

The off chance

The challenge of writing a realistic HannibalXWill lovestory

Von Gepo

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 dissocial 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 dissocial 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 flashbacked 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 outmost 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.