

Author note – I apologise if I've not portrayed the Salem witches correctly or anyone on the Hannibal show, this is based on the American TV series not the film just really wanted to write my entry on this ☺

A date with Salem

When her husband came home one day and told her she would be attending a dinner party, she thought nothing of it. When he said it would be just her and Hannibal Lecter, she stopped writing and looked up.

“Why?” Comes a half-hearted mutter as he sat down next to her. She had met Hannibal only three times in her life, twice in therapy and once at the crime scene of her own mother. He took out a small piece of paper; placed it in her lap tenderly, as if he was scared of what it might contain.

“In truth, I don't know.” Her husband shrugged. He always had all the answers, just not this time. “Perhaps he wants to talk to you about you. Or about me” His voice trailed off and he gazed at the discarded embers of the fireplace, which parachuted from the flames and landed as blackened smudges on the carpet. He was vacant today, lost in something he couldn't quite acknowledge yet.

Bridget sighed; she had no desire to attend dinner with her therapist. Opening the note, she quickly scanned down the beautiful calligraphy and quickly found herself immersed in the persuasive nature of the Lecter language.

Dear Bridget,

I hope this letter finds you well and that your husband, my dear friend Will, has delivered it to you with my intention to invite you for dinner tomorrow night. If you do wish to accept, then I can assure you that the food will be of the utmost favourable quality. Will mentions you adore the French culture; I will keep that in mind when preparing our three course dinner.

Hannibal

“You told him I like French culture?” She nudged her husband and smiled, as he awkwardly fidgeted away from the letter. He was always on edge; his mind had the ability to impersonate a thousand devils and the ability to catch them as well. It was admirable, he saved countless families but sometimes, after the case was closed, the sentence handed out, the killer, he stayed in Will's head. He slipped into Will's darkest dreams and she was the one who had to save him when he woke up, covered in sweat and tears and a contorted expression of horror that only those with the purest empathy could ever experience.

“He wanted to know, he's quite fond of you Bridget” Will forced a warm smile and she could tell there was someone else in his mind tonight.

“You had to do it again today, didn't you” she frowned and rested my head on his shoulder. He was tense and his eyes darted around the room, looking for someone who was not there.

"I can stop it, you know? If you want me to?" Bridget said, choosing her words carefully. At first, he shook his head.

"You don't have to. I know the risks when I walk into the room. I have to deal with the consequences"

She knew he was trying to convince himself, more than me that he wasn't suffering. Instead of accepting his answer, she sat up and crossed her legs. She placed one finger on the sides of his temple and he didn't resist.

"You don't need to suffer." She whispered. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. The room fell silent except for the soft crackling of the flames, the still hum of the flickering light bulb, the tapping of a light breeze against the windowpane like the fingers of ghosts, asking us to let them in. "You don't need to suffer" She repeated and suddenly, Will opened his eyes and looked around the room.

"I will never understand how you do that" He smiled, his expression both a fiction of relief and awe. Bridget blushed; she was never good at accepting admiration, especially for her abilities, which she kept hidden from the world like a little locket under the rib cage.

"My grandmother was a witch" She took his hand in her own, entwining their fingers, "She used to be able to bring people back from the dead too."

"From the dead?" Will softly laughed in disbelief; he had been sceptical to any sort of supernatural hokey pokey, that was, until he met Bridget. She had made him vow not to speak of what she could do, for it was dangerous knowledge, if that knowledge had gotten into the wrong hands.

"From the dead" Bridget confirmed and they both turned to the fire, half engulfed by the swell fatigue of the evening and half rotting in the magical essence that surrounded the young lady, who had everything and yet nothing to hide.

Bridget Graham, dressed in all black, knocked on the large oak door, which was unusually polished for a psychiatrist who never hired his own cleaners. She peeked down the street from under her umbrella; the houses were beautiful and gothic and under the blanket of pouring rain, reminded her of the streets of the Paris, where the buildings were like slices of a wedding cake, piled on top of one another in the utmost delicate manner. Everything about the street was artificial, such as the trees that grew within the lines of the metal cages surrounding them and the droplets of rain that carefully oozed into the symmetrical drains on the side of the road, rather than creating puddles on the pavement.

"Mrs Graham" A voice broke her trance and she looked up to see Hannibal in the doorway, shielding his face from the rain with a gloved hand. He smiled warmly at her and opened the door wider. "Please, come inside. This weather is not the best."

"I would be obliged" She replied and stepped past him out of the rain. She closed her umbrella and droplets of water soaked the freshly pampered carpet. "Oh, I'm sorry" She frowned and Hannibal simply shrugged.

"Let me take your coat, the dining room is just through there"

Bridget thanked him and walked through the house, which was as large as a castle, the walls decorated with Florentine art, pictures that depicted beautiful angels dancing beneath trees of luscious fruit and dragons, reaching out to touch their feet, missing, just by an inch. In the dining room, she gasped at the decadent display of gluttony: there were plates stacked with intricate carvings of exotic meat, oysters drizzled in a

white sauce, a bottle of French champagne that sat in a bucket of ice. It was a feast for a king rather than an acquaintance and Bridget almost felt guilty, that someone had tried so hard to adapt to her tastes. She eyed what she assumed to be her place at the table and there was an especially beautiful dish that sat in its place.

“Le gigot d’agneau” Hannibal spoke from behind her and she jumped a little. “Will said you have a taste for French culture. I rather agree that they have some of the best culinary dishes. Please, be seated.”

Bridget took her place on the side nearest to the burning fireplace and Hannibal sat at the head. In front of him was a rather different dish to her own. “La blanquette de veau” He remarked, “When the veal is not browned through cooking it in stock and water. One of my favourites.”

“I’ve never had veal before” Bridget politely said and Hannibal smiled.

“I source the meat from my own private butcher.”

“Interesting.” She murmured and cut a bite size portion of her meal, placing it in her mouth. It was heavenly and her eyes widened in surprise of how delicate it tasted, how erotic with flavour and she looked up to see Hannibal who was watching her from the other side of the table.

“This is exquisite” She admitted, “Perhaps one of the best dishes I have ever tasted.”

“I am flattered.” Hannibal took a bite of his own dish and a waiter came forward and opened the bottle of champagne, pouring Bridget a glass. She looked at it suspiciously and took a sip.

“So you wanted to have dinner with me, without my husband?” Bridget asked, her face amassed with the same sort of curiosity Hannibal recognised in her counterpart, Will. He nodded and his smile grew wider.

“Will has been better during our sessions. This is because of you. But I know in our sessions you talked about your own trauma that is sometimes worsened by your husband.”

“Is this another therapy session?”

Hannibal laughed again and sipped his champagne. “Would you like it to be?”

“It depends what you are going to ask me.”

“You must sometimes feel reminded of what happened to you when you look at your husband, who works with serial killers daily.”

Bridget gulped down the uncomfortable feeling that was rising in her stomach, up through her ribs to the base of her throat. A reminder of the past, which was now creeping into the room and dancing softly under the amber glow of the firelight. The ghost of her mother stood in the doorway and she looked into the darkness the same way Will Graham looked out of his window at night, onto the white blanket of snow that covered the nothingness. Hannibal noticed this.

“In our two sessions, we did not talk about what happened that day.”

“We did not.”

“Perhaps I am overstepping the boundaries of dinner party conversation.” Hannibal clasped his hands together.

“No, no it’s all right.” She smiled and took another bite of her dish. She was far too polite to reject inquiries from her own psychiatrist. In the corner, her mother moved closer, but she still wasn’t visible in the dark.

“Will is one of my closest friends. Perhaps my closest.” He murmured and his eyes faltered in their ominous gaze. “He views death as a failure on his own part. He could not save Abigail from her father. He could not save your mother.”

Bridget avoided his eyes. "Nobody except whoever killed my mother is responsible, especially not my husband."

"But you feel he is responsible. You always have."

She blinked and a single tear fell down her cheek, landing silently into her lap. She felt her mother sat opposite the table and when she looked up, she was there, smiling, gulping down the champagne and suddenly, a large red dot began to spread across her chest and then, she was slumped against the chair, dead. Bridget shook her head and grasped onto reality with trembling fingers.

"I noticed that your spouse name is Bishop." Hannibal changed the topic, the desire to keep his guest from breaking down at the dinner table overwhelmed him. It was not professional etiquette, he thought. "You are descended from the original Salem Witches."

She finished her glass of champagne rather quickly after he mentioned this and sighed. "You're not going to call me a witch, are you?"

"There is nothing bad about being a witch. The supernatural is something that all of us wish we possessed. As humans, we are obsessed with the extraordinary."

"And yet they were burned for being exactly that." Bridget laughed sardonically.

Hannibal shrugged. "The extraordinary incites fear as well as admiration. People are afraid to recognise difference, though difference is a natural part of life."

She wondered whether Will had confessed to Hannibal about her ability. She feared she was going to be labelled insane, placed in the confines of a cell to be poked and prodded by those of social science, just like her ancestors had been.

"I was named after my great great great great grandmother" She emphasised each great to place distance, "She was wrongfully convicted even after they found her not guilty."

"Many people are wrongfully blamed for things they did not do." Hannibal stood up and poured them both some more champagne himself. "Many people blame themselves for things they did not do"

"Are you talking about Will or yourself?"

She had caught him off guard and he paused for a moment before calculating his next answer. "I was talking about you, Bridget."

Bridget took the opportunity of uncomfortable silence to excuse herself from the dinner table to use the toilet. Hannibal's eyes were like two vultures, trailing her as she moved across the velvet space glistening in the firelight. He stayed sat down in his seat after she left and drunk the rest of his champagne. He looked down at his hand. He looked at the knife next to it. He looked back up at the doorway and decided what had to be done.

She wandered down the hallway and glanced up at the chandeliers that twinkled above her like a constellation of broken stars. The light reflected off the figures in the paintings and it made them seem alive almost, watching as she tiptoed down to where she presumed the toilet would be. There were two doors at the end of the corridor, one red and one black. She made a gamble and picked red, for it was her favourite colour, the colour of the dress she wore when she first met Will.

When she opened the door, she almost fainted at what laid behind it. The stench was the first thing to crawl out around her feet like a wet dog; she held her nose and willed the vomit to stay put in her stomach. She did not cry out and attempted to rationalise whatever was in the darkness of the room in her head. Then, she lifted a hand, her

fingers shaking with the fear of what she was going to find. They rested over the light switch.

They pressed down onto the unknown.

Bridget Graham had only ever seen one dead body, her mother's. Only for a second before it had been stuffed into a black body bag and carted away to the scalps and whims of young medical students to carve and dissect. Now, she was looking at ten of them.

It was a dance of death on white tiled floor, with blood splattered Picasso on the walls. The bodies hung from the metal tables, draped on the floor like discarded jumpers on a summer's day, missing limbs, organs and some just a pile of pink rotting flesh, stripped of identity and anything human. She gagged in horror and remembered Hannibal's words, 'difference is a natural part of life'. This was his version of natural. Bridget turned to leave, to run to Will and tell him of her discovery, only to turn and face Hannibal, who was stood at the end of the corridor, a large hunting knife in his left hand. She felt the life leave her and fear washed over her body like that pre-puking nausea in your gut.

"I did not want this to happen Bridget, but it must." He said and for a second, she almost believed that he meant it. He was staring at her with two large sorrowful eyes, which undoubtedly were calculating his next three moves. He would put the knife to her throat, he would cut it quickly to avoid the screaming and he would place her in the room she had just found and he would lie, to Will, Jack and the FBI just like he had always done.

She put her hands up in the air and realised that whilst he was the killer Will had been trying to catch the entire time, she was a witch. She didn't have to die tonight if she didn't want to. That was something she knew and he didn't for the first time.

"Why did you want to kill me Hannibal?" She deflected the subject as the fear slowly left her and was replaced by a rush of adrenaline. He cocked his head to the side.

"I simply have to, it's nothing personal Bridget." He frowned and took a step forward.

"How would you explain this to Will?" She attempted one last time to reach him but it was clear he was too far from reachable.

"I'm sorry Bridget"

Bridget clenched her hands together and decided to channel everything she was feeling into them. "So am I, Hannibal."

He leaped forward and she closed her eyes, murmuring the words 'Come to a still'.

Hannibal froze in his path, his body contorting, his face moving into an expression of shock rather than horror. The knife dropped from his hand to the floor and when Bridget opened her eyes again, they were glowing a violent violet. She unclenched her hands and every single chandelier in the corridor flickered erratically.

"Hannibal" Bridget stepped forward, her hands moving in front of her. "Go back and sit in the dining room please."

The command made Hannibal's body stand up straight and take big steps towards the dining room. He looked at her in awe and opened his mouth to protest but no words came. He was under her spell and she was not going to break it any time soon. His first mistake had been inviting a witch to dinner. His second had been letting her see the room full of dead bodies.

Bridget returned to the red room and closed her eyes once more. She had never brought someone back from the dead but it wasn't exactly impossible for her line of

heritage. Her grandmother had brought her husband back when he passed from a stroke. Perhaps she could bring Hannibal's victims back one last time.

"As the darkness brings light and light brings day, bring these souls back to say, one last rhyme, one last curse, one last time to avoid the hearse"

What happened next was spectacular. At first, nothing became of the bodies and Bridget assumed she had failed. She turned to leave but in leaving, suddenly heard the scraping of fingers against the floor and looking back, she watched as the mutilated victims of Hannibal the cannibal came to life, bones crunching, limbs contorting as they rose from the ground and tables, not alive, but somehow living in that moment. She backed away from the doorway and allowed them to stumble through the corridor, down to the dining room where Hannibal was sat. She stood there for a moment and then, eclipsed by her own power, began to follow them.

The masquerade of the dead entered the dining room and the witch made her through them, standing at the other end of the dining table to where Hannibal had been forced by her powers to sit. He gazed in a hypnotic admiration as each of the nine bodies took a seat around the table. There were men and women, people of all different professions, some missing arms, legs, kidneys, anything he had felt like taking if the opportunity suited him, their eyes glowering with the same mystical purple as Bridget's own.

"So you are a witch" Hannibal finally managed to say. He smiled and nodded to himself. "That's how you helped Will, by manipulating him."

"I wasn't the first to manipulate Will, you know that better than I" Bridget replied and the dead bodies looked at her, then back at him in some sort of zombieified confusion.

"What are you going to do, Bridget?"

She paused and knew there was no easy way of getting out of this. He was smart, he could pin the blame on her and say she was a witch, but then again, witches didn't exist according to the American FBI. He would be labelled as insane, there would be enough evidence to convict him. She would leave, and she would not be able to return ever again. It was sacrifice and as she gazed over the rest of the dinner guests, she noticed her mother, sitting in the last seat, a warm smile on her face as if she had just made mac and cheese for dinner. Bridget smiled back, her eyes welling with tears.

"Did you kill my mother, Hannibal?"

Her mother was the tenth, and so was not one of the zombieified victims of the red room. Nevertheless, Hannibal's face showed no identifiable answer and it wasn't until he spoke that she knew.

"It was an accident, Bridget."

She choked back the sadness that grabbed at her heart and threatened to rip the strings, to break the rib cage and to fly from her chest, landing on the table and becoming the main entrée of the evening. She resisted the urge to take a knife and end her mother's killer's life. She took out her phone and dialled Jack's number.

"Bridget?" His voice was deep and she knew Hannibal could hear it from the other side of the table. However, he was paralysed and unable to intervene so he sat there, admitting the final defeat with the eyes of a thousand more victims lingering on his every move.

"Come to Hannibal's house. I've located the Chesapeake ripper." She sighed and put the phone on the table, leaving Jack's nervous drone to radiate around the dining room like a classical piece Hannibal would often perform in the light of his dinner parties.

“I guess we are both not meant to be part of the natural order” Bridget remarked and smiled one last time at her mother. “But there is a fine line between what is natural and what is wrong. I’m sorry it had to end like this Hannibal. I hope you understand.” She said and walked out of the room, out of the door, leaving Hannibal to the mercy of his zombieified victims, the lives he had taken for his own personal satisfaction, deaths that meant nothing, futures that would never be fulfilled just to quench one man’s hunger. She looked up into the pouring rain, the wind whistling through her ears along with a white noise and the stench of death, which had followed her from the red room and now, would follow her for the rest of her life.

Words: 3648