

# The off chance

## The challenge of writing a realistic HannibalXWill lovestory

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### 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 spaghetti 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.