened the FBI up to a lawsuit, and more of that bad publicity she’s so allergic to.

Will was sorely tempted to tell her to go screw herself all the way into next year, but having a legitimate purpose here makes it easier to check in with Jack. So he gets his minimum contracted
hours, and no more, and he puts on his glasses, and when the trainees glance at him and murmur among themselves, he stares at them straight through the lenses until they go silent.

His lectures have a lot of powerpoint slides lately, and dim lighting.

The phone call comes as he’s unhooking his laptop from the projector, his class filing out in a rumble of feet and chatter.

He looks at the name on the screen for several seconds before he answers, and he keeps his words cool, neutral. “What can I do for you, Alana?”

“You’ve been giving interviews to Freddie Lounds.” Her tone is just as cautious and measured.

He wonders why they’re having this conversation if neither of them wants to. “That was our agreement, so yeah.”

There’s a pause, and Will doesn’t have to see her to read the uncertainty about what she’s planning to say. “Be careful around her. She still thinks you’re a killer, Will.”

He props his ass against the edge of the desk and raises his eyes to the ceiling, to the glare of the suspended lights, his voice kept low and his back to the departing trainees. “Freddie says different things, depending who she’s trying to get a rise out of. She told me she believes Hannibal’s the copycat.”

“She told me she thinks it’s both of you, together,” Alana says.

The phone is rigid and cold, tight against his cheek. “And what do you think?”

“I haven’t decided yet what I think.”

He releases the air from his lungs, long and slow, lets his words rise and fall, a little friendlier, more approachable. “Have you talked to Hannibal about this?”

“No, I… I’m not seeing him outside work right now.”

The catch of hurt in her voice gives him a passing pang of guilt below the wash of relief. “Do me a favour, Alana. Don’t tell him about Freddie’s theory.”

“Why wouldn’t I?”

Her tone’s turned sharp, and it’s an effort to keep his own words light. “He’s liable to confront her about her poor manners and lack of journalistic integrity. Freddie being Freddie, it’ll only make her bite harder.”

There’s a pause full of thought, and he needs her not to think. “You’re suddenly very protective of Hannibal.”

“He’s been helping me with my problems lately.” The full, angled light of the moon, and Hannibal’s hands working with his own, dissecting the skin from the head of the man he killed. “I’d like to return the favour.”

Shifting and restless tapping echo down the phone, a growing silence before she answers. “He needs to know what’s being said about him, Will.”

Will’s own hand is twitching over his thigh. “She hasn’t said anything publicly, she can’t.” Not yet. She’s seen even less than he has. “She only said it to us in case we’d let something slip.”
“There’s nothing to ‘let slip’, not about Hannibal.” Alana’s words have a defensive, slicing edge, and he takes off his glasses, stowing them in his pocket and pressing his fingers between his eyes.

“So we hardly need to worry about it, do we?” That rustling silence spreads again, and he sighs into the phone. “You’ve known Hannibal a long time. Freddie can dig all the dirt she likes, but she can’t draw a treasure map if there’s nothing there to find.”

“Maybe you’re right.” It’s a very wary maybe, a crack spiderwebbing beneath the porcelain glaze. “Maybe we don’t need to worry him with her fantasies.”

Until the next time Freddie taps at her, and then she’ll break.

“Look, if she brings it up again, we’ll tell him,” he says. “Most likely there’ll be another story for her to chase tomorrow, and she’ll give up on one that’s going nowhere.”

“You’ll tell me what she thinks the next time you see her.” A demand, not a question. He stares into the white of the ceiling lights and tells his first real lie. “Yeah, I will.”

“Okay,” she says simply, and he knows that’s the end of the conversation.

“Goodbye, Alana.” Saying it feels unpleasantly final, and he presses the red button and shoves the phone into his pocket.

Behind him, there’s the squeaking scrape of feet on linoleum, and another bang of the door.

The timing of the call wasn’t a coincidence. She knows his schedule, and she knows enough people at Quantico who’d tell her if Jack had called him in on a case and altered it.

Six months ago, she would have come to him with anything, even when he was obviously unstable. Now he merits a phone call when he’s in a public space.

What did she think he was going to do? Respond to her with insults? Threats?

She must have fielded some fierce internal debate, but in the end, she did call. She warned him, just in case she’s wrong.

He lingers at the desk, his fingers curled around its edge, hanging onto that last frayed thread of their friendship.

The door to Jack’s office is ajar, and he walks in, toeing it shut behind him. “We’ve got a problem.”

Jack looks up from his paperwork, his jaw tight. “The kind of problem that requires you to barge into my office without knocking?”

“It’s Freddie Lounds.”

“She’s always been a problem,” Jack concedes. “What’s she done now?”

“She told Alana she thinks the murders are me and Hannibal working together. I asked Alana not to tell Hannibal, but…” He shrugs.

“You don’t think it will hold.”
His mouth quirks at one corner. “Alana doesn’t trust my motivations when it comes to Hannibal.” He perches on the corner of Jack’s desk, staring at him with absolute certainty. “Freddie’s getting too intrusive. He’ll kill her, Jack.”

Jack closes the file in front of him, leans back in his chair and props his chin on his hand. “This could be the opportunity we’ve been looking for. You go with him, and as soon as he makes a move, we arrest him.”

Will shakes his head. “I can’t predict what he’ll do.” His fingers tap against the wood; it looks solid but sounds cheap and hollow. “I brought him Randall Tier laid out on his table last week. Maybe he’ll decide to surprise me, hand her over gift-wrapped in her own intestines.”

Jack’s watching him with sharp eyes. “You said you understood him.”

Will drags a hand through his hair, the strands catching and tugging at his nails. “I do, but it doesn’t work like that.” It doesn’t seem to work like anything, all of it blurring together till there are no more edges, only shadows. “He likes the game, on both sides; the shifting sands of uncertainty make it fun for him.”

“So what’s your suggestion?”

“We have to bring Freddie in. You make her disappear, and I’ll tell him I killed her. That should seal the deal.”

Jack leans forward, exhaling air, his forearms settling across his desk. “Listen to what you’re saying, Will. You want me to tell Freddie Lounds everything we know and what we’re doing.”

Will raises his eyebrows and tilts his head to meet Jack’s gaze. “Or we could sit back and wait for him to kill her, arrest him after the fact when he hands me the evidence, quite literally on a plate.”

Jack’s hands come up to his face, rubbing at his temples, and there’s another long, slow breath before he looks back up at Will. “You’re sure this is the only way?”

Will’s mouth twists at one corner. “I can’t be sure of anything, except if we don’t kill her, he will.”

There’s a pause, of ticking seconds and low voices from the corridor outside, and then Jack snaps into motion, reaching for the phone. “Okay. I can clear it to get her into one of the witness protection suites.” He’s tapping at numbers, quick and precise. “We’ll use another name to limit the internal rumour machine.”

Will stretches a hand towards the phone, not physically stopping him, only suggesting. “There’s one more thing we’ll need.” Jack looks at Will with narrowed eyes, already knowing he’s not going to like it. “There has to be a body, and it’ll have to be… dramatic. After Tier, it won’t be convincing if I say I just disposed of her quietly.”

Jack’s hand goes to his forehead, his fingers settling over the top of his nose. “I’m not going to have a career at the end of this, am I?”

Will’s lips curve, and it’s not a smile, and the sound he makes isn’t anything like a laugh. “Welcome to the club, Jack.”

When he and Jack go to talk to Freddie, she’s wary, and she takes some convincing, but she’s already suspicious enough of Hannibal to hear them out.
She’s as poised and viper-tongued as ever, her eyes moving constantly between them, observant and sharply assessing. When he reads her, she doesn’t feel scared. No dilation of her pupils, no metallic note to her voice, no sweat rising on her skin through her make-up.

It’s anticlimactic when she agrees, and on a distinctly visceral level, sharply unsatisfying.

He would have liked her to be scared.

He sits opposite Hannibal at the dinner table, between them the lomo saltado that isn’t pork and isn’t Freddie Lounds.

It tastes amazing, an explosion of spice and onion and heirloom tomato-soaked protein on his tongue. Beneath the ginger and the cumin, he can’t detect the acidity that Hannibal describes.

It tastes like sublimely prepared food. It goes beautifully with the Saint Emilion Grand Cru.

Hannibal’s tongue and teeth sweep the meat from his fork; the silverware, the setting, his subtly patterned suit and burgundy shirt, he’s every inch the elegant professional.

Will lingers on each detail of his perfect surface, and he sees past that first skin to the one beneath; the juxtaposition of the refined, educated man of culture and the viciously methodical killer, and he understands that neither is a lie. They co-exist, superimposed in near-flawless alignment, and every breath taken by one feeds the other.

He consumes another bite from his plate, another piece of this meal they prepared together, Hannibal smiling and brushing touches at his hip when they passed in the kitchen, sharing the effort and the experience.

They sipped wine in the music room as the meat marinated, and Hannibal talked of his more amusing patients – no names, of course, no breach of confidentiality, only the generalities of their ridiculous neuroses, as they mulled over the backstories that might have triggered them. Hannibal’s hands moved fluid over the harpsichord keys in snippets of melody, before breaking to wander across Will’s thigh, his touch affectionate and light. The depth of it was all in his eyes, in the contentment that radiated and settled within Will, slowing his pulse and easing his mind, the pleasure that flowed with them when they moved into the dining room.

Hannibal is charming, cultured and sensual, theatrical and poised, and arresting in every movement.

Hannibal would kill Freddie.

It’s not as if Will can’t understand the appeal – sometimes the urge to grab her by the throat and squeeze just to stop her from talking leaves every muscle in his body twitching. But there’s a hard, unbreakable line between thinking it and doing it.

Hannibal doesn’t have any lines. He never has. He never will. And Will looks at him across the table, with his own lines fading and shifting, becoming so much harder to see. He watches the movement of Hannibal’s lips as they shape his words, the curl of his fingers on the stem of his wine glass, and he feels himself basking warm and relaxed in their conversation, and he’s already half way hard.

Chapter End Notes
I said the series was about to get less smutty and more plotty. It's still true, but maybe more noticeably in the next chapters!
A few lines of dialogue are lifted directly from the screenplay, for which writing credit goes to Jeff Vlaming, Andy Black and Bryan Fuller.

Thanks again to crystalusagi for beta-ing this one.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Hannibal presents the ortolans as the pinnacle of his culinary drama, laid out head to toe with swollen blind eyes in their metal dish, lapped by gentle flames.

When Will reaches to take one, it’s warm in his fingers, but not uncomfortable. He makes a wide ‘O’ of his mouth and slowly slides it inside.

It sits on his tongue, a lump of alcohol and juices and hard beak. It’s hotter in his mouth, skirting the edges of tolerance.

A rite of passage, Hannibal described it. They lock eyes, watched and watching; Hannibal’s gaze is intense and greedy. Whatever Will’s being inducted into, it goes beyond the eating of small birds.

He bites down, and his face freezes.

At first there’s the overwhelming Armagnac, the dried fruits and caramel of thinly distilled alcohol, the meagre flesh soaked from the inside as well as out. As the bones crush beneath his teeth and the ribcage collapses, there’s a rush of hot, liquid fat into his throat, almost scalding, and the slippery ooze of its innards over his tongue. Beneath it all, there’s a hint of the gamey flavour he associates with the quail and turkeys he’s shot and eaten.

He chews slowly and attempts a neutrally curious expression, resisting the urge to open his mouth and breathe cool air past the burn. The fractured bones prick sharply at his tongue and cheeks when he sucks them in to encourage the cooling saliva.

It is, by some margin, the vilest thing he’s ever put in his mouth.

He crunches through it, methodically separating the flesh into smaller pieces, watches as Hannibal presses his own bird between stretched, thin lips, his mouth closing around thumb and index finger to suck the juices from them before he lowers his hand. Even with his jaw working, crushing down on the sad morsel made food, Hannibal is mesmerising.

Will closes his eyes; he doesn’t believe in any god to hide from, but sometimes the need to shield himself from Hannibal is overwhelming.

He swallows the first chunk, continuing to chew on what’s left, and when he opens his eyes again, Hannibal’s are still there with him.

Hannibal’s lips are moving, shining damp with juices and gilded by firelight as he talks about his previous experience eating ortolans, of the ‘stimulating reminder of our power over life and death.’
Will knows the power of life and death; he’s vibrantly aware of the euphoria he finds in exercising it, and this lump of soft meat and intestines, of sharp beak and bones scratching its way down his throat, this isn’t it. But he accepts the offered line of conversation gratefully, steering them into more overt territory. “I was euphoric when I killed Freddie Lounds.”

The statement’s a lie, but the sentiments aren’t. It’s far less awkward discussing how he feels when he kills than having Hannibal ask what he thought of the ‘delicacy’ they just consumed.

He sips liberally from his wine as they talk, washing the last of the taste and sensation of the shrivelled little bird from his mouth. He’s not driving home tonight; Mrs Larin is engaged to see to the dogs, and he’s free to indulge. Indulge in the alcohol, and in the rest of dinner, which meets Hannibal’s exacting standards and tastes fantastic.

Later, he’ll indulge in Hannibal, naked and carnal. He’s seeing it now, Hannibal stripped free of the pale tan suit, sitting at the table, bare and unashamed, while Will slides beneath it to touch him. His fingers shape to the curve of his wine glass, and he feels them slide up Hannibal’s calves and over his thighs, the slight catch and scratch of his hair. His tongue sweeps across his lower lip, wetting it, as his mind locks his mouth to Hannibal’s skin, sucking and marking.

Dessert is a classic central European cremeschnitte, impossible to eat without licking at the stray vanilla custard and powdered sugar sprinkled over his lips. He sees the way Hannibal’s eyes wander over his face, follow his fork to his mouth and then drop to watch him swallow, and he suspects Hannibal is embracing some erotic fantasies of his own.

There’s no rush, and no need to rush – neither of them are going anywhere else tonight. Hannibal pours a twenty-year-old Lagavulin reserve, sipping and talking as they allow the fire to die. They’re both full and relaxed, hovering along the edges of drunk from the wine and the whiskey. When they move upstairs to the bedroom, their kisses are slow and lazy as they drift towards sex, until Will’s crouched over Hannibal with his lips wrapped around his erection, buoyed by Hannibal’s constant touch and frequent smiles. The taste is one Will’s always tolerated rather than liked, but the memory of the ortolan is vivid in his mind, and taking Hannibal’s cock in his mouth is far more enjoyable than that.

They shouldn’t be doing this without protection. Not with the barbed pricking of bones on his tongue fresh in his mind, and a roughened patch on the roof of his mouth where the fat burned, but they’re doing it anyway. He sucks and plays and teases with delight, eyes canted up to watch the expressions flit over Hannibal’s face, and he swallows him down in sharp satisfaction, flush with the giddy thrill of control.

When he comes into Hannibal’s mouth in turn, naked and feeling everything, no condom between them to dull the sensations, watching Hannibal’s cheeks work around him, watching his eyes as his throat bobs and his tongue swirls over his wet lips to lick away the last smear of Will’s semen – it’s almost better than fucking him.

There’s more kissing as they draw the sheets up, more soft words and brushing of fingers on skin, and Will drifts in the pleasure of it, then easily on into sleep.

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When he wakes again, it’s around four in the morning – hardly unusual for him. He’s sprawled against Hannibal, with his nose pressed into his neck where the skin disappears into silvering strands of hair, and that’s quickly becoming normal.

He doesn’t spend every night this way. It’s inconvenient for work, Wolf Trap being a lot closer to Quantico than Baltimore, and he doesn’t want to leave the dogs alone too much. He stays over at
Chandler Square maybe half the time.

He sleeps better these nights. He sleeps through a solid four or five hours, and then sometimes he’ll roll over and carry on sleeping.

Other times, like now, he’ll lie awake. Awake, with eyes adjusted to the dark, watching Hannibal, the relaxed shape of the killer breathing beside him. Watching the sheets rise and fall over his chest, listening to the soft sounds as he shuffles and snuffles in sleep, and occasionally snores. Feeling the heat of him where their legs tangle, and the weight of him everywhere.

The wine’s gone from his system, his thoughts clear and wholly his own, and he stays close, and sees and hears and touches.

Even these nights, when he might study and contemplate through to the winter dawn, the first four or five hours are more sleep than he usually gets at Wolf Trap. It’s not just the orgasms; it doesn’t have the same effect when he jerks off at home, but maybe the prowling of the dogs contributes to his restlessness. And he’s never considered his bed inadequate, but when this is done and Hannibal’s in jail, he’s maybe going to invest in a new mattress, because Hannibal’s is indulgently soporific.

Will’s fingers shift on Hannibal’s arm, feeling the muscle beneath the skin, softened now in sleep, but capable of locking and holding and causing pain.

Everything with Hannibal is a wildly shared indulgence. Hannibal yields when Will wants him to, takes control when Will needs him to, and resists when Will’s looking for a force to overcome. There are bruises when they play on the edge of violence, deep ones, but not where they show, and they never draw blood.

There’s no discussion, each time. It happens wordlessly, communication through a look, the tension of limbs, the warm or sharp edge to a smile, understanding translated into action and touch.

He trails his hand over the length of Hannibal’s arm, reaching further around to trace his ribs and belly, brushing through the line of hair. Hannibal’s back is pressed all along Will’s chest, the tight swell of his ass settled into Will’s hips.

Hannibal knows everything violent and dark in Will, and sleeps here in complete trust.

As Will does on these nights himself.

He closes his eyes, his arm wrapped around a murderer, pushes his face back into the disarrayed mop of hair and breathes there.

He told himself he’d take it all, everything he could, for the short time it was here.

Sometimes he wonders how far he might have been willing to go to keep this if Hannibal hadn’t killed Abigail.

And then he has to laugh inside himself, shaking and silent, because even if he could forgive everything Hannibal’s done, if he could live with everything that would come, there’s no compromise between Hannibal’s perfectly manicured existence and Will’s pack of dogs, nowhere in a house of fine art for enthusiastic tails.

There’s nothing here, pressed against his skin, only a brittle and twisted evasion of reality.
The wheels turn and turn as the chair rolls forever downwards, the rumble of its passing trapped in endless echoes between concrete walls. The charred figure strapped within shrieks and hisses when pockets of fat ignite beneath the skin, the reek of gasoline lost beneath the stench of burning hair and flesh, globs of flaming cloth falling away in a trail of fire behind –

He wakes, simultaneously warm and chilled with sweat, only half aware of the noise that dragged him from the dream. He’s in his own bed this morning, not Hannibal’s, the sheet over the thin mattress clinging to his skin. He sits upright, tugging a hand through the damp, tangled hair that straggles over his forehead.

The knocking is back, louder, and he drags himself from the bed, rubbing at his eyes as he goes to answer. The dogs are sitting with pricked ears, but they haven’t barked, so it’s someone they know, and he tugs on a pair of jeans over his sweaty sleepwear.

Alana stands there when he opens the door, Applesauce sniffing back and forth along his veranda. His own dogs dash out to meet her, the whole pack streaming past his knees on either side and on into the snow.

He stares and blinks, squinting into the low winter sunlight. “Do we do friendly visits any more?”

Her expression doesn’t change, no greeting in it. “This isn’t a friendly visit.”

He almost wants to laugh, because of course it’s not. “Oh. So what kind of visit is it?”

There’s a hint of redness in her eyes, but her tone doesn’t waver. “I guess I’m trying to convince myself of something.”

“You’re worried I killed Freddie Lounds.” It’s not just the icy air on his sweat-damp skin leaving him cold.

“Did you.” Her voice falls at the end instead of rising. It doesn’t sound like a question.

He tilts his head and keeps his eyes locked to hers. “Why do you think I would?”

“I told you she suspected you, and two days later she was murdered.”

“Well, that would be bad timing on my part, wouldn’t it?” He raises his eyebrows and widens his eyes. “It makes me look guilty.”

“Nothing you’re saying sounds like ‘no’ to me.” Her face is stiff, more of an edge to her speech, and he resists the urge to close his eyes against her.

“People believe what they choose to, Alana. They always do.” It’s impossible to keep the bitterness out of his words, all the resentment at everyone who thought him a murderer. “Nothing I say can change what you decide.”

There’s enough guilt in her to look away, to avoid his stare. Her eyes drop to his collarbones, exposed above the damp neck of his T-shirt, then down along his arms to his wrists. He doesn’t need to follow her gaze; he knows the position of every bruise and suck mark left on his skin.

When her head comes back up, there are lines deepening around her mouth. “Is Hannibal your therapist, Will?”

Will would really like to know himself what Hannibal is for him. He hasn’t been sure for a long time. “He’s been helping me with some issues, but he never sends me an invoice,” he says. “You’re in the profession, you tell me what that means.”
Her shoulders go back, the movement accentuated by the lines of her stylish jacket. “You know how inappropriate it would be for him to make any moves towards a relationship with you.”

He huffs out air, humourless, steaming in the morning’s chill. “Hannibal hasn’t made any inappropriate advances, Alana.” He’s not exactly lying. Hannibal only ever gave him heated stares and vague suggestions. It was Will who initiated and advanced the physical aspect between them, every time.

She’s not mollified in any way, her face and body language set. “I think Hannibal is bad for you and your relationship is destructive.”

He narrows his eyes, matching both her expression and her tone, though it probably loses something written on a man with sweat-drenched hair and a stretched, ratty T-shirt. “Then you should be grateful you’re not involved in it. I’d recommend you keep it that way.” He goes back inside and closes the door. His dogs will be happy playing outside a while longer.

Seconds later, her boots tap on the wood of his steps as she leaves.

He stands in the clutter of his silent living space, with goose-bumps crawling up his arms through a lingering layer of sweat, and he grabs for his phone and dials before he rethinks it.

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Hannibal’s softer in the mornings.

It’s not just the freshly-washed hair drifting over his forehead and down to his eyes, though that adds to the picture. It’s not the simple, cable knit sweater, because he manages to look outrageously proper and formal even in that. He flows around his kitchen with an elegance that’s more leisurely, still devoted to preparing the perfect breakfast, but it doesn’t need the constant laser focus of his timed-to-the-minute multi-course dinners.

When they discuss cases at the office, when they talk of murder and morality over dinner and drinks in the evenings, Hannibal is pure intensity, every word a careful choice, steering and shaping Will towards his ends. With the subtle early light, over coffee, he’s expressive and open, more an attentive, engaging companion than calculating manipulator.

He smiles easily, infectiously, and Will’s mood curls and lightens around him.

There’s food, always, eaten lingeringly, woven through with lazy conversation on any number of topics. Today it’s avocado toast alongside arugula frittata served straight from the skillet, while Will bemoans his students’ woeful skills as essayists. He should be home now, wading through the last of the pile, but this is so much more relaxing and pleasant, and he has the rest of the day to work, so long as Jack’s murderers leave him in peace.

“I have patients to see this afternoon myself,” Hannibal says. “There’s a new one on the schedule who promises to be interesting, if less pleasant than many.”

Will’s professional interest stirs, rising above the level of their general chit-chat. Hannibal’s ‘interesting’ patients have included the likes of Randall Tier. “Are they unpleasant because they’re rude, or do they have more violent tendencies to intrigue you?”

“In this case, a quantity of both.” Hannibal slides another piece of frittata from his fork, chewing contentedly and swallowing before he elaborates. “He has a long history of psychological and physical abuse, frequently against his sister.”
“The easily available target,” Will notes. It’s common enough for bullies and sadists. “How old is the sister?”

“She’s an adult, if that’s what you’re asking.”

“So she’s old enough to leave and cut all ties,” Will says. “She doesn’t have to be a victim any more.”

“I’m sure she would love to move away. Unfortunately, when their parents died, her brother was given full control of the family finances. If she leaves, she’ll have nothing.”

Will’s face twists in quick disapproval. “‘Family finances’ implies there were some assets to pass on, so I’m guessing she’s educated. Unless there are disabilities to factor in, she should be able to walk out and earn her own way.”

“Spoken easily by someone who has done it.” Hannibal’s smile is there, but this time it’s a little less real, and he drops his eyes to cut another slice of his food. “It might be simpler to work your way up when you’ve never had anything. There’s nowhere else to go. Perhaps it’s harder to live with nothing when you’re habituated to a certain lifestyle.”

Will pauses with his avocado toast hovering by his chin. “You speak like someone who’s experienced it.” He’s curious where this conversation about Hannibal’s patient is leading, but he’s more intrigued by Hannibal.

He doesn’t think Hannibal’s going to answer at first – the length of the silence is uncharacteristic in a man who wields words with such easy skill.

“Wealth and power were not anathema in the Soviet states, despite the overtly socialist ideology. When applied correctly, they were positively embraced.” Hannibal’s tone suggests a man lecturing on an interesting historical point, not relating his own life. “At the first hint of obstinacy, they were removed, of course, often along with life or freedom.”

Will remembers Hannibal’s talk of being orphaned when the conversation moved to parents in one of their early sessions. He tries to imagine Hannibal the child, stripped of home and family in a day, and not even his empathy can completely bridge the canyon between that boy and the man sitting opposite him now.

He considers the house they’re eating in, Hannibal’s extravagant office space and his later education at the Sorbonne. “You reclaimed your status before long.”

Hannibal’s fingers are tight on his cutlery as he makes an attack on his frittata. “Another branch of the family left Lithuania earlier, along with their portion of the money. When I was taken in by my uncle, I gained access to those assets.”

Will lowers his own eyes to his coffee, keeps his words quiet, minimising pressure. “And in Lithuania?”

“Legally I own an estate, restored to my name after independence. It hasn’t been maintained for many years. I expect it’s in poor condition.”

Will doesn’t ask why he hasn’t gone back to look, to restore. The answer’s obvious enough. He lightens his tone and gestures towards Hannibal with his mug. “So are there any other secrets you have hidden away in Europe, besides old country mansions?”

Hannibal glances up from his plate, amusement flickering across his face. “There’s a title, technically, should I care to claim it.”
Will arches his eyebrows and peers out from beneath his lashes. “I would have thought ‘Lord Lecter’ would be just the thing to impress the New World elites.”

It’s there again, Hannibal’s actual smile, quick with wide-stretched lips and a brief flash of teeth. “Nothing quite so grand, I’m afraid.” His face settles into something more earnest, just a hint of curve lingering at his mouth, and he leans across to brush his fingers over Will’s. “I find that respect is far more meaningful when it’s earned, by someone worthy of it.”

The subject is closed now, another sliver of Hannibal’s past glimpsed and then sealed away. Will returns the smile and takes another bite of toast, content with the change.

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Work claims them both with long evenings, and a couple of days pass before he sees Hannibal again. He meets him at his office, after the last patient has left, and when Hannibal opens the door, his eyes fix on Will, his fingers reaching out to stroke along his cheek.

For a moment, Will thinks Hannibal’s about to break the pattern, make the push towards physical intimacy, but he turns away, heading for the bottle of wine and the corkscrew on the desk.

Will tries to ignore the clench and sink of his belly.

The cork releases with a characteristic pop. “Alana came by my office today,” Hannibal says as he pours.

Will’s pulse trips and accelerates, racing uneven, and he slides into his chair and focuses on breathing evenly while he waits for the rest of it.

Hannibal brings the glasses over and hands one to Will. He takes it with deliberately careful fingers. “She expressed some concerns over the nature of our relationship. She believes I may be taking unfair advantage of you.”

Alana’s suspicions are becoming almost as problematic as Freddie’s. *Standing in the freezing dark of a cemetery in the early hours, looking at a charred corpse elevated to an effigy. “It’s a courtship.”*

Courtship suggests a choice to say no. He’s not sure that’s ever the case with Hannibal.

He swirls his wine around the glass and twirls his mouth in a wry smile. “She’s not exactly wrong, just almost a year late. You were taking unfair advantage of me from the day I met you.”

Hannibal doesn’t bother to look offended, only tilts his head, curious. “And now?”

Will holds his stare, giving due consideration to his choice of words. “Now I think we’re both taking advantage. In our differing ways.”

Hannibal takes a slow sip of his wine, still watching Will over the rim. “A mutually agreeable arrangement to extract what we need from one another.”

Will’s mouth curls slightly at the corners. “I’ve yet to figure out who’s getting the best of it.”

“Perhaps it needn’t be a competition.” Hannibal’s words slide out effortless and casual, but there’s an unblinking intensity behind his eyes. “Perhaps we can agree that as long as we both receive enough, a full accounting is unnecessary.”

Will breathes out a quick huff of air, almost a laugh. “I’m not sure I believe either of us could ever
stop playing. Any more than your new patient could stop playing with his sister.” He hasn’t forgotten Hannibal’s ‘interesting’ client and their side-tracked conversation.

“The two situations are hardly comparable. Neither of us holds a position of power over the other. Only the power we allow.” Hannibal’s voice falls deeper with the last sentence, and Will flashes on Hannibal pinned over the dining table, and on his knees outside the bedroom, sees those moments reflected back in Hannibal’s gaze.

There’s warmth coiling through his stomach, a warmth that’s lust and the fierce flush of control.

He pushes the memory aside before it absorbs him, before he wholly lives it again. “That’s true for the sister. She gives him power when she stays.”

There’s a smile flickering at the edges of Hannibal’s mouth. “Not entirely. She chose a different approach to resolving her situation.”

Hannibal’s not just talking about her in the abstract. He knows her. More than that. “You like her.”

“She has a forthright and practical demeanour which I find agreeable. She came to me for therapy as a condition of her release after she attempted to kill her brother.”

Will raises his eyebrows and hums amusement above his wine glass. “That would solve the problem of him controlling the money.”

“Unfortunately not. Their father was avidly patriarchal and decreed that the estate should go to a male heir.” That subtle flash of humour is back in his voice. “I advised her to refrain from trying again until she could get away with it.”

Will takes another mouthful of wine, considering Hannibal as he swallows. “Is it ethical for you to have both of them as your patients?”

“It requires me to tread some delicate ground, but I would not divulge to either any details that the other has told me as their therapist.” The fingers of his free hand tap once on the arm of his chair. “My knowledge of their different perspectives may allow me to speak in generalities of the options for altering their relationship.”

“Doesn’t sound like there’s much chance of changing it for the better.”

“Likely not. However, it is my role to make suggestions.”

Will parts his lips, letting the edges of his teeth show. “And what have you been suggesting, instead of murder?”

Hannibal’s lips curve again, but this time in pure calculation. “I discussed with her the possibilities inherent in pregnancy.”

“Another male heir,” Will muses. “A creative move.”

“One I believe she’s already enacted.”

Will tilts his head, watching for Hannibal’s minute reactions. “One that carries an element of risk. Her brother can hardly fail to notice.”

“Every creative act has its destructive consequence, Will. The Hindu god Shiva is simultaneous destroyer and creator.” The lines along Hannibal’s brow deepen as his eyes widen, so slightly. “A
child is only born because those older must die.”

The shadows crawl around the edges of the room, gathering together, blackness combined and lifted into a god, into the many-armed effigy swelling to fill space, rising up into the ceiling. All this talk of a child, a child manufactured and intended as a tool, it’s too close, and his mind is soaked in the metallic scent of her blood. “You sacrificed Abigail. You cared about her as much as I did.”

“Maybe more,” Hannibal says, yet there’s no thread of regret through the words. “But then how much has God sacrificed?”

Will feels his whole face contort and twist, his Hannibal-adapted persona submerged in grief, in anger. “What god do you pray to?”

“I don’t pray. I have not been bothered by any considerations of deity, other than to recognise how my own modest actions pale beside those of God.” Hannibal swallows once, slow in the ensuing silence, licks his lower lip before he speaks again. “Will… should the universe contract, should time reverse and teacups come together, a place could be made for Abigail in your world.”

She already has a place. A place in his head and in his heart, a place he can’t sacrifice or forget.

Will’s vision is blurred through the edges, distorted by the unshed tears gathering at his lids, and Hannibal sits opposite, artfully composed, talking about theoretical possibilities as if they matter, as if they change anything.

His eyes slide away to the god-creature obscuring the windows, to the living statue, the antlered mockery of religion, and Hannibal’s gaze follows, as if he sees it there too.

The quiet stretches and stretches, and his phone buzzes in his pocket.

He closes his eyes, blinking the wetness away, and doesn’t reach for it.

It buzzes a second time, and Hannibal tips his head at him inquiringly.

He sets down his glass and pulls out the phone, swipes the screen to show the waiting texts.

“It’s Jack.” His lips thin and tighten downwards. “I’m being summoned.”

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When he gets to the office, Jack’s not alone. Alana’s there too, sitting on the other side of the desk, looking up at him with puffy skin, pale beneath the thin layer of make-up.

“She figured out half of it,” Jack says, “so I told her the rest.”

The chair scrapes across the floor as she stands and steps towards him, stopping an arm’s length away. Her eyes are wet and highly reflective; her hands twitch at her sides, then stiffen. She’d close the gap and hug him, but she knows he doesn’t like it.

He almost does want to be held right now. But only almost.

“I’m so sorry, Will,” she says.

Will thinks of the friendship they had, of conversations almost easy by his standards, and the faintest frisson of potential. It’s nice to have her trust again, but it won’t be the same. Can’t be the same as before she abandoned him, before everyone did, before his life shattered like one of
Hannibal’s teacups.

The smile he gives her is weak and uneven. “Yeah. Me too.”

He gets the hell out of Jack’s office as soon as he can plausibly extract himself and bolts for the peace of the men’s room. Alana’s waves of teary guilt and regret are still crashing into him; alongside Jack’s vaguely sorrowful earnestness, it’s a flood that’s almost overwhelming.

He splashes his face with cold water from the faucet and hunches over it, dripping; hates opening his eyes to the stark geometry of the red and white colour scheme, the glare of the mirrors and their surrounding fluorescents.

He wipes off his cheeks and chin and dries his hands, the process rote and mindless. He reaches into his pocket and takes out his phone, scrolls down through his contacts to the number.

His thumb hovers over the button.

He wants to make the call, wants to hear Hannibal’s voice, logical, level and calm, but he doesn’t know what he’d even say.

He has so many things to mourn by now, and so many lies to hide, it’s hard to know where to start.

He shuts down the screen, pushes the phone back into his pocket, closes his eyes and breathes the sharp stink of disinfectant. Composes his face into something like normalcy, and walks out through the building and down to his car.

He sits in the driver’s seat in the soothing dimness of the parking garage, and his phone’s back in his hand, the name staring up at him yet again. The seconds rumble by with a brief flash of headlights, another car moving through the depths.

He plugs the phone in to charge and starts the engine, heading towards Wolf Trap and home, towards his dogs.

He doesn’t make the call.

Chapter End Notes

Next up: here come the Vergers...
A few lines of dialogue are lifted directly from the screenplay, for which writing credit goes to Chris Brancato, Bryan Fuller and Scott Nimerfro.

Thanks again to crystalusagi for beta-ing this one.

Will feels the phone buzz in his pocket during his afternoon lecture. Then a second time less than a minute later.

He ignores it until the class is over, unlocking the screen while his students are leaving.

The messages are from Hannibal. ‘Perhaps you could visit my office when you are finished at the bureau today.’ ‘There’s someone I’d like you to meet.’

Hannibal doesn’t text; Hannibal calls. And yes, he knew Will was teaching today, but it’s still unusual enough to pique Will’s interest.

‘I can be there around 4:30,’ he sends back, then instantly regrets it. He should have phoned to confirm, put himself in a place to ask questions. Though if Hannibal’s deliberately denying him the details, it wouldn’t have helped.

The phone rings while he’s still staring at it, and Alana’s name appears on the screen. He hits the red icon, declining the call.

It beeps at him as he’s packing up his laptop, and he waits till he gets to his car to listen to the voice mail. Listens to Alana asking him if they can meet up for lunch tomorrow, her voice friendly and light and forced.

He texts her to say he’ll be busy with student assessments, and doesn’t suggest an alternative. He knows what she’ll want to talk about. It’s not a conversation he intends to have.

He makes it to Hannibal’s office ten minutes early. For his scheduled appointment, he’d do the polite thing and wait, but it’s not, so he goes right in.

The waiting room is empty, and there’s nobody inside with Hannibal when he opens the door. Will’s too curious by now to bother with the formalities of a greeting. “When are we expecting your guest to arrive?”

“We’re not expecting them at all,” Hannibal says, lifting his car keys from the desk. “They’re waiting for a visit.”

Hannibal takes them in the Bentley to meet the mysterious person, and they park in the garage beneath a hospital twenty minutes later.

“Margot added me to her list of emergency contacts,” Hannibal says as the elevator doors close after them. It’s the first information he’s given on why they’re here. “Apparently she was involved in a car accident yesterday evening, and there were some difficulties reaching me. I was not made
aware of her situation until after her surgery.” Hannibal’s tone makes it clear how much credence he gives to the explanation of delay, and Will doesn’t ask for more details. He’s about to find out anyway.

They stop at a numbered room on the fourth floor. Hannibal knocks on the door politely, and a female voice calls, “Come in.” She makes it sound more like a summons than an invitation.

Will steps inside, and finds a large, well-appointed private room that probably costs more each night than his quarterly heating bill.

He’s looking at the back of an attractive woman in her underwear; there’s a network of old, pale lines and some more recent welts marring her shoulders where her hair parts to expose skin. She’s standing in front of a full length mirror, staring at the single vivid, inflamed scar that stretches across most of her stomach.

She catches his gaze in the glass, then shifts her eyes to find Hannibal’s. “I didn’t realise this was going to be a social occasion.”

Hannibal doesn’t blink at her tone, only steps forward to make his introductions. “This is my colleague I mentioned, Will Graham. Will, this is Margot Verger.”

It’s immediately obvious who she is – the wealth, the years-old wounds – this is the victimised sister of Hannibal’s sibling patients.

She regards Will coolly via the mirror, showing no concern for her state of undress. “We’ve met,” she states simply. Outside Hannibal’s office in the dark; the professionally dressed woman and the man who didn’t kill all those people.

Will doesn’t offer a greeting. Despite her dry humour, this isn’t a social visit. From the location of the newest scar, he’s assuming she’s no longer pregnant.

“Will is affiliated with the FBI,” Hannibal says.

Margot turns away from the glass, looking back and forth between them with very old eyes. “That’s not why you brought him.”

“No, it’s not.” Hannibal doesn’t elaborate, and neither does Margot.

She reaches for the shirt lying across the back of a chair, and slowly slides it up over her arms and shoulders, mindful of any pull on her abdomen. “He could have done what was done laparoscopically,” she says, her fingers working the buttons, “but my brother told them to leave a scar.”

“He branded you.”

Margot doesn’t flinch or question Will’s interpretation. “He wanted it emphasised that he won.” She stares into the emptiness of the room, her face as still as ever, the windows reflected in the shimmering layer of wetness over her eyes. “He always wins.”

Her sense of loss is profound, sadness drawn around her like an enveloping shroud, but Will doesn’t find her presence abrasive. Decades of concealing her reactions and emotions from her brother, isolating them behind a chilly façade, have made her easy for Will to be close to, even in these circumstances. He’s wholly aware of her, but he’s not overwhelmed.

He can see why Hannibal likes her. He knows why Hannibal wanted him to meet her.
“Moving on isn’t just a distraction, it’s a rebuke,” Will says. The muscles are tightening in his jaw, and his memory flashes on Hannibal smiling at him through the bars at the BSHCI. “Show your brother how strong you are. Survive him.”

Margot’s eyes move to Will, distressed, isolated. “There’s no resolve to this.” She steps into her skirt and fastens the tie at her waist, smoothing down the fabric, perfecting her image. Her surface is utterly calm, despite the violation, but Will can feel her there inside, the woman who waited and planned and intended murder. She’ll do it again, with the right opportunity.

She’s still herself, and Will enjoys seeing it.

Hannibal looks up at her from the sofa; his position is atypically casual, his elbows propped on his knees, body language relaxed and approachable. “If I may ask, Margot, who was the father?”

There’s a slight pause at Hannibal’s use of the past tense before she answers. “I have no idea. I met him in a bar.”

It’s not the answer Will expected from this woman with her untouchable demeanour. “That seems a risky way of achieving pregnancy.”

He gets the impression Margot would never do anything quite so banal as shrug, but her disinterested facial expression conveys one well enough. “He was well dressed, professional. With my recent history, I couldn’t go to a sperm bank.” Her eyes widen in a studied mockery of innocence. “Attempted fratricide is considered a sign of mental instability on their checklists.”

“You don’t know this man’s name?” Hannibal’s pressing, but his voice is infinitely gentle. Will remembers many words spoken in that enticing accent, quiet and personal, drawing him closer to listen more easily, remembers the effect they had on him before he knew the truth.

“I didn’t ask.” Margot takes an earring from the bedside table, slides it into place and straightens it. “If I don’t know, my brother can’t touch him.”

“I thought you might have approached someone you know.” Hannibal leans forward, inviting more confession, more intimacy. “Perhaps someone with the temperament and resources to deter your brother.”

Margot’s eyes settle on Will, with an oddly neutral stare. He imagines she wears the same expression surveying the family’s pens of livestock. “I considered it.” She turns then to Hannibal, flashing him an arch look. “I thought about approaching you, but I knew you’d say no.”

Hannibal tilts his head, studying. “It would have gone far beyond the bounds of professional ethics.”

Margot raises her eyebrows. “That’s not why you’d say no.”

Hannibal doesn’t confirm or deny that, and she reaches into the cupboard by the hospital bed, takes out her purse and a few items of make-up.

“If you’re leaving soon, we can take you home,” Will says quietly. His eyes move to Hannibal as he speaks, because they came here in the Bentley, and Hannibal’s warm serenity is approval of the offer.

Margot throws him a sceptical look as she snaps her purse closed. “That might invite some scrutiny you wouldn’t enjoy. I’ll have the staff call me a cab.”
The aura of hollowness and futility persists in the crevices of his mind through the silent drive back to Chandler Square, and when Hannibal steps in to take his coat in the hallway, Will cups his jaw to tilt his face and kisses him.

Hannibal moves with him, slow, gentle, and Will brushes their mouths together and lightly presses against him. Hannibal’s hands stroked over Will’s cheeks, then slide down to settle above his elbows, not holding, just resting there. The kiss is dry at first, lips chapped by winter and artificial heat, and it’s just starting to dampen, to slide a little more deeply, when Hannibal breaks it with a soft smile. “I should start dinner.”

Hannibal’s hands are still there, a soft pressure through the coat over his biceps, and Will’s breath is a long sigh of ease as he smiles back. “I know.” It wasn’t about sex; he only wanted to touch. He lingers close for another stretching second before he pulls back, shrugging the coat from his shoulders and following Hannibal through to the kitchen.

They cook together as they often do now, meaning Hannibal cooks while Will does simpler things like slice vegetables and chop herbs. It’s a conventional meal with actual chicken, and their conversation winds back and forth naturally, covering music and geography and culture. It’s all… comforting normal.

He gets another call from Alana during dinner, and he declines that one too. He listens to her voice mail while Hannibal goes to bring out dessert, but he doesn’t call her back.

When they rise from the dining table, Hannibal doesn’t offer after dinner drinks. Instead he moves close and rests a hand on Will’s face. “I would enjoy it very much if you would join me in bed, Will.”

Will closes his eyes and feels the touch of fingers on his skin. “I can’t stay tonight.” He has an early class, and he didn’t make arrangements for the dogs.

The contact brushes downwards, over his cheek to his jaw and wraps around his chin. “You don’t have to stay.”

Hannibal’s breath is warm over his nose, and Will opens his eyes to study the face inches from his own.

Sometimes he still thinks of avenging Abigail, of taking a knife to Hannibal’s throat. He makes one deep slice and the blood splashes out over his body, the scent of it thick and rich around him. It’s warm on his skin as Hannibal’s eyes glaze and his pupils fix, and Will stands soaking in every moment, victorious, justified.

Other times he thinks of fucking Hannibal, of sinking into the tightness of his offered flesh, and it makes him instantly, obviously hard. It’s there now, the stirring and swelling of his cock, the heat sliding through his belly as his lips part.

Everything connected to Hannibal makes him feel stimulated in so many ways, and all of them are… inappropriate.

He told Hannibal he never felt more alive than when he was killing Randall Tier. It’s still true, but being with Hannibal gets him close.

“Ohay,” he says. “I can leave in an hour.”

Hannibal smiles, and curls a hand around the nape of Will’s neck. “Then we’ll make sure an hour will be enough.”
He follows him up to the bedroom and they undress, partly themselves and partly each other.

It’s easy now, doing this with Hannibal. There’s no tension, and no need for it; it’s just them, and this is how they are. Hannibal’s body is wholly familiar to him – Will knows every part of him that reacts, every place that’s over-sensitive and makes him brace not to squirm. Hannibal grows aroused so quickly when Will touches him, sometimes when Will even looks at him, and he’s hard long before he’s naked. They both are.

He spreads Hannibal over the bedsheets and presses fingers into him, slick with lube; watches the tension ripple through his muscles as he stretches him, watches his tongue slide between his teeth when he brushes over his prostate.

He rolls on the condom and pushes into Hannibal, then pauses to kiss him, merging their lips in mutual pleasure. He thrusts, and reaches to brush the hair back from his eyes. He thrusts until Hannibal’s breathing with parted lips and heaving chest, and then he takes his cock and strokes him as he tips his head into the pillow and closes his eyes and comes.

Watching Hannibal abandon his precious control and let Will steer him to his end has become a delicious indulgence, worth holding back his own gratification for.

He stills his movement as Hannibal’s orgasm ends, lets him recover and adjust, and Hannibal opens his eyes and says, “Don’t stop, Will.”

Will looks down at him and holds steady inside him. “It’s not too much?”

Hannibal smiles, and his fingers curl tight around Will’s biceps. “I don’t believe it’s possible for you to ever be too much.”

Will lets his eyelids drop closed against him, against the world, and shifts his hips and fucks him. He fucks him until he loses himself in the rhythm of it, in the heat of it and the pressure all along his cock, and then he pushes in one last time and finally he comes.

The clean up is routine by now, quick and habitual disposal of condoms and tissues. Hannibal presses close behind him, sticky with their combined sweat, throws an arm over Will and nuzzles into his hair. Will drifts in the post-orgasmic haze, relaxed, peaceful, every inch of him steeped in satisfaction.

This could have been something like happiness, if Hannibal were who he appears to be. If Hannibal could be the brilliant, caring psychiatrist, and not a vicious mass murderer. If Hannibal were who he appears to be, Will wouldn’t be in this bed. Hannibal only wants him because the antlered monster that inhabits him recognises something of itself in Will.

He doesn’t know which twists more sharply – the fantasy that he might have some kind of real relationship, or the knowledge that this farcical facsimile is the closest he’ll ever come. That this brief, intense interest from a man incapable of lasting connection is all he can share.

Will shifts beneath Hannibal’s arm, rolling to face him across the rise of the pillows. He can’t fall asleep here, and in the time that remains, he figures they might as well have the conversation he’s been expecting from Hannibal all evening.

He reaches to find Hannibal’s free hand and tangles their fingers together. “So has Mason Verger’s business card made it into your Rolodex yet? A lack of courtesy would appear to be his defining characteristic.” The card index isn’t evidence – it proves nothing except Hannibal’s meticulous organisational habits. The names in it are all people who are still alive.
“Mason is my patient, Will. The death of a former patient of mine, followed by that of Ms Lounds with her rather public suspicions, has invited scrutiny.” Hannibal’s fingers curl tighter around his own. “If another patient were to die, I would much prefer to have an alibi in place, with multiple witnesses to prove my innocence.”

“You want me to kill him?” Will’s mouth twists with a hint of humour. “I’m not exactly considered free of all vices myself in the perception of my colleagues.”

“Margot says Mason has been inquiring after the father.” Hannibal slants calculating eyes deliberately onto Will’s and holds him with them. “Perhaps we should provide him with one.”

Will raises his eyebrows, his head tipped in curiosity. “You intend to make me the bait?”

Hannibal leans forwards, brushing their noses together, his words tinged with amusement beneath the drama. “It would be prudent to have an appropriate case prepared for self-defence, should we need one.”

Will stretches his lips into a slow, lazy smile. “Oh, I think I can go one better than that.”

“He’s the perfect choice, Jack.” Will props his ass against the edge of the desk instead of taking the chair. “He’s rich, with bodyguards and staff always hanging around him. Hannibal won’t actually be able to kill him.”

Jack looks up at him, neutral and cautious. “What if you’re wrong?”

Will lifts his eyebrows and his lips curve slightly. “If I’m wrong, his only relative is his sister, and she won’t miss him.”

“Will…”

Right. He’s supposed to be law enforcement, by some vague association. He’s supposed to want to arrest people like Mason Verger, for all the good it would do.

Jack leans forward over the desk, his chin propped on clasped hands. “You didn’t like this idea when I suggested we use it with Freddie. You said you couldn’t predict him.”

“Hannibal was going to go after Freddie himself, it was his turn in our game.” It’s frustrating sometimes, having to explain things to Jack that should be obvious. “This time, he wants me to make the kill.”

Jack blinks slowly. “I don’t see how that helps us.”

“I can turn it around, convince him it would be better to do it together.” Will’s hands are twitching in the air over his thighs, adding emphasis, needing Jack to see what he’s saying. “He’ll start the attack, I’ll arrest him and you’ll have two witnesses to testify.”

Jack leans back in his seat, fingers tapping restlessly on the desk as the seconds pass. By the time he pushes his chair back from the desk, Will knows he’s in. “Maybe I’ll have three.”

Will lets the curiosity show on his face, and Jack gets to his feet. “I’m a good fisherman too,” he says, and Will follows him to the window of an interrogation room where Bedelia Du Maurier paces the floor with her hands clasped in front of her, every trace of her icily controlled personality eradicated.
Will’s only met her once, but that one meeting told him a great deal about her. Hannibal’s professional and personal respect for her told him more. “Can I talk to her?”

“I was hoping you would. Maybe she’ll be more forthcoming with you.”

Will’s head jerks from the window to Jack. “She didn’t come in voluntarily?”

Jack’s still watching Bedelia circle the room, her whole demeanour that of a woman trapped and diminished. “She ‘volunteered’ after some of her other options were explained to her.” He turns to look at Will then. “She’ll have to get more specific about what she knows if she wants a deal. So far she’s talking in vagaries.”

“That’s a familiar experience.” He compares the woman in front of him now with the one he’s seen and heard about, and he finds himself wondering how much of either is an act.

He knocks on the door politely and gives her a moment before he lets himself in. She’s recovered some of her poise with a visible audience, seated neatly with her calm face bordered by waves of perfect hair, but her purse is clutched in her lap defensively.

He stands behind the chair opposite her, resting his hands on the back of it. “I’m told you were hard to find.”

She looks up at him with huge, limpid eyes. “That was my intention.” Her words are slow and precise, with just a hint of a quiver beneath them.

“What if he had found you first?” She doesn’t answer, and he slides into the seat, leaning forwards across the table. “You could have come to us,” he says gently.

Her face tightens, and so does her tone. “I was vividly aware of how well your faith in justice worked out for you. I chose not to replicate your mistakes.”

He doesn’t react to her sharpness, keeps himself relaxed and amenable. “Thank you, by the way, for visiting me in the hospital. And for what you said.”

“I don’t believe I spoke with you in the hospital.” Her head tilts barely an inch to the side, a gesture so reminiscent of Hannibal it’s like a knife. “I had a conversation there with a man who let himself be used, manipulated and victimised. It is apparent to me that I’m talking with a different man today.” For just an instant, her aura of apprehension drops entirely, and he’s looking at the woman who inspires so much interest in Hannibal. “I wonder how different you have become?”

Hannibal sits across from him with slightly parted lips, considering Will’s tale of his evening visit to Muskrat Farm. “You made me the bait instead. That’s an interesting choice.”

Mason Verger pinned beneath him on the edge of the drop with the pigs screaming below, his eyes wide with shock and madness and just the beginnings of fear. Adrenaline and the pounding flow of blood through his muscles, the rush of power and the greed for it rich in his head. “I gave him two targets instead of one. Now Verger believes I blame you as much as him.”

He could have killed him. He could have beaten him to death right there, just like Randall Tier, skin splitting and bone crunching beneath his fists, the warmth of blood smeared over the back of his hands and splashed across his cheek. Verger isn’t a murderer, not quite, not technically, but he’s something that needs to be squashed, to be crushed and expunged from existence. Will knew exactly how it would feel and he could taste it.
Killing Verger wasn’t the plan. He let him go, let him stand and stay within the world, and he walked away.

He came to Hannibal to tell him about it, to watch the hunger flash over his face and his pupils dilate as he visualised Will’s use of violence. And now Hannibal runs his tongue across already wetted lips, and stares at Will with layers of want. “Mason will likely target me first. He considers me the instigator, the source of his many ills.”

Will nods his agreement and reaches out a hand to settle against Hannibal’s cheek. “So stay in touch.”

Hannibal does stay in touch, until he doesn’t.

It’s Sunday, and Will has a quiet afternoon with the dogs and a couple of minor repairs around the house.

He hasn’t been able to reach Hannibal for over an hour. His last message said he was at the office, catching up on paperwork.

It isn’t a surprise when the car pulls up at his door. He’s mildly surprised that it’s a stretch Mercedes – he hadn’t been expecting such a high class ‘invitation’ – but he was expecting something.

He’s pleased to see it arrive. The last hour has revealed in him an intense dislike of waiting; it makes him restless and twitchy, and not even the softly nudging noses of his dogs could ease him. He’s prepared to be frisked, and they don’t find anything. He doesn’t carry a handgun at home.

He’s less pleased to find Mason Verger inside the car.

Verger talks a lot, and like most narcissists, always about himself. He plays the enthusiastic host, offering drinks and a running commentary on his life history and theological leanings. His agitation grows increasingly obvious with Will’s continued disinclination to engage.

The feeling is completely mutual. Verger’s attempts at a genial persona are pitiful; the reptile is always lurking just below the surface with alligator eyes exposed to the air. His exaggerated body language, his loud speech and embellished tones make more than one thing inside Will itch and crawl and yearn to get out.

There are antlers beneath his skin, and a craving to let them spread.

It’s a relief to finally arrive at Muskrat Farm and be free of the car. More of a relief to find Hannibal alive, suspended above the pig platform, watching him with curious eyes.

Will sucks in a single long breath, his pulse darting and pounding beneath the calm he presents for their audience.

Will wants him arrested, not dead. Mostly. Definitely not at the hands of a contemptible amoeba like Verger.

He walks towards Hannibal, circling in to follow him as he swings. Hannibal’s expression is studiedly neutral, his eyes locked on Will. His hair is in total disarray, almost obscuring his eyes, and there’s a cut on his forehead, blood streaked along his temple.

It’s his feet that strike Will most powerfully; naked feet, incongruous and vulnerable dangling
below the expensive suit, and even at home Hannibal’s feet are never bare outside the bedroom.
Mason Verger shouldn’t get to see that. Only Will should get to see that.

There’s a soft anger flaring and smouldering through his chest. And then Verger’s pressing a knife into his hand, telling him to use it.

He’s thought about this. More than once.

He killed Randall Tier with his fists, but he skinned his limbs with a hunting knife. It left him wondering how different it would be to use a blade on tissue that was still living, that moved and bled and reacted.

He’s thought about it with Hannibal.

He steps forward, closer, slowly, and then his arm sweeps up, jerking the steel to lie against the lightly stubbled skin of Hannibal’s neck.

When he kills Hannibal in his fantasies, Hannibal is utterly calm. Passive. Resigned. Sometimes he talks, quietly philosophical. Sometimes he’s silent, only waiting for Will to take his revenge in total acceptance.

That isn’t the Hannibal looking at him now. Those coffee eyes are watching him with something like a challenge beneath the curiosity. Wondering how far Will’s going to take this, how much of the opportunity he’ll indulge.

He finds the shocking knowledge that if he did slit his throat, Hannibal wouldn’t be disappointed.

They look at each other, and there’s clear understanding.

Will knows exactly what he’s about to unleash, and there’s a surge of heat through his stomach at the image of it, of the coming violence, of killing alongside him. Of angling this knife between Mason Verger’s ribs for what he’s done.

He grabs Hannibal’s arm and flips him around, slicing down through the straps, feels the leather part raggedly beneath the blade, Hannibal’s weight shifting and dropping as the restraints give.

Verger yells behind him as Hannibal drops to the platform, already rolling as he lands.

There’s quick movement beside him, and then abruptly there’s blackness.

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He wakes lying on his own bed, the mattress and pillow instantly familiar, and there’s a damp nose nuzzling at his fingers. His hand moves automatically to rub over the head – Winston, from the size and the ears and the consistency of the fur.

He’s wearing clothes, but his shoes and coat are gone, and there’s a shape in front of the light of the window that resolves into a blurry Hannibal, leaning over him.

He blinks, once, twice, and Hannibal crystallises into clear lines. Will thinks about all the questions he should ask under the circumstances, and the first one he puts into words is, “You brought me home?”

Hannibal hums affirmation. “You were unconscious with a head injury.” He shines the thin beam of a keyring torch into each of Will’s eyes in turn, his other hand cupping his head so he can’t turn away. “As a responsible physician, I could hardly leave you unattended.”
Will’s head aches and he can smell blood – strong, lots of it, rich and metallic, far more than would have come from the small cut on Hannibal’s brow, the dried streak beside his eye. More than would likely have come from his own head, given his conscious state and Hannibal’s low level of concern.

And then he hears another voice, from the direction of the armchair. “How is that? Is that good? Do you want another piece?” A quick laugh that makes his senses tighten and the hairs prickle behind his neck, like his dogs when the coyotes yip and howl in the night.

Will squints up at Hannibal, into the light. “Verger?”

Hannibal smiles down at him, his fingers sliding gently along Will’s chin as he straightens. “Don’t worry about Mason, Will. He’s keeping himself entertained.”

Verger and blood and his dogs. Will shoves himself upright, leaning back for support as a wave of dizziness rushes over him, the window ledge sharp against his spine. His vision fades and then solidifies again, and Mason Verger is sitting in the chair across the room, the dogs in a circle close around his legs. He’s cackling and leaning forwards to offer Buster something; Buster takes it from his fingers delicately, as he’s been trained to, then swallows it without chewing.

Will blinks once, as if that will change what he sees. He doesn’t have any dog food in his house that shape. “Mason… What are you feeding my dogs?”

Verger lifts his head and turns to answer, turns into the light from the windows, the shadows falling from his face. But he doesn’t have a face any more; he has a raw mask of exposed, bloodied flesh and grinning, lipless teeth. “Just me!” He throws his head back as he dissolves into a bout of maniacal, hacking laughter, and another red, clotting globule sloughs from his chin to join the smears on his shirt.

Will stares, fixated, as Verger raises a crimson hand clutching a glint of silver and slowly carves a fresh piece of tissue from his cheek then holds it dripping towards Harley. Harley accepts it with the same gentle restraint, licking at the blood on Mason’s fingers after she swallows.

Will looks back at Hannibal, who’s smiling gently down at him with one hand on Will’s wrist, tracking his pulse. “What did you give him?”

“An experimental cocktail of my own design.” Hannibal’s pride in his achievement when he glances over at the laughing man is pure and unconcealed. “Mason is currently disassociated from this reality, so he will make his own, steered by a few careful suggestions.”

Will’s eyes are drawn inexorably back to the horror that used to be Mason Verger, his curiosity too strong to contain. “He doesn’t feel it at all?”

“Pain exists in his world, but only as a concept,” Hannibal says mildly, “not as something to be personally experienced.”

It sounds implausible, but there’s no denying its effectiveness. Will’s hardly the person to question Hannibal’s pharmaceutical expertise, piecemeal though his memories of it are.

Hannibal’s fingers are at Will’s temple now, feeling gently along his hairline. There’s some pain at the touch, but he’s had worse.

Verger flings his arms into the air and proclaims dramatically, “I’m hungry!”

Hannibal turns to look, and without a flicker of hesitation says calmly, “Eat your nose then.”
Will slants his eyes up at Hannibal and finds him smiling in total confidence, watching Mason with an expression somehow both wholly at peace and intensely predatory.

Will follows his gaze across the room, his eyebrows lifting as he considers Mason with a quiet sense of expectation. Will he really…?

“Eat my…” Verger pokes at the cartilage, wobbling it under his fingertips. “Eat my nose?”

Oh, yes, yes he will.

Hannibal’s lips are slightly parted, hovering on the edge of a smile; Will sees him stretch and change into the creature, antlered and black and magnificent, the beast in him briefly content, but far from assuaged.

Will shakes his head, triggering a quick spike of pain that brings him back to reality, and the lingering practical concerns of their situation. “Now that he’s in my house, what do you intend to do with him? You must have something in mind.”

He can’t find any part of him that actually objects to Hannibal’s design for Mason and his head’s too sore to invoke any guilt at the lack of it, but there’s a mild underlying annoyance that Hannibal brought Verger here to leak evidence all over Will’s living room. Though Will did drag a bloodied corpse through Hannibal’s house and lay him out on the dining table. He supposes it might be unreasonable to complain.

Hannibal sits on the edge of the bed, and strokes along the back of Will’s hand. “I thought it best to await your input before I made any final decisions. Mason is your choice as much as mine, after all.”

It’s not untrue. Will did choose Mason; they both selected him as ‘deserving’ by their differing criteria and offered him as a plaything to the other.

There’s a spiked surge of desire to walk to his kitchen, take one of his fish gutting knives and drag it across Mason’s throat, but that would cause a chain of consequences difficult to manage. For Margot, and for himself.

Will looks down at their hands, resting together on the bedspread, and back up at Hannibal. “Murder or mercy?”

Hannibal inclines his head, watching Will with that familiar studied intensity. “You have an almost unique appreciation of both, to extremes rarely recognised, and never in the same individual.”

“There’s no mercy.” His words come out dispassionate, analytical. “We make mercy, manufacture it in the parts that have overgrown our basic reptile brain.”

“Then there is no murder. We make murder too. It matters only to us.”

There’s a strange sense to Hannibal’s flow of logic, always; it’s part of what makes him so innately dangerous. “I’m not in the best position to take action,” Will says. It isn’t even a lie – he got dizzy from sitting up in bed. “He’s your patient. You do what you think is best for him.”

Hannibal untangles their fingers and walks over to Verger with no hesitation, no pause to consider the possibilities, his decision made in a single moment. The ache in Will’s head isn’t enough to dull the jump and skitter of his pulse, the quick breath of expectation sucked into his lungs.

He’ll finally get a glimpse, see some small fraction of what Hannibal does when he frees his beast.
And then he’s watching Hannibal break Mason’s neck, a distinctive crack followed by a silence that’s profoundly satisfying. The move is as perfectly clinical as Will’s always known him to be, the way he is in a dozen reconstructed murders that live in Will’s head.

Hannibal puts a hand to Mason’s throat and nods when he finds the pulse. The expertise and precision of him is breath-taking.

Will feels no urge at any point to stop him.

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Thirty-six hours later, Jack paces the limits of his office, his shoulders back and frustration written tight through the muscles of his neck. “Verger won’t give an inch. He’s sticking to his story that it was the pigs.”

Will’s propped against the desk with a tumbler in his hand, watching him stalk over the carpet as dully beige as the rest of the decor. “You knew he would.” A man like Mason Verger would never go public with the story of how he was forced to destroy himself, whether or not he could find a way to omit his own crimes.

“I can’t honestly say I’m upset about it,” Will adds mildly. Jack stops pacing to glare at him, and Will takes a casual sip of his whiskey. “Even if Mason would testify, there’s no edited version I can tell in court that doesn’t implicate me as much as Hannibal. My defence for most of it is I was unconscious and saw nothing. Juries love hearing that from someone who was just released on multiple murder charges.”

Jack sucks in a long breath through closed teeth. “You might be right,” he says eventually, and he sighs and slumps into his chair. “If you took the stand with that story, the OIG would slam the door behind me by the end of the day.”

Will has no plans to give Kade Prurnell another shot at him, with or without Jack taking the fall alongside him. “Hannibal won’t change what he is. There’ll be other opportunities.”

“I don’t have much scope left to run interference for you,” Jack points out. “Freddie’s getting antsy at the confinement. She won’t play dead forever, and we can’t involve any more civilians.”

Jack’s not wrong. Will can’t spin this out indefinitely either; everything’s gotten… complicated. “Not a civilian then.” He stares into the golden depths of his drink, reminiscent of firelight mirrored in Hannibal’s eyes. “I could tell him to kill you.”

Silence from across the desk; silence, then the rapid drumming of fingers on cheap laminate.

Will doesn’t lift his eyes from the tumbler, and Jack doesn’t need to speak for Will to have his answer.

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Will’s eyes move easily along the words on the page, his mind and body settled in the comfort of the armchair. It’s calm, relaxing, the silence ideal as the last of the throbbing in his skull fades away. Hannibal’s sketching at the small desk over by the fireplace, the occasional spit and crackle of wood and the faint scratch of his pencil the only distractions.

Will had plucked the book from Hannibal’s extensive shelving with a flicker of amusement; ‘The Phantom of the Opera’ seemed suitably melodramatic for Hannibal. It’s an early US edition from 1911, a red hardback bound in textured cloth, ridged under his fingertips, with pages heavy
enough to be satisfying when he turns them and a story familiar enough not to tax his aching head.

‘I have invented a mask that makes me look like anybody.’ The words flow from the paper and trigger an instant connection in his mind. ‘People will not even turn round in the streets.’

His attention shifts over to Hannibal, head down with eyes lost beneath his lashes, absorbed in his art. Opportunities to study Hannibal without being watched in return are rare.

Nobody looks at Hannibal except when he wants them to, and always in the way he wants them to. Even Jack, now that he knows, doesn’t actually see him. He sees the Chesapeake Ripper, a target, a long-frustrated goal with which to crown his career. Only Will sees all of him.

And Will’s eyes are dragged back to the book, to the other sentiment he read there. ‘Now I want to live like everybody else. I want to have a wife like everybody else and to take her out on Sundays.’

Hannibal’s not looking for any wife, but there’s something in the way they’re sitting now, Will in one chair and Hannibal in another, with no words passing between them for the last half an hour. Hannibal’s drawing instead of entertaining his guest, because Will’s not a guest any more. Hannibal’s acting like he belongs here. This has become… domestic.

Will pulls himself back from fiction and the desires spelled out there, closing the book without marking the page. He knows what he has to do tonight; he only needs his opening to lead into it.

He lays the book down on the table next to his armchair, stands up and walks slowly to where Hannibal sits, still wrapped up in the world he’s creating on paper; the defined, muscular bodies, laid out in death and despair and artistically draped sheets.

Hannibal glances up briefly, then continues his shading as he explains the subject and the context. Words pass back and forth between them, simultaneously meaningless and filled with layers, until Hannibal draws back into the room enough to look up and give Will his full attention.

He’s beautiful.

It’s not a word Will thought he’d ever apply to a man; definitely not to Hannibal with his angular bone structure and severely parted hair, and now with a scab along one eyebrow. But he’s watching Will with features softened by the light and the expression written over them, eyes tiger-flecked with reflected fire, and it’s the only word that fits.

“Achilles wished all Greeks would die, so that he and Patroclus could conquer Troy alone.”

Life doesn’t conform to fantasy, even in myths.

He’s been stepping closer to the desk as they talked, looking at the drawing, at Hannibal, whose throat is stretched long, muscle and tendon defined by the angle. Will’s hand twitches and curls by his thigh, the ever-present temptation to reach out and stroke. His mind is filling in the detail, the stubble he knows is there at this hour, the catch of it at his fingertips.

The silence stretches, but it’s not uncomfortable, as they stare, locked into each other.

Will turns away, from the desk, from Hannibal, stepping towards the fire when he begins his speech with words that are inherently, undeniably true.

“This isn’t sustainable.”
His eyes are drawn to the pile of notebooks spreading across the desk, then back to the one in his hands; lengthy notes meticulously hand-written, hours of conversation and revelation detailed with analyses and conclusions and recommendations for future behaviour.

He tears the pages free, hesitates and looks up before he tosses them into the flames. “Won’t your patients need these after you’ve gone?”

Hannibal runs quick fingers along the spines of the books on the balcony, selects one to toss down to the office floor. “The FBI will pore over my notes if I left them intact. I would spare my patients the scrutiny.”

Will bends to pick it up, and his hands and breath still at the image of a clock face, distorted with all the numbers crumpled together in one quadrant. “These are your notes on me.”

Hannibal cocks his head and peers over the railing, amusement soft in his voice. “So they are.”

Will leafs through the pages, finding clock after clock with digits skewed and lines scattered, his gut tilting and aching at the worsening progression displayed there. Hannibal cares for his patients enough to destroy their records rather than have their secrets probed by strangers. Will was his patient, and Hannibal gave him a fake diagnosis, left him rudderless and terrified through blackouts and seizures, and risked permanent damage to Will’s brain.

There’s movement in his periphery, the tap of Hannibal’s shoes on wood as he descends the ladder, and Will’s fixed on the poison seeping from the book in his hands.

Will could never take that chance with Hannibal; his intelligence, curiosity and humour are a vital and integral part of him, yet Hannibal played with Will’s health like he was a game of Monopoly, rolling dice across the board and basing his strategy on their fall.

Hannibal steps up behind him and Will drags his eyes from the page to Hannibal’s face at his shoulder. The same man stands beside him now burning his career, his life and everything he’s constructed over decades to this withering pile of ashes, because Will asked him to. It’s impossible to tell the reality from the lies any more.

He tears the papers from their binding and offers them to the dancing flames; they flare brighter, and the past is consumed in spreading lines of warm, deadly fire.

Hannibal watches their destruction alongside him, then turns back to the expanse of his office, its precision defiled now by the books scattered across the wood and the rugs. “When we have gone from this life, Jack Crawford and the FBI behind us, I will always have this place.”
There’s something almost wistful in his voice, and Will tilts his head to look at him. “In your memory palace?”

“My palace is vast, even by Mediaeval standards. The foyer is the Norman chapel in Palermo.” The pensive note disappears, a smile hovering at the edges of his lips as Hannibal describes for him the beautiful spaces built into his head. Will sees them as he talks, the vaulted ceilings and ancient stone gathering around them, the elegance and severity and bloodied centuries-long history of locations so much more suited to Hannibal than Baltimore.

He’s listening to Hannibal’s secrets, and it’s natural to respond, to tell him about the stream, the river and the fishing line that’s always been his retreat from a world that becomes too much.

Hannibal understands instantly; he always does.

Hannibal walks over to the desk, picks up another of the notebooks slated for destruction and lets it fall open, studying the words there. “If I’m ever apprehended, my memory palace will serve as more than a mnemonic system. I will live there.”

Will follows him over, his fingers tight around a book cover emptied of its content. “Could you be happy there?” The answer feels vital, decisive, though it can’t change his choices.

There’s the slightest of pauses before Hannibal speaks, meaningless in anyone else, but an operatic overture for this man. “All the palace chambers are not lovely, light and bright.” He lifts his eyes from the page to meet Will’s. “In the vaults of our hearts and brains, danger waits. There are holes in the floor of the mind.”

Will doesn’t know of any holes in the floor of his mind. There are too many over-lapping layers built up to leave gaps there, only edges to trip the unwary where carpet and hardwood and linoleum meet, and even his own feet can’t hold purchase on the truth.

He turns back to the pile of books, so close to Hannibal as he picks up another, careful to keep the thin layer of air against contact before he takes it to the fire to destroy, making space between them he can breathe in.

Always there’s too much space and never enough, the contradiction undeniable, and yet fluidly co-existing.

Hannibal must pick up on his mood, because he maintains the distance, and doesn’t push for more conversation. There’s only them and the books, and the sooty aromatic scent of the disappearing pages.

They finish burning Hannibal’s world with the crackle of flames between them to fill the silence.

“I feel poisoned.”

Alana’s voice is quiet in the space of the borrowed conference room, her eyes distant as she finishes her confession.

Guilt creeps hollow through him at the way he’s been avoiding her. She’s needed to talk about this for days, needed someone who knows.

He looks down at his reflection in the polished surface of the table and swallows his regret. “We’ve all been poisoned.” No-one who has extensive contact with Hannibal emerges intact. Everyone in his circle is more flexible about the law than they used to be.
Will’s become flexible about more than that.

She takes another breath, deeper in the silence. “You’re still in the thick of it.”

His hand twitches on the wood, smearing prints across the veneer. “I’m getting through the worst of it.”

Her lips part, and then close, a hesitation before she commits. “Did you ask Hannibal to break things off with me?”

“I…” He’s not sure there’s a good answer to give her. “Kind of?” It was more that Hannibal offered, but it doesn’t sound great put that way either. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be. I’m not.” Her fingers curl on the arm of her chair. “When I think of –”

“Don’t. Don’t think about it.” He knows everything Hannibal’s hands have done, what they did to Abigail, and he thinks of those hands on his skin, how much he loves it when they are. He dreams about it, and he wakes up hard and aching and sick.

Alana leans forward, closer, her elbow on the table. Her face is different, bare of make-up. “Is there anything Jack should know that you haven’t told him?” Her eyes are gentle, filled with an almost overbearing concern. “Something that maybe someone else should tell him?”

Will’s jaw tightens and he looks along the table and speaks through his teeth. “There really isn’t.”

“How far did you have to go, Will?” Her voice is steady behind the layered emotions, control in every inflection, and it’s Doctor Bloom who’s sitting across from him now.

He quirks his lips and glances sideways at her. “I’d say any distance at all is too far when it comes to Hannibal.”

“Will…”

He fixes his gaze on her, unwavering, uncompromising. “It was my plan from the start, Alana. I chose it. All of it.”

Her eyes drop down to his jacket where it conceals his forearms, where she saw bruises.

“I start that too,” he says, because it’s the truth. “Every time.”

“And he finishes it?” A note of determination now, more push in her tone.

“We both do,” he says, flat. It doesn’t matter exactly how it happens. The details change, but it ends with both of them lost in dizzying lust, clinging together and mutually sated.

“You can’t blame yourself for the things he did, Will.” Her words are softer again, but the edge is still there beneath them. “Don’t punish yourself for him.”

He lifts his eyes up into nothing, to the meeting of walls and ceiling, and speaks level and even. “He was amazingly predictive, reading your body language and your responses so he knew what you wanted from him without you having to ask. He never did anything you wouldn’t enjoy, and he’d know, you wouldn’t have to say it. Sex always happened to your timing and desires, the pace and mechanics of it suiting your mood. He was the most considerate lover you could hope for, and he was so good, you never even thought to ask if maybe he wanted something different that night.”
He looks back to Alana when he finishes, finds her staring at him with blanched face and wide, shocked eyes.

It was cruel, after he told her not to think of it, but he has a point to make. “Do you miss him?”

“No.” She shakes her head emphatically. “At first, when he broke things off and I didn’t know why, but now… no.”

Will locks onto her gaze, and his voice is steady and certain. “Neither will I.”

The lamb was slow-cooked through most of the day. Hannibal describes its preparation in exquisite detail, the mustard seed farfalle and sage, the minted pea shoots with their pods. The meat’s so tender it falls from the bone rather than being carved, and almost dissolves in his mouth before he can chew.

There’s a light and delicate piano piece playing that Will doesn’t recognise, the scrape of cutlery on porcelain, the low snap of the fire behind him. There’s Hannibal sipping Merlot in its glow, eyes reluctant to leave Will’s for the food on his own plate.

He looks tired tonight, older, a puffiness around his lids and lines deepened across his face.

Will drops his eyes back to the lamb and takes another bite, the flavours swelling and rolling over his tongue.

He told Alana he wouldn’t miss him.

He might miss these dinners. Some of them, at least.

When they finish eating, Hannibal doesn’t rise to clear, or to fetch dessert. They sit with their wine, the plates before them holding only stripped bones and inedible decoration, and Hannibal’s fingers play along the stem of his glass. “There are evenings when potential hangs in the air – electricity ready to arc across the heavy sky or spear down towards the earth.”

It’s going to be one of those conversations, rife with symbolism and undercurrents. “Potentially deadly,” Will offers.

“But also starkly and undeniably beautiful.” Hannibal’s gaze moves up from the table settings to Will’s face. “No-one looks away from the lightning, Will.”

“We are fascinated by what we fear.” True for humans since they harnessed fire. Perhaps more true for Will than most.

A pause before Hannibal speaks, a soft sound as his lips part. “We take that same force and normalise it, keep it everywhere around us.”

“Yes. But no longer feared. We embrace it and we mourn its absence when it is taken away.” Hannibal looks around him, at the house and the belongings they both know he won’t see again after tomorrow. “We are surrounded by electricity in this moment, the alternating current shifting back and forth through the wires in every wall of this room. Yet alternating current is a mere convenience of efficiency and safety.”

Will quirks his lips and completes the thought. “To be useful, it must first be transformed into
direct current.”

“Which carries greater risk.” Hannibal’s eyes slide back to meet Will’s, heavy-lidded and dark.
“You have been alternating for some time, Will. Are you ready to become direct?”

Will raises his eyebrows and gives a soft huff of air. “That decision’s already been made.”

Hannibal tilts his head, his finger tapping once on the table. “And your direction is that Jack must die?”

His eyes flick back to Hannibal, his face held still and neutral. “It’s… necessary,” he says slowly, feeling his way along the words. “What happens to Jack has been pre-ordained.”

The silence stretches oddly, a longer gap between thoughts than Hannibal ever leaves. Will reaches for his wine, the Merlot lingering rich and fruity on his tongue after he swallows.

“We could disappear now. Tonight.”

Will stares, fixated, drawn; the words he’s hearing fit no plan, no sense of who they are, or are pretending to be.

“Feed your dogs,” Hannibal continues. “Leave a note for Alana and never see her or Jack again. Almost polite.”

Will looks down at his ravaged plate, at the exposed rack of ribs and its peeled fruits displayed at the table’s centre. “This would be our last supper.” It is; it was. They won’t eat tomorrow.

“Of this life,” Hannibal says softly. “I served lamb.”

The significance can’t be missed. “Sacrificial?”

“I don’t need a sacrifice.” Hannibal’s gaze is locked on a set point at the far end of the table. “Do you?”

He’s so fucking convincing. Will could almost believe it. “I need him to know. If I confessed to Jack Crawford right now…”

Hannibal finally turns to look at him before he speaks, and Will can’t deny him the shared contact. “I would forgive you.”

It’s a near-forcible effort to remind himself that Hannibal killed Abigail. He befriended her, helped her, told her he’d protect her, shaped himself into everything she needed in that moment, and then he murdered her because it was more convenient that way.

Hannibal’s voice remains low, with a trace of something that might almost be hope. “If Jack were to tell you all is forgiven, would you accept his forgiveness?”

It can be hard to remember, when Hannibal’s eyes are gentle, caring, in the moments when his smile is a shaft of unadulterated joy, that everything he shows is a manipulative lie. Hannibal’s pretence is as deftly nuanced and as fake as Will’s own, and Will can’t forget what he knows.

What he knows is that they wouldn’t last six months. Hannibal would grow bored, Will would become a hindrance, and Hannibal will kill him, just like he killed Abigail.

Will doesn’t want to die. He doesn’t want to kill Hannibal to save himself.

He’s not sure he wants to arrest him, but it’s the only viable option he can see.
He's not sure he wants to arrest him, but it's the only viable option he can see. The skin draws tighter around his eyes and his mouth twists downwards. “Jack isn’t offering forgiveness. He wants… justice.” Justice for Abigail. It’s all Will has left. “He wants to see you. See who you are. See what I’ve become.” He has to stop, control the roughness in his voice. “He wants the truth.” There’s something crawling over his face that isn’t a smile, because Will wants the truth, needs the truth.

If only he knew what it was.

Hannibal’s face is still, his features harsh in the light, until he finally turns away. “To the truth, then. And all its consequences.”

It sounds like a toast, but when Hannibal presses his wine glass to his lips, he’s internalised, solitary. Moments later, he slides from his seat to clear the dishes.

Normally Will would go to help him – he hasn’t played the guest role in weeks – but Hannibal wants his space, his kitchen his emotional anchor, and Will’s easier with a few minutes apart too.

He can’t figure it out, Hannibal’s sudden urge to protect Jack. Jack is the enemy, full of suspicion and insinuation; dangerous. Hannibal calls Jack his friend, but that can’t be enough to stop him. The shapes don’t connect into any pattern Will knows.

They talked about it, planned it together. Or more honestly, Will made suggestions and Hannibal quickly followed.

He drains the last of his wine in successive, gulping mouthfuls.

Hannibal returns from the kitchen bearing dessert and a brightened attitude, quick enthusiastic words as he talks about summers spent travelling through France, discovering the regional variants of its cuisine. The clafoutis is warm from the oven, a rich sugared flan scattered with black cherries and a hint of almonds, and Will finds his appetite restored while Hannibal describes the Roman bridge crossing the river in Limoges and the city’s rich history of porcelain manufacture.

Will watches him reminisce, absorbed in the details of his features and fleeting expressions, and the last of the earlier tension dissolves as a new one rises, their organic connection stirring through his cock. Dinner and sex, it’s the natural flow of their evenings, and Will wants him and anticipates the progression, his erection swelling and ready.

His mind isn’t ready.

Will watches as Hannibal slides his fork between lips darkened with cherries, lips that brush and press against his own, lips that curl around him and smear with his come, and he can’t stay. He can’t stay the night, knowing it’s the last time he’ll touch him, that tomorrow he’ll see him locked forever into a cage.

He has to stay. Hannibal will know something’s wrong if he leaves.

His stomach churns around the food, light and rippling with desire, clenching tight with echoes of portent. Hannibal’s going to take Will to share his bed, to lavish care and enthusiasm over his skin, and Will’s going to have to smile and kiss him and keep the Judas from his eyes.

He only knows one way he can do it.

He’ll ask Hannibal to fuck him.

Hannibal’s in his head now, a fixed point with tendrils winding into every part of him, every piece
of his life. When he cedes control to Hannibal, when Hannibal pushes into him, his mind and body relax into the immediacy of them together – no decisions, no thought, only the shared physicality and desire, their mutual delight and enjoyment of each other a flood that washes anything else from the deepest pockets of his brain.

It’s not something he likes to do often – after everything Hannibal did to him, voluntarily giving power to him should be terrifying. In reality there’s the surging thrill as he lets go and the blissful comfort that follows, and the only disquiet lies in recognising that unwanted truth in himself when he wakes again in the early hours.

He’ll need that tonight, the purity of it, the perfect distraction of Hannibal inside him and pressed against his skin, no existence outside his body and the man who surrounds him and makes him feel.

Will chews slowly, drawing out dessert, but eventually there’s only the scrape of his fork on empty china and Hannibal rises from the table.

Will follows him out into the hallway, where the stairs climb towards the bedroom, and Hannibal stops instead of approaching them. He strokes his hand along Will’s cheek, and Will instantly leans in. Hannibal turns his head to kiss Will gently on the corner of his mouth, then pulls away.

“I’m afraid I’m feeling a little unwell this evening.” He’s only inches away, but there’s a note of the earlier distraction back between them. “You are of course welcome to stay the night, regardless.”

There’s a pool of relief lapping at the back of Will’s mind, and a crushing wave of disappointment and loss, of something he’ll never have again.

“No, it’s okay, I wouldn’t want to… impose.” He stumbles over the word; everything he’s doing is an imposition, on Hannibal’s hospitality, on his trust, on his life.

Hannibal cups Will’s chin and brushes his thumb over his lip. “You never could,” he tells him, and the hollow nausea of guilt swells further in Will’s stomach and squeezes tight around his ribs.

Maybe if Hannibal weren’t the unhesitatingly ruthless monster Will sees in the blackest recesses of his mind…

But he looks at him and he knows that he is.

Will presses his hand to Hannibal’s, because the next time he touches him will to be arrest him. “Good night, Hannibal,” he says, and Hannibal blinks at the use of his name.

The lines around his eyes and down by his mouth soften, but he doesn’t smile. “Good night, Will.”

Will collects his coat, slides his arms into the sleeves and wraps it close around him. He steps out of the house into the chill Baltimore wind, and the door closes behind him, shutting out the light.

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The last day is long.

He has no classes – that’s probably good for the trainees, because he’s not feeling sociable – and he spends it at home.

He takes a generous hike with the dogs shortly after dawn, close to six miles. Buster’s fully
recovered now after the attack by Tier and he makes the whole distance with no drop in enthusiasm.

Later in the morning, Will calls Hannibal and asks about his health, and he assures him he’s feeling better and still expecting him for their dinner that evening. Hannibal’s unfailingly polite, but the conversation’s short and stilted, padded with hollow platitudes and too many pauses. Will knows the line is tapped, and Hannibal suspects it.

When he hangs up, he wonders again about Hannibal’s suggestion to spare Jack. To abandon their plan and just go quietly together, leaving Jack unharmed.

He doesn’t doubt that Hannibal will do it, once they’re in place. He’ll do it because Will asked him to, and because a part of him wants to. Hannibal will try to kill Jack, and Will’s going to stop him.

He has to stop him, because there’s only one window to concern himself with in either the kitchen or the dining room. Wherever Hannibal chooses to make his move, Will can keep himself between Hannibal and Jack’s snipers, make sure they won’t get a clear shot.

He’s not concerned about Jack harming Hannibal. They’re close enough in weight, and while Jack has the training, it’s been years since he did real field work, since he personally wrestled a suspect to the ground. Will’s confident Hannibal can hold Jack in check long enough, and then he can move in behind to cuff him while Hannibal’s attention is all on Jack.

It’s going to work. It has to work.

Nobody else gets to die.

He eats a microwaved lunch he has no appetite for and waits through the stretching afternoon, the numbers on the clock by his bed reluctant to change. There are student essays he should be marking, a paper on the effect of temperature on Dermestid beetle activity in corpses he could be reading for peer review, but his brain won’t stay with the minutiae.

The sun sets and darkness wraps itself around his house.

He changes out of his dog clothes into something more suited to Hannibal, and then his phone rings, and Alana’s telling him Kade Prurnell has exploded a bomb in their plans, everything shattered and scattered beyond any chance of repair.

“They’ve issued a warrant for your arrest, Will. For acting as an accessory to entrapment.” His eyes are closing as she speaks. The FBI are going to arrest him. Again. Shit. “And for the murder of Randall Tier.”

He snaps alert at the addition. At murder.

This time he’s not going to sit here quietly and wait for them to come for him.

The dogs have started to bark.

“And Will?” His thumb’s right over the end call button; he barely stops it in time. “I told Jack.”

He presses down and cuts her off. There are cars crunching over the gravel of his driveway, two dark SUVs.

Fuck. No wonder Jack hasn’t called him; he’s not sure he can trust him now. Jack will go after Hannibal alone, and he’ll go there early.
Will sinks down below the window to get his handgun from the desk, grabs his coat and heads out the back door towards the woods.

He stops running when he’s sure he’s alone, pausing against a tree to catch his breath, the sweat chilled on his forehead.

He doesn’t have a plan when he takes out the phone – he only needs to know what’s happening. The wait through the ringing stretches, interminable.

“Hello.” Hannibal’s voice is undeniably normal, unconcerned and soothing, and Jack’s not there yet, everything’s still okay.

He doesn’t know what to say, what words he can use that won’t wreck everything; his options are contracting down around him, leaving only the narrowest of tunnels to crawl through, and none of them are anything he wants.

He swallows hard and settles for, “They know.” He hangs up without waiting for an answer.

His nearest neighbours are a quarter mile away, and he sets out at a lope again, grateful for all the running he does with the dogs.

The lights from the house draw him in; he’s a quiet, hassle-free resident, and they accept his story of the Volvo’s mechanical problems, offering to drive him into Tysons where he can easily get a cab.

The rain starts almost half way to Baltimore. It’s a slow drizzle at first that progresses to a downpour, and traffic slows, the red glare of brake lights smeared across the windshield of the taxi with each sweep of the wipers.

Time’s barely moved all day and now it’s racing, and Will’s struggling to track the numbers on his watch as the car crawls into the city. He sees them skew and twist before his eyes, falling into distortion and lies.

And then eventually they’re there, pulling up opposite Chandler Square.

He paid the fare in advance, and he gets out of the cab and jogs across the street towards the house. The water’s almost a wall, and he’s drenched before he makes it to the steps up from the sidewalk, rivulets running cold down the open neck of his shirt. There’s light, too much light spilling from the doorway…

“Will!” Alana steps out from behind the bushes near the half-open door.

He blinks the drips from his eyelashes and doesn’t ask why she’s there. “What’s happening?”

“I think Jack’s inside. I heard crashes and yelling, so I called and reported gunshots.” She’s quick and to the point, and she’s done exactly the right thing.

“You didn’t go in?”

She points above her head, to the arc of cloth and metal shielding her from the rain. “Defend myself with an umbrella? No.”

Will draws his gun, and looks through into the hallway, seeing nothing out of place, no hint of violence. “Stay here,” he says automatically, though that’s what she was doing anyway.

He pushes the door fully open and steps inside.
It’s all so familiar, the dark wood and reflected lamps, the pale wall he pressed Hannibal against with his fingers curled harsh at his throat. It’s strange and eerie without Hannibal here, without his eyes on him, his hands on him reaching for his coat.

He takes a few more steps, his feet quiet on the rug, knowing which floorboards creak beneath. Water slides from his hair beneath his collar and on down his neck.

_Bang._

It’s low and loud, the sound of something very heavy brought up short against something solid.

A burning urge to run, to know, but he sticks with his training, slow and measured. Past the rows of framed prints, past the dining room of so much food and music and Hannibal flat against the table while Will held him pinned to the wood and fucked all the way into him.

The same sound as he edges towards the kitchen, unaltered with the same result, the continued resistance of force.

He turns the final corner and there’s Hannibal, and there’s _everything_, so much visual and sensory input crashing through his head, detail upon detail, each one an impact that’s almost physical.

Hannibal turning towards him, a pointed silver blade emerging from each red-soaked hand. Blood scent hanging thick and rich in his nose, heavy in every breath. Wrinkled dress shirt with rolled up sleeves, crimson soaked all across one shoulder, smeared down waist and sleeve. Shattered glass cupboard, fragments sprayed along the floor, wooden cutting board impaled by a carving knife. Hair clinging and clotted all around Hannibal’s face, down over his eyes, blood streaked beneath each nostril to his lip. Picture knocked crooked on the wall, dark liquid trailing to the closed pantry door and seeping beneath it. The rise of Hannibal’s shoulders and chest, the stretch of cotton tight around him, the panted exhales of exertion.

He sees it, what happened in this room, what’s still happening.

He was right. Hannibal held his own against Jack, and more.

“Hello, Will. I’m afraid you’re late for dinner.” Hannibal glances to the door beside him, a flash of caustic humour chafing and forced through his voice. “We started without you.”

He’s seen it before, seen it in his head, so many of this man’s crime scenes and so many details, but it’s not the same as _seeing_ it, and a shiver runs through his entire body.

It’s not revulsion.

His arms drop down, the gun held loose by his thigh. “You were supposed to leave.” Heavy emphasis on the last word, because this didn’t have to happen, and nobody else gets to _die_.

“We couldn’t leave without you.” Hannibal’s gaze goes beyond him and over his head. “You can come down now,” he calls, and there are feet on the stairs behind Will.

He whips around to look, weapon raised again for the threat, even as part of his brain screams at him that he’s _turning his back on the murderer with the knives_, and she’s there on the steps, she’s real and alive with huge, stark eyes, and she’s so very scared. “Abigail.” Her name falls out of him on a breath he didn’t realise he was holding.

She’s still now, half way down and staring. “I didn’t know what to do. So I just did what he told me.”
He thumbs the safety back on and lowers the gun, and she’s coming closer, still cautious, one slow stair at a time, but she’s here, and real, so real, the scar on her neck paler and finer than he’s ever seen it, and Hannibal didn’t kill her, he protected her, like he said he would, and all of Will’s assumptions and calculations have been flawed, have been wrong.

She stops again at the bottom, her eyes flicking over his shoulder onto Hannibal, stunned and shocky and wide. “He said you’d come with us.”

He looks back towards Hannibal, to the red-streaked shirt and the long glint of steel, to the spreading pool of blood oozing beneath the pantry door; too much information and so many possibilities and so few, and the police are coming and there’s no time –

Hannibal sets the carving knives down on the chair by the pantry and steps closer to Will, his hand reaching up to cup his face. “Time did reverse.” There’s something like resignation written across his eyes as his other hand slides beneath Will’s coat to his waist, a single, shuddering breath before he speaks again. “The teacup that I shattered did come together.” His fingers stroke a path along the curve of Will’s ear, combing into his wet, clinging hair, and then there’s pain, sharp, sudden, unimaginable pain spearing and dragging across his belly, jerking, further, more, more, forever pain…

His body convulses and staggers, Hannibal’s grip tight behind his head pulling him close, and he clutches, clings, sagging and shivering as Hannibal wraps around him, his chin held on his shoulder, and finally he’s dragging in almost enough air to breathe.

Hand at his shoulder, hand in his hair, curling and soothing, and nothing can take the edge from the pain. “A place was made for Abigail in your world.” A vague awareness of her behind him, that first shocked gasp and the hitched breath of tears, but his world is only Hannibal and the searing fire across his gut.

He had a gun once and now he doesn’t, and he can’t remember letting go.

He doesn’t know when he let go of anything, but he knows he did.

“I wanted to surprise you.” The bitterness of acid burns through Hannibal’s words and in his head. “And you – you wanted to surprise me.” Will’s feet are sliding, smearing through his own blood, struggling for grip that isn’t there.

Hannibal holds him and cradles him, and hates him and lets him fall.

The impact is a fresh surge of agony and he curls around his belly, gripping tight through the coat. GASPING, aching for air, each surge of his lungs sending another shockwave below his diaphragm; scrabbling half-sprawled against the cupboards and Hannibal broadcasting even more pain at him through his own, because he knows, and he can’t know, but he does, and how long has he known?

“You would deny me my life.” Hannibal’s words are quiet now, collected, but his throat jumps and swallows.

Words. He knows there are words. He can make words, he has to. “No… not your life… no…” Hannibal’s lip twitches upwards, the briefest wrinkle through his nose. “Even now, you’re still lying, still deceiving.”

“I – I – no – “ He can’t say it, what he means, what he meant, no breath and no control of it.

Hannibal’s head tilts an inch and he leans just a touch closer. “Did you believe my compassion for
“Not – not –“ Compassion, no, it wasn’t, he tried. He heaves in air and steers it, forces it through his lips as his mouth shapes the words. “I called.”

“So you would rip me from my life, send me into exile with nothing and think that was enough?”

Nothing? Hannibal can’t have nothing, he’d made plans, they had plans… “I didn’t… know…” So many things he didn’t know, about everything, about Hannibal, about himself.

Hannibal straightens back to his full height and looks away. “And nor did I. It seems we are both to pay the price for being fools.”

There’s still Abigail. She’s not nothing, she’s not, and Hannibal won’t be alone…

“I forgive you Will.” Hannibal’s voice is soft and oddly genuine, but the fierce, shocking pain in his gut says so much more, and there’s no clemency in its burn. “Will you forgive me?”

Hannibal’s eyes move to her, still standing frozen near the base of the stairs, her mouth half open, her face a wreck of streaked tears. “Abigail,” he says gently. He holds out his hand to her, and she walks towards him, trembling, like she wouldn’t know how to stop, and takes it. He guides her close, holding her against him with her back to his chest, and they’re both looking down at Will. “Abigail is my gift to you. I saved her for us.” Hannibal drops his cheek to her hair, eyes on Will over her shoulder. “She’s our daughter, Will, yours and mine. It would be unfair of me to keep her, when you cannot.”

He sees it then, he knows it, and, “No… no… don’t,” and Hannibal’s hand comes up to her neck. “No, no, no,” as her eyes see and widen and flinch before the blade slices deep across her throat. And then there’s blood, all blood, red on Abigail’s struggling fingers, her shocked, agonised face, and he flinches and turns away from the hot spray of it over shoulder, his cheek, yelling out his own agony at the movement and the loss as Hannibal drops her twitching to the floor, unwanted, rejected, like Will.

Hannibal crouches close, peering into him, ignoring the tormented writhing and choking of their daughter two feet away. A single drop of sweat runs down the side of his nose; it has to be sweat because nothing else makes sense when he’s talking to Will of his option to escape the pain and choose the stream.

There are answers, and questions, so many questions, but he can’t make words any more, only a gasped grunt with each breath, each jagged stab of agony as he clings tight to his own blood-sodden coat and braces for the next spasm of his lungs.

He’s slipping sideways, down to the floor, to the blood, and Hannibal’s gone, he’s leaving, on his feet and striding away, all purpose with no glances back. There’s only Abigail, still moving, clutching feebly at her neck, and he crawls forward, reaching, futile. He couldn’t save her last time, only Hannibal could, and Hannibal doesn’t want to, he doesn’t care…

She’s moving beneath his hand, but he’s failing, he’s failed everyone, the floor and the blood reaching for him and sucking him down.

His thoughts are becoming almost as splintered as the words, and then even those are gone.
Epilogue

He’s in the hospital, surrounded by the low hum of machines and restricting lengths of bandages and tubes.

He knows where he is. It’s not his first time awake. He drifts in and out; he’s been doing that for a while.
He doesn’t open his eyes. There’s nothing to see.

There’s only what’s in his head, but he opens his eyes anyway when Abigail comes.

Her face is still, practical and focused, a thick white gauze stretched across her throat.

“They said it was surgical. He wanted us to live.”

Will blinks and breathes, feels the ache in his gut with every rise of his chest, the pull of the stitches. “He left us to die.”

“But we didn’t.” There’s the first play of a smile across her face, a hint of something positive, a chance. “You’re still here.” Abigail, who was intended as a gift, the perfect gift selected with such care, then destroyed in rage when Will rejected the giver.

“Do you believe I sent Randall to kill you, Will? Is it easier for you to believe that?”

The answer was clear even then. He’s never really believed Hannibal wanted him dead. It’s fully within the possibilities for Hannibal to test him.

He knows now what he needs to do. It’s going to be a while before he can.

It’s hard to return her smile when everything hurts this much, but they understand each other.

He lies back and waits to heal.

Chapter End Notes

When I wrote Bad Connections last September, it was a fun little porny one shot. I never intended to rewrite the second half of season two, but after I’d written ‘just one more’ a couple of times, it seemed too late to stop! I’m sorry that the hot sex had to take a sharp left into major angst and canonical betrayal, but there’s just no way to fix this - season two Will isn't in a place where he could make a different choice. I did save Alana, if it helps at all?

Anyway, thanks to everyone who came along for the ride, and stuck with this series through its dramatic tonal shift!

End Notes

You can always find me here on tumblr.

And here's a post to reblog if anyone's feeling extra generous.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!