

The off chance

The challenge of writing a realistic HannibalXWill lovestory

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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 pursued 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 ... Abigail's body still unbound except for-

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

"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 conscious. 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 back 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!"