

# The off chance

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## Prolog: Prologue

"Will?"

This once Dr. Lecter seemed genuinely surprised. As far as Will could remember that was a rare occurrence. Well, he did not trust his memory completely but if what he thought was right, then Dr. Lecter's lack of emotion would not surprise him.

"Well, do not stand in the snow, come in" The other opened his door just like he always had with his office door.

Except this wasn't his office. It was his home.

"What brings you here on this fine evening?"

He was led into the dining room. The table wasn't set this time. He vaguely remembered being here once without a dinner invitation. He just couldn't remember why or when. God, he hated this hazy feeling. Especially with him in the room. He turned his eyes on Dr. Lecter.

"I was released."

"Released?" The brown eyebrows rose. "That leaves me curious. You were admitted for five murders just two months ago."

"Yes" Will nodded. This would be the difficult part. "They found out I had an autoimmune encephalitis. They treated it and I was found not guilty by reason of insanity and the insanity was classified temporary because it stemmed from a medical disease which is now treated. Which means I am a free man."

"Are you feeling relieved?" Dr. Lecter took a seat.

Will closed his eyes and sighed. Well, check on step one. Damn, he wasn't made for this. But what other options did he have? He took a seat opposite. After a few moments of looking at the other he answered: "Not at all."

"Why is that?" Dr. Lecter leaned forwards.

"They treated that encephalitis. Being a doctor I guess you know more about this than I do" Will cut himself off and looked sideways. How was he going to sound convincing?

"I am treated ... but that only means they eliminated the acute stage. Even with the medication, it could always reappear" He shook his head and looked up. "I feel unsafe. And this last stage ... it left damage. I am still hallucinating."

"That may be the trauma" Dr. Lecter folded his hands. "You always had nightmares. We call it 'lice and fleas' – you had autoimmune encephalitis but you may also have an acute stress disorder on top of it."

"No" Will shook his head. "I mean ... maybe. I have ... there are holes in my memory. Especially the week before they captured me ... it is completely gone."

Not completely if he was honest. But he wasn't about to tell this man what he really thought. He was done with trusting. He was done with believing. He had looked. And he saw a vague design. He only needed a bit more evidence.

"So you are not sure if you might ... do something again" Dr. Lecter avoided the word kill. How thoughtful.

"Yes" Will looked him directly into the eyes. "Dr. Lecter ... Hannibal" One muscle of the man's mouth twitched but not in disdain. More in amusement if he was capable of something like that. "Of all people on this planet, you know me best. You know who I am. I ... I desperately need your help."

"My, my ..." The other leaned back and regarded Will for a moment. "And how shall I go about helping you?"

Well, here it came. Last step. He hoped he had done well so far.

Will took a deep breath and answered: "Let me stay. Keep me by your side. It is the only way I can feel safe."

"Alana" Will nodded at her and the others. "Jack. Beverly."

"What is this, Will?" Jack let out a long sigh.

"Thank you for coming" Will waited while the three took seats. He wished he had a proper seat in his cell. "Especially for someone who you think is insane."

"I do hope you do not want to plead not guilty in front of us."

"Jack!" Alana shot him a look. "Sorry about him, Will. You sound more stable" She smiled at him.

"I am more stable" He smiled back involuntarily. "Certainly not stable enough to be released but that is not why I asked you here. So don't fear, Jack."

"Okay" The man nodded. "So what are we here for?"

"Brainstorming" He began pacing in his cell. "At first, this will sound completely crazy and paranoid. I want you to prepare for that. I only want you to listen to it first. Just ... think of it as a story. A fairytale if you want so. Just give the story a possibility."

"I hope you remember that you are the one with the endless well of imagination" Beverly folded her arms.

"Might I ask one question beforehand?" Alana frowned. Will made an affirmative gesture in her direction. "Why us three?"

"Because I need your memory" Will stopped right in the middle of his cell. "This encephalitis thing, it ... it messed up my own memory quite bad. I only remember a lot of fragments. These fragments point in a direction but I just do not have enough evidence to see what they point at."

"Evidence for what?" Now Jack frowned as well.

"For an unresolved murder case" Will looked at him directly.

"Well" He leaned back and folded his hands in his laps. "Then I am all ears."

"Your release is all over the news" Dr. Lecter looked up from his breakfast to assess Will's reaction.

He certainly didn't have to fake that one. He snorted.

"News meaning actual newspaper or tattlecrime?"

"Tattlecrime has a lot of influence" The other smiled indulgent for a moment. "You shouldn't underestimate Miss Lounds."

"She makes wrong accusations all the time. No one would take her seriously" He bit into his toast with marmalade. Whatever this quasi-assignment would turn out to be, he would be well fed by the end of it.

"No one of our academic status, no" Dr. Lecter took a sip of orange juice. "However ... not everyone is up to our intellectual standards. You would be surprised what people can do when they think they have a righteous cause."

"You are telling that to someone who used to work in the FBI homicide department. I think I am used to a lot of things."

"You are used to the minds of the criminally insane ... and psychopaths" Another assessing gaze. "You are not used to the minds of those which we call normal."

"I do know normal people" Will lay down his fork and folded his arms.

"Give me a name" Dr. Lecter smiled amused.

"Alana."

"Neurosis from severe binding anxiety, most likely due to childhood trauma. Try

again" The smile only deepened.

"Jack?"

"Chronic depression. He has self-worth issues which make him unstable whenever he doubts himself, might be narcissistic personality disorder. Do not try anyone from the department. They all have their own little problems."

"Well" Will looked around as if searching for an answer in the dining room. He stopped after a few seconds and remained dead still. "You?"

"Hm" Dr. Lecter looked down at his nearly finished breakfast. "I do not dare to analyze myself. Seems we reached a standoff."

Will only nodded. He hadn't expected this to be easy. The guy was slick as an eel. Why in heaven did the others think he could work this out? In comparison, he had the social capabilities of an octopus.

"Back to topic ... it does not seem safe for you to go outside" Dr. Lecter nodded slowly before continuing. "And I cannot take you with me into my office."

"Can I stay here?" Will looked up with his best puppy eyes. He had not used them since high-school – consciously at least.

"As you wish" The other only nodded.

"So let me get this straight" Jack pressed his thumb against his second and middle finger and held them up. "You want to tell us that it sounds fishy that you killed all five of them."

Will just nodded. God, he hoped they would understand.

"And you have a hunch that somehow someone else framed you" Jack paused for a second. "But you can't remember why you have that hunch or who it could be."

"Yes, exactly" Will rubbed his face with both his hands.

Jack only sighed, shook his head and said: "You already told me that one when I was interrogating you."

"I did?" In a flash, Will was at his bars. His voice thrummed with excitement. "What else did I say? Try to remember word by word."

"Jack, I don't think-"

"Try" Alana had turned to Jack. "Jack, his argument is sound. If he has no memory loss and had no fever when Hobbs was already killing people, then there is a strong possibility he might be right. Just ... let us try."

Jack sighed deeply. He did so nearly every thirty seconds by now. For a moment, he looked to Beverly but she only shrugged her shoulders. After some seconds of silent contemplation he said: "Alright ... I said it was you, I think. You answered you might be. And then you said I might also be someone else who had framed you. I didn't ask further ... I think I changed the topic."

"Damn it!" Will nearly banged his head into his cell bars but stopped himself before the impact. "Okay ... let's try something else. What conclusions did I come up with about the murder cases?"

"We found some kind of plastic in Madchen's oxygen tank" Beverly answered. She had been silent up to now. "You asked if it might be a comb. Then you said it was neither suicide nor an accident. You said it was murder. You opened the Thalheimer for the doctor's body and said that that one was done by a copycat. That Madchen had seen someone kill the doctor. You looked at his wounds again and ... I don't know how exactly you got that one but your next conclusion was that the Hobbs copycat was the same as the Madchen copycat."

"That it was someone who perfected their crimes into art" Jack added.

"Okay, okay" Will took a deep breath. "That makes sense."

"It does?" Jack raised his eyebrows.

"Yes ... yes, of course" Will began pacing again. "Let us assume that I wasn't a raving lunatic at that time" All three blinked their eyelids in slight disbelief. "And am not" They all nodded slowly. "Someone knew what Hobbs was doing. Either from Hobbs or ... or from our investigation."

Jack's mouth corners certainly went down upon hearing that.

"Yes ... of course" He stopped his pacing. "He was on the investigation team. He called Hobbs to warn him that we were coming. Which is why Mrs. Hobbs was already dying when we got there."

"Wait a minute" Jack held up his hands. "I talked about this with Dr. Lecter. He said it was possible that you made that call while he was loading the car."

"But I was loading the car" Will looked up. "I was ... and he was in the office."

The statement was followed with silence.

"Will?" Alana swallowed. "Why did you not invite Hannibal to this?"

"Coq au vin" Dr. Lecter placed the dish in front of Will. "With Château Giscours to refine the taste."

"Thank you" Will was just thankful that there was bread served with the dish. While everything here tasted great, it came in small portions. No wonder the man was this lean. "I guess you hear that all the time but you are a great cook."

"I still like to hear it" The other took his seat. "Thank you for the compliment."

"Where did you learn to cook like this?"

"I taught myself" Dr. Lecter looked up with a smile. "Most things are best learned by oneself."

"Huh" Will tried not to tuck in greedily. It was actually hard. He missed his chocolate bars. Hell, he would actually give the world for a burger right now. "What else did you teach yourself?"

"The piano."

"Really?" Will looked up in surprise. "You can play? That is great, I love ... well, I mean, I would like to hear you play if you'd like to."

"I can certainly indulge that" There was a faint smile on Dr. Lecter's lips. Well, he most likely smiled at the childish excitement for which Will chided himself already. He wasn't here to play around. People depended on him. Lives depended on him.

"Great" God, this ... whatever tasted great. He didn't want to believe Dr. Lecter was the monster who ... but wasn't it always like that? People turning bad whom you never expected to? "What else did you teach yourself?"

"Psychology" He took a sip from his wine. "It is not something you can learn from a book or a lecture. You have to experience life, to experience people and learn from observation" He turned his gaze to Will. "Did you have to learn what you do? Did you have to meet different people first to understand their thinking?"

"Hm" How to answer that? "No ... no, I don't think so. I mostly read books. I haven't actually met many criminals."

"That explains a lot" While Dr. Lecter chewed on his meal, Will chewed on those words. What did it explain? He stayed silent, waiting for more clues. "You understand the psychologically abnormal. Yet you show none of the common emotions of those who learned that from observation."

"What common emotions?" Will inclined his head in question.

"Fear" They looked into each others eyes directly. "You do not recoil from the

criminally insane, even though you feel good to kill them. You love justice, yet do not abhor injustice."

"I do!" Will nearly jumped in his seat. "I do, I ... I mean, yes, I do not fear criminals, I am not disgusted with them but ... it is not as if I like them either."

"You understand them" Dr. Lecter leaned back and smiled. "You do not like it but you understand them to the depths of their soul. It is why you cannot hate them even though you wish to."

"I can hate them" But he felt the furrowed brows on his own forehead. Could he really? Could he hate Hannibal Lecter if he found the man guilty? "I can ... I can kill them."

"Out of hate? Or rather out of mercy?" The other picked up his wine glass.

"Mercy?" Will grimaced. "How can you ... how can it be mercy to kill someone who ..."

"Who is in pain and therefore killing others? You do not think that death can be a mercy?"

"I'd rather have you tell me" He grabbed his own wine glass far less elegant than the other man. "You are the psychiatrist. You should be the one who believes that everyone can be saved with the right treatment. Why not a murderer?"

"It certainly depends on his motive" Dr. Lecter stared into his wine. "People have different reasons for murder. Pain is one of them. Some pains can be cured, others cannot. We all have our limits."

"And what people can never be cured?" Will felt chilly. He had not thought they would get to this point so soon.

"Psychopaths. Impulsive control disordered people" Dr. Lecter began eating again.

"All those who are neurologically incapable of functioning without killing."

"You think psychopaths are neurologically unable to control their killing?" Will only whispered. He had the feeling he was looking into the depths of Lecter's soul but he saw ... nothing. A big empty space of nothingness.

"Some of them" He took the wine bottle and refilled their glasses. "I do not think you can rehabilitate those who already killed. Especially when they have no incentive to change themselves at all."

"And ... what incentives could you give them?"

Dr. Lecter looked up and measured him with an almost lazy gaze. It took him at least ten seconds to answer: "I have no idea."

"This is madness!" Jack had begun pacing just like Will. "You think Dr. Lecter killed those five and put it all on you? Why should he do that?"

"I don't know!" Will nearly tore out his hair. "I know that I knew, I just can't remember."

"Jesus Christ" Jack shook his head.

"It would be possible" Alana seemed deep in contemplation. "He had the opportunity and it would make sense if ... yeah, it is possible. He could have misled us about you."

"But why should he?" Jack sounded a bit calmer than before. "Why should he kill people? Why should he frame Will? And what about all the evidence?"

"What evidence?" Will stopped his pacing as well.

"Your fishing hooks. You made trophies out of your victims. We found them lying around openly in your house" Jack crossed his arms and turned to Will. "Anything to say on that account?"

"Of course!" Will smiled. "That proves it!"

"Proves what?" Jack frowned deeply.

"That it wasn't me!"

"Will" Jack sighed. "As always, I cannot follow your leaps. Explain for the commoners."

"Just ... if I did the murders, then there are two possibilities. One that I killed them in cold blood, the other that I did it because of my encephalitis" All three nodded. "We all seem clear on the point that I did not kill them because I am a horrible psychopath, right?" Jack hesitated a moment but nodded when the other two did. "So I only could have done it because of the encephalitis. Right now the explanation is that I identified so immensely with the killers that I did what they did, right?"

"And you already explained how strange it would have been to kill Madchen then because it had no pattern" Beverly added.

"Yeah" Will nodded. "Same with the trophies. Remember Hobbs and Madchen? None of them took trophies. I does not fit the pattern."

"All of your counter-evidence right now depends on some patterns only you can see, Will" Jack sighed and sat down again. "Say you are right with this ... fairytale. Why Lecter? Why should he have done it?"

"Art ... whoever made the copycat killings, he cared about the art of killing. He wanted more beauty in what was done. And he had no positive feelings for his victims whatsoever. He was disgusted by them. He wanted to humiliate them. Maybe ... maybe he wanted to make their life more beautiful by giving them a beautiful death. Maybe he believed he killed out of mercy."

"But why only copycat then? Why not kill on his own?" Beverly asked.

"The copycat is hard to find" Will spoke like he was in trance. "No motive, no common method, nothing to connect victims ... what big unresolved murder cases do we have?"

"Chesapeake-Ripper" Jack heaved a sigh. "You won't tell me now that Lecter is not only our copycat but also the ripper, right? That is too far a leap."

"The first victim ... she missed her lungs, right?" Will began pacing slowly. "Did Marissa miss anything?"

"No" Beverly folded her arms. "Neither did the doctor or Madchen."

"Marissa happened fast. It happened to blame Boyle" Will drove a hand through his hair. "Madchen was planned to look like an accident. The doctor ... he was also meant to blame someone. Madchen maybe. Maybe me" He looked up to the ceiling. "But the Boyle girl was not killed to blame anyone or to erase evidence. She was killed like the murderer wanted her to be killed ... stabbed with all available weapons and missing organs."

"Like the Chesapeake-Ripper" Jack mumbled. "God damn me."

"Lecter would know what that would do to you. He could watch with a seat in the front row. He knows where you live, how much your trainee meant to you, he could actually ask you about your deterioration" Will swallowed. "Just like he watched and asked about mine."

"You are painting Hannibal a true psychopath" Alana pursed her lips. "Don't you think we would have noticed anything before now if he was?"

"Would we?" Will looked into her eyes directly. "How shocked were you when you had to arrest me? I do not think we want to look for sickness in our own ranks. Especially something very dark and deeply hidden."

"Okay, okay" Jack held up his hands. "Can you give me one solid evidence that either Dr. Lecter did anything out of the normal or that you did not?"

All three trained their eyes on him.

Shit ... solid evidence. If having no fever when the first two were killed ... Madchen

dead who could have confirmed there was someone else ... Abigails body still unbound except for-

"The ear" Will grabbed the bars hard because he couldn't swallow for a moment. He couldn't even breath.

"Another leap?" Jack asked with a sigh.

"Alana ... what does a human ear look like if it was in a human stomach for twelve hours?" He nearly couldn't even ask. Just remembering ... he just could not.

"Dissolved" She had to take a deep breath. "It ... you are right. If you had eaten even a part of her, it would have dissolved considerably. Stomach acid has pH one, it is completely impossible that the ear looked this fresh if ..."

"Is it possible it just got stuck in his esophagus?" Jack asked with a detached voice.

"Not while he was concious. He would have vomited it out then and there if he wasn't passed out due to sedatives. Someone must have given him psychotropic medication and placed the ear deep in his throat. That ... that needs medical knowledge, accessories and precisely timed and dosed sedatives. That is the work of a doctor."

"Can we drive to my house?" Will took the armchair next to Dr. Lecter. "You know ... I don't have any clothes here and I could get some stuff."

"We could also buy you new ones" The other led his book sink to his lap and looked Will up and down. "Your wardrobe does not fit my interior."

"Well ... sorry ... I guess?" Will blinked a bit out of sorts. "I don't really know if I can afford a whole new wardrobe. Especially in your ... style."

"Well, a suit or two never did harm to anyone. And you would look much more sophisticated with them. Let us visit my tailor. I am certain he can also make you some ... tasteful free-time clothes."

"And underwear?" He only whispered that one while his face took on a certain kind of red.

"He can provide that as well. Silk would fit you."

God, he wished he never brought that up. He was here to expose Dr. Lecter as a murderer, not discuss underwear with him. Why the hell did they come up with this?

"My house, my rules" The other took his book up again. "If you cannot afford a wardrobe, you should think about selling that house of yours. It is in the middle of nowhere anyway."

"I like the middle of nowhere" He said with a pout in his voice. He nearly bit himself for it. Most importantly, he wanted to return to his house. He wanted his dogs back. And his home. And his life.

"You like running away" Dr. Lecter answered easily.

"I do not!" If he did, he would not be here, right? "I just don't like ... people."

"I can relate to that."

He could? Well ... okay, maybe he could. Psychopaths were known for notoriously hating everything and everyone. So maybe he could get the gist of it, even though Will was sure that they had quite different qualities of dislike.

"But you can not relate to my attempt to get away from the world?"

"I would call it cowardice" He was shot a look. "You are hiding here, are you not?"

"I am ..." Trying to find out if the other was a serial killer. "I may be hiding, yeah."

"You give in too easily" This time the look was filled with annoyance. "You do not have a borderline personality disorder and you always remind me that you know who you are. So why agree with me in everything?"

"I am not agreeing with everything" Will folded his arms. "See? I just disagreed."

"So you are no parrot. Instead you sound like a petulant child."

"Why are you so mean today?" Will pouted. "Normally you are the nice guy."

"Normally I am your psychiatrist" This time it wasn't only a look. Dr. Lecter's eyes were trained on him. "But you are not here because you need a psychiatrist, right?"

Definitely not.

"What do I need?"

"A friend."

Will's heart nearly skipped a beat. Friends? Was that how the other saw him? As a friend in need? Good Lord, that was ... that was just completely fucked up. And he had to play along. He had to find out what Lecter had done.

"Shouldn't I call you Hannibal then?"

"Feel free to do so."

"We have no evidence against him."

"He certainly erased his tracks well."

"I still can't believe he could have done that."

The three stuck their heads together. At least they had listened. If anything happened, they had a suspect. An idea at least. That was all he wanted. He wanted them aware of the danger. Will sat down on his cot with a satisfied sigh.

"Will?"

Huh? Jack was standing right in front of his cell door. What did he miss?

"What is it?"

"What would you do if you were set free right now?"

"What?" Will furrowed his brow. "I would walk right back into this cell. I am still under charges for murder. And I wouldn't try breaking out to kill Lecter a second time."

"So that was your plan the first time?"

"I ..." He shook his head. "I don't remember. Might have been."

"You want to see him convicted, right?" Jack certainly had a serious expression.

"Well ... yeah" Will nodded.

"If he really was a killer" Big emphasis on if. "You would be the only one who could get him. The only one who could find evidence or even get him to confess."

"How?" Will's face filled with complete bewilderment. "I can't even think of one way."

"You still have more chances than we do."

"So what?" He shook his head slowly. "You want to free me, so that I can get him to confess his crimes? No way in hell."

"Are you sure that he is a murderer or are you not?" Jack asked unkindly.

"Well ... I am."

"Then you will find evidence" Jack pointed a finger at him. A gun would have had the same effect on Will. "You will get him."

"You do know that he will kill me if he finds out we suspect him?" Will couldn't believe his ears.

"I am aware of the risk" Jack noted. "Still, I plan on taking it."

"Do I have any choice in this?" Will nearly pleaded.

"You can either rot in here or try to get him out there. That is your choice."

"That is blackmail!" By the way, where were Beverly and Alana? Did they leave him alone with Jack? Or was he hallucinating again? Jack certainly sounded like himself but that could be his mind playing tricks on him again.

"Deal with it" Jack nodded and stepped back. "I'll come tomorrow for your answer."

"What are you doing, Hannibal?" Will tried to turn to the man behind him but the tailor kept him in position with the poke of a needle.

"Trying out colors" Hannibal slung another cloth over Will's shoulder. "You are a chameleon. You can actually wear nearly everything with your coloring. At first I thought that was quite unexciting but I have to notice I proved myself wrong. It is ... inspiring."

"Well ... as long as you have fun" Will had never thought about what color would go best with his hair or something like that. It sounded like something a woman would do.

"I have, thank you for asking" Not that he had really asked. "Dijou, I think we should try mint and bordeaux on him."

"Same style as the black suit?" The tailor asked.

"One of them could be tight fit. He is still young" Hannibal mused.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Only that it may suit you" The other stepped around the tailor and looked at Will from the front. "Yes ... you definitely look better in a suit."

"Well ... thank you, I guess" Will swallowed. Somehow, this all sounded wrong. The compliments most of all. The ... the peace of all this. They were like two good friends on a shopping trip, not like a murderer and a cop trying to find evidence on him.

"Please change out of these and wait for a moment. I will get the next set" The tailor stood up and nodded with a smile.

"Sure" Will stepped down from the platform while the man already bustled around. "I'll be right back."

He turned to the changing room. While walking he shot a look over his shoulder. Hannibal was just raising his gaze from somewhere below eye line. Will just shuddered slightly.

Somehow, the guy was creepy. More than normally.

"So, what have you decided?"

Well, not even a greeting. Will hung his head. That was Jack for you.

"I don't have all day, Will."

"How, Jack?" He raised his gaze. "I thought the whole night and had no idea. How shall I get evidence on him?"

"I don't know and I don't care. For all I care you can go and tell him you developed a taste for killing and want to join him on his hunts" Jack kept his eyes trained on him. He could not look back. "Kill his pet turtle, offer yourself on an altar, I don't even want to know. Just take him down. If he is really the Chesapeake-Ripper, I don't even care if you kill him. Just take him out."

"Now who is the one obsessed?"

"You get him" Jack gripped the cell bars and leaned in as far as possible. "That is an order. Get him."

"But how? I can't play vigilante based on presumptions which might not even be true! Just because I think they are ... I could be wrong. I could be putting the blame on a complete innocent just because I can't carry it myself."

"Will" Jack's voice carried a calm form of menace in it. "I did not sit here yesterday for hours, just so you can chicken out now. Get the bastard. Don't you want revenge for Abigail? Don't you want to save the people he will kill in the future?"

"I ... of course, I do but ... I still don't know how."

"Well, latch onto him like a leech if you must" Jack rolled his eyes. "It will take some

time to get you out anyway. So think of something."

"Like a leech ... you mean to become his shadow? To follow him everywhere? Stay in his house and ... but how?" Will sank into his thoughts. "I am not very sneaky. He is quite the perfectionist. He would notice every small detail out of place."

"Can't you come up with some kind of excuse why you have to stay by his side?" Jack frowned.

"I couldn't" Jack's voice deepened. "I could not ... speak with him. Normally. Friendly. Not after what happened."

"You will have to" Jack nodded and turned to take his leave. "I take your answer as a yes."

"No!" Will jumped up and nearly sprang to the bars. "I can't be nice to him! He murdered Abigail. He called her our daughter and then he ... he even made me eat a part of her! I cannot forgive him! I will not forgive him! Jack!"

"That is the spirit, Will."

"Jack!"

## Kapitel 1: 1. Chapter

Find out if he did the murders. Expose him. Get evidence.

It sounded so simple in the abstract. But how should he do it? He already searched the house, not once but more times than he could count. There was nothing out of order. The guy didn't even have hidden porn magazines. It was exasperating.

But he knew he was right. Hannibal was the only one who could have framed him like that. He killed the Boyle girl because he could. And he had taken her lungs as trophies. At least if his guess was right, Hannibal must have had a lot of organs.

Somewhere.

He just had to find them. Maybe there was some kind of hidden door somewhere. Or he kept them in jars buried in his front garden. Or maybe he really did sell them as illegal transplants. But then he must have stashed the money somewhere because none had shown up on his official accounts. Maybe a bank account abroad? Like one in Switzerland? The FBI did not have enough power to persuade those banks to give them any information.

But still, then he should find some documentation. Someone like Hannibal wouldn't keep things like that in his office, would he? Maybe he would. Maybe he would have to search the office as well. Just ... how should he manage that? He did not want to make Hannibal suspicious.

He was certainly out of ideas.

It wasn't like Hannibal to just drop something like "Oh, do you think I should kill again?". He did not slip up. Especially not around Will. Maybe ... if he could get him to trust him more ... to tell about it.

But you could not get a psychopath to trust you. It wasn't their nature. They never trusted. They always kept to themselves. They were friendly, yes, some even very socially skilled but when you tried to get under their skin, you would only hit granite.

He sometimes wondered how most of them were still married. At Erie, he had seen a lot of men with dissociative personality disorder. They married wives with an abundance of emotion, normally borderline personality disordered young women. Their kids were a catastrophe. Loaded, upper class bastards with no mercy from their fathers and the eccentrics from their mothers.

At least Hannibal wasn't married. Certainly a thing to thank him for if there ever was one. And as far as Will knew, he also had no kids. Seeing as the guy had killed off Abigail, he most likely would never have any. He had no love left for anything, neither wives nor children.

Most likely he just had no love, full-stop.

Maybe he was on to something there ... everyone who killed had a motive for killing, even though it might be very hard to guess. But he already knew some things about Hannibal. Maybe if he knew more he could piece together the puzzle that was Hannibal Lecter.

What did he know?

He was quite sure Hannibal had a severe dissociative personality disorder. That meant he got the genes for it and must have had a horrible childhood. But the only thing he knew about that childhood was that Hannibal had grown up as an orphan. And whatever drove him to kill, it most was most likely connected to that childhood.

He knew that Hannibal's colleagues, even the people he studied and lived with had

thought of him as a very sane, nice person. So he must have learned his social skills before med-school. Seeing that the guy was – without a doubt – quite intelligent, his time in college might have been enough for that. So whatever had traumatized him had ended before college.

While asking about one's childhood was quite rude, he might start with asking about his time in college and med-school. That would certainly prove more insightful than searching the damned house for the tenth time.

"My time in college?" Hannibal smiled pleasantly. "Are you asking about my wild youth and how many girls I bedded?"

"Well, yeah" Will tried to smile innocently but he was sure he failed miserably. "You know, mine was quite boring. Studying, working and sitting in the library to read. I guess you had much more fun, right?"

"What gives you the impression?" Will just shrugged. Hell, he did not even have an impression. The guy could have done anything from saving kittens to throwing parties in the nude. "Well, yes, I guess I had a bit more fun than you had. I went to college in Baltimore. I may not have been partying every night but I certainly enjoyed an active social life. And I gained my love for music in that city."

"Did you also study there? John Hopkins medical school?" Will nearly cursed when Hannibal nodded. "Did you go there with some of your peers? I guess it is great to already have friends in a place."

"Yes, we stuck together" So much for the theory of learning social skills in college. "I lost touch with some of them after graduation but most are still in contact even today. It is nice to have such loyal friends. They come over for dinner whenever they are in the area."

"Great" Will's tone of voice sounded sulky even to himself. "Were you always that popular?"

"I did not move around much, so I had a more stable basis to work from" Hannibal took another spoon of his Creme Brulée which was delicious by the way. "I imagine you were in a much more difficult situation than I ever was."

Well, yeah, being poor, raised by a single parent and completely oblivious to society's internal rules tended to make you an outcast. Will just snorted and nodded.

"How do you want to spend the evening? Do you enjoy concerts?"

Great. Another topic. Asked about Hannibal's life and found out exactly nothing. Way to go, Will.

"What have you got on him?"

"Jack!" Will looked around, even though he knew Hannibal was at work. "You can't just call here in the middle of the day. What if Hannibal was here and had picked up the phone?"

"I just called him in his office to make sure" No change in his tone whatsoever. "So what have you got?"

"Nothing" Will let out a deep sigh. "Absolutely no evidence in this house. It does not even have a personal note. No photographs, no old letters or postcards and certainly no organs. Anyone could live here and nothing would change. There is a safe but I don't know what's inside."

"Damn" Jack was silent for a second. "I can't get you a search warrant for it. We don't

have enough evidence ... and you can't pick it?"

"I might have been a special agent but that specialty is empathy, not stealth" Will dropped onto a seat. "I would like to search his office but I haven't come up with any excuse for that yet. And I am trying to gain his trust to get more information on him. But it's hard as hell. He's open until a specific point and then there is no way to get more out of him."

"Well, at least you keep each other company" Jack snorted. "No matter who of you two is the murderer, you are keeping an eye on each other."

"Gee, thank you for that vote of confidence" Will shook his head. "If you have an idea on that office thing, I am open to suggestions."

"I'll call again."

"Bye, Jack."

Well, great. At least he wasn't given a deadline this time. He would not have one until Hannibal killed again.

"So, what do you do here all day?" Hannibal asked over dinner.

"Well, nothing really" Searching his house. "I read some books. Watch some TV" Being bored. "Do you want me to do some housekeeping or something?"

"I employ a cleaning service" Who already scared Will half to death when they had come in. "You seem to have no problems going outside with me. So I was thinking about sending you out for small periods of time without me. Rehabilitation is still our goal, isn't it?"

"You are not my therapist, Hannibal" Will instinctively recoiled. "You said we were friends."

"I apologize. It wasn't my intention to make you feel ... inferior" A smile curled around his lips. "I thought it might do you some good."

"It won't" Well, most likely it would if he really was who he feigned to be. But he needed this dependency to get more information. "Even though ... no, maybe not."

"Tell me" Hannibal leaned forwards.

"It wasn't easy to stay here alone at first" That made sense, right? If he really needed Hannibal close, that would have been hard. "Now it's okay. Maybe you should leave me in another place for some time" That wasn't too bold, was it? It was a sensible suggestion, right? "Somewhere safe but a bit in the open at the same time ... like your office."

"My office?" Hannibal regarded him over his wineglass. "How is that more in the open? Looking at your history I would have guessed you would feel more comfortably there than here."

"No ... no, I don't" And why? He should have come up with his reasoning a bit earlier. "I ... we talked about cases there. It ... reminds me."

"I see" Hannibal nodded and Will had to stop himself from sinking to the floor in relief. "It is also a reminder how I was unable to stop you. Have you confronted that part of our relationship yet?"

Unable to stop him.

Will froze up. The nerve of that guy ... unable to stop him? Him? When all the while Hannibal ran around killing people and actually making Will believe he did it? Making Will believe he might have killed Abigail when it was- He stood up so fast his chair fell and hit the wall behind him.

"I guess not" Hannibal nodded again as if he was a wise and noble man guiding a

young boy or even an animal. "I was blind. I never even dreamed it might have been you. If not for that ear, I would never have suspected you."

Will clenched his fists. The nerve of that guy ... mocking him like this. As if he wasn't knowingly saying all Will wanted to shout at him. How could he?

"I would have tried to stop you if I had just known. I do not know if I would have been able to but I would have tried nonetheless. Can you forgive me?"

That sick, sick bastard. As if he regretted anything of what he had done. As if he wanted forgiveness. As if he wanted to be stopped. He never showed any remorse before. He did not even know what that was most likely. And now he used it to goat Will.

To torment him with his failures.

Will ground his teeth so hard they felt like bursting any second now. Holding in his words seemed impossible. But he couldn't. He wasn't allowed. He had to maintain his facade.

So he fled the room.

He had nearly fled the house as well. In the end he barricaded himself in the shower and turned it so cold that memories of nearly drowning as a child overturned the memories of Abigail's smiles and tears.

Naturally he dreamed about her.

Killing her by piercing her with antlers. Burning her. Gutting her with a knife. He spend half the night having nightmares and the other half crying about them. It was really the worst.

He knew she was dead. He knew Hannibal had killed her. He did not know why he knew but he was completely sure. He knew Hannibal had sedated him and placed Abigail's ear in his throat. And he knew it was his fault. He could not remember why he had taken Abigail back to her house and set her up for slaughter that way. But he knew it was his fault.

How could he face Hannibal again, knowing he had killed her? Knowing he did not feel any remorse? Knowing he had dangled that knowledge in front of Will without even giving an inch of truth?

He wasn't made for this. This was psychological warfare and he was like a front soldier without a weapon. He didn't know how to trick people or to lie. All his life he had only told the truth and suffered for it so often that he had stopped speaking at all for some time. He had spoken again for active duty and actually learned to speak for lectures. But he had never learned how to charm someone, how to make a friend or lie by omission. He had never learned to reign in his feelings even though it had gotten him into trouble so many times.

He knew he could not do this.

He had told Jack and Jack should have known. This was just too much. He was surprised he had come this far without making Hannibal suspicious but how should he keep that up? He made pleasant conversation with the man and tried to ask questions – but he had only been able to do that by adamantly not thinking about Abigail.

By not thinking about his guilt of not noticing anything off about Hannibal earlier.

And the bastard had rubbed it in his face ... that unbelievable asshole. The wasn't even a word to describe how much anger and hate was inside off him. Hannibal had played him, had made him doubt himself, had killed people important for his work, his health, people he had liked. Endangered people he might have come to love like

Alana. People he had loved like Abigail.

He had to stop this. He had to tell Jack he could not do it, he should send someone else.

But who?

Wasn't that always the question under the line? Who was there but him? Who had the same empathy as him, who had the same knack for solving crimes, who had the same history with Hannibal?

There was only him.

There was always just him.

"Good morning, Will."

He closed his eyes and stopped in his tracks. Why the heck did he have such a bad luck? What had he done in his last life to deserve this? He continued on and said: "I thought you had already left."

"I guess you did not want to see me then" Congratulations for understanding implications in the most unwanted situations possible. "I did not want to leave without apologizing. I pushed too hard."

"I am not made from glass" Will grabbed an apple and bit into it while staring at Hannibal. Not much to see, the guy seemed to have never learned any facial expressions.

"But you are unstable" Hannibal looked him up and down. "It is why you are here after all."

"I am not- I ... I am unsure" He let his gaze falter. "Don't analyze me!"

"I am afraid I am unable to switch off that part of my brain" Hannibal leaned against the kitchen counter, a perfect image of relaxation. "You came to me because I was your therapist. I may have failed you but I still helped you. Enough that you are here instead of somewhere else ... somewhere where people failed and used you without giving you anything. Which is everywhere else."

Will tried to swallow but couldn't. His whole throat seemed to have closed up. He should not let a murderer get under his skin. Not the guy he was here to investigate. He shouldn't. The man had killed Abigail.

"There are people who helped me ... who were nice to me" It sounded weak even in his own ears.

"Which is why you have been living with them and regularly meet them" Hannibal took the few steps to stand beside Will who promptly faced away. "Face it, Will. You lived with stray dogs because they never hurt you. You would always have their gratitude. They would never betray you. It was the only thing you could endure as company."

"Then why the fuck are you hurting me now if you know that?" He hugged himself and took a step back.

Hannibal let him. A few moments later he left.

He didn't know why he stayed. Duty. Abigail. He wasn't so sure. The fact was that he stayed. He dressed in the cloths Hannibal had bought him and read one of his books and stayed. He even accompanied him out for a concert and dinner. An apology as Hannibal explained.

He seemed to have a lot to apologize for. Not that Will would forgive him anything.

And not that Hannibal was apologizing for much except aggravating Will. Some

nights, Will asked himself if the man might regret anything. It was known that psychopaths never felt regret. They were actually unable to as far as he knew. But maybe he had some kind of logical regret. On the other hand that would be horrifying – if Abigail had lived he would only have continued to use her for his sick games.

Sometimes Will asked himself if death might really be mercy.

Right before internally screaming at himself for thinking about Hannibal's words. At the same time wasn't he supposed to think about them? Think maybe but not believe. Not to make them his own. But how could he think about them and not see that Hannibal had a point? Sick and twisted as it may be, he was right in his own way. Wasn't he?

"He continued to ask me ... Will? Will, are you listening?"

"What?" Will looked up.

"You seemed to have spaced out. Am I boring you?"

"What? Oh, no, sorry, I just ... I think about a lot of ... stuff" Will sighed. Great answer as always. He was so eloquent. Maybe he could bore Hannibal to death.

"Will" Hannibal leaned forwards and placed a hand above Will's. "I did not want to hurt you with my words. I would not take them back but I would gentle them. Others have been hurting you over and over again and I did not want to take a place in that line."

"It's nothing" Will drew back his hand to end the contact.

"It is not nothing" Hannibal's eyes were trained on his face and that gaze was strangely unnerving. "It is your soul."

"You make me feel broken" Will averted his eyes.

"I can only give something that is already inside you more attention" Hannibal sounded amused. "Some people may fear people trained in psychology but we are not able to completely change people's minds."

"You can change mine" Will looked at his own hand which trembled under his gaze. "I am susceptible to ... actually everything."

"The murders showed how susceptible you are" Hannibal leaned back in his chair.

The murders? But Hannibal had done ... oh. That was what he meant. He wasn't susceptible enough to just take the blame for those murders. Will flinched and looked up with wide-open eyes. But that meant ... if he said that it meant ...

It meant he knew. He knew why Will was living with him.

A small smile curled Hannibal's lips.

"How long shall I be gone?"

Will looked around. After that dinner he had thought Hannibal would not bring him here. But he did. How long would he need to search the office? How often would he have to search it?

"How about an hour? And longer next time" Will suggested.

"As you wish" Hannibal nodded. "I will be back then."

Will held up his hand as a farewell before turning and scanning the office. If he was Hannibal where would he hide something? He selected the table and a cabinet as the most likely candidates and began his search.

It did not take him long to find a big folder which he carried to the table. Inside were some beautiful sketches. They were unsigned but ... could they really be Hannibal's? Psychopaths weren't known for their artistry. Most of them were unable to even have creative thoughts, much less to be able to express them. But these were beautiful.

Landscapes, people, deserted streets. A smiling old man, a young mothers with

children, a beach scene ... a corpse. He carefully laid the first fifteen to twenty sketches aside and picked up the one he had just found. It pictured a man laying on the front of a car. His chest was opened up, as well as his abdomen. You could not distinguish if he was missing organs because various tools were stuck in his body. His upper body was a bloody mess.

Will nearly ripped the paper from holding it while he was shaking like a leaf in the wind. This was made by Hannibal. Without a question, it was drawn by him.

And it depicted a murder of the Chesapeake-Ripper.

So he really ... it really had been ... he had thought of that more as a guess. Something to get Jack into the boat. But that he really ... could he? Could he be the Chesapeake-Ripper? But why would he kill with a certain method and rhythm while at the same time he did other murders without method or rhythm? If he did not want to get caught, why develop the Chesapeake-Ripper at all? It made no sense ... did he want some kind of recognition? Fame? Did he want people to investigate? People like Jack or-

He calmly placed the sketch back on the table. It would do no good to damage it. It was evidence. Maybe even crucial evidence. If Miriam's fingerprints could be found on any of these ... he placed all of them back in the folder and positioned that one how he had found it. He had become good at not leaving traces. Good at stealth.

"Will?" Hannibal opened the door.

"There has been another Chesapeake-Ripper murder" Jack said instead of a greeting. "It was Hannibal" Will took the phone with him, suddenly quite cool-headed. "It happened when he was supposed to be at work. He was here every evening and night."

"You sure? Because it happened last night."

"It cannot ... I would have heard if he left the house ... I think" He said down. "But it was certainly Hannibal. He has a folder with sketches in his office and one of them depicts a man stabbed with car mechanics' tools lying on a car."

Jack was silent for a moment before he carefully replied: "That is exactly what happened."

"I found that sketch yesterday evening" He had found it. He had found it and thought it was an old murder. Not something in the future. Not something still in planning. Dear god, he had found a plan and he might have been able to save that man if only he had called Jack at once-

"Will!" Jack barked into the phone. "Focus!"

"I'm here ... here" For some reason he was out of breath and had to take deep lungfuls. "I mean ... I found the sketch. I thought it was something that had already happened. It was very detailed."

"And you are sure you really saw it? You weren't hallucinating it? Or thought it was a sketch while you butchered that man?"

"Hell no!" He shook his head even though Jack could not see that. "Hannibal left me in his office for exactly one hour. I wasn't able to do much in that time, I ... wait a sec ... he left me for one hour. Where was that crime scene?"

"A fifteen minute ride from his office" Jack replied curtly.

"Do you think he could have done that in half an hour?" Will began to shiver. By all that was holy ... butchering someone like that in half an hour? If the crime scene looked exactly like that sketch ... and then the guy had just calmly taken him back

home? He hadn't looked any different. Like he had only been drinking coffee and chatting up a counter girl in that hour.

"Where is that sketch now?"

"Well ... in his office. Just like he is ... I guess he would already have destroyed it. Maybe. Can you get a search warrant for this?"

"Most likely not" Jack sounded like he wanted to screw the judge's head until a search warrant popped out. "Have you found anything else?"

"No ... is the guy missing organs?"

"His liver and his spleen" Jack answered sorely.

"Well ... he must have taken them somewhere. He did not have enough time to bring them anywhere else. He either had someone with him who took them or they must be ... somewhere around his office or house" Will sighed and sacked onto the couch.

"What a mess."

"Well, we have a lead" Jack's voice sounded like iron scratching iron. "The Chesapeake-Ripper has to kill two others in the next few days. We will watch you both."

"You do know that I am quite likely to be killed?" There was only silence. Then the unmistakable sound of the other party hanging up. "Jack! Jack, you asshole!"

"Good evening."

Will only nodded and looked up slowly. Smile in place, perfectly smooth face, nothing out of order. It seemed anticlimatic that Hannibal looked like he always did. On the other hand if every murderer looked haggard and evil it would not be so hard to arrest them.

"What is it?" He stepped into the room and took a seat opposite Will.

"Have you heard about the murder today?"

"It was on the news" Hannibal paused and waited for Will to say something. Will was not inclined to. "Do you fear that you might have done it? Don't worry, it happened while we were both home. The house has an alarm system that informs me if the front door is opened."

"I could have disabled it. Left through a window. Maybe you forgot to enable it."

"We were up until midnight and they pinpointed the time of death to around ten in the evening. Even if you somehow flashbaked while being in the office, that was only from six to seven o'clock."

"One could have used cold to make it seem as if the guy was killed later. Or heat if he was killed after midnight. The time of death is approximate and can only be trusted in a stable environment" Will studied Hannibal's face carefully but of course nothing let his muscles twinge.

"True enough" Hannibal folded his hands and held them in front of his face. "Tell me how you would have done it."

Tell him how he had done it. Why he had done it. What he would do next.

Why would Hannibal want to hear that? He knew it all. Did he want to know how much Will knew? To see how long he had before he was arrested? He had to know that they had nothing on him if he wasn't arrested already. And he was completely relaxed. He knew that Will might know everything but had no evidence. None except what Hannibal gave him.

Should he give Hannibal something?

"Losing sleep is not worth a murder. So the time of the crime is a quarter past six o'clock. It wasn't cold. The guy really died around ten. It was anaesthesia. The

murderer used scalpels to minimize the damage, so that the victim would not bleed out too soon. Liver and spleen were carefully removed, the arteries held until they had a thrombus big enough to hold the blood. Then the tools were inserted to keep him in place. He awakened from anaesthesia, struggled, thereby opened the thrombus and bleed out."

"Quite a theory" Hannibal nodded with a deeper smile. "But medically impossible. The collateral venous system isn't good enough to get the blood back to the heart with a blocked vena cava inferior. One cannot control a thrombus enough to make it work like that."

"So what did the murderer use?" Will trembled. He knew that was bad but he couldn't stop. What the hell was this? Murder-debriefing?

"A tube made from water-resolving microfiber which would have completely dissolved until morning. It would begin leaking until the man bled out and vanish afterwards."

"That's ... sick" Will shook his head. "He would be unable to move because of the tools in his body ankered by the car and slowly bleed out over hours. That is just ... cruel."

"All the Chesapeake-Ripper murders are cruel" Hannibal reminded him. "All the victims had their organs removed while they were still alive."

"What would the murderer do with them?" Will asked. Hannibal would either kill him anyway after he already told him the trick or he would live to tell the tale.

"What do you think?" Hannibal's face showed amusement.

"Well ... sold them. Kept them somewhere as trophies. I can't really think of anything else" Will made a face even saying that.

"That only means you haven't seen the darkest pits of hell" Hannibal stood and took a step to the door. "I'll go prepare dinner while you think more about it."

Will sacked into his chair. Dear god, thanks ... he did not seem to be on list of planned killings. At least not now. And it did not seem likely that Hannibal would poison him.

"Pâté de Foie gras."

"Looks delicious" Will tried his wine. "Where do you get your recipes?"

"Mostly from books and other cooks. You might not believe it but I like to go out for dinner. Sometimes I ask for the recipe" Hannibal took his seat. "Over the years I collected quite a lot."

Great, Will. Small talk with a murderer. What did he want to accomplish here? He had to tell Jack about the microfiber tube. What else was there to do? Finding evidence seemed unlikely. As well as waiting for Hannibal to slip up. So why did he stay?

"I already planned for tomorrow but what about the day after? Would you like to eat out?"

"Well ... yeah, why not? Even though I don't think we will find a restaurant that cooks better than you do."

"You flatter me" He toasted him. "Aside from all that murder business I haven't asked you about yesterday yet. Did you have any flashbacks? Panic attacks?"

"Err ... no, it was alright" Will nodded slowly. "I would like to try for longer."

"That is alright for me" Hannibal nodded. "What about leaving you for two hours the day after tomorrow and having a late dinner afterwards?"

"Well ... maybe the day after? Being there and going out afterwards ... that's a lot, isn't it?" Considering he might find more murder sketches while Hannibal was out killing someone. He did not think he could stomach food afterwards. And screwing up

Hannibal's plans sounded fine right now.  
"As you wish."

No new bodies.

No new sketches.

Even less than all that. The sketch with the Chesapeake-Ripper scene had of course vanished. Jack had his team look up microfiber producers and found out that no one sold anything like that even though it was possible to produce it. Well, Hannibal wouldn't have told him if he was trackable by it. He left enough evidence that Will knew it was him but not enough that anyone else would believe him. It was maddening.

What was he playing at? Why did he want to rile up Will like this? Or wasn't it about him? He seemed to be some plaything to Hannibal but maybe he gave himself too much credit. Maybe it was unrelated to him.

Maybe he was actually just hallucinating things. Maybe he couldn't trust his own mind like before. Maybe he couldn't even trust his own thoughts. It sounded paranoid but if a disease could screw him up like that, maybe his overimaginative mind could screw up itself? He had always had strange dreams after cases. Before he changed to the classroom he had always had nightmares. Sometimes he had seen unusual things in broad daylight. Mostly in the corner of his eye but he had been sure it was there even though he knew it was not.

Had he really seen that sketch? Had he really stayed in that office? Had Jack really called and told him about a murder case?

And how should he proceed if he did not know if he could trust his own head?

"There has been another murder" Hannibal said instead of a greeting. "Jack called me. Did he call you as well?"

"No ...?" Will laid down the book he had read. "There was?"

"A young women who sold cosmetics. She was displayed in her backroom beauty parlor."

"Huh ... and why did Jack call you?" That point sounded more than wrong. Did Jack somehow confront Hannibal? Did he just call to know where he was?

"He said he knew you were living with me. So he asked me what you and I had done at the supposed time of death to check if you might have been the killer" Hannibal said down with a glass of wine. "Of course you were unable to. It happened two days ago when we were out for dinner."

Oh no. Another murder with a fake time of death. What did he use this time? A time machine?

He hated intelligent killers.

"And what long objects can you find in a beauty parlor to impale her with?" Will sounded resigned.

"Next to none" Hannibal took a seat. "You are developing a sense for this. It was actually quite a problem I guess. She had a bamboo plant which was used."

He guessed. Of course. He fucking knew and Will knew that he knew and he knew that Will knew that he knew. God he was getting tired of all this. He would gain nothing and be killed in the end for it.

"Why her?" Will sighed.

"Is that important?" Hannibal shot back.

"I guess not" The younger shook his head. "My reactions are your fun in this, right?"

"They are extraordinarily interesting. Where has your sense of guilt gone?" Hannibal sounded sincerely amused.

"What do you want from me?" Will jumped out of his chair and screamed in anger. "Do you want me to cry? To despair? To kneel and beg you to stop? It would never stop you! Nothing will ever stop you!"

"My, my ..." A smile curved the other's lips. "You are overreacting. I am only asking questions. You do not have to beseech me to stop that. Tell me to and I can be as silent as a grave."

Will could not repress a sob. God ... he wanted to kill Hannibal. He wanted to throttle him. Flail him. Take one of the kitchen knives and run it through his body. Couldn't he at least be honest about his crimes? He threw information at Will like you would throw meat at a starving dog but it was not enough to ever convict him. Nothing was ever enough.

"I am still pushing you too hard" The voice was surprisingly near and only a second later two arms pressed Will against a solid, warm body. "You are fragile. I do not want to break you."

"Let go of me" His voice trembled. His whole body trembled. Fear and anger mixed together to something akin to horror.

"Surely" Hannibal took a step back and smiled. "Only ask and I will to my utmost to comply."

"Stop killing."

His voice nearly broke. This was it. This meant confirming that he was only here to spy on Hannibal. That he knew. This was the end of their delicate dance around the truth. Now or never. If he was killed now he would at least have done his best to help. More than he ever thought himself possible of.

"Dear Will" Hannibal's hands still lay on his shoulders. "You must have misunderstood something. I am not a killer. I am only a psychiatrist who cares deeply for you. I am your friend."

But Hannibal's grin was downright cruel.

## Kapitel 2: 2. Chapter

Will opened his eyes to glaring sunlight. He drew his eyebrows together and looked at his clock questioningly. It said twenty past nine. That was ... unexpected. He lay back down and sighed. Why hadn't Hannibal woken him? He must have already left the house. Maybe the guy had respected his wishes for the first time? It seemed unlikely. Will sighed and stood up. So ... what should he do this fine day? Search for the women's organs? Knowing he would never find them except if Hannibal wanted him to find them? He shook his head. Well, he could start with a shower and breakfast and go from there. Smiling about having made a decision he started with going to the bathroom. In there he opened every cabinet – you never know where the guy might put organs thinking they would be found.

Will even switched on the water while standing beside the shower instead of under it. It was just ... okay, maybe he was getting paranoid but for a second he had seen the shower spouting blood. He hated being played mind-games on and he recognized it was only a result of Hannibal's latest game but he still feared what could happen. Even if it was totally unreasonable that it could happen. If being killed was a likely event why would a bloody shower be unreasonable? It made sense – at least to Will himself.

And wasn't that his eternal problem?

Next he searched his own room in pursuit of missing organs and some clothes for the day. What a great daily routine. Searching for organs in your dresser. Will snorted to himself. Hannibal did this for his amusement ... so if he really placed the organs somewhere, it would be at an obvious place which Will would reach only after believing that the guy had not placed organs anywhere. Hannibal wanted to keep him on his toes. He did not even have to see Will actually finding the organs. Just picturing him and his reaction might be enough for him. Or maybe he hid somewhere in the house, waiting for Will to come across the organs to watch his reaction.

Will swore to himself that he would not scream. If he found some organs, he would keep his cool. With that thought he descended to the living area, looking around for intestines hanging over doorframes and carefully placed hearts in the hands of one of the decorative statues standing around. He saw none of all that. He actually saw nothing out of place at all.

Kitchen coming right up, hm? Alright, he would search the kitchen. He opened all cupboards and cabinets, even the drawers. He only found spices he had never heard of before – well, no wonder when you only used salt and pepper – and a delicate-looking silver cutlery which was unknown to him. He sighed over the absurdity of looking for eyeballs in teacups but he still did it. It was only after checking every pot that he relaxed slightly. He took a bowl and some cereals to make himself breakfast. He was even humming a low tune when he opened the refrigerator to get some milk. The sound stopped instantly and his eyes opened widely. As he had sworn, he did not scream. Not because of willpower but because something seemed to constrict his throat and strangle every sound.

Right on eye level he was looking at a perfectly human sized brain.

“Pick up the phone, damn it, Jack, pick up the goddamn phone ...” Will kept muttering

to himself while he paced the living room.

"This better be good" The other did not sound as if he was in a particularly good mood.

"It's me" Will tried to get his erratic breathing under control.

"Will? Don't tell me you did it. Or maybe do. I want an excuse to shoot someone" Jack nearly growled.

"What?" His own voice sounded hoarse.

"The fucking corpse over here!" Jack shouted into the phone.

"I- there ... there is another?" Tears were streaming down Will's face. Fuck. There was a fucking brain in Hannibal's fridge and people were screaming at him as if he was the guilty one.

"Yes, there is a new corpse, Will. Surprise" The word sounded like a slap in the face.

"And she is one of the worst I ever saw."

"She?" Will blinked. "She as in a woman impaled on bamboo sticks in her back-room beauty parlor?"

"You fucking knew and you didn't call?" This one was even louder than the last. "What the heck are you good for anyway?"

"I ... I'm sorry" He said automatically. "Didn't you find her yesterday?"

"No, you idiot, we found her about twelve minutes ago. Why the fuck should we know about a corpse somewhere in a back-room parlor?" Jack's rage turned to icy cold determination. "So you knew about this. And you did not call. You either did it and are playing innocent or you did it in another psychotic state and just don't remember. Anyway, I am going to arrest you now."

"Wait a second! That was Hannibal, not me!" Anger and desperation mixed in his voice.

"Even if you only covered for him, I will get your ass back in prison."

"Jack, listen for a minute! There is a human brain in Hannibal's fridge and I am only a second away from puking my guts out. If you want to arrest someone, get a forensic team over here and arrest Hannibal afterwards."

There was stony silence on the other end. Enough for Will to start hyperventilating again. He knew that was bad and he knew he should stop but he just couldn't. Even as his muscles began to cramp up.

"There is a brain in your fridge?" Jack sounded calm for the first time since picking up the phone.

"Yes, there is a human brain in the fridge" Will had to swallow and was finally able to stop breathing so fast. He took every breath deliberately now. "And Hannibal told me yesterday about the dead woman. But he said that you had called him about it."

"Bullshit. The woman was only found this morning" Jack took a deep breath as well.

"Okay. I'll head over and bring a forensic team. Do not move, understood?"

"Yeah ... yeah, I- I'll ... just sit down" Will nodded absently. "I'll wait."

"Good" That was followed by a long beep.

"And?" Jack was standing next to Will who was sitting in one of the living room chairs.

"I don't think it's from a human" Beverly crossed her arms. "It's the right size but not the right form. More like a cow or maybe a horse. Best we take it to the laboratory."

"Then Hannibal would know you were here" Will forced out. His voice was quivering like a leaf in the wind.

"How is that a problem?" Jack only seemed annoyed by his interruption.

"It's ... I don't know. Who knows what he thinks?" Will looked at the other

beseechingly. "He is mad. No, he ... he isn't mad but still he does not live in the same reality as we do. Who knows what he will do. Who knows what game he is playing here."

"You should" Jack crossed his arms. "You are the empath here. And last time I looked you certainly weren't living in the same reality as I did."

"Jack!" He jumped from the chair but even with a look up close there wasn't even a trace of guilt in Jack's face. His gaze wandered slowly to Beverly, hoping and fearing at the same time what he might see there.

She did not look away but neither did she look completely comfortable with the situation. After a moment she offered: "I could probably identify it with the pictures and a tissue sample. One would never know I had taken that sample."

Will mouthed a thank you her way. She only nodded and went back to the kitchen.

"So ..." Jack stared at the place where Beverly had vanished but he was clearly speaking to Will. "What did he say? What did he know about the murder?"

"He ..." Will recollected the scene. "He said there was another murder. That you had called him to ask where he and I had been" Jack made an impatient noise. "He said a woman selling cosmetics had been found in her backroom beauty parlor. The murder had happened three days ago when we were out for dinner. And that she had been stabbed with sticks of her bamboo plant."

"We calculated the time of death to be about Tuesday morning. That would be some hours before your dinner."

"Haven't you kept tabs on him?" In spite of everything he did Hannibal was still human. He couldn't make himself invisible or walk through walls. If someone observed him 24/7 he should not be able to murder anyone.

"Yeah ... he had patients the whole day, then drove here to get you and went to dinner with you. It's just ... I would like to believe you and arrest him but we have given him an alibi with our surveillance. He really couldn't have done it."

"And I?" Will's voice was only a whisper. "Did I ... leave the house?"

"Do you think you would still stand here if you did?" Jack looked at him. "This was a Chesapeake-Ripper murder. It wasn't done by you or him. But somehow you both seem to know about it" He took a pause in which he regarded Will. "It makes you ... suspicious. More even – it makes you suspects. Both of you. I don't know what to think but I sure as hell won't trust either of you."

"Jack ..." Will sounded pleading. "I did not commit those murders. If there was more I could tell you I would. I-"

"I'm not inclined to believe you" Jack nodded, more to himself than to Will.

"Why?" He clenched and unclenched his hands in helplessness. "Why won't you believe me?"

Jack leaned near as if to whisper in his ear but his voice was harsh: "You're alive. It's suspicious."

Will didn't know if he should be angry or disappointed. Even if he could chose one feeling, he didn't know if he should rage or cry. He felt like he didn't know anything. He didn't know if what he saw, what he heard and thought was real. He didn't know if his conclusions had any merit or if he was only spouting nonsense which no one except him believed. He didn't know if he would survive the night.

He wanted to be angry at Beverly for not telling Jack off. He wanted to be angry at Jack for daring to suspect him of murder. He wanted to hate Hannibal most of all but

he somehow couldn't bring himself to. And that left only one person to be angry with: Himself.

Why was he even here? Why had he thought he could help with this? How had he imagined this to work? Hannibal murdered even though he had one former FBI agent in his house, others following him all around the clock and the whole homicide department at his heels. It was beyond absurd and it still happened. He played with them and he played with even higher stacks than last time.

There was a way to end this. There always was. He could kill Hannibal himself. It would mean his death but by now that did not matter much to him. He didn't know if he could trust reality. But he would kill a dangerous person whatever happened – either Hannibal if he was the murderer or himself via Hannibal which would make him too dangerous for society anyway. So maybe he should. Maybe that was what Jack was counting on. Maybe that was why they had released him. To do what they could not. They always used him to do the things they could not do themselves.

Jack had made him hunt down those criminals. He had nearly gone mad because of it. Now he made him try to stop Hannibal. He would certainly go mad if this continued. So why not kill Hannibal to escape madness and be killed for it? At least he would die with a clean consciousness. As clean as a consciousness can be when you had killed someone. It all came back to Hopps, didn't it?

Killing a man for the first time. Living with the fear, the guilt and the secret irresistible feeling of power. He could do it again. He had done it so many times now. Killing another psychopath would not weight hard on his mind. Yes, he could ... he could even save a life. If there would never be a third corpse in this series, they would know he had been right.

He could live with that. And he certainly could die with that.

He looked at the kitchen knives. One of these would have to do. Wouldn't it be fitting to kill Hannibal with one of his own kitchen knives? Oh yes. Will grinned when he chose one. It was Hannibal's favorite. Quite a fitting end.

He settled back into the living room chair he mostly used, knife securely in his hand. Now he only had to wait. All good things came to those who could wait. Hannibal would come, just as he came back every evening, exactly at the same time. Hannibal was predictable when it came to his schedule. When he wasn't killing people or throwing out threads while smiling charmingly.

Will's grip on the knife tightened when he heard the front door open. Hannibal would come to the living room first. It was the place Will most often frequented. He would say hello, continue on into the kitchen and tell him what he had planned for dinner. Just like any other evening.

"Evening, Will" Hannibal only spared him a short glance and went straight into the kitchen. "How was your day?"

"Splendid" Will forced the word out.

"Have you finished your book?"

"Not yet" Should he go after him? Or should he wait for Hannibal to come back? He tugged the knife back to his side when he heard footsteps drawing near.

"Is pâté de cervelle alright for dinner?" Hannibal stepped into the room but stopped near the door.

"Sure" If he would only take a few steps ... just some inches more and he could reach him.

"Great" Hannibal nodded obliviously. "I'll begin with the preparations. Just ... take a shower, all right? You smell a bit."

"Do not!" Will would have stood up if he hadn't remembered the knife in his hand in the last second. No use letting Hannibal see that he was armed.

"Do too" The other only nodded and headed back into the kitchen. "Take your time." Will stayed seated, looking at the now empty spot in bewilderment. How should he ... what should he ... he smelled himself. Well, okay, maybe Hannibal had a point. In his nervousness he must have sweated quite a bit during the day. But should he really shower? He looked at the knife. Well ... he shouldn't attack Hannibal in the kitchen. He would most likely work with a knife himself. He should wait until dinner. Best to take a shower now.

With a sigh he headed upstairs, knife in hand.

This was even more surreal. He was about to kill a man and all he did was peacefully standing under the shower spray and filling the bathroom with steam. Maybe he should knock his head against the wall to be done with it. Then Jack could arrest Hannibal for killing him, even though he hadn't actually done it. But who would know? Who would care?

He shook his head and let out a sigh.

Could someone please tell him what he should do? Give him some kind of sign? God-like intervention or something? He had hallucinations anyway, so why did he never see any signs of God talking to him? Sure, he wasn't schizophrenic and didn't have a brain tumor like that guy from the angel case but his autoimmune disease had given him all kinds of false knowledge and strange deductions before. Surely an angel with a message or even some figures in the steam weren't too much to ask for?

He was so absorbed in his thoughts that he nearly jumped out of his skin when he heard a sound behind him. A sound like a vacuum being filled. The sound of an opening shower stall door. He turned around.

And screamed.

Logically he knew what he would see. I didn't help. It never helped.

He stumbled backwards, sliding, falling.

His hand hurt, his rump hurt but he could only think of crawling further away, backing up against the stall walls with no further escape. He was dead. He was so fucking dead.

"Calm down" Hannibal held up his hands innocently. No knife. No weapon at all. "I only wanted to talk to you without the surveillance's notice."

"What surveillance?" Will's voice trembled.

"Ah" A smile lit up Hannibal's face. A soft, pleased smile. "I had wondered."

"What?" Not only his voice, his whole body trembled. Shook with shivers of fear.

"Calm ... you have nothing to fear" Hannibal slowly bend and held out a hand.

Will stared at that hand. That face. That hand.

What?

"I only wanted to surprise you. I did not think you were this jumpy. I apologize."

Huh? Will blinked. The trembling subsided but left him shaky. He slowly held out his own hand to let himself be helped up. And he was helped up. No sudden moves, no reaching for the shower head to strangle him with the tube and still no weapon.

"It's alright" Hannibal's voice was soothing. "I did not want to scare you. Calm down" A shudder went through Will and nearly forced him to his knees. "No, no, we won't have that ... are you crying? Did I do this?" One hand still held Will's arm, the other caressed his cheek. "You poor thing. So scared ..."

Hannibal was nearly crooning. It made Will cringe inside. Good, he hated this. He hated his weakness. He hated his tears. He hated his loss of control. It only made him sob for which he bit down hard on his lower lip.

Hannibal's arms settled around him and slowly guided him into an embrace. All the while the guy continued talking as if he was a child or a hurt dog or something like it: "You don't have to be scared. There is nothing to be scared of. All those fears, all this anxiety, it is all in your mind. It is not real. You are safe here. You came here for safety, so I will keep you safe. Don't worry. No one will harm you while you are with me."

Shit. Will suppressed another sob but had been so close to bursting out of him. He hated this. He hated Hannibal. He hated what Hannibal had done to him. He hated how the guy played with his mind. He hated everything about it.

He lifted his arms and gripped Hannibal's shoulders. He only had to shove. He only had to push the guy away to be free of the embrace. He only had to use a minimum of force to have him take a step backwards.

Why couldn't he?

Why the fuck did he feel as if he were paralyzed?

"I will keep you safe. You are mine to protect. Mine to keep. I will not let harm come to you. So calm. Relax. I can hold you up if your legs give out. Now calm ... good. You're doing well. So well" One of his hands had begun to stroke his spine. "Exactly like that. It feels good to relax, hm? You can relax here. Such a good boy."

Will still trembled. He was leaning against Hannibal and he relaxed and he still trembled. He hadn't known that was even possible. But he felt good and scared at the same time. Somewhere along the lines of positively nervous.

"Very good" Hannibal grabbed his shoulders and righted him until he was standing on his own again. He nodded, smiled and turned to leave the shower.

Will nearly went after him until he remembered where he was and who he was with. The sharp reminder struck him like lightning. Hannibal. A murderer. A serial killer. How could he forget even for a second?

"Ah, here you are" Hannibal – still a bit wet and completely naked – reached for something in the pile of Will's clothes lying on the washing machine. Will flinched when he saw what Hannibal had taken. "This is what I was looking for. I need it for cooking" Hannibal smiled over his shoulder without turning. "See you at dinner."

He left without another word.

So Hannibal knew.

Will had thought that all along but this was prove that Hannibal knew what he was here for. One cannot ignore his supposed guest carrying around long kitchen knives. No one sane at least and even though Hannibal killed off people like others would weed their garden – he was sane. In the strictest sense that he had no hallucinations or delusional ideas. As long as you did not count regarding humans as mere disgusting assembling of meat without any virtue or merit an delusional idea.

Without any doubt Hannibal knew that Will was here to spy on him and knew that he had killed those people. So why hadn't he killed him yet? Why was he kept alive? What were Hannibal's plans for him?

He should replay this conversation word for word. So Hannibal had come into the shower – why? He had said something about surveillance. Had he thought that Jack had bugged the house? Maybe even installed cameras? The bathroom with the running shower would have swallowed both sight and sound. So Hannibal had sent

him to shower – most likely after he noticed Will had taken the knife – to ... to do what? If he expected surveillance it would have been the perfect opportunity to kill him. But he hadn't done so.

He had made Will intuitively tell him that there was no surveillance. Maybe that had been all he wanted to know. Maybe he had just wanted to find out if there was any surveillance. And Will had blurted out the truth right away. Great move, Will.

And then Hannibal had ... well ... what exactly had that been? Calming him? Why should he? Maybe it was another attempt to fuck with his mind but what did Hannibal plan to accomplish? What was his goal? Will let out a deep sigh.

He did not have the slightest clue.

“Have you ever thought about becoming a vegetarian?”

“Is the dish not to your liking?” Hannibal's face showed actual concern. Maybe he was petty about his cooking skills. Well, he had a right to. Will had found the damn brain in the fridge this morning and thought it belonged to the latest victim and still he was able to eat. Notwithstanding the latest freakish scene in the shower. One would expect all that to curb Will's appetite.

It did not. Dinner was obscenely delicious.

“No, no, it's great. I just wondered. You like meat, especially organs. So I thought ...”

“If I might be on a crusade against vegetarians? Not at all” Hannibal smiled one of his trademark not-reaching-his-eyes-smile. “I like salad. I am just no friend of fish. So it is either meat or salad with me.”

“What about non-salad vegetarian food? Indian for example?”

Anything which did not include organs sounded good right now. Had Hannibal ever ... no, he did not want to think about it. It was disgusting. Hannibal wasn't a cannibal. He wasn't insane and he hadn't immigrated from an remote, otherwise unknown island.

“I like to eat it occasionally. But mostly when I am eating out” Hannibal reached for the wine bottle to refill their glasses. “I do not have the necessary spices here to do it myself. I don't like prefabricated mixed herbs. And a good curry has about fifty different spices in it.”

“Really?” No, you idiot. He wanted to get Hannibal to cook vegetarian, not discuss exotic spices. “Don't you like to try? Mixing all those can't be easy. I guess it would be a nice challenge for you.”

“Hm ... an interesting proposition. I concur. But I would like to make Thai instead of Indian food. And seeing as we are not vegetarians, I want to try some of their recipes with chicken.”

“Alright” Chicken sounded fine. It was something easily identifiable at least. “Anything I can do to help?”

“I'll write you a shopping list. Do you think you can manage groceries?”

Will was nearly asking why he shouldn't be able to until he remembered that Hannibal liked to keep up their facade. Well ... if he had to play a fearful ex-killer afraid of stepping out of line to survive then he would.

It had been a week.

Jack had not called. Every time Will tried calling him, he seemed to be out of the office. And no matter how often he left a message asking to be called back it never happened. So Jack really was through with him.

Will sighed and curled up on the sofa. What should he do now? It all seemed ... senseless. He wasn't able to stop Hannibal. He wasn't able to get any evidence on him. Even if he somehow miraculously did get something Jack wouldn't listen. He could try to kill Hannibal but after that night a week ago the impulse had deserted him. As well as his courage. And he wasn't coldblooded enough to kill someone he had been living with for weeks anyway.

So what was left to do? Give up? Go home, get his dogs from Alana and search for another job? Could he? Would he be able to forget what a mess he had left here? He closed his eyes. He knew he wouldn't. He would not be able to leave.

He would just stay and wait.

Maybe someday Hannibal would finally kill him. Maybe that would help to convict him. Will could only hope. It was his only hope left to be of any use.

"Oh, look" Hannibal had just sat down and taken up the newspaper. "There has been another murder."

Great topic for breakfast. Especially when they both knew who had done it.

"Gruesome. They found a butcher impaled on his own sharpened bones" Hannibal continued playing or actually being oblivious to Will's discomfort. "His legs were skinned and hung with the animal's legs. They only recognized them after searching for the missing limbs for hours. It seems to be a Chesapeake-Ripper murder. The victim was missing his heart."

"Still missing it I suppose" Will said more to himself than to Hannibal.

"Well, yes. Obviously" When Hannibal lowered the papers there was a smirk on his face. "It means the killing spree is done for now. There have been three victims."

"Thank God" Will let out a deep sigh. Unexpectedly he wasn't one of the victims. He was alive. He shouldn't feel glad about the murder but somehow he was. "When was he killed?"

"Yesterday, probably around noon."

"Didn't you have clients at that time?" Will furrowed his brow. How the heck did he kill all those people? He was still under observation, right?

"Of course I had. What else should I have done?" The smile could be called condescending at best. "You are a better radar for crimes. You seem to understand why and how people do those horrible things."

Will was tempted to tell him to shut it but he wanted to survive another day. So he would reign himself in and pretend again that nothing was wrong and that Hannibal was a normal psychiatrist. Whatever he needed to stay satisfied.

"So, tell me more" Hannibal held the newspaper out to him. "What happened?"

"I have to see a crime scene to do that" He concentrated on eating his boiled egg.

"I have seen you doing it far away from crime scenes. I know you can do it" Hannibal smiled but there was a hard edge to that smile. "Indulge me."

Shit. Will studied the other carefully. He didn't want to do these debriefing sessions. He didn't want to encourage Hannibal. But at the same time he did not know why Hannibal kept him alive and this might be it. He spoke carefully while watching the other: "I don't want to. Whenever I think myself into a murderer ... it means that I see what he sees. I do what he does. I feel what he feels. I am being him in that moment, completely emerged in his thoughts and fantasies. In those moments I like killing people. I like mutilating them. Every time I do it it leaves a stain on my soul. Every time I feel a little more disgusted with the world and myself."

"Yes."

Will waited. Hannibal didn't seem inclined to saying more. He still held out the newspaper.

"Why would you want me to do that?" Desperation clung to his voice.

"I want to see what happens when the disgust overwhelms you. Will you conquer it? Or will you drown? Will you be able to cope or will you break away from yourself and become someone else? Someone who really thinks and feels like this?"

Will knew what question Hannibal did not ask. He knew because it was what he most feared: Would he become someone like Hannibal? Was it possible to drown in such much blood and gore that he would turn into the one he despised most? That he would give himself up to escape the pain?

He reached for the newspaper.

Maybe that was Hannibal's plan. Maybe his goal was to turn Will into someone like himself. But why would he want to do that? Why would he want to turn Will into a copy of him? I didn't make any sense. Well, maybe it did. Maybe ... maybe he knew enough now to find out.

Will eased into one of the chairs and relaxed. His mind always worked best when he was in the middle of a crime scene. This house was their crime scene. This house was where Hannibal kept and groomed him into another being. He let himself sink into his mind.

He was a bit older than forty. He was living alone in a big house in a quiet, family-friendly neighborhood. He had never been married and did not seem to have had a girlfriend or another significant other in quite a while. He had studied medicine, became a surgeon and then changed to psychiatry. He was a psychopath and had killed for at least fifteen years now.

Spotlight.

He always had problems connecting with others. They never noticed because he was charming when he wanted to but he felt severed from other human beings. They did not feel as if they belonged to the same species he did. Rather they seemed to belong to one species and he was alien. It never bothered him much. He was superior to them. He did not need to spend time on their feeble social interactions and miserable attempts to gain affection from one another. He was free to learn whatever he wanted, read all he liked and enjoy the finer things in life.

He tried dating in college to see what the fuzz was about. He never understood. Sex was nice but the price tag of a hormonal, nagging female was too high. Prostitutes seemed a cleaner and cheaper solution. Not that he needed their services. He wasn't a slave to his urges the way most men his age seemed to be.

He chose surgery because it suited him. Blood and intestines held a peculiar fascination for him. Holding them in his hands gave him more thrill than sex could ever do. It felt like power. It occupied him for quite some time before he became bored again.

Boredom had always been his eternal enemy.

Something was missing. The precise surgical way in which he had to do his operations seemed too confined. There was no art in it, no artistic value. And it was only half the fun if he could not see people's facial expressions. He wanted ... more. Something new. Something exciting. He tried different fields of surgery but even the most radical and bloody didn't satisfy him.

He found his answer one night. He didn't want to save people's lives. He wanted to snuff out that light burning in their eyes. He wanted to replace it with fear, desperation and pain. He wanted the thrill of knowing that he truly had the power of a God. He would bring another Deluge and cleanse this earth of all that foul, abominable creatures.

He would be merciful and give their lives meaning. Lives that lacked all kinds of worth would be turned into works of art. He would be a creator in his own way. He would become what only he could be. He was chosen. It was why he had been made different. He had been made in the image of God.

Or so he thought. It was pure bliss in the beginning. Luring his prey, killing and arranging them. Always fearing that someone would find out, that someone would find him. But they never did. He became more daring. He went on killing sprees, left patterns and even clues to his identity. But they never found him.

He had overestimated the force of law. He had guessed that at least one might have something similar to his intelligence. If one did, he wasn't in the field. It was almost too easy. No, wrong, it was too easy. It wasn't fun anymore.

He had long since changed his occupation to psychiatry. Understanding people's minds seemed like an interesting challenge. It was like trying to understand another species who didn't even speak his own language. Fascinating – but repetitive over the time. They all had the same patterns. Schizophrenia linked to mania. Fear linked to depression. Severe depression linked to schizoaffective disorders. Some personality disorders were less severe forms of those psychotic diseases. Other personality disorders based on disturbed emotional input, processing or output. Narcissistic, antisocial and Borderline personalities – they were all just different manifestations of similar neurological deficiencies. Some modulators turned too high, some too low, some defect but all part of the complex emotional regulation network.

He had long perceived that he wasn't a God. Those had been delusional ideas to give his life meaning and self-worth. Not that he had ever missed them. His personality made him unable to miss his feelings. It even made him unable to feel his self-disgust. His personality disorder – if one could call it that – seemed like a gift to him. And he wasn't alone. There were others like him, even though most of them weren't as daring and nearly all of them a lot more stupid.

Thankfully his personality also made him unable to feel any sympathy for them. They seemed like flawed experiments of a grand ideal of a human. He might be such an ideal. They certainly were not. Killing them felt more like euthanasia than killing regular humans.

Searching for them and getting to know them became his new excitement. Maybe somewhere he would find one that would be interesting. Finding someone who was similar to him sounded tantalizing. In a good way. Putting his brains against another criminal genius ... well, that sounded like fun. Winning would mean he could go against a better one. Losing would be a glorious death.

It would be like Sherlock and Moriarty. Only better.

He just never found one. Finally when he was near to giving up, someone interesting crossed his path. Not a criminal genius. Not even a genius. But someone with the astonishing skill to think himself into every criminal in the world. No matter how sick, no matter how twisted. What a rare gift.

A gift he didn't know how to handle. What should he do with him? Certainly not kill him. It was like having a rare specimen in your lab when you had seen nothing but mice all your life. He would observe. Give him obstacles. Give him riddles. Turn

everyone against him and see how he would cope. Isolate him. And then keep him to play some more. Training him, grooming him and see how far he could go. He could discard it if it broke or if he got bored with it. But right now it was his new toy. His brand new source of fun.

Will opened his eyes. He trembled. His whole body shook. As soon as he got a minimum of control over himself he dashed to the bathroom and vomited. He retched until there was nothing left inside of him. Only then did he have enough energy to cry.

## Kapitel 3: 3. Chapter

Will did the laundry before the household service could do it. He polished and cleaned everything so that they could not even find a speck of lint on the couch. He went to the farthest markets to get the freshest groceries.

He did everything he could so that he did not have time to think.

It just didn't work. He went to bed but couldn't get the thoughts of Hannibal out of his head. His nightmares woke him whenever he finally fell asleep. And at four AM at the latest he gave up on sleep and lay awake until breakfast. Or rather until he felt able to move. Sometimes that wasn't until midday. Once he was finally up he couldn't stop working. Doing something. Most times he did the same thing over and over again just to have something to do. Until he nearly fell unconscious from exhaustion – and was still unable to sleep.

Hannibal just observed. Literally. He spent his evenings sitting in the living room not even pretending to read. He followed Will with his eyes wherever he went. Sometimes he even followed him in person.

He never said anything. It felt like having a scientist scrutinizing you while imagining all the horrible experiments he could perform on you. Will didn't know exactly what Hannibal was thinking. But he also didn't want to know. He only wanted to escape those eyes, those thoughts, this ... this situation.

He just couldn't.

He could not let the others down.

So he persevered. He ignored the burning gaze as well as he could and he tried to shut down his thoughts as much as possible. He knew it was a futile task but maybe he could last this out. Maybe some day Hannibal would just ... stop or change or die or whatever. He just had to wait. All good things came to those who could wait.

“You are in fear and that fear is beginning to drag you into depression.”

Will stopped in his motion of polishing a silver fork and swallowed. This was bad. He didn't know how but change seemed bad. And this was a change. This wasn't casual small-talk. This might be the prelude to his end.

“I don't know what you are talking about.”

“You might not” Hannibal took a seat opposite him. “You might have repressed your feelings or your knowledge of those feelings. But I don't think so. I think that if you look at your actions closely you will notice that fear is driving you.”

“What actions? Polishing the silver?” Will concentrated even more on it so his gaze wouldn't falter.

“Polishing the silver everyday” The sentence was followed by a long pause. “Doing all the housekeeping ... about three times more than needed.”

“It's only that I feel a bit useless. I miss having a job” At least a job where he knew what the fuck he was supposed to do.

“Then work for me. I could use a secretary.”

Will's eyes snapped up. Hannibal was just sitting there, politely smiling as always, the image of sincere sophistication. Well ... that was unexpected. Hannibal wanted him to work for him?

“In what capacity? What would I do? Your office seems to work quite well without

assistance.”

“I cannot take phone calls while I have patients. My schedule is actually a mess and I am constantly wondering how I keep up having an orderly workday. The same goes for my bills and taxes” A complete lie, Will was sure. He couldn't imagine Hannibal as less than perfect. “I have a lot of old files that need to be sorted through. I've always just stashed all my notes away but my storeroom is filling up” Another lie. Hannibal's office alone was big enough to hold the files of another thousand patients. “You could be a big help and it would give you something to do. I'd even employ you legally if you'd like.”

“Huh” Will regarded the other for a full minute before saying anything else. Of course he showed no sign of any specific mood whatsoever. “Why not?” At least it did not sound like a prelude to killing him. “If you think I could be helpful.”

“I wouldn't have asked otherwise” Hannibal nodded with a satisfied smile. “So you will come with me to work tomorrow?”

Will waited for a second before he nodded back. He just didn't understand Hannibal most of the time. He had been inside his head and still ... still he could not figure him out. Why not kill him? Will wasn't fun. He did not try to be boring but he couldn't help himself. He was plain old Will and nothing more. He wasn't special. And he certainly did not know how working as a secretary could mend that in any way.

Well, his opinion obviously did not matter.

If Hannibal thought he could somehow do something interesting ... did he plan to kill someone in front of Will? He had enough clients coming to his office. Or maybe there was something in the files – maybe he had files on all his murders. No, he would not. People could have found that before. Hannibal wasn't so careless. So why?

Will lay aside the silver fork with a sigh and turned to Hannibal asking “Can I help with dinner?”

No corpse in the office.

No photos or sketches of horrifying murders in the first stack of files. Will actually found himself relaxing a bit around eleven o'clock. By now he had ushered three different patients into Hannibal's office who were all quite surprised to see a secretary working next to the waiting room. But there had always been a room and there had always been a table – a secretary was meant to be there. So they accepted him after a look of surprise and a shake of his hand.

His first action had been to buy an actual calendar for writing down patient's appointments. Hannibal hadn't lied in that regard, he kept his appointments only in his head. He really had stacks of files which were neatly organized but had no summaries, which were what Hannibal wanted him to write. He had given him an example of how he liked those summaries and had already corrected the first two between his second and third patient.

Will had to admit that even though he was totally out of his depths it was fun somehow. Reading those patient files was like reading psychological thrillers. He had never studied any psychological illnesses except for those he needed for work and his own diagnosis. Reading Hannibal's files he began to doubt what that psychiatrist had once told him about his autism. He might ask Hannibal for some books about the subject.

Most importantly he felt better. Before, there had been this gnawing hunger for something he could not name and this slight feeling of panic that never abated. This

was better. Work had always been good for him. Too much time left him thinking and that was always bad when you tended to get lost in your own head. He did not like his mind. It was a booby-trapped maze and taking the wrong turn always led to pain. But here he could forget about the demons in the back of his mind and even the one on the other side of the door. And not only that – he was even having fun. He always liked learning something new and doing something he had not tried before. Psychology seemed like a worthy occupation. Even just playing secretary was nice. He just dreaded his first phone call. He had always hated the phone because he could not see the other person. Gauging people's moods had never been his forte but without a visual it was even worse.

It was Alana that had persuaded him to buy a phone. What was she doing now? Was she still caring for his dogs? Did she listen to Jack or might she still be on his side? And what was Beverly thinking about him now?

The last week he had not even thought about them once. He had been so wrapped up in his own misery that sometimes he couldn't even remember what had brought him to Hannibal. Other times he willfully forgot. Remembering meant pain. It had always been that way. Thinking about Jack meant feeling betrayed, thinking about Alana meant feeling a hurtful longing and thinking about Beverly meant feeling like a failure. Hell, even thinking about his dogs only left him with the feeling of having let them down.

He always disappointed people. Someone was always counting on him and he couldn't live up to their expectations. Hannibal was just another one in the long line of people expecting more than he could give. And most likely he would be the last. There was a certain satisfaction in that thought.

Maybe dying wasn't so bad. It was a lot like running away. Just leaving everything unfinished and bringing pain to everyone you knew. Most people saw that as bad but was it really something evil when everything you did anyway amounted to disappointing everyone? It did not seem that way to Will. Yeah, maybe being killed was the right thing to do. He could help Jack in his investigation. It would at least save him from being labeled a murderer or an accomplice. Maybe some people would keep him in their memory as something more than a complete failure.

It was a nice thought.

He began humming while he read the new file.

"You seem to be in better spirits" Hannibal nodded with a satisfied smirk.

"I am, thank you very much" Will glanced up from his current file. "I like this work. It is soothing."

"I am glad to hear it" Hannibal lay a hand on his shoulder. "Are you ready to go home now?"

"Sure, let me just finish this" He wrote down some key words. "I hadn't realized how late it's gotten."

"It is well past seven. Are you hungry? I planned on spagetthi for tonight."

"What a surprisingly common dish" He put the file back in order. "I like it. Let's head home."

On the way Will had a bunch of questions about the files and Hannibal shared some anecdotes. They still talked in the kitchen and well into dinner. It was while having dessert that Hannibal asked: "So ... what has changed? Why are you this ... happy?"

"I conquered my fear" Will smiled. "I stopped thinking about death."

"And why is that?" Hannibal inclined his head.

Should he really answer that? It might set Hannibal off. On the other hand, what harm would there be if he really meant it? So he said: "I decided I am alright with dying."

"Oh?" Hannibal lifted an eyebrow. "You plan on dying on me?"

"No" Will's gaze was trained on his ice-cream. "I just reckon ... you know, it might be any day. I don't want to die. But if it has to happen ... well, then it happens."

"That is ... unexpected" Hannibal studied him as if he were a work of art. "Sudden. What about your wishes? Your dreams? Don't you have any goals in life? Or a reason to live?"

"Hm ... nope" Will looked him in the eye. "Not really. I have already reached the top of my career. I don't have any family left. My friends shun me. I don't have or want kids, so ..." Abigail. Hannibal had killed Abigail. "It might have been different if Abigail were still alive."

"It was a terrible loss" Hannibal nodded.

Will knew he should have screamed at him at the top of his lungs. He should have upped and left. He should have felt an explosion of anger. As it was he just nodded and asked: "Could you at least ... do you think the rest of her was buried?"

"It was her wish to be given to the forest. Just like her father had taught her: Nothing shall be wasted. I am sure some wolves or such were happy to find her remains."

"That was her wish?" Will looked up and felt tears prickling his eyes. "You honored her wish?"

"She deserved honor" Hannibal nodded. "I wish she could have lived. I liked that girl. It was like having a daughter. A hurt little butterfly with too many dark secrets but still nice to watch."

"She was innocent" Will squinted his eyes in anger. Righteous anger on her behalf – he seemed able to manage at least that.

"She had killed those girls, Will" Hannibal paused for a second to study Will's face. "Her dad and her, they did it together. He saved his little girl from persecution with his stunt but that does not mean she was innocent. She knew what she did. She knew that I knew."

"She knew because she picked up the phone that day" He knew it was a guess but it made sense. So that was why Abigail had to die. "She knew it was you. You both knew what the other had done."

Hannibal only nodded.

"She never said a word" Will shook his head.

"She knew that no one would believe her. She knew that if she kept silent so would I. She also knew I could not let her run free forever" Hannibal finished his dessert and folded his hands to put down his chin on them. "She embraced death. She had known it was inevitable."

"Like I do now?" Will was secretly pleased Abigail and he had something in common even if it was this. "I know who and what you are. You know that I know even if we dance around the topic. I know death will come for me. I am not afraid anymore."

"Help me put away the dishes?" Hannibal made a loose hand gesture indicating that he meant the few things left on the table.

They brought them to the kitchen in silence. Will just stayed in front of the dishwasher watching Hannibal pick out a knife. So ... guess it would be now. Well, no better time than the present, right? He asked: "Did you kill her with one like these?"

"With her own hunting knife" Hannibal chose his favorite cooking knife. "She gave it to me. She was proud ... facing death without a flinch. I felt like a real father."

"Your notions of family are quite disturbed" Will could not help saying.

"Be that as it may" Hannibal took the few steps to stand in front of him. "Killing loved ones myself feels better than losing them. I know it was my own fault. I am in control, I feel a sense of rightness ... seeing as I never feel the guilt anyway."

"So you kill me and keep me in good memory knowing that you had to" Will did not avert his gaze. He kept his eyes trained on Hannibal's. He would be their focus right up to the end, and the end would not be far off. "Will you eat some part of me? Did you eat some of her?"

"No" The other held up the knife and began cutting lines onto Will's upper body without breaking his skin. Curious that Will's only thought was how unfortunate this all was for his shirt. He had liked it. "You are no mere animals. You are special. You both deserve honor ... what is your wish, Will? How can I honor you?"

"Make it quick" He had the sudden urge to close his eyes but he resisted. He would look Hannibal into the eye until the very end. "I don't want any pain" His body was shaking. He actually feared pain. Not death in itself but the pain – he did not want to suffer. He would not have to. Strangely he believed in Hannibal's absurd notion of honor.

"Hm" It wasn't agreement. It was only an acknowledgement of what he said. Hannibal followed the trail of his knife with his eyes. The moment stretched into eternity.

One second.

Two.

Three.

Was it already a minute? An hour?

"You are worth more than that" He retracted the knife and put it on the counter behind him. "You are special. You should die in a great climax or as a hero or in the happiest moment of your life" He lifted one hand to caress Will's cheek. His tone was low and filled with a believable imitation of sadness. "You don't even know what happiness is."

"Abigail did not know that either" Will heard the beating of his heart in his head. "She didn't know happiness."

"I was unable to make her happy" The hand proceeded to his neck, formed a hook and pulled Will towards Hannibal. "Who knows ... maybe I can make you happy. I should make you smile before I selfishly destroy you. It is only fair."

Will only noticed his tears because they stained Hannibal's jacket on which he had lain his head.

"You are worth it. It has to be a grand ending. I owe you this much."

The tears would not stop coming, so Will embraced the other fully.

"Sssch ... calm, little rabbit. You don't have to be afraid tonight" Hannibal laid a hand on Will's back and rubbed it up and down. "No harm shall come to you. I will see to it."

Three days. Three days and nothing out of the ordinary happened.

He had guessed that if Hannibal were planning anything ... strange ... it would have happened by now. But nothing had. They ate breakfast, drove to work, headed home and made dinner. In the evenings they read or went to concerts. Some evenings they even watched TV. It annoyed Hannibal a bit because he thought it plebeian but on this one he did not complain.

It was on Sunday that he asked what Will would like to do. All the Sundays before they had just stayed home but this one Hannibal actually asked. Of course Will was

completely at a loss. Normally he would spend his weekend walking the dogs, fishing and watching TV. Since he was now living in the middle of a city without dogs, most of that was out. And telling Hannibal he wanted to spend his Sunday watching TV did not sound like the best of ideas.

So he asked what they could be doing. That left him with more knowledge about the city he had lived and worked in for years than he had ever had. It seemed to be full of museums, art exhibitions, music halls and sport centers. As far as he could remember he had been in a natural science museum once but that was the extent of his knowledge about such places. And that had been in high school.

Hannibal was simply appalled.

Well, not everyone could be as sophisticated as he was. And most people did not suffer from the antisocial personality disorder that left Hannibal feeling chronically bored. Most people were sufficiently entertained by sports and drinking. But Hannibal was not. Hannibal certainly was a special case. Maybe he should introduce him to video games. It might curb his more ... homicidal tendencies.

It wasn't likely, but hope was always the last thing you should give up.

In the end they decided on visiting an art exhibition. Not exactly the most interesting thing one could do but it beat watching TV. Even though he could kind of understand how someone with nothing better to do than look at the strange pictures in the galleries might come to decide that torture and murder were more fun.

Hell, that was a bad joke. It still had a grain of truth. So he persuaded Hannibal to go visit an arcade next Sunday. And find a DVD rental to get some action movies for the following week. If Hannibal actually planned on making him happy, something more than a whole lot of books would be a good start.

Hannibal was a lousy person to watch movies with.

He could tell you the plot in the first five minutes. He saw through every kind of intrigue after the first few hints. He could explain the most unnatural killing methods when they watched crime dramas. He knew tricks how to murder in hermetically sealed rooms he hadn't even heard of in the FBI. Hannibal was a strategic and criminal superbrain.

No wonder movies bored him. There was no mystery for him and action movies didn't affect him at all. Having no fear really was a bitch when it came to entertainment. All kinds of romantic movies were out for similar reasons. When all positive emotions as well as anger seemed to be another language for you watching movies who evoked those emotions had to be a waste of time. That left them with horror movies. Hannibal found them worthwhile but Will was scared shitless by them, and would spend half the night either awake or in a nightmare.

Not funny.

It brought out Hannibal's sadistic tendencies. The movies didn't affect him much, but having Will cry and cling to his arm amused him. After only three evenings, Will was begging Hannibal to stop the torture. Mercily he relented.

So, movies were out. Onto video games. The arcade had seemed like a good idea, but it was full of teens and young men competing to be the biggest jerk in the room, which spoiled the fun. They went to a gaming store and tried some different games before deciding on an X-Box and a PS4 with a bunch of games.

Will had a great time. Hannibal mostly humored him. Without looking at a game guide or walkthrough, he mostly knew where to find rare treasures, what dialogue options

to pick and how to get through dungeons. He played fighting games by learning all the secret moves, calculating damage points and using exactly the needed style to win with the least effort possible. He liked one or two of the racing games. But most of the games were too simple for him and he finished them in record time.

That left them with sports. Passive observation held no interest for Hannibal, so they had to actually exert themselves. Unfortunately for Will, he had let himself turn into a couch potato, even while Hannibal had stayed in shape by jogging three times a week. Will couldn't keep up with him. Whenever he tried, it felt like he was about to cough up a lung. He began accompanying Hannibal while he jogged but they did not take up something new.

Within a month, Will was out of ideas. By then, they had read every acceptable book, visited every museum and gallery, and attended every concert and sporting event. What the heck was left? A hobby would have been nice but except for drawing – which was already rare for someone with APD – Hannibal had no interests at all. And even though he was really good at drawing he did not have a lot of inspiration or creative ideas.

He began to understand why he might actually be interesting to Hannibal. He was different because he had rare abilities. And he was as emotional as one could get without having borderline personality disorder. Hannibal hadn't framed him and lied to him and made his life a living hell to torment Will. He had done it out of boredom. And his motivation for killing was mostly boredom as well.

He wasn't likely to cure that but maybe he could lower the death rate.

Getting Hannibal to explain exotic topics worked. Some movies worked as well. Not that he was likely to watch them more than once but it was a start. Video games worked to an extent. They held Hannibal's interest for a few days. Trying new recipes was good, as well as accompanying Hannibal to cultural events. It was tedious for him but at least it entertained the man.

Some days he was tempted to call Jack and ask if his strategy was working. If the murder rate had actually gone down. But on the one hand what would it prove? Hearing that he was worth something? That he had done something useful? And on the other hand ... would Jack even pick up the phone? It did not seem likely. Maybe it was better this way. He could pretend he helped keep people save by entertaining Hannibal. He could hold on to the thought that he was finally doing good.

Some days he remembered that Hannibal was planning his death. That somewhere in his head there was a great master plan for when and where and how to kill Will. Most days he was just too busy to care. Working as a secretary for Hannibal and keeping him occupied in the evenings was a round-the-clock job. It was simple marvelous. It kept him on his feet from dawn to well into the evening. It was even better than his old job. He did not have to think.

Until Hannibal said one evening: "You are still not happy."

"Hm?" Will looked up with a smile on his face. "What do you mean?"

"You are not happy. Content, yes, but not happy" Hannibal looked him over with a hand laying on his chin as if he was a great thinker. Well ... he was one. "You have a good home. Good food. A fulfilling job and company. You do not have borderline personality disorder or a similar disease ... so why aren't you happy? What are you missing?"

"Nothing" Will smiled. What was there to miss? "I have everything one could wish for.

You provide all that a human needs.”

“Still you are not happy” Hannibal said.

“Well ... I miss my friends. I miss Alana.”

“Why her specifically?” Hannibal was in full doctor mode.

“Yeah ... well” Will sighed. “You know ... before my brain went to hell we had ... well, I ... I liked her. A lot. You know?”

“You mean you saw her as a potential love interest?” It sounded cold coming from Hannibal.

“Actually, it was more than that. I think she liked me too. We even kissed” Will grinned from one ear to another in remembrance.

“So now you miss her?”

“Well ... yeah, I guess so” A shimmer of a blush stained Will's cheeks. “It would have been nice if we could have ... if it had worked.”

“What separated you?” Hannibal's voice sounded as if he had some earnest interest.

“My disease mostly. My social skills. Her personality” Will sighed. “She said it was loneliness that drove us to each other. Not interest.”

“Does love develop from interest?” The voice was actually coloured with curiosity.

“Might interest be the first stage of love?”

“Well ... I guess it is. I am no expert” Will shrugged. “I can't say that I really ever have been in love.”

“And what should one do if he or she is interested in a person? What would you do?”

“Pursue her and try to make her agree to a relationship. Date her and then ... I don't know. Kiss her? Marry her? I think that is what people do. They try living together and seeing if they're compatible. And if it works well they stay with each other.”

“Hm” Hannibal lay his head to one side. “Is love about living together or kissing each other?”

“Both of course” He guessed. What did he know about such things? Love had always been a mystical word wrapped in legend and hearsay. He had no experience with love. Love was something for normal people. He wasn't normal, so he wasn't made for love. That had always been his belief.

“So what would you do if I kissed you?”

“Huh?” Will looked up. Had he heard correctly? Had Hannibal really asked that? No, he must have misheard. Maybe he said dissed or hissed or pi- no, Hannibal would not use that one. But the other one was nearly as unbelievable. “Pardon me?”

Hannibal stood and came around the nearly empty table. He stopped at Will's side, laid a hand on his shoulder and turned him, asking: “What would you do if I kissed you?”

Will swallowed. His throat felt dry. Hadn't he had water somewhere? He would have liked to look away and search for it. But his gaze seemed locked in Hannibal's. After a few tries of opening and closing his mouth he asked: “What?”

“Let's see” Hannibal leaned forward. With his free hand he gently lifted Will's chin.

Smooth lips met his own. His were dry and chapped while those other ones seemed perfect. They pressed lightly against his and shifted to accommodate the shape his own. The pressure increased while the fingers touching his chin rode down his jawline to his neck and curled in his hair. Will took a deep breath which pressed him upwards. He did not dare to stand but he certainly did not draw away from this new sensation. Alana's lips had been slightly wet. She had not reciprocated at all. She had stood there and had let him do what he wanted, so that he had drawn away in fear.

This was different. It was not he who had to initiate the kiss. It was not he who had to

wonder if he was wanted or not. He just had to react. And this was so easy to react to. He never knew how a kiss should actually work but it came to him naturally. Hannibal made it easy for him.

Hannibal!

Will suddenly drew away, his eyes wide like a deer's.

"Amusing" The hand on his neck drew forward to his cheek, one thumb caressing the side of his face. "Let's do that again."

He jumped from his chair and sprinted to his room.

Hannibal did not follow him.

## Kapitel 4: 4. Chapter

One week.

One week of not meeting Hannibal's eyes, trying to look away, giving monosyllabic answers during dinner. One week of fearing physical contact in any way, keeping his distance and flinching from every casual touch. One week of having to put up with his own thoughts.

Thinking about Hannibal. Dreaming about Hannibal. Fantasizing about Hannibal.

He had never believed himself to be mad. Strange, yes, abnormal, yes, sick at some points in his life. Never mad or crazy. Now he felt like it. His every thought circled around that kiss like a hawk who had driven its prey into a hole with no other exits. Spiraling like a sinner's soul on his long and painful way down to hell.

Some nights he had felt hell's fire licking at his skin. Other nights he had dreamed it was Hannibal's tongue. Some moments he had seen haunting ghosts, shivered in fear and put his arms around himself. Sometimes he had imagined they were Hannibal's. Some evenings he had shot the other curious looks and hated himself for it. Some days he had held those furtive memories dear.

It tore at him. It threatened to tear him apart. How was he supposed to deal with this? He had never ... no one had ever ... he had seldom showed interest in another person and he had always known it was futile. Alana was the only one who had ever ... whom he ever thought he had a chance with. And even then he had known that was only wishful thinking.

From early on he had dreamed that someone would offer him his or her love. Someone who would see him as he was, understand him and hold him dear. Someone who would accept his jumbled emotions as the love and sincere longing that they were.

Hannibal was as far from that ideal as one could get. He was unable to feel positive emotion or sincerely express it. He had admitted that he lacked in understanding Will – which made Will interesting to him in the first place – and that he planned for the worst possible ending. His motive in kissing him had been to see if he could be a substitute lover. And if he succeeded he wanted to kill Will.

The most rational reaction would have been to have rejected Hannibal on the spot. He was neither a suitable lover nor would it have been safe to accept him even if he were. But Will had never been the most rational of men when it came to matters of the heart. He was socially inept and he knew it. And he also knew that he would never have a lot of romantic opportunities. By age twenty-three he had decided that it did not matter to him if his suitor was male or female as long as they would give him a chance.

And it certainly did not help that he tended to madly fall in love with even a possibility of a romance. Which subsequently made him fall madly in love with whoever offered the possibility. It was just too rare and precious not to savor. One kiss was enough to send him head over heels.

That one kiss was enough to be madly drawn to a guy least suited to be his lover ever. So even without wanting to he awoke to the ghostly feel of fingertips on his skin. Lips caressing his own. Hair tickling his shoulder. Even the pale moonlight felt like a soft breath on his calves. It was driving him mad in ways he had never thought possible. He could not look at Hannibal without thinking of what could be. Even knowing that he

was day-dreaming a reality which had zero chance of coming true, he could not stop his thoughts. Had he not known better, he would have said his immune system had overreacted and given him hallucinations.

He began to doubt himself in a whole new way: What if Hannibal could be rehabilitated? He might not be able to feel much but he wasn't a classical psychopath. He actually lacked some characteristics of an antisocial personality disorder. First of all, he was not impulsive. He did not kill whenever the urge to do so struck him. He planned his murders. Secondly, he was intelligent. And thirdly, he was creative.

All three of those factors were completely atypical for an ASPD patient or a psychopath. It was exactly those three factors which had made it impossible for the police to catch him. And those same three factors might yet become Will's salvation. Hannibal did not have to kill. He had the self-control to curb his impulses. If boredom really was his only motivation, alleviating that boredom should be able to get him to stop killing.

Theoretically.

On the other hand Will had tried his best for the last one month and a half to entertain Hannibal. Still the guy planned to kill him. And for what? So that he would not have to face his loss if Will ever left by another way? But wasn't that a strange thought in and of itself? Of course he had met his share of murderers who had killed all their girlfriends with that reasoning. But shouldn't Hannibal have been immune to such feelings? If he could not feel regret, could he really feel loss?

It seemed so. Amidst all the emotions Hannibal could not feel, loss was the one he could. It was strange, wasn't it? If he could feel loss, didn't that imply that he could hold someone or something dear?

Will tried to recall all the psychopaths he had ever met or read case reports about. Everyone of them had a whole bunch of emotional deficits. They could not feel any positive emotions. They could not feel guilt or regret. They did not respond to punishment. Their answer to every challenge in life had been to get angry or aggressive. Instead of grieving they sunk into depression, mostly alleviating their negative emotions with alcohol or drugs. If they killed, they killed on the spur of a moment. They'd break into a house looking for money, unexpectedly run into a woman, rape her, and then kill her to keep her from going to the cops.

And every one of them had been as stupid as white bread.

Precious few had been intelligent enough to form sentences with more than seven words. Those cases were well documented with all their interviews published. But even those were impulsive, aggressive and only calm if left alone. Creative murderers who killed for art's sake were mostly a Hollywood invention.

On the other hand they existed. Hannibal was living proof of that. And Will was a specialist in those rare cases. He of all people should have been able to solve the puzzle that Hannibal posed. Was he really only a toy to him? Why would Hannibal want to kill him if he was a toy? Wanting to kill him like Hannibal did implied that he was precious to him. So what had turned him from a mere toy into an important person who drew feelings from Hannibal?

Will fastened the bathroom towel around him and sat upon the toilet. Not that he had to use it, it was just convenient. The bathroom was warm and except for that one time Hannibal had never followed him here. He could relax here.

He closed his eyes.

His name was Hannibal Lector. He was a psychiatrist who murdered people for artistic reasons and to alleviate his boredom. He had taken in the pet he had played with

before for fun. He kept that pet to study it.

Spotlight.

His pet had been most interesting. The most interesting thing he had seen in years. His unique abilities, his disease, his newest behavior – it seemed a great study. He had wanted to enjoy that taste to the fullest. Until something unusual happened: His pet had become another being to him.

It had happened only once before. Abigail had been interesting to him. Against his better judgment he had let her live for quite some time. Killing her had been unexpectedly painful. Not actual pain, he had never felt that kind of ripping sensation some of his clients described. But thinking about what could have been brought tears to his eyes.

That came completely unexpected.

Having similar feelings again now was even more unexpected. Feelings for a daughter might be something genetic. But feelings for an unrelated human, especially feelings of love ... it seemed too strange a concept. Still it seemed to be exactly what he had looked for – something new. Love was new. Loss was new. Maybe he might even be able to feel a twinge of regret if he killed him.

And he would kill him.

Not because he was bored with him. Far from it. He would kill him exactly because he was interesting. He wanted to see what that would do to himself. Maybe he might be able to experience some feeling for the first time in his life. Scientifically he should be able to feel. His threshold was just much higher than other people's.

He might be the first human ever to invoke real feelings in him. It was an honor to be killed for that. Most likely his pet would not see it this way but who knew? It was able to think itself into all kinds of psyches. Maybe it would understand. Maybe it would appreciate being killed.

Will opened his eyes. His breath came out shaky. Even though the mirrors were still fogged, the room seemed unexpectedly cold to him. He did not have to puke like the last time but he felt far from stable. So Hannibal wanted him dead for experimental reasons. He even wanted him to be thankful for it.

And worst of all, one of his main thoughts was how sweet it was to count for that much.

“Good morning” Warm lips pecked his cheek before he could flinch from them. “How did you sleep?”

I dreamed about you. That nearly left Will's lips but he was able to hold back. He just nodded and ducked his head to concentrate on his breakfast. And maybe so he would not be the target of any more affection this morning.

It was simply amazing how someone with next to no feelings at all could still understand humans so well and give one so much attention and appreciation without even feeling the need to. It was just what Hannibal did. Like a standardized program taken from a TV show for dedicated husbands.

Worst of all it worked.

Every day it got harder not to look up and smile. To expect and reciprocate that kiss. To take his hand and hold it while he sat down. To let yourself be fed and tell the other how well done the eggs were. It reminded him of kindergarten where he had watched some girls play house.

It was disgustingly sweet. It was exactly what Will had always craved.

"Would you like me to scramble some eggs?"

I'd like you to do a hell lot of things. Will just closed his eyes. Really, this was pathetic. He was an appalling creature when he was in love. Wasn't there any hormone injection against this kind of thing? He just sat there, tried not to look up and blush like a virgin. Well, in his own way he was a virgin. That kiss last week had been the third he had ever had. One with Alana, one with a girl in high-school who had lost a bet and had to kiss a creepy guy. That had been him. The joy of being a freak.

"Stay with me."

He hadn't noticed the hand on his cheek, so the voice speaking directly in front of him startled him. Will jerked back. Near, too near. He nearly toppled out of his chair trying to get away from Hannibal.

"Sssch" The other gripped his upper arms and gently pulled him back. "I am sorry I scared you. You look like a deer caught in headlights" Amusement tinged his voice.

"I'm- ... I mean ... err" Will stammered and blushed furiously. Damn, he had it bad. "Please."

"Please what?" Hannibal smiled. "Kiss me?"

God, yes! Will shook his head but that meant turning it in Hannibal's direction. He caught his head with a hand and his lips with his own. It didn't even take a second before he melted against the kneeling guy in front of him like butter on hot toast. God, his resolve was easily overcome.

He was much too easy, he knew – he still couldn't stop. It was all he ever wanted. More than he had ever dared dream of. And it had come true in one smashing instant without any chance of mentally preparing for it's onslaught.

Just like this kiss. And even without having any basis of comparison Will knew that Hannibal kissed damn well. It was warm and there was pressure and the tip of the other's nose caressed his cheek. And some days – like this morning – he just forgot he was supposed to resist and let a tongue in that danced with his own.

It all blended together into a blissful haze. At least until those lips parted from him and he was held back from following by a gentle touch on his shoulder. It was a sweet, fey moment right before the regret and guilt and shame came back and broke over him in agonizing waves.

Like exactly now.

Will gasped and jumped from his chair. Hannibal had already drawn back. He looked around wildly for him and found him quietly putting away the breakfast utensils. Will just turned and stormed out to barricade himself in the restroom.

Really. What had he been thinking? Hadn't he thought at all? This guy's agenda was to kill him. Kill him when he was most happy and if he continued this way that certainly wouldn't be far in the future. Why did Will just allow all that? What made him react to Hannibal like a fourteen-year-old girl? If he could trust his word even Abigail had had more sense than he showed right now.

What would it take to remind him he was here because Hannibal was a dangerous serial killer?

By eleven he had worked up the courage to call Jack. Even when he picked up the receiver he had to remind himself he had nothing to lose. If Jack told him there were as many victims as before, it was even more proof that Hannibal could not be trusted. "Special agent Jack Crawford, Head of Behavioral Sciences department. Who's speaking?"

"It's me ... Will" He braced himself for rejection.

"Something new on the front?" The other was talking business and nothing else.

"Well ... I tried to keep him occupied and ... I just wanted to ask if there was any change. Less bodies or ..." He couldn't even finish the sentence. He was shaking in his seat. He hated talking to people who he knew had a bad opinion of him.

"We had no Chesapeake-Ripper murders. But that's not unusual. We had one person with missing organs but that could be tracked to a smuggler ring. We had more bodies in total but the murders were a lot less sophisticated. If this trend keeps up and if I believed your Hannibal story I'd say he tracked and killed newbie murderers."

"He did. He was looking for a challenge, so he tracked down his own kind" He thought. He wasn't all too sure his suspicions were true. "At least that is what my profiling says."

"Humor me for a moment. What does your profiling tell you about him?" Jack sounded slightly interested.

"He kills for fun. Most things bore him, he needs the kick. Not only of killing but of knowing that you will never get him. That he could parade through your office and pin his crimes on your own employees. That he can kill your employees and you would still not suspect him. Or even if you suspected him that you would never be able to get him. He wants to see how far he can go. His next target will most likely be me" He should not think about that kiss, he just should not ... it had felt so good. "He knows we are not on good terms anymore, so my body will either just disappear or it will look like a suicide."

"Don't think that if we find out that you killed yourself we will arrest him and put him on trial. It sounds more likely that you would kill yourself to spite us all than that he'd kill you. Psychopaths are impulsive. They don't plan, they just do."

"Jack, Hannibal is different" Will pleaded. "He is not impulsive at all but he is still a serial killer. Those murders are well planned. Remember those last Chesapeake-Ripper murders with the changed time of death? Those were planned deaths."

"Or just as impulsive as all the others because there were no changes in the time of death because Dr. Lector is not the killer!" Jack bellowed. "You are obsessed. Go die in peace, Will, you are getting on my nerves. Don't call if you don't have evidence."

There was a loud crack, followed by the dial tone. Will took a deep breath and slowly put down the receiver. Well ... that did not go so well. Understatement of the year – that went horribly. He wouldn't even die for a reason. Jack had decided not to investigate if he died and it looked like suicide? He knew he wasn't in favor right now but that ... he knew that feeling. There was something in his throat choking him. Choking and reaching down to his heart to squeeze it.

It was sadness. A desperate sadness, the feeling of being lonely and unimportant. It felt like your heart was being ripped out and shredded into pieces. He felt like crying. And he hated crying – it made him feel like a helpless child. It did not remind him of times where people eased his sorrow because there had never been such a time. Crying only meant being humiliated further because people could see your pain and tease you for it. At least there was no one in the anteroom right now and no one was expected. He could cry to his heart's delight if he wanted to.

He decided he wanted to. There was only death left for him anyway.

"You seemed a bit out of sorts after lunch" Hannibal said while they had dinner. "Did something happen today?"

"Nothing" Who was he kidding? Was it even worth keeping us this charade? "Jack told me I was a drama queen and it would be more believable that I would kill myself to get dirt on you than you being a serial killer."

"You seem to have taken it rather well" Will just raised his eyebrows in disbelief. "Normally you would have asked yourself if he might be right and if you might be hallucinating again."

"Well, regular guys don't tell their ... whatever I am they would kill me. Or how you killed other people" Still, he was right. When had he gained such self-confidence? The irony of knowing you would only be here for a short time? "Don't try mind-games at this point."

"If I wanted to I would have given you evidence of your changing moods and suicidal behavior in the recent past. As well as questioned you on your belief that I really am who you think me to be. But those games don't work on people with self-confidence."

"I guess I adapted" Will just smiled ruefully.

"Are you sure?" Hannibal had lowered his voice. It sounded amused. It sounded seductive.

Will blushed instantly. Hannibal seemed to have no problem at all keeping him off balance. Worst of all how could he react to this change of topic? Hannibal had just admitted to being a serial killer. And it only took a change of tone to get his mind back to sex again.

Did he just think that? It wasn't about sex! It was about ... kissing and hugging and intimately doing ... well, maybe it was about sex. Could he be any more pathetic? Did it matter? He would die and he could not help anyone with it anyway. Why not enjoy the short time he had left?

"You always lose yourself in your thoughts" Hannibal's voice was right next to him. He certainly used his chances well. "I never know if you are here with me or somewhere else" A hand turned his face in Hannibal's direction. "Sometimes I am not sure if you aren't with someone else in your mind."

"Like who?" Will intentionally leaned his head into the hand on his cheek. Was he provoking Hannibal right now? Consciously? When had he become so daring?

"Who knows?" Hannibal moved in but didn't kiss him. "Some people who do not give a damn about you seem to matter a lot to you. Especially Jack."

"Can you feel jealousy?" Will's voice wasn't more than a whisper.

"Do you plan on finding that out?" They had both moved so closely that there wasn't more than a few centimeters between their lips. "Might be a bad idea."

"Might be ..." Will's lids were half-closed. He could feel Hannibal's breath on his skin. At some point in time a hand had placed itself on his neck and drawn him in. He could feel Hannibal's body warmth. He could smell him. He could feel him.

Just when had they started kissing?

Who knew someone without emotions could still be this passionate? Or maybe it was his own passion just overflowing and spilling all over them. No matter what – it was incredible. Hands on his arms, his sides, his skin. Lips on his mouth, his jaw, his throat. Without exactly noticing how and when he had moved onto Hannibal's lap and wrapped his arms around him. And when had that hand sneaked under his shirt?

"Whoa, wait, I-" He jumped up, bumped into the table and scurried sideways. "I think I ... I just remembered I had to ... I mean ..." He escaped through the door to the living room. "Thank you for dinner. See you later."

He ran.

What the hell had he been thinking?

This was Hannibal! The guy who wanted to kill him. Had he completely lost his mind? He most assuredly had taken leave of his senses but ... just why did it have to feel so good?

To be finally acknowledged. To be judged as worthy of something – even if it was only a death in happiness. It wasn't love but it felt close enough. It felt divine. Even knowing it was just a prelude to his death ...

Really, would dying be so bad? Everyone had to die one day. Sure, he had this animal instinct to survive but was surviving what he consciously wanted? Being alive meant that he had to work with people who would never understand him, live alone and dream of things he would never have. Was dying young that bad when it meant you could die happy?

Even if he decided it wasn't, did he have any chance to get away? He could leave the house, sure. But how far could he go? Where could he go? There was no home waiting for him, no friends, not even his dogs. There was nothing left for him in life.

He had never known happiness in his thirty eight years of life. Wasn't that a good predictor for his future? Here was someone offering him everything he ever wanted. For the price of his life, okay, but still ... to be loved and to die happy. Didn't people in the movies always say that it was better to have lived with love for a short time than to live long without love?

Just a few hours ago he had been more than ready to throw his life away. It hadn't been the thought of death that had startled him. Only ... well, his fears. Those fears that were never silent. Those fears of being inadequate, of disappointing others and of being left alone.

Suddenly he felt cold. The blanket that had warmed him for hours was still there but the warmth did not seem to reach him. He shivered and pulled his arms around himself. This time he consciously imagined they were Hannibal's.

"Hannibal ..."

"Yeah?", asked someone no more than a meter behind him.

Will spun around but of course it was dark. Though he did not need light to recognize the voice. He crawled to the other edge of his bed before he asked the darkness:

"What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for you to call out" The rustling told him that Hannibal was slipping into his bed. His hearing proved right when a hand touched his upper arm and drew him back into bed without much force.

"Am I dreaming?" Will bit his lip but followed the pull. He ended up stretched out at Hannibal's side with his head on the other's shoulder.

"Would that be a good dream?"

"I ... guess so" Will looked up but even up close he wasn't able to see anything. "I have had dreams about you for weeks now."

"And what would I do in those dreams?" His voice held amusement.

"Err ... well" Will felt redness crawling up his face. Thank God it was dark. "You ... kiss me?"

As if it were one of those movie scenes that runs in slow motion as soon as the lovers touch, Hannibal gently lifted his face with a hand under his jaw and joined their lips. It wasn't shy but at the same time it wasn't forceful. I gave Will the opportunity to draw away without actually giving him a reason to. It seemed unhurried and sweet and warm all at the same time. By now it seemed familiar. It tasted of coming home.

It was a taste he had never had before.

He had never understood why people rushed home after work. For him leaving work meant that he had to think about what to do with himself instead of just being given tasks. It seemed like a bother. But sinking into Hannibal's embrace, sharing kisses and warmth, it felt like he could finally understand.

Those kisses felt good. That hand under his nightshirt felt good. The weight of that leg resting between his own felt good. He only began shivering when Hannibal pulled off his shirt but as soon as it was off he was wrapped into strong arms and pulled against a warm, completely naked body. Will just pushed into that warmth without even sparing the strangeness of a naked body a thought. His shivering because of cold and fear turned into quite different shivers. There was a hand caressing his back. Another hand caressing his back as well, just a bit further down. It pulled him against Hannibal from time to time so that he was pressed tightly against the other's stomach and leg. And what lay in between. After a few pulls Will drew up his leg over Hannibal's to be able to be pressed more tightly against him.

That that hand stopped on his upper bottom to increase friction only made him sigh in appreciation. He could feel the slight wetness staining his pajamas as well as his stomach. He wanted to be even closer. All this felt like he was melting and his only wish was to meld with Hannibal's skin. So he did not even think of resisting when Hannibal leaned against him. He just went with the flow and rolled over, so that Hannibal could settle between his legs.

All the while the kissing had never stopped. Even rolling together they kissed. The kisses still had a lazy touch to them but it was mingled with hunger. And with Hannibal's weight on top of him they turned a lot more hurried. Soon enough they had turned to devouring each other. There were lips and teeth and tongues and much more importantly there was force. Just as there was more and more friction between their midsections.

They only parted for the question "May I?" when Hannibal pulled off Will's trousers but he wasn't even sure if he had answered or not.

He only remembered the feel of hot flesh, skin, hair and the scent of musk. He remembered moaning and not knowing if it was his own or Hannibal's. He remembered clinging onto Hannibal and leaving scratch marks on his back. He remembered kissing until their lips felt bruised. He remembered coming and mingling his seed with Hannibal's on his stomach.

He remembered smiling.

It flashed like a dream-come-true-story right before his eyes.

And even though it was pitch-black in the room he knew Hannibal could feel his smile. For the first time in his life – he was happy.