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**The Doctor and the Orderly**

by cinnabongene

Summary

Two short fics exploring the dynamic between Hannibal Lecter and Barney Matthews, written for a fellow Hannibal fan on tumblr.
Chapter 1

There was a flu going around Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane like... well, like an airborne virus in a facility where many people were confined and not allowed to leave. While it was difficult tending to any sick serial killer, Barney just hoped that Dr. Lecter wouldn’t fall victim to the virus. It was always the strong, composed ones who were the most fussy when they fell ill.

Barney quirked an eyebrow in perplexion when he saw that Dr. Lecter had returned his dinner hardly eaten. It wasn’t like him to pick at his food like that; to refuse meals was considered rude, no matter how disgusting the food may be. “I know it’s not the ‘gourmet’ food you used to cook before you were caught, but I thought you would have gotten used to it by now,” he remarked to the doctor.

“Oh, it’s not that. Not entirely. I just haven’t been all that hungry lately,” explained Hannibal.

Barney sighed. “Alright. This had better not be the start of some complicated ploy to break out of here.”

“I assure you, it is not,” said the doctor simply.

The orderly took the uneaten portion of Lecter’s dinner to be disposed of, a skeptical scowl gracing his features the whole way.

Later that same night, as Barney sat reading a book which Hannibal had recommended to him— he had to admit, the man had impeccable taste in literature—his ever vigilant ears picked up the sound of retching and coughing from the last cell on the right. With a heavy sigh he set down the book and ventured down the dark corridor.

In the dim light Barney could see Doctor Lecter uncharacteristically hunched over on himself, sitting on the side of his cot. “I’m terribly sorry,” Hannibal murmured, pale as a corpse. “It would appear I have caught the flu.”

Barney almost felt bad for tying Hannibal up in his straightjacket so he could be moved to a holding cell while his cell was mopped. The orderly could feel the feverish heat radiating off him and the shivers that ran through his body. Still, he didn’t consider for one second loosening the bonds. Hannibal Lecter was a highly dangerous killer, even when he had the flu. “Sorry, I know this can’t be comfortable right now,” he said.

“It’s alright, Barney. You’re only doing your job. I would not expect anything else,” Hannibal murmured weakly from behind his mask.

Once Barney and the armed guards had safely returned him to his cell, Hannibal laid awake in his cot, tossing and turning. Torn between being too hot and being too cold, he couldn’t decide if he wanted to ask for more blankets or kick the ones he had to the floor. When he had been a medical doctor, Hannibal had gotten used to seeing other people sick. He had even nurtured illness in others in the case of Special Agent Will Graham. But he had never quite gotten used to being sick himself. Logically, he knew it was just a simple flu and it would pass, but he had never been sick in prison before. He had never felt so helpless and vulnerable to an illness. “Barney?” he called for the orderly. Barney always took good care of him; Barney would make sure he was okay.

“Do you need anything, Dr. Lecter?” asked the orderly, appearing on the other side of the cold, metal bars.
“My fever feels to me to be at least one hundred and two degrees,” Hannibal prefaced his request. “Would it be possible for me to get some ice cubes?”

Barney seemed to consider it for a moment. “Ice cubes are hard and they could be fashioned into a weapon...” The orderly watched as Hannibal’s pallid expression dropped in disappointment. “But I could get you some crushed ice.”

“Thank you. I would appreciate that.”

Hannibal waited, trying hard to remain patient, as Barney went to get some ice cubes from the freezer in the staff lounge. The orderly ran the ice through the blender until he was certain there were no more sharp edges, and poured it into a soft foam cup. Thinking of an even better way to cool Dr. Lecter’s fever than ice, Barney also grabbed a small washcloth—the precise size so that it could not be used to strangle anyone—and ran it under cold water. On his way back, he walked purposefully so that the ice would not melt.

“Thank you, Barney,” said Hannibal, gratefully taking the ice and the wet washcloth as they were passed to him on his tray. Pressing the cold cloth to his burning face, he sighed in relief. “Most people would not have taken the time to accommodate me like this.”

Barney shrugged. “I’m just doing my job, Dr. Lecter. If you cooperate with me, I’ll cooperate with you. Is there anything else you need?”

“Just silence so that I may try to sleep,” he said, lying back down on his cot.

“Well I can’t guarantee silence from the other patients, but you won’t hear anything from me,” the orderly assured.

Hannibal nodded and placed the washcloth over his eyes, creating the illusion that he was in total darkness instead of under the dim glow of the asylum’s fluorescent lights. “Goodnight, Barney.”

“Goodnight, Dr. Lecter.”

The next morning, Hannibal awoke to a scent that had not graced his sensitive nostrils since he had been incarcerated, the scent of quality food. His empty stomach rumbled in appreciation. The scent was accompanied by the sound of footsteps which Lecter recognized to be Barney’s.

“How are you feeling?” the orderly asked, seeing that Hannibal was awake.

“I feel as though my fever has gone down considerably,” he replied. “I hope you do not mind me asking what it is that you have brought.” Hannibal gestured to the foam bowl in Barney’s hands.

“Chicken soup, my wife made it. She wasn’t very happy when she found out who she had made it for, but I figured the last thing you needed to put on your stomach is the food they serve here.”

Lecter smiled the genuine grin of a very polite serpent as Barney passed the soup to him on his tray. “Thank you.” Taking a tentative sip, he was delighted to find that it tasted much better than what was passed off as chicken soup by the chefs here. Chicken did not have quite the same rich and savory flavor as human flesh, but Hannibal decided it would be best to keep that observation to himself. “Please tell your wife I am grateful that her culinary skills are more refined than those of the hospital’s chefs.”

“I’m sure she’ll be glad to hear that,” said Barney, half-joking, doubting his wife would understand the gravity of having her cooking complemented by Hannibal Lecter. The orderly pulled up a chair in front of the cannibal’s cell. Conversations with Dr. Lecter never ceased to be stimulating. “Dr. Chilton seems to think you’re faking your illness so we’ll lower security around
you,” he informed the prisoner.

Hannibal looked up from his soup, the pallor beginning to disappear from his visage. “And I seem to think Dr. Chilton is faking his credentials to run a state hospital for the criminally insane, but that does not change anything either.” He took another sip, the warm broth soothing his sore throat. “Besides, you would not lower security around me even if I was in my grave.”

Barney allowed himself a slight chuckle. “You’ve got that right. So, is there anything else I can get you?”

The corner of Hannibal’s mouth quirked into a smile. “No, your company is sufficient enough.”
Chapter 2

Hannibal cringed as the body was brought out. It wasn’t as if he hadn’t seen dead bodies before—and in much worse condition—but there was something particularly disturbing about this one. Dr. Hannibal Lecter knew that, unless his victims were avenged by some copy-cat killer, he would not be sliced open and cannibalized. His body would not be found buried hastily in the woods or abandoned by the side of the road; no, his body would be found the same way this one was. The elderly convict had not had a very dignified last few days. As his physical condition had declined, he became increasingly dependent on the orderlies until he was no longer in charge of any of his bodily functions. Hannibal had been able to hear his dying screams echoing through the dimly lit halls as he had begged for death to put him out of his misery. Had they not been behind bars as well, Hannibal knew that many of the other convicts would have gladly indulged him.

As it always did in the end, nature finally answered the dying killer’s pleas, and Hannibal watched with morbid fascination as the sickly and emaciated body was paraded down the asylum’s hallway. Hannibal and one of the orderlies that frequently attended to him, Barney, made eye contact as the latter pushed the cart with the body through the narrow hall. The look was silent affirmation that prisoner and orderly were feeling the same thing: it was horrible that people had to die this way, but it was a relief to have the inevitable over with.

As much as Hannibal tried to dismiss the image from his mind, he couldn’t stop picturing the deplorable state of the decrepit inmate’s body lying out on that cart, stripped of his dignity for all to see. He ate his dinner that night slowly and methodically, leaving a large portion of it cold and untouched.

Barney had shot him another look as he took the plate away. “I sure hope you’re not coming down with something again, Dr. Lecter.”

“No, I assure you, I’m fine. Some days I just cannot stand the deplorable cooking they have here.”

Barney raised a skeptical eyebrow in Hannibal’s direction before walking away.

Later that night, as Hannibal attempted to sleep, his subconscious was assaulted with the same images as his waking mind. In his dreams he saw a prisoner, weak, old, unable to even move from his bed, completely dependent on the orderlies for even the most basic of functions. He found himself in an even more dimly lit than usual prison cell, but he was not alone. The bed was not empty. Like a tiger stalking its prey, Hannibal crept closer and pulled off the covers in one fluid movement. The sheets fell out of his hands and fluttered to the ground. Lying in the bed was a body, wrinkled and aged, but it was not the body of the prisoner who had died; he recognized the face as none other than his own.

Hannibal awoke in a cold sweat to his own startled gasp, a sound which seemed alien to his ears. As he tried to regain his composure, his ears picked up a series of more familiar sounds: a book pages crinkling, chair legs scrapping against the concrete floor as its occupant stood up, and familiar footsteps making their way towards his cell. “Everything alright, Dr. Lecter?” asked Barney.

“Yes, fine.”

“…I know what you must be feeling,” said Barney. “It’s tough seeing that.”

“I’ve seen my fair share of dead bodies, Barney. Or have you forgotten why I’m behind these bars?”
“No, I’m just saying, it must be scary knowing that you might die like that.”

“I do not fear death,” said Hannibal. “Judging by my current predicament, death is going to be my only means of escape from here.”

“But you do fear a humiliating, painful death?” prompted Barney, reading the between the lines.

Hannibal grit his teeth. Only Barney. Only Barney would dare to prod him like this. Only for Barney, in the middle of a night full of nightmares, would he give in to the prodding. “I do have an aversion to dying here. However, that is seeming more and more inevitable. I do not wish for you to find me one day lying dead in my own excrement. Nobody wants to go like that.”

“I agree with you, Dr. Lecter. Truth be told, I don’t want to have to find you like that.” The words felt strange leaving Barney’s mouth. True, Hannibal was a murderer, and if anyone deserved a horrible death, it was arguably murderers. However, over the years he’d gotten to know Hannibal as more than just a monster. It was through their late night discussions like this that he had learned to see the man behind the monster. And in Barney’s opinion, no man deserved to die a painful, humiliating death.

“Everyone else does. I can see the newspaper articles now. They’ll want to take pictures of me dead, limp, pale. That’s how I’ll be remembered. That’s all I’ll be to them.”

“Oh, I don’t think that’s quite true, Dr. Lecter. Your name already means much more to the public than that. I have a feeling you’ll be remembered for what you did with your life long after your death. Even if that is how the public remembers you, at least you’ll know that’s not how I’ll remember you.”

“And how will you remember me, Barney?” the doctor wanted to know.

Barney thought about his answer for a moment. There was no reason not to be frank with someone who was locked up behind bars, but he also didn’t want to get too much on Dr. Lecter’s bad side. It was not every violent murderer who was as polite and cooperative. “A monster,” Barney decided. He watched Hannibal’s eyes for any reaction, but found none. “But also a man. A monstrous man with a great taste in books,” he added gesturing to the book in his hands, his page being saved by his thumb.

“I’m glad you’re enjoying that,” said Hannibal. “I had better let you get back to it. And I suppose I should try to get back to sleep before Chilton comes in to test out whatever new idea he has for making my life even more tediously miserable.”

Barney sighed and nodded. “Goodnight, Dr. Lecter.”

Hannibal laid back in his cot and closed his eyes for the first time that night without seeing the image of the dead prisoner. “Goodnight, Barney.”

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