

"DEGREES OF SEPARATION"**By****Dante DeBono**

INT. CLUTTERED STUDY - DAY

The room is a tight space filled with things and crowded by THREE PEOPLE. They bear a striking family resemblance, something like sisters.

Inspecting the shelves of an overflowing bookcase to one side of the room is THE RESEARCHER, a tired looking woman in her late 20s.

On the other side, curled up in an armchair by the window and staring at her phone, is a girl in her mid-teens. THE FAN.

And at the desk in the centre, sitting in front of a laptop, is THE WRITER. She has the pinched face of a person approaching 30, but the frenetic energy of someone slightly younger.

She turns to the NOTEBOOK on the desk beside her, pulls a PEN out of the messy bun on top of her head, and aggressively crosses out something on the page.

THE WRITER

Nope. Hate it.

THE FAN

(distractedly)

It was just an idea.

The Writer starts to rant, becoming more and more frustrated:

THE WRITER

A terrible idea. I'm full of those. I don't know how to make it say what I want it to say. I don't even know if I know what I'm trying to say anymore. I know it's going to be queerer, but how can I do that? What do I change?

The Researcher lets out a long sigh, turns to lean against the bookcase.

THE RESEARCHER

I still can't believe we didn't go the traditional thesis route. Creative practice is so...nebulous.

THE WRITER

That's what I like about it.

THE RESEARCHER

(bitingly sarcastic)

Yeah, you seem like you're having a great time.

THE WRITER

I'm just blocked or something.

THE RESEARCHER

What's stumping you, then?

THE WRITER

Everything I write is shit.

THE RESEARCHER

Watch it.

THE WRITER

Everything I write is poop.

The Researcher rolls her eyes, moves to peer at the screen over the Writer's shoulder. The Writer lets her, reaching for her disappointingly lukewarm cup of tea.

THE RESEARCHER

This isn't prose.

THE WRITER

Oh. Yeah, no. I'm writing scripts now.

THE RESEARCHER

Since when?

THE WRITER

Since all the adaptation literature you threw at me had a screen media focus. Plus, she--

The Writer gestures to the Fan.

THE WRITER (CONT'D)
 --only watches TV.

They both turn towards the Fan, still occupied with her phone.

THE WRITER
 Do you even know what a book is?

The Fan doesn't look away from the screen, just raises her hand to flip the bird in the Writer's direction.

THE FAN
 Just because they're not books, doesn't mean I'm not reading.

THE RESEARCHER
 What are you reading then?

THE FAN
 A domestic Hannigram café A-U.

The Researcher's eyebrows furrow, puzzled. She looks to the Writer who is chuckling, amused.

THE RESEARCHER
 You understood that?

THE WRITER
 Most of it. It's fan fiction.

(to the Fan)
 What's Hannigram?

THE FAN
 Ship name. Hannibal and Will.

THE WRITER
 Oh, okay. As in the Thomas Harris books? 'Red Dragon'?

THE FAN
 No, like the show.

THE WRITER
 (underbreath)
 See, all TV.

THE RESEARCHER
 Break it down for me, then.

THE WRITER

'Domestic', as in everyday home life.
 'Hannigram', as in a romantic relationship
 between Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham. And
 'café AU', as in an alternate universe where
 they work in a café.

THE FAN

Hannibal works there, Will's just a customer.

The Writer spreads her hands. *There you go.* The Researcher nods
 along, straightening up and wandering back to the bookshelf.

THE RESEARCHER

You know I think I read something about
 that...Yes, here. Jenkins.

The Researcher pulls a book off the shelf: '**Textual Poachers**' by
Henry Jenkins. The Fan gets up to have a look.

The Writer's eyes gleam with recognition. She looks back to the
 laptop and starts clicking away.

THE FAN

What's that?

THE RESEARCHER

An updated edition of a book from 1992 about
 participatory fan practices. Including fan
 fiction. And I know '*Enterprising Women*' is
 here somewhere too.

The Researcher scans the shelves again, handing off the book to
 the Fan. She starts flicking through the pages curiously.

THE FAN

I thought fan fic was a new thing.

THE RESEARCHER

Hardly anything is really new. Certainly not
 entirely original.

The Researcher gives up, turns to a distracted Writer.

THE RESEARCHER (CONT'D)

What are you doing?

The Writer refuses to look up.

THE WRITER

Nothing.

The Fan puts down the book and hefts herself halfway over the desk, sticks her head over the laptop and laughs at what she sees on the screen. The Writer shoves her back, looking embarrassed.

THE WRITER

Shut up.

THE FAN

Really? *'Star Trek'*?

The Writer is blushing. Remains silent.

THE FAN

Nerd.

THE RESEARCHER

Don't be rude.

THE WRITER

(defensive)

You know, without Kirk and Spock, you'd have no Hannigram.

THE FAN

What are you talking about?

THE WRITER

They're the original slash pairing. It's literally--

She taps the cover of *'Textual Poachers'*.

THE WRITER (CONT'D)

--in here. People have been shipping them since the 60s.

The Fan turns to the Researcher. *Really?*

The Researcher nods in agreement. The Fan lets out a surprised little hum.

THE WRITER

Fan fic has always been a way for fans to make the stories they love queerer.

The Researcher stares at the Writer pointedly, waiting for her to notice. When she does, the Writer gives an indignant shrug.

THE WRITER

What's that look for?

THE RESEARCHER

Fans make stories queerer?

THE WRITER

Yeah. Lots of big fandoms have popular queer ships. They kind of dominate these days.

THE RESEARCHER

Might you even say that they're writing queer adaptations?

THE WRITER

Well, it's a kind of adaptation...

The Writer trails off. The Researcher walks back to the desk, checks the laptop screen.

THE RESEARCHER

The kind of queer adaptations you've been writing for fun since high school?

THE WRITER

But it isn't the same. Fan fiction is very specifically an amateur practice, it doesn't appear in the canon.

THE FAN

Um, what about '*Hannibal*'?

THE WRITER

What about him?

THE FAN

No, not the character. The show. The creator, Bryan Fuller, literally calls it 'fan fiction'.

THE WRITER

Really?

The Fan nods excitedly, rushing behind the desk, pulling the laptop towards her and typing away. The Writer watches.

THE FAN

See? He made so many changes to the story that the opening credits have to say that it's only, "based on the characters from the book".

THE WRITER

What changes?

THE FAN

Real fan fic stuff. A whole lot of canon divergence, bunch of genderswapping and racebending. And multiple queer characters that don't reaffirm problematic stereotypes.

THE RESEARCHER

No Buffalo Bill, then?

THE FAN

(wincing)

Yeah. Oof.

THE WRITER

So, the show isn't concerned with fidelity, but with aligning itself with a more contemporary audience.

THE FAN

Exactly! It's so good.

THE WRITER

But a lot of the time, we judge the success of adaptations based on how closely they follow the original.

THE FAN

Well, sure. But sometimes that's not the point.

THE RESEARCHER

Oh, that's good. I agree with her.

The Writer sits up straight: a lightbulb moment.

THE WRITER

Fan fiction is intrinsically critical of the original text being rewritten, and has a long history of queering normative narratives entirely separate from industry gatekeeping.

The Fan is buzzing with enthusiasm, squeezing at the Writer's arm. The Researcher smiles at them, a knowing gleam in her eye.

THE RESEARCHER

Can I be honest with you?

THE WRITER

Hard not to be.

THE RESEARCHER

This was sorta one of the reasons you decided to do this project? Right? Because it's true, annual surveys from fan websites are dominated by queer pairings. There's an appetite for those kinds of queer stories that isn't reflected in mainstream media.

Realisation dawns on the Writer's face.

THE WRITER

Should I be writing this down?

THE RESEARCHER

Yes! Always!

The Writer jumps into action, scribbling in her notebook.

THE RESEARCHER (CONT'D)

That's what the working journal is for. To keep track of the process. That's data.

THE FAN

The android from '*Star Trek*'?

THE RESEARCHER

What? No. I mean it's something to look at in the analysis.

THE WRITER

Okay, how's this? *"If stories reflect social values, approaching adaptation as a slash fan fic writer encourages more progressive and inclusive imagined worlds that utilise the original text as a site for the creative exploration of queer narratives."*

THE RESEARCHER

Bit long.

THE FAN

I liked it.

THE WRITER

Thanks, kid.

The Writer roughs-up the Fan's hair. She grumpily moves away, righting herself. The Writer laughs, turns back to the Researcher.

THE WRITER

So, I need to stop being precious about the original?

THE RESEARCHER

I think so. This is about balancing 'critique of' and 'appreciation for'.

THE WRITER

Canon divergence but still referential.

THE FAN

We've been writing that kind of thing for ages.

THE WRITER

Over a decade now.

They all cringe. The Writer stares at the Fan with something like horror on her face.

THE WRITER

Gosh, I suddenly feel ancient. You're a baby, you shouldn't even be allowed on the internet.

The Fan rolls her eyes, unimpressed. The Researcher claps her hands, drawing their attention. All business now.

THE RESEARCHER

I'm going to go do some reading, see if there's anything we can use to substantiate our thoughts.

The Researcher turns her expectant gaze to the Writer.

THE WRITER

I'll make an outline for the adaptation I'm gonna write with fan fic techniques.

THE RESEARCHER

Great.

The Researcher turns to the Fan, who's making herself comfortable in the armchair once more. It's silent while she settles in, eventually noticing they're waiting for her to say something.

THE FAN

Oh. I'm gonna finish reading this fic.

She points at her phone.

A beat.

THE WRITER

I'll let you know if I need anything.

They all get to it.

END