See You on the Other Side of the [Senate] Floor

by Face_of_Poe

Summary

In which the author can't believe she just tagged a Hamilton/Conway relationship. But here we are, so. Let's go.

Alexander writes his way out and lands himself in the Senate Page Program alongside such notable classmates as Eliza Schuyler, a senator's daughter, and John Laurens, whose father is the Speaker of the House. True, they're all outfitted to be perfectly inconspicuous and effectively interchangeable, but he just kind of can't shake the feeling that he shouldn't be here in the first place.

Naturally, it takes all of about twenty minutes for his first day on the Hill to go totally sideways.

(see notes for further explanation of tags)
Notes

Throwing my hat into the Hamilton ring and straight into hell, I expect. Having devoured as many high school and politics AU's as I could find, the only logical thing to do was write a high school AND politics AU, and here it is, compliments of the Senate Page Program.

Note the warning and the tags - this story will involve a relationship between a 16 year old and a man ~20 years older. There is a power dynamic at play (even beyond the age difference) that puts it highly in dubious consent territory. Legally speaking, the story primarily takes place in D.C. where the age of consent is 16. Everything else speaking, Thomas Conway is sketch as hell. In fact, I considered putting just about everyone in the musical and show in Conway's role, and then decided it would have to be the person we never actually meet, because it just seemed a bit too slanderous.

I went for a sort of modern/historical remix here. I've seen lots of clever uses of modern AU's - Jackson, D.C., and a 21st century Revolutionary War and so on. I didn't do any of that - in a very general sense, this is modern U.S. government with Federalist and Democratic-Republican parties. The Founders and others from the era are transplanted, and I gloss over any details that would otherwise belie the setting, for fear of getting too wrapped up in the world-building. D.C. is just D.C, and I vaguely hand-wave away anything that conflicts (like the names of the Library of Congress buildings, which is driving me crazy, but anyway).

The Senate page program still exists - the House program (which was the scandal-plagued side) ended a few years back. Again, I took the most basic details of the program and largely just sort of invented day-to-day functioning. If anyone reading this has any actual experience as a congressional page or knows someone who does, all my sorry's.

If you're here for the Turn tag, the Culper ring characters are largely there to fill out more names among the 30 pages. André and Arnold will make some more pointed appearances. Lee could be borrowed from either fandom. I headcanon'd a more Turn-esque Lafayette (but older) and historical Madison (mostly because the visual of little 5'4 Madison chilling with giant Jefferson is one of my favorite things ever), but whatever floats your own fantasy boat.

And with no further ado:
Chapter 1

He should have gotten a haircut.

*John has long hair,* a niggling voice in the back of his head reminds him.

He doesn’t need that voice to remind him about those curls.

*John’s father is the Speaker of the House, he can wear his hair however he wants.*

He certainly doesn’t need that voice to remind him of that, either. To be honest, he’s still not entirely sure how he got here. But there’s nothing for it – he ties his hair into a neat ponytail at the nape of his neck and resolves to ask one of the proctors later if it’d be best cut short, and moves on to examine the rest of his appearance with a critical eye.

Standard issue navy suit and tie. Badge, lapel pin. Plain white dress shirt. Black shoes, polished to a shine, shoes that Mister Stevens had bought new for him despite Alexander’s insistence that an old pair would do, so long as they cleaned up well and fit comfortably.

The image looking back at him is sober, professional, and perfectly unremarkable. Exactly, Mister Gates had said the night prior, as they were meant to be. Recognizable but unobtrusive. Anonymous cogs to help turn the wheels of the government, not so much behind the scenes as wholly unnoticeable even in the middle of the Senate floor.

*The next four months,* Mister Gates had said, *will undoubtedly be among the most grueling of your insignificant lives to date.* A few had chuckled cautiously at that; Alexander had already sized Gates up enough to know it wasn’t meant as a joke. *You will attend your lessons; you will maintain adequate grades; you will adhere to curfew; you will be in the proper place at the proper time for each session, do your duties without comment or complaint, and finish your school work regardless if the day adjourns at five p.m. or one a.m. You will comport yourselves respectfully, and be always available but never conspicuous. This is not the time to geek out over your favorite so-called celebrity politician,* he scowled around. *This is not the time to ask for selfies. You are now United States Senate pages – and your conduct reflects back on your family, your school, and the senator gracious enough to sponsor you for this term.*

Orientation regarding their living and school arrangements was the evening before, immediately upon arrival. Now, uniforms distributed and donned, is time for their introduction to the Senate, a morning tour and early lunch scheduled with their sponsors or, more likely, their staff, before being set loose to go about their duties for the rest of the day – for the rest of the term, really.

Alexander reaches a hand into his blazer pocket and feels for the folded paper with an office location, a phone number, and an email address. Theoretically, he should not need to visit his sponsoring senator’s office after today, save for official Senate business, but it still feels like a lifeline. Until last night, his only familiarity with anyone or anything in this strange, new city was through this senator and his staff who had taken a chance on him and given him one in turn. A phone call, a few emails… it wasn’t much.

But he is unendingly grateful.

The door flies open behind him, and he watches quietly through the mirror as one of his roommates falls into the community bathroom. He hangs a jacket on the doorknob and joins Alexander at the
“Hey, man,” the boy says, turning on one of the taps and splashing cold water over his face. “You were up early. New bed?”

He blinks at the question, just shy of mothering, and manages to stutter out before he offends, “Just don’t sleep much.”

“Guess that’s good,” he turns and snags the tie from the hanger. “Once we start classes tomorrow, I’m going to forget what a good night’s sleep feels like.”

Alexander watches as the other boy turns up his collar and threads his tie around, nimble fingers working deftly, twisting and folding the fabric and tightening a perfect knot. He straightens the collar and reaches back for the jacket. His pins are already in place, shiny and straight, and Alexander surreptitiously checks his own for the tenth time.

Even if they weren’t sharing a dorm room, Alexander would remember the name of this teenager who somehow manages to make the bland uniform look dapper, if only because his first and last names are ridiculous in equal measure.

“Here,” Hercules Mulligan must read something in his fidgety dissatisfaction, and steers him carefully around so he can study his tie. “Let’s just…” he loosens it, works the knot apart, adjusts the distribution around his neck, and redoes the thing.

“I’d have thought it’d be hard, doing it backwards.”

Hercules laughs. “My father owns a haberdashery. Tricks of the trade.”

“Oh.” Alexander blinks, stares at him for a long moment. “Do… do people still say haberdashery?”

“Only the ones that’re legit.” Hercules winks at him, takes a last look at his own attire, glances down at the watch on his wrist and turns for the door. “You’ve got five minutes to finish prettying up, but Gates kinda seems like one of those military types…”

“If you’re not fifteen minutes early, you’re five minutes late?”

“Something like that. See you downstairs.”

He’s not left alone with his thoughts for long though; Hercules has barely disappeared before the entirety of the room next to theirs is pouring in to finish readying themselves for their first day on the Hill, and Alexander yields the mirror space in the name of the good manners his mother raised him with.

It’s just nerves he’s battling at this point, anyway. A mirror isn’t going to do anything to resolve the keen sense that his selection to this prestigious program is something of a fluke, and that even dressed alike as to make them effectively uninteresting and indistinguishable to a stranger, something in his bearing or his voice or his eyes will give the game away. John Laurens and Eliza Schuyler hadn’t said they were the children of sitting U.S. politicians; but teenagers gossiped, and everyone knew who they were before introductions even began. They speculated which students from well-connected families donated to whose reelection campaigns.

Hercules Mulligan’s father probably outfitted the president, for all he knew.

The fourth boy in their crowded room is still an unknown to Alexander. He is quiet and observant, piercing dark eyes that catalog every one of Alexander’s movements, even as he steps back in to grab his wallet and building keys before heading downstairs to join –
“Ha!” A whirlwind of riotous curls intercepts him even before the door closes. “Look, Aaron, look, I told you Herc would get him.”

“Hm,” Aaron Burr responds noncommittally.

“Wha-?”

“Your tie,” John studies it with a keen fascination. Alexander flushes with mortification – is he that obviously helpless? But then – “Hercules has been aggressively correcting wardrobes all morning, it’s great, I swear to God, he just went downstairs early so he’d have time to fix everyone else’s… there’s just something so distinctive about the way he does this and I cannot figure it out…”

John finishes his study and raises his eyes to meet Alexander’s, grinning.

Once he can get past the distraction of the curls, Alexander is also forced to conclude that John Laurens has quite possibly the kindest eyes he’s ever seen.

Kind eyes that widen a moment later. “Oh my God, do you have an extra hair tie? I think I forgot to pack any and it’s entirely possible that my father will have a coronary if he turns on C-SPAN and sees me running messages on the Senate floor with that ridiculous mane flying around behind you!”

“Sure.” He drags his duffle out from under the bunk he shares with John and plucks an elastic band from the front pocket.

“Thanks a million – I’ll give it back once I have time to grab some. Or I guess I’ll give you a new one?”

“I’ll take the old one plus a new one as interest, thanks very much.”

John smiles broadly as he pulls a messy ponytail. “A businessman, then. Savvy."

Aaron clears his throat. He’s silently glided across the room to take up Alexander’s place by the door during his distraction by hair ties and everything about John Laurens. “If you gentlemen are ready? I believe we’re expected downstairs in the next minute.”

Alexander follows John to the door, and sweeps his arm out exaggeratedly for Aaron to precede him. “After you, Mister Burr, sir.”

Aaron huffs under his breath and ducks out the door. John waits for him to pass, grins and winks at Alexander, and then positively flounces off down the hallway to the stairs, ponytail bobbing along behind him.

That, Alexander decides, over the tingling nerves curling in his stomach, is so inconvenient.

X---X

Proctors Lee and Shippen send them on their way to their respective sponsoring senators’ offices, double-checking against lists on clipboards as they leave that they know where they’re headed. Proctor Shippen reminds each group that heads out into the chilly winter air of the U.S. capital, “If your host’s office dismisses you early, the time is your own, but you cannot be late for the group rendezvous in the main lobby outside the Senate floor at one o’clock!”

He saw it the afternoon prior, but there’s a different sort of grandeur to the looming Capitol dome on
this brisk Monday morning. Tourists are replaced by suited men and women with briefcases, interns laden down with coffee orders, bicycle messengers weaving around the slower traffic and cutting off pedestrians in crosswalks.

It’s new; it’s nothing like home; it’s wonderful.

“Catch flies that way,” Hercules nudges him forward. “Never been to the Hill before?”

“Never been to D.C. before,” Alexander corrects absently.

“Really?” John looks around, surprised. “What part of Virginia did you say you’re from?”

“Oh. Um…”

“Hamilton!”

He whips around and sees Proctor Lee ducking out into the cold, looking instantly irritable in the absence of a coat against the biting cold. Alexander takes pity on him, and starts heading back towards Webster Hall. “Go on,” he waves John and Hercules ahead. “I’ll see you at one.” Lee purses his lips in disapproval at Alexander’s light jog of a pace, as if he’ll rumple his crisp suit, so he slows it to more of a power walk until he’s close enough to hear and be heard without shouting.

“Something wrong, Mister Lee?”

“You’re headed somewhere else, ignore what your paper says.” Alexander blinks, caught off guard.

“Got a pen, kid?”

“I’ll remember.”

Lee stares at him, unimpressed, until he grudgingly fumbles for a pen tucked in the inner pocket of his jacket. “Shoot.”

“Russell three-six-two.” He waits while Alexander jots it down, tongue poking out between his teeth. “It’s the one on the left,” he adds dully, gesturing vaguely at the office buildings two blocks distant, like Alexander can’t be bothered to read signs, even if he hadn’t already memorized the building locations on the map in his orientation packet.

“What’s there?” Alexander asks, tucking the paper back away to safeguard it from the wind. Lee cocks a brow. “Was there a typo on my form?” Alexander elaborates. “Or…?”

“I dunno, kid,” Lee bites, rubbing his arms in a futile attempt to warm up. “Got the call and had to run you down, didn’t have time to chat and get the details. Go on, you’re going to be late.”

Helpful.

He dashes back up the street, catches up to the rear of the group, thirty teenagers dressed alike, heads bowed against the wind in the January chill that would be brutal compared to what he’s grown up with, except the novelty of it makes it exciting. The bulk of them head towards the Dirksen-Hart building, but maybe ten or twelve turn left and head towards the smaller building on the next block, waving goodbye to roommates and new acquaintances, allies in a strange world.

Alexander sees John’s curly poof of a ponytail and Hercules’s short black hair disappearing into the throngs of people approaching the nearer building. Scanning the group veering to the left, he remembers a few names – there’s Abigail Culper and Anna Strong, linked arm-in-arm, a sullen-looking girl named Maria trailing along behind.
The back of Aaron Burr’s bald head catches his eye though, and he seizes on the familiarity and squeezes his way past a harried man with a Starbucks cup in one hand and a cell phone pressed to his ear with the other to insert himself at Aaron’s side. “Hey,” he breathes, winded.

A cool brow cocks curiously as Aaron glances sidelong. “What did Lee want?”

“Gave me a different office number, guess my sheet was wrong.”

He shrugs; Alexander thinks that the end of Aaron’s willingness for conversation, until he adds, “You’re very lucky. Senator Washington is an extraordinary man. He’ll make for an extraordinary president.”

“You think he’s going to win in November?”

Aaron snorts. “I know he’s going to win in November.” He tugs Alexander’s sleeve as they approach the building and steers him away from the crowded doorway. “We can use staff entrances all over the Hill,” he reminds Alexander patiently.

“Right. And they said something about tunnels connecting everything?”

The corner of Aaron’s lip quirks up. “First timer, eh?”

“Yeah.” He’s slowly feeling the paranoid sense of inadequacy about that fade away. Away from the group of politicians’ kids and heirs of the donor class, he finds himself tapping more readily into that determined, self-starter nature that had gotten him here in the first place, defying all odds, insistence from well-meaning teachers that it simply wasn’t how things worked. Senator Washington, his unendingly helpful chief of staff Mister Arnold, with whom he’d been emailing right up until his flight, they know his story. He has nothing to be embarrassed about.

“I haven’t been in a few years,” Aaron concedes. “Since my father passed. Everything used to seem so much bigger.”

Everything still seems frankly huge to Alexander. “Sorry to hear that,” he offers. “I lost my mother a few years ago, too.”

“Never knew mine,” Aaron replies wistfully.

Alexander’s eyes go wide, and he grabs Aaron by the arm and pulls him to a stop, ten feet from the door to the building. “You’re an orphan? That’s crazy, me too – I didn’t think anyone else in the group would understand, sitting there with Senator Schuyler’s daughter and Speaker Laurens’s son, how much the odds seemed stacked against me in even being here, but God, isn’t it great? It’s like, being given the chance to prove ourselves, when…”

He trails off as Aaron’s expression shifts from confused to decidedly nonplussed, and backtracks. “Oh, God, sorry, it’s not great that your dad died, like yay, dead parents or anything, but -”

“Alexander.” His mouth claps shut instantly. “Maybe just… don’t… talk so much?”

“I – what?”

“I’m just saying… filter.” He blinks. “Smile and watch and listen. No one’s here to prove anything. We’re here to do a job and do it well, and everything else is just noise.”

And with that bit of imparted wisdom, Aaron spins and walks through the revolving door to the security check just inside.
Alexander follows, flushed hot despite the cold tinging his cheeks pink.
It’s entirely possible, he decides as he stares blankly at room 362, that he’s lost his mind.

He checks the number – checks it against the door – wonders if it is possible that he got the number wrong from Lee, and oh how pissed would the proctor be then? – except he’s confident that he got it right, and confident that this is, in fact, Russell 362 and this is where Lee told him to be.

Which doesn’t make any more sense of the plaque on the wall by the door.

---

It’s entirely possible, he decides as he stares blankly at room 362, that he’s lost his mind.

He checks the number – checks it against the door – wonders if it is possible that he got the number wrong from Lee, and oh how pissed would the proctor be then? – except he’s confident that he got it right, and confident that this is, in fact, Russell 362 and this is where Lee told him to be.

Which doesn’t make any more sense of the plaque on the wall by the door.

---

Sen. Thomas Jefferson

(DR-VA)

Minority Leader

“I’m confused,” Alexander admits to the empty hallway.

“About what?” the (not-so) empty hallway asks back, and he sucks in a startled breath and spins to find a positive slip of a man waiting patiently behind him to enter the office. He’s short, shorter than Alexander even by two or three inches, skinny enough to look sickly – and the black of his well-tailored suit does little to fill him out. Were it not for the lines creased on his forehead and a steady sort of intelligence behind his eyes, Alexander would have mistaken him for a student like him.

But then those eyes land on the pin on Alexander’s lapel that identifies his role. “Oh! You’re the new page. Hamilton, was it?”

“Oh – yes. Alexander.” He steps aside and lets the man through.

He holds the door open, a heavy binder tucked under his other arm. “Come in, come in. The senator should be finishing up a call any minute here…”

He rambles on faintly as he leads Alexander through the outer office, throwing faint waves at a receptionist and a young woman with a phone pressed to her ear who might be an intern. They go through a doorway into a more private suite of rooms – Alexander can see a couple of men in a small conference room across the way, jackets off and thrown over the backs of chairs, pitching a stress ball back and forth as they talk. A closed door at the end of the short hallway has the senator’s name on it again, and the man taps once on the door and doesn’t wait for a reply before pushing on in.

“I swear to God, James, I am going to arrange the murder of every single one of those assholes on the House appropriations committee. I told him – I told the chairman that I can’t do anything on our side of the aisle over here with the kinds of numbers they’re talking, but -”

The senator is swiveling in half-circles in his desk chair while he talks, head tilted back, riot of curls that put John Laurens’s to shame thrown over the headrest, eyes closed while he complains. The man who brought Alexander back to the room clears his throat lightly to cut him off, and then settles
down in the far chair opposite the desk from the senator and flips open the binder to begin reading, leaving Alexander standing in the doorway like an idiot.

Jefferson opens his eyes and looks at Alexander like he’s an idiot. He points a long, slim finger at him and directs his attention to the man sitting across from him. “Yo. Who the fu… heck,” he corrects at a sharp look, “is this?”

That jolts Alexander out of his stunned stupor. “Alexander Hamilton,” he steps forward and thrusts his hand out. “At your service, sir.”

“Ah… ha,” the senator takes the hand gingerly.

“Thomas,” his companion sighs, long-suffering, “I know you know what a page looks like, and I literally just told you that he was coming.”

“Right, I – really?”

“Not twenty minutes ago.”

“I was on the phone.”

“Yes, and I smacked the mute button and told you that you were walking George’s page through his first morning on the Hill.”

Jefferson opens and closes his mouth a couple of times. “I – gosh, yeah, I missed that.” He pauses and looks back and forth between his staffer and Alexander a couple of times. “Do, um… Do I -?”

“Yes, you have to.”

“Right. Alexander, was it?” He nods, eyes wide. “You’ve met my chief of staff then, Mister Madison here – he can -”

“Nope,” Madison cuts him off, still engrossed in whatever he’s reading.

“Gah. Fine. Sit down, kid, come on.” Alexander inches towards the seat hesitantly. “I don’t usually do this…”

“Because you usually whine about it until they give the spot to another senator,” Madison mumbles at Alexander’s side.

Jefferson shoots him a glare. “But you’re here so I guess this is my Monday morning now. Lovely. Let’s do this. You got a pen and paper?”

Once more, he finds himself fumbling for the pen tucked inside his jacket, and the half-sheet of paper that had Senator Washington’s office information. Jefferson eyes it, then reaches down into a bottom drawer of his desk and pulls out a little notebook instead, slides it across the table to him.

“Oh. Thanks. Sorry, I didn’t realize -”

Jefferson holds up a hand to cut him off. “Here’s the deal, Alexander. I’ve been here a while now. Long enough to know that any assho-” He glares at Madison when a light cough interrupts.

“Anyone who can read a map, follow signs, can do the job you’re here to do. You don’t need me to hold your hand and walk you through six office buildings.”

“Well… no, sir, I guess not.”
“Right – so,” he gestures down at the blank page in front of Alexander, “I’m going to tell you the truly important parts of surviving life on Capitol Hill: the best cafeterias to go to for breakfast, the best ones for lunch, the ones the tourists never quite manage to find, and the one that’s never busy between noon and one for some mystical reason I haven’t quite yet sussed out in the eleven years I’ve been here.

“And then we’re going to go on a walking tour of the best coffee shops in a six block radius.”

Madison actually looks up at that and scowls. “Thomas, he’s sixteen.”

“You drink coffee, kid?”

“Yup.”

“Well, there we have it. We’ll do early lunch while we’re out, a quick round of the Capitol Building itself, the floor, the dem-rep cloakroom, get you to the lobby at… what, one?”

Alexander opens his mouth, hesitates a moment, and hedges, “Yes, um… about that…” Jefferson raises a slow brow. “I appreciate it, but I’m still not… entirely sure why I’m here?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well… Senator Washington sponsored me, so…”

“Senator Washington was held up at home with family business.”

He bites his lip, feeling like he’s pushing his luck. “Right but… I think I’m probably supposed to be with the pages on the… federalist side?”

“Pages are non-partisan,” Madison supplies drily, thumbing through a file folder he’d exchanged for the binder.

“And Washington is independent,” Jefferson adds wryly.

Alexander gapes. “He’s – but he’s the majority leader!”

“And I still haven’t figured out how that one works,” Jefferson confesses, “but so it goes. Look, kid, it doesn’t matter. It’s a fifty-one – forty-nine Senate, I think the federalists can afford to lose one on their side. They put you with me because pages are traditionally hosted by their own senators, that’s all.”

“I… right.”

“Where you from, anyway?”

He bites the inside of his cheek, feels his face flush anew. “Um. Saint Croix.”

“Hm,” Jefferson nods agreeably, and then stops and frowns. “Sorry, what county is that in?”

“What? No, the -”

“The Virgin Islands, Thomas,” Madison slides the folder over, and Alexander realizes it must be his application file, sent from either Director Gates or Senator Washington’s office.

Jefferson snatches it up. “Whaaa-?” His eyes skim quickly across a few lines of the top page, and then peer suspiciously over the top of the folder at Alexander. “Why are you here?”
“That’s what I was trying to figure out!”

“No,” Jefferson pinches the bridge of his nose, “I mean – don’t pages have to be…?"

“I’m a citizen!” Alexander cuts him off hotly. “I have just as much right as John Laurens or Eliza Schuyler or… or Aaron frickin’ Burr to be here, and just because I don’t have representation in the Senate doesn’t mean -”

“Burr’s kid is a junior already?” Jefferson asks interestedly, and Alexander groans, because of course.

He can practically hear Madison roll his eyes. “Thomas…”

“I’m just saying, we should check in on the kid –”

Madison gestures impatiently at Alexander, and then throws his arms up in frustration at Jefferson’s bland shrug. “Look, Alexander – it was a last minute change made in haste. As you say, you don’t have a representative, and you don’t work for your sponsor anyway. You don’t even work for your sponsor’s party, you just sit on his or her side of the floor during sessions.”

He knows all of that, and feels a bit ridiculous getting worked up over it. “Yeah, no, I… sorry. I’m not trying to be… difficult. The change just caught me off-guard. I’ve never been here before, and Senator Washington’s office knew that, is all.”

“Never been to D.C.?”

“Never been to the continental United States,” he corrects Jefferson drily.

The senator nods slowly, eyes narrowed and thoughtful as he contemplates the nervously defiant teenager sitting before him. Alexander isn’t sure what he’s thinking, but Jefferson seems to resolve it, standing quickly and leaning over to pluck his suit jacket from a coat rack in the corner behind his desk. “C’mon, then. We’re going to have to add a key stop to our Capitol tour.”

Madison perks up. “The drawer with the good candy?”

Jefferson nods solemnly. “The drawer with the good candy.”

“I – what?”

“Ever heard of the candy desk, Alexander?” He shakes his head, eyes wide. “A senator from the majority party is designated the keeper of the candy desk. Senator Morris of Pennsylvania currently holds the honor.”

“And there’s a… good drawer?”

“He thinks only the federalists know about it,” Madison murmurs absently, engrossed anew in the binder he’d brought in. “Thomas delights in stealing from it on a regular basis.”

Alexander is pretty sure that there’s not a single democratic-republican bone in his body, but decides that some of them might actually be alright. At least on a personal level.

“Alexander, if you’ll go wait in the outer office for a minute,” Jefferson pulls the door open and holds it for him, “I just need a quick word with James about my schedule this afternoon.”

He scurries away quickly. It’s perhaps not how he envisioned his first morning going, and he’s genuinely disappointed to lose the chance to meet Senator Washington – he might not get the
opportunity, beyond a word in passing, after today – but there are worse ways to pass a morning than having the Senate minority leader showing him the best coffee shops around the Hill.

Once he’s disappeared back into the outer office, Jefferson closes the door and levels a cool stare at his chief of staff. “James. What the hell.”

“I know.”

“Why am I escorting a walking inferiority complex of a Crucian teenager around the place?”

“I'll look into it.”

“Did we run out of ambitious, precocious high schoolers in Virginia?”

James looks up at him under raised brows. “Maybe George was making a point.”

Jefferson snorts softly. “As he ever delights in doing.” He wraps a purple scarf loosely around his neck, sketches a sardonic salute, and heads out to catch up with his new charge.

X---X

Senator Jefferson remains true to his word, giving Alexander lots of pointers about the best food and the quickest lines and the tunnel bodega with the best coffee for when he’s really in a rush, and he even throws in a few pointers about favorite reading nooks in the Library of Congress buildings that tend to be overlooked by the masses. He does, in fact, give Alexander a quick tour of the tunnel system that connects the Capitol, the congressional office buildings, and the Library buildings, under the guise of exiting into the cold winter air to a more advantageous point for their great D.C. coffee tour.

They grab coffees to go at the first place they pass, still doing a steady business as it heads into late morning. Jefferson gets a few casual greetings, a couple of waves, and more than a few less-than-discreet cell phone cameras come out, and Alexander isn’t sure if his status as a congressional quasi-celebrity is due to being minority leader or due to his distinctive appearance.

A bit of both, Alexander decides, trying to be subtle in his own assessment.

They talk D.C., St. Croix, and Virginia as they stroll along, Alexander jotting down periodic names of cafes he really shouldn’t be going to. They get vouchers for most meals during the week in the cafeterias in the vast Hill complex, and even some lunches off-site on weekends, but until he gets his first paycheck in two weeks, spending money is precious.

Politics itself doesn’t really come up, and Alexander suspects that’s something of a preservation strategy on his host’s part.

Just after eleven, they settle in a corner booth of a little out-of-the-way place four blocks from the Russell building that looks like it has a simple enough selection of soups and salads and sandwiches, except the first look at the menu nearly makes Alexander’s eyes pop out of his head.

Jefferson must’ve been waiting for it, because he chuckles as he opens his own menu. “Don’t worry kid, I’m not a big enough asshole to drag a teenager to a place where a cup of coffee costs seven dollars and expect him to pay. I’ve got you covered.”
“Thank you, sir,” Alexander says quietly down to his own menu, keenly aware that the only reason he isn’t bright red is that the feeling hasn’t quite yet returned to his face after spending forty-five minutes out in the cold.

He fights down the instinct to seek out the cheapest thing on the menu but figures he’s just finished one cup of coffee and can forgo the seven dollar brew; but then Jefferson is asking for a whole carafe for the table and that’s that.

“So,” Jefferson finally decides to address the elephant in the room once they’ve placed their orders. “I gotta ask. What led you to apply for a program that, far’s I know, has never been overtly offered outside the fifty states?”


The senator snorts. “Fair enough, I suppose. How’d you pick Washington’s office to apply with?”

And Alexander meets his gaze levelly when he replies, “He’s very outspoken about the politics of disenfranchisement.” Jefferson’s mouth presses tight, and Alexander has the sense that he’s working hard to suppress an eye-roll. “Hey,” he jabs a finger across the table, like he’s sitting in debate class and not with a relative stranger of a United States senator. “Your country has an archaic justice system that locks up more of its population per capita than anywhere else in the - ”

“Ah, ah,” Jefferson waggles a finger right back, “you can’t be all indignant about being a citizen in one breath and then disavow it in the next – it’s your country as much as mine.”

“Talk to me when I have a representative with an actual voice and a ballot to cast in a presidential election.”

Jefferson grins, all teeth. “You’re sixteen, you wouldn’t be casting one anyway.”

Alexander considers telling the Senate minority leader that he’s kind of a dick. Said minority leader tampers down his grin, like he can read the impulse in his eyes, and changes the subject. “You looking at colleges here?”

“Yeah. New York, actually, I…” he trails off though, watching a slightly disheveled man, sweat pasting his mussed blond hair to his forehead, eke his way through the increasingly crowded café towards their table, eyes locked on the back of the senator’s curly head. “I think someone’s looking for you.”

He follows Alexander’s gaze half-heartedly, and then sits up straighter, surprised. “Gil.”

“Thomas,” he acknowledges, a bit more tersely, and Alexander sees his eyes drifting between them, like he’s unsure about the teenager sitting across the booth from the senator. He considers offering to leave, if they need to talk privately, but then the newcomer is hovering at the edge of the table and leaning down to brush a light kiss on either of the senator’s cheeks. “James said you’d likely be here.”

“Ever an honor, to be sought by my favorite fighting Frenchman,” Jefferson smiles – and just as quickly shifts into a frown as the man shakes his head slowly back and forth. “What…? Qu’est-ce qui se passe?”

“Ce n’est pas bien,” he grimaces.

“Encore à l’hôpital?”
Alexander realizes too late that they’ve shifted languages so as to maintain a semblance of privacy, and before he can attempt to awkwardly explain that he should go if that’s the case, Jefferson’s friend murmurs softly, “Elle est morte, Thomas.”

Alexander instinctively looks up sharply even as Jefferson puts his head in his hand and swears softly. “Fuck.” He sighs. “Ce matin, ou…?”

“Une minute, Thomas,” his friend peers curiously at Alexander and offers a vague smile. “Le nouvel élève, n’est-ce pas?”

“Oui, monsieur…”

“Lafayette,” he holds out a hand, nods encouragingly.

“Alexander,” he offers in return. “I’m sorry, I can… I’ll just…”

“Merci, Alexandre,” Lafayette nods gratefully. Alexander stands up, awkwardly edges out of the booth, pointedly ignoring Jefferson’s curiously calculating stare. Lafayette halts him with a light touch to his arm though, and says kindly, “I do not know when he will be back, but Senator Washington is much looking forward to meeting you, ça va?”

And there’s the pink rising in his cheeks again. “D’accord. Merci.” And he ducks off to splash water on his face, and maybe stare at himself in the mirror some more and wonder just what his life has become.

Lafayette takes up his abandoned seat, meets Jefferson’s stricken gaze for a moment, and then stares down glumly at the table while their server passes through to check on them, waving him off when he asks if he’ll be joining the meal.

“Jesus, Gil,” Jefferson murmurs once they’re alone again, “what the hell happened?”

“Heart attack, they think.”

The senator starts. “Heart – heart attack? A teenager?”

Lafayette shrugs, helpless. “The seizures, they can cause the, ah, comment dit-on, arythmie? She collapsed at breakfast – didn’t make it to the hospital.”

“My God.”

“I gave the family’s statement to James. He’s working on a draft for an announcement when the session opens.”

It takes a few minutes for the implication to catch up to Jefferson. “What, he…? George wants me to do it?”

“If you are not comfortable doing so, I can give it to Monsieur Franklin.”

“No, no, it’s… fuck, it’s fine. Christ.” He sees the server heading their way with a tray of food and purses his lips. “I need to head back.” Glances around, suddenly remembering his lunch companion. “I need to find the kid.”

“He’s hiding in the bathroom. Nervous little thing, n’est-ce pas? C’est très mignon.”
He scoffs. “Kid’s got a chip on his shoulder of gargantuan proportions.”

“We were all young and looking to prove ourselves once, sois gentil, mon ami.”

“His mouth’s going to get him in trouble, just you wait.” Smiling apologetically, he asks the server if they can’t get their food wrapped up to go; not an uncommon occurrence, from the way he takes it in stride and whisks the tray right on back to the kitchen. “You heading to Virginia?”

“I need to go grab a few things from George’s office and then head to HQ to start making a frankly obscene number of calls to cancel events, emails to the regional offices to halt all activities for the time being, suspend any polls we have in the field…” He trails off, closes his eyes, and shakes his head tightly.

Christ, he hadn’t even thought about that dimension. “Triage and delegate,” he advises, speaking from far too much experience, realizes that’s probably part of why Washington wants him to break the news, but that it’s mostly meant as a message, a moment to look past the ever-passionate and oft-bitter rivalry between the two of them – a moment of unity for Virginia, a moment for the leadership to see beyond party and circle the wagons. “I know you’re close with the whole family.”

Lafayette just nods, weight of the world behind his usually vibrant eyes. “I’ll be in touch, or Arnold.” He stands, and Jefferson follows suit, lets himself be pulled in for another round of pecks to the cheeks. “And I’ll tell your young charge it is safe to come out now,” the corner of his lip turns up, and he slips away as suddenly as he’d appeared.

Alexander finds himself struggling to keep pace as Jefferson heads back towards the Russell building with decidedly more determination than their meandering stroll. He’s got the paper bag with their lunch in one hand, his head bowed down thoughtfully as he walks, for all the world appearing to pay no attention to his surroundings.

But the congested sidewalks seem to part for the senator who exudes an authority that extends beyond his imposing figure. Alexander wants desperately to ask about the fateful rendezvous with the mysterious Frenchman that’s thrown their morning plans askew, but he can see even from brief glimpses of the senator’s face that he’s immersed inside his own head.

He’s composing, Alexander thinks, and recognizes the look well enough. An argument, a speech, a letter, it’s hard to say what worlds are being erased and created and rearranged behind those impenetrable eyes.

And after a morning of a sort of off-kilter, aloof disinterest, he can see at last how this relatively young senator, this diplomat-turned-politician, emerged as a more restrained counterpoint to George Washington’s meteoric rise as a reformer in a system embroiled in its own faults, at the whims of a populace discontented by the status quo, and became his party’s standard-bearer.

Chapter End Notes

Because the Alexander Unexpectedly Knowing French trope is the best trope.
The Candy Desk is a real thing - the honor presently falls to Sen. Toomey, of Pennsylvania. I am unaware if there is a secret good drawer exclusively for the Republicans, however.
Chapter 3

The office is out to lunch, and the view from the conference room is boring. Jefferson shut himself in his office without a word, left Madison to point Alexander to a place he could sit and eat before he, too, closeted himself in the office at the end of the hall with a quick assurance that someone would walk him over to the Senate chamber on time.

He’s twice seen Madison dash between Jefferson’s office and the outer bullpen, once with half of what he’s pretty sure is Jefferson’s sandwich jammed in his mouth, some mixture of tomato and avocado and aioli something-or-other on a bread he’s never even heard of before. Alexander is ignored, and content enough with it, as it gives him time to ponder over what’s happened.

**Who’s dead**, more specifically. *Elle est morte*, Lafayette had said, and how he wishes he had a computer on hand so he might figure out who he is and maybe gain some clues into this unexpected mystery.

At quarter to one, he’s done with his sandwich and his little Styrofoam container of soup, and starting to get twitchy. Being late on his first day sounds less than ideal – can a pass from a senator excuse tardiness? – and he starts tapping his foot nervously against the leg of the desk, feeling weird about just walking out when he was told to wait and be escorted, but feeling equally weird about interrupting whatever powwow is going behind Jefferson’s closed office door.

At ten ‘til, he figures there’s nothing to be done but to find his own way, pretty much guaranteeing he’ll be late at this point. He collects his lunch trash, turns to deposit it in a bin in the corner of the room, clutches his cold coffee like a lifeline, and turns back to find himself being watched bemusedly from the door.

“Hello, then – are you hiding?”

Alexander starts, throws off his footing, catches his hip on the edge of the conference table, and nearly drops his coffee in surprise and pain. “Ow.” The newcomer aborts a grab for the cup, and smiles apologetically. “You’re very sneaky.”

“You’re very… lost?”

“Er… no, not exactly, I…”

The door flies open at the end of the hall and Madison’s head pops out. “André! Walk the kid to the floor lobby, would you? Show him the cloakroom.” His head disappears behind the slammed door once more.

And that is that.

André takes it in stride, seems to appreciate the rush Alexander is in, and sweeps him from the office without any further ado. He keeps his pace more manageable than Jefferson’s long stride, but Alexander hangs a half-step back and admires the low queue tied at the nape of the man’s neck, and wonders that he was worried about his long hair being unprofessional.

Or maybe it’s just something about Jefferson’s office.

“So,” André comments pleasantly as they step through the basement door that leads them into the tunnels connecting to the Capitol Building itself. “New class of pages – who are you?”
“Alexander Hamilton, sir.” Gets a sidelong, cocked brow, and he knows that doesn’t really answer André’s question. He goes for the footnotes. “Senator Washington is out of the office so the program reassigned me to Senator Jefferson for this morning’s orientation.”

A light grin pulls at the corner of the other man’s mouth. “Good gracious, I hope he didn’t leave you in that conference room for three hours.”

“No! He was…” Nice probably isn’t the precise word he’s searching for, but the morning had not been unpleasant by any means. “Helpful.” In his own way. “Something came up and we had to rush out on lunch.”

“Hm.”

There’s a gentle lilt to André’s voice, like an accent he can’t quite shake. “Are you British?”

“By way of France and Switzerland, yes.”

André steers him down a side corridor, away from the throngs of foot traffic heading over for the impending Senate session or simply returning from lunch breaks. “Wha-?”

They duck through a floor-to-ceiling partition made of long panels of a sort of flexible, transparent plastic – a wind and noise barrier, Alexander realizes, as they step through on the other side where a waiting Capitol police officer glances over André’s identification badge and then waves them on through.

They join a small group of people on the edge of a platform, and Alexander stares, dumbstruck. “There’s a subway?”

“It’s not a burdensome walk, but I gather you to be in something of a hurry. And we’re a lazy lot, isn’t that right, Senator Langdon?” He winks at an elderly man standing to his left, and receives a half-hearted wave in return.

“Mister André,” the old man acknowledges in a disinterested, reedy voice.

This, Alexander admits to himself, is pretty cool. Barely thirty-six hours ago, he’d never left his island of fifty-thousand people; he’d thought nothing could top the flight, until he was in a cab with his face pressed against the window, staring at the sheer scale of everything in D.C. Now, boarding a train for the exclusive use of government staffers, darting about in the bowels of the U.S. government…

They take up spots, standing, in the middle of the car; a briefcase digs into Alexander’s hip, just where he bashed it into the conference table, and everything is just great.

He must look ridiculous, for the size of the grin he can’t seem to wipe off his face.

“What do you do for Senator Jefferson?”

André smiles down at him. “I’m his office guru.”

He has exactly zero idea what to make of that. He takes a shot. “Like… you fix the printer?”

From André’s bark of laughter, the shot is far wide, but he is not unkind in his amusement, eyes crinkling and dancing merrily. “Perhaps gatekeeper would better suffice. You would not believe the amount of information that passes through a senator’s office on any given day, much less the party leader’s.”
“And you control the flow of information to Senator Jefferson?”

“Both ways – what comes in, what goes out.”

“Can I ask a question, then?” André nods. “What’s going on right now?”

“Alas, that I do not know. Not the usual channels of office business, I do have some limitations.”

He supposes being accosted over lunch wasn’t quite the same as business emails and briefing memos and angry constituent letters and phone calls. “Can I try for another, then?”

“What’s going on right now?”

“Whatcha got?”

“Why doesn’t Senator Jefferson sponsor pages?”

“He does, from time to time. He just avoids it when he can.”

“Because it’s a waste of his time?”

“Ohh,” André muses, shaking his head. “He’d have you think that But I’ll let you in on a secret, and you must hold it in the strictest of confidence.”

Exciting. “Okay.”

André leans down so he can murmur for Alexander’s ear alone amidst the crowded car. “He absolutely detests having to choose one.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well… think about it. There are thirty spots a session; two school terms, two summer blocks. One hundred senators, one hundred and twenty spots divvied among them each year. Can you even begin to fathom how many applications are received for every single one of those placements?”

Virginia alone has eight million residents, Alexander knows; he looked it up. Even the population of D.C., small as the city is geographically, is more than ten times that of his tiny island.

“So the office gets a stack of packets from… perfect students, with perfect grades, community volunteers, club presidents… and then there’s the campaign donors mixed in, congressmen’s children, so on and so on…” He shrugs. “The senator simply hates being obliged to select one perfect fit out of a stack of hundreds of perfect candidates. Someone will narrow it down to a manageable handful, and Madison will narrow it down even further, but he always forces the senator to make the final selection.”

The train slows, and then comes to a final stop with a sharp lurch. André is clearly a practiced hand, and grabs Alexander’s elbow just in time to prevent him from falling into the man with the offending briefcase.

“Congratulations, however,” André tells him as they step off and follow the crowd of men and women into the basement of the Capitol Building, “on being Senator Washington’s perfect fit.”

It’s two minutes past the hour when they step through the doorway from the stairwell onto the ground floor of the Capitol. André points vaguely off to the left. “House occupies the southern wing – you probably won’t have too much need to visit that side, but make sure you check out the rotunda and Statuary Hall.” He leads him down a long, ornate corridor, running up a vague commentary of
trivia that speaks to too many tours given to curious constituents.

Once they enter the north wing, André turns right and heads up a sweeping staircase. “The chamber is on the second floor, gallery on the third. Every senator has a hideaway office in the building independent of their legislative office, but there’s no directory of them and you’ll only know where to find one if you’re offered the information by said senator. It’s called a hideaway for a reason.”

“Wow.”

“Lobby,” he gestures, and indeed, the group of pages is hovering awkwardly and awaiting further instructions while Proctors Lee and Shippen, and Director Gates, account for them. “You’ll do your schoolwork out here when you’re not busy on Senate business. It looks like a museum, but you can sit on the furniture, promise.”

He holds up a finger as Shippen waves them over, and clasps his hands together and bows his head in a silent plea for forgiveness.

“The main doors here open into the back of the chamber. Federalists on the left, Democratic-Republicans on the right, which’ll look backwards when you’re sitting at the dais.” He directs Alexander down the corridor that runs along the right side of the chamber, and points out a busy doorway, already teeming with people ahead of the session. “Cloakroom – where the work actually gets done, but don’t tell the senators that. You’ll alternate shifts running errands on the floor or manning the phones and sorting messages in here. Mister Henry is in charge, he’ll get you all sorted and operating like a well-oiled machine in no time, he’s been doing it for more years than he’d admit.”

A passing man with lines etched deep into his face and greying hair smacks André in the arm. “Whelp.”

André grins, and leads Alexander back down to his waiting peers. Utterly ignoring Gates’s look of impatience that tells Alexander he is, in fact, the last one to arrive, André looks over the assembled group, intrigued. “Ah – Miss Schuyler, a pleasure as always. Mister Burr, Mister Laurens.”

Proctor Shippen sidles up and taps him on the shoulder to reprimand, “You’re late, Mister André.”

“My utmost apologies,” he takes her hand and brushes a kiss over her knuckles, “Miss Shippen.”

She blushes and looks at the floor, bashful; Alexander can hear Eliza Schuyler and Abigail Culper giggle behind their hands.

“Away with you, sir,” Gates grumbles, shooing him on. “I have twenty-five minutes to make sure that this ragtag bunch can keep the gears of government moving, and there’s no time to lose.”

Twenty minutes later, Alexander doesn’t much feel like he’s suddenly equipped to turn the gears of government, but everyone else looks equally frazzled by the sudden rush of information, so at least he figures he’s not behind the curve.

They line up at the doors on either side of the dais, and Gates counts them. “Who’s on the wrong side?” he barks. “Sixteen for the majority, fourteen for the minority.”

Aaron Burr clears his throat. “I believe Alexander is out of place, or perhaps confused by Senator
Washington’s lack of party affiliation.”

He goes red and opens his mouth to protest, but then Proctor Lee is leaning over and murmuring something to Gates, who scowls, whispers back, and then waves a hand dismissively. “Fine.” He walks away grumbling something about, “…destroying decades of tradition…”

John Laurens pushes his way in between Alexander and Aaron and clasps his arms. “Welcome to our side of the floor. What’s the story?”

But then they’re being herded into the room by Lee, Shippen on the other side, and Alexander’s explanation dies on his lips when he gets his first glance at the Senate chamber.

It’s… surprisingly small, from the inside, and he can only imagine how much more grandiose the House chamber is, holding more than four times the number of people. But one hundred desks really don’t take up all that much room, and with perhaps three-quarters of them already filled, there’s just something so… pedestrian about the picture. The men and women of the United States Senate, sitting sideways in their seats to chat with those sitting a row or two above, or over, looking for all the world like any one of Alexander’s classes back home before the bell, and –

-a chime sounds, and the picture really is complete.

“After today, you’ll alternate hours with schoolwork, so half of you are working at any given time.” Lee points to the ledge at the bottom of the large dais in the center of the room. “Five of you at a time will sit here to be summoned for errands or to deliver messages on the floor; two or three will field calls in the cloakroom and bring messages to the door as needed. You’ll be flexible – if you’re needed on your hour off, you’ll be available. Schoolwork is secondary, and even if it’s an all-night session, you’re still expected to finish it on time.” He directs them all to sit, jammed in together, on the platform. “For today, you’ll mostly observe, so get cozy.”

The chime must have been an alert of some sort, because the rest of the chamber fills in quickly. Clerks and secretaries take up spots on the lower tier of the dais, smiling down at the new group of students, and the room hushes as an older man settles himself at the spot in the center reserved for the chairman, the president pro tempore in the Vice President’s absence, and Alexander recognizes Senator Benjamin Franklin in an abstract sort of way, a face he’s seen on the internet, on the television.

He stands as the minute counts down to half-past, and clears his throat. “Before we formally open the day for business, the junior senator for Virginia would like to address a more personal matter to the body. Senator Jefferson?”

Alexander leans out so he can peer around the girl sitting in front of him, and sees Jefferson rising slowly from a seat in the front and center of the room; immediately to his left is an empty desk that must normally belong to Washington.

“Thank you, Mister President,” he addresses Franklin quietly. A moment passes in which he seems to deliberate, before deciding to move to a lectern at the front of the room so he can speak facing the assembly, his back to the dais. Not typical procedure, as far as Alexander understands.

“Something’s wrong,” John mutters at his back, confirming his suspicions. “The majority always gets first speaking privileges, even if the leader’s absent.”

From their spot behind his left shoulder, they can see as Jefferson opens a thin, leather portfolio and places it gently on the lectern; takes a minute to stare down at his papers, and then clears his throat softly and looks out over the assembled body, two conspicuously empty seats front and center.
And then he closes the portfolio and sighs. “It has become all too easy,” he speaks softly, “and all too common to identify by the differences amongst us, rather than unite around the unshakeable bonds which speak to our common purpose, our shared histories; indeed, outside this spotlight, this partisan theater, our triumphs are celebrated – and the burden of our tragedies borne across the shoulders of many, that no single one of us might flounder alone and drown in the depths of despair.”

He draws a steadying breath, and Alexander notices the subtle shift in the atmosphere of the hall – no delusions as to the type of speech they are listening to, and his eyes are drawn back to the empty desk beside Jefferson’s own.

_Elle est morte, Thomas._

“It is with that poignant thought that I must now, regretfully, be the bearer of the news that Patsy Custis succumbed to her struggle with epilepsy this morning.”

A soft but shocked murmur rises in the assembly; Alexander’s brow furrows in confusion, and he turns to John to ask if he knows who that is, and finds him staring, stunned, at Jefferson’s back, eyes wide and disbelieving, his fist shoved in his mouth to block whatever exclamation was on his lips.

“We all knew Patsy,” Jefferson continues, “a frequent presence in her father’s office, a confidante in his recent endeavors on the campaign trail… a companion on his arm for fundraisers and benefits that undoubtedly bore poor Martha after so many years attending. Those of us who have been here long enough remember her from a vivacious child, charming, and all-too-willing to offer those uncensored opinions which her unfailingly diplomatic father wouldn’t voice.”

Jefferson pauses here, clasps his hands behind his back and bows his head. “Patsy was a dear friend to many of our own children, always happy to lend a supportive welcome to those thrust unceremoniously on the national stage, under the microscope of the public eye, living vicariously each day through their parents’ successes and failures. As such, I know that she will be mourned, she will be missed – but most importantly, she will be remembered and loved as one of our own.

“The Washington-Custis family extends their deepest gratitude for our support and patience while they come to terms with this sudden and unexpected loss of a most beloved daughter, stepdaughter, and sister, who never let her experience with a chronic, unpredictable illness hold her back from a thing she set her mind to.”

There’s a moment of stunned silence; then Jefferson lets out a long, low breath, collects his notes, and returns to his seat, looking worn.

The assembly seems to take a collective breath – Franklin rises, preparing to formally convene the session – and then a cut-off sob shatters the quiet. Alexander whips around to see Eliza Schuyler, tears pouring down her face, hand pressed to her mouth, looking devastated, trapped and helpless.

No one quite seems to know what to do, as Franklin begins speaking again, but Alexander cannot fathom many things worse than getting blindsided with the death of what was apparently a good friend, and being forced to sit through the drudgery of government proceedings. He slips off the edge of the dais, offers her a hand, and shepherds her out of the room, not sure if he’s imagining the hot stares of their peers and a room full of senators at his back.

The corridor is empty and quiet, save the sound of voices emanating from offices up and down the hall, the quiet ringing of a phone that might be coming from the dem-rep cloakroom. Eliza stands facing a blank stretch of wall, the heels of her palms pressed into her eyes, taking deep, ragged breaths in an effort to stave off another flood of tears.
“I’m sorry,” she manages at last in a rasp. “You should get back.”

“No, hey,” he hesitantly touches her shoulder. “You shouldn’t… was she… a friend, then?”

And there came the tears. “Yeah,” she gasps. “She…”

Words fail her anew, and Alexander takes her by the hand again and leads her around to the lobby. “You should sit; let me see if I can find you some water…”

“Mister Hamilton!” He cringes and turns, finds Gates and the man André had mentioned, Mister Henry, coming around the corner. “You seem rather incapable of being where you’re supposed to, this afternoon.”

“I…” he stammers, and gestures down at where Eliza sits slumped on a sofa that really does look like it belongs in a museum, head buried in her hands. “She…”

“You have exactly one day to learn the job you’ve come here to do, and you -”

“Thank you, Mister Gates,” a deep voice cuts him off, a man emerging from the door at the top of the hall. “That’ll do. Today is not a typical one for the Senate, and I’ll be glad to fill in any holes in…” he peers at the name badge on Alexander’s chest. “Mister Hamilton’s education.”

Gates works his jaw and goes a bit puce. “Of course, Senator Schuyler.”

Ah.

Eliza launches herself into her father’s arms as soon as Gates disappears again, leaving Alexander standing awkwardly by. “Did you know?” she demands, voice breaking.

“No,” he shushes her softly, rubbing soothingly at her back. “I’m sorry, darling.” He catches Alexander’s eye over her shoulder and nods back towards the chamber. “Best be getting back – you can mostly ignore Gates. He’s far more concerned about the reputation of the Page Program than the actual functionality of it.”

“Yes, sir.”

But he’s intercepted at the head of the corridor by someone coming up the stairs, who blinks in surprise. “Ah. Alexander. Perfect.”

“Mister Madison?”

“Run and fetch Senator Jefferson, would you?”

“I… fetch him?”

Madison just stares blankly. “Yes.” And then offers, “He’s been waiting on a phone call.”

So he slips back into the chamber, where events have moved on and a young senator he doesn’t recognize is speaking from her desk about something to do with agricultural subsidies or some such. Walking past the dais, he awkwardly leans down by Jefferson’s desk to whisper. “Mister Madison says you have a call…”

Jefferson rises and follows Alexander to the front of the chamber, clasping a hand firmly at the back of his neck as he moves to take up his seat by John again and steering him instead back out into the hallway. Alexander wonders if he’s in trouble.
“Have I done something wrong?” he asks as the door closes behind them.

Jefferson rolls his eyes and holds out a hand, into which Madison slips a cell phone that looks to be muted. “Senator Washington’s office is going to be… unpredictably staffed, in the immediate future. He asked that mine be made available for any problems you might encounter as you settle in. So…” he waves his hand vaguely in Madison’s direction, smacks the screen of the phone to unmute it.

Alexander catches a few words as he walks off for some privacy. “Marty, sweetheart – I’m sorry to pull you out of class, but I have some news and wanted to make sure you heard it from me…”

Madison thrusts a slip of paper at him and Jefferson disappears through an unmarked doorway. “In case of an emergency outside the scope of the program.”

“I…” he frowns down at the phone number, email address. “What kind of emergency?”

The shorter man just shrugs blandly. “Something you are ill-equipped to handle, on your own in a strange city. Get mugged on the metro; lose your passport; whatever.”

“I don’t have a passport,” Alexander finds himself countering, “You don’t need one to… never mind.” Entirely beside the point. “Right. Thanks.”

He goes back to work, suspecting the day can only grow more boring from here on out.
The slow shuffle of sixty feet trudging up the stairs from the basement of Webster Hall back to the dormitory levels is hypnotic to Alexander’s shell-shocked and half-awake brain. He’s barely aware of his feet following John on auto-pilot until he’s watching the other boy collapse face-down onto a sofa in the common room, his mussed hair flying every which way.

“What,” Hercules intones from the doorway; pauses, collects the scrambled mush of his brain, and tries again. “What just happened?”

“School,” a mischief-eyed boy named Caleb, reduced to a dull stare, walks in behind them with one of his roommates. “I think. School? Just. Yeah, that happened. Right, Benjy-boy?”

“Guh,” Ben responds eloquently, and the three of them go prowling for caffeine in the kitchenette on the other side of the room. No coffee maker, much to Alexander’s chagrin, but someone rather thoughtfully found the time to stock the fridge with energy drinks, mountain dew, and those little Frappuccino bottles – he suspects Proctor Shippen. Lee’s too surly to want them caffeinated and sugared-up.

Eliza swoops in gracefully behind the sorry lot of them and sits down primly on John’s legs (“Mmgh.”). She looks better adjusted than most. “It doesn’t get better, you just get used to it,” is the wholly unwelcome wisdom she imparts. “That’s what Angelica said, anyway.”

“I hate her,” John declares to the sofa cushions.

He earns a smack. “You do not.”

“Your sister is beauty and grace personified,” he amends, “and why didn’t she warn me?”

“She still remembers when you spent a night pulling my pigtails at a Congressional Christmas party.”

John snickers; Eliza smacks him again.

Alexander lowers himself to lie on the floor next to the couch; considers for a moment, and reaches out to tug on a handful of John’s curls (“Mmph”). “How long have you two known each other?”

“Oh,” Eliza muses, “since we were old enough to come to D.C. for things like Congressional Christmas parties and be expected to behave with, ah… a modicum of proper decorum.” (John snorts). “My father was in the House until… eight? Eight years ago.”

She mentions it without expectation or judgement, for which Alexander is grateful; she’s not like Burr, who seems to expect everyone to know all the finer points of everyone’s history on the Hill-Alexander still doesn’t know Burr’s personal connection to it in the first place.

John finally rolls over so he can speak without a mouth full of cushion. “Opposite sides of the aisle, o’course, and the House is a big place, but they co-chaired the select subcommittee on… something-or-other for a while, and so we were obliged to tolerate one another’s presence.” He presses his lips together, considering, and then leans down to stage-whisper, “She was a brat.”

“You, John Laurens, are a scoundrel still to this day.”

“Yeah, but Peggy likes that about me, so.”
“Oh my God, stop.”

Alexander cocks a brow. “What’s a Peggy?”

“The little sister who started pulling my pigtails in turn,” John snarks, and Alexander takes another handful and tugs. “Ow.”

“I can see the appeal.”

Yesterday, he’d found himself somewhat indignant of what was surely a bit of mild nepotism that secured their spots in the program, but today he can’t find the energy to muster up the resentment. Something to do with all of them being run just as ragged as the next, getting the crash course in the Secrets of the Hill. Something to do with seeing them equally offended by the 6:15 class start time, and then just as stunned by the sheer speed and volume of the coursework.

And maybe something about seeing them sitting on the wall outside the building at quarter ‘til curfew the night prior, finally with a free moment to grieve the loss of a friend.

The assessing stare John gives him, sidelong from his spot on the couch, head resting on his arms, gives him more important things to think about anyway. “Are you a scoundrel as well, then?”

_Yikes._

“Yikes,” Eliza states blandly. “Is that the time.”

He won’t meet her drily amused stare, and seizes instead on the proffered distraction. “We have an hour.”

“Compete with fourteen teenage girls for four showers and two sinks, and then get back to me on the significance of that statistic.”

“Point.”

She climbs nimbly from her perch atop John’s calves, smacks him once more on the back of the knee good-naturedly, and slips out of the room.

Hercules follows close behind, leaving Caleb and Ben chattering away animatedly on the other side of the room. “I need a nap.”

Alexander eyes the open can of mountain dew in his hand. “Uh.”

“No, man, there’s like... _science_ to this. You take a power nap before the caffeine hits your brain, and it like... gives you double the boost.”

He reiterates, “Uh.”

John rolls to his feet, gingerly stepping over Alexander’s prone form. “I have a hot date with a coffee cart.”

“Oh,” Alexander sits up abruptly, “want to scout out coffee shops with me? There’s one two blocks east that looks a bit too _natural, vegan, chia_ this that and the other, but I could give it a chance.”

Hercules takes that as his cue to vanish, and John frowns. “I think I know that place.” Pauses. “My father won’t let me near it.” Alexander snorts. “Wait, when did you _possibly_ have time to scout out the local brews?”
Half an hour later finds them sipping almond milk lattes, sitting at the long counter in the front window and watching the foot traffic pass by. They’re in their uniforms, ties tied with the Hercules Mulligan thumbs-up of approval just before he passed out for his mountain dew-fueled power nap.


“You know him?”

He shrugs. “We’ve crossed paths. I doubt he’d pick me out of a crowd.” Takes a long swig of his drink. “He drives my father crazy.”

Alexander mentally adds potential for juicy political gossip to his growing list of Reasons to Hang Out with John Laurens. Right behind his hair, his eyes, and his unabashed flirting. Priorities. “Why’s that?”

“Oh,” he twists the cup around in his hands, “I don’t know. Thinks he’s afraid to stand up to Washington, I guess. But my father sits on a comfortable majority in the House, and is something of a more partisan creature, so take that for what it’s worth. I think he’s just playing a longer game.”

“You think he wants to be president?”

“Rumor has it he might yet throw his hat in the ring this year.” Alexander glances over at him, curious. “He won’t, though.”

“How do you know?”

“For the same reason he won’t wage open war on the majority in the Senate. Some – my father included – think he’s intimidated by Washington’s popularity and it makes him reticent. They’re wrong though – it’s not hesitation holding him back. Jefferson simply doesn’t make his move until he knows he can win.”

Alexander doesn’t know much about Jefferson beyond that he was a diplomat before a politician; John Laurens sounds like he’s written school papers on the man’s career. Hell, maybe he has. “What’s the story with his man, Madison?”

A last gulp, and John polishes off his drink – he turns, lobs it in the direction of the trashcan by the door, where it bounces off the rim and rolls to a clattering stop at an outgoing customer’s foot. He smiles disarmingly, retrieves the offending refuse, puts on his best southern boy charm with a, “I am so sorry, ma’am,” and has her fighting down a reluctant smile as he holds the door open for her on her way out.

Alexander takes that as their cue to start heading back to the Hill. The day’s nearly as cold as the one prior, but the wind is gone, and the bright morning air is refreshing in the sun, not biting. He pitches his own cup and falls in beside John, who picks up the trail of their conversation. “I don’t know Madison. My father really despises him, which inclines me to think he’s probably not half-bad.
He shrugs. “He had this kind of…totally disengaged vibe? But also a vibe like he was actually running the whole show, it was fascinating.”

“I dunno. Jefferson’s probably a bit too self-involved to be managed much, but they’ve been together for years. Think Madison kept the office running after Jefferson’s wife died and he just sort of… checked out for a while.”

“Oh. Shit.”

John shoots him a sideways look. “Yeah. Long time ago, early in Jefferson’s first term. Washington hadn’t been in much longer, but he really stuck up for him while he was missing in action and, well…” he wrings his hands and stares down at the ground. “Yesterday’s little speech seemed a bit… symbolic. Reciprocal. I’d say moving, but knowing he was gallivanting around the place on his Great Capitol Coffee Tour all morning, perhaps it was simply politics.”

“Wha-? No,” Alexander protests, “that’s not… he found out while we were at lunch. I mean, I didn’t know that’s what had happened, but a man came looking for him, and they talked privately for a few minutes, and then we hurried back to his office while he more or less forgot I was even there. That’s why I was late.”

“Ohh.” He scuffs his toes on a curb while they wait on a light, and then notes glumly, “I didn’t bring anything black.”

“When is the funeral?”

“Dunno. I’ll stop by my father’s office when I have time and see if they’ve said. And to see if he can arrange something for me to wear, God knows I won’t have the chance.”

They walk in silence for a few minutes and then join the line of staffers waiting to go through security to enter the Capitol. Alexander weighs a number of trite condolences, knows from experience that they’ll do nothing save oblige a trite response in kind, and opts to say nothing.

X---X

There’s no floor session that morning either, and Alexander spends the time running errands for the Finance Committee meeting taking place in the Dirksen building. Senator Schuyler is the committee chair, and he smiles kindly in recognition when he sees him sitting in a chair by the door as he enters; the ranking member of the minority is Senator Gerry, who ignores Alexander entirely.

They’re pouring over a new House taxation reform proposal. He starts to listen, but doesn’t have time to get too engaged in the back and forth before he’s being sent off to collect a briefing book on tariffs at the port of New Orleans, and he’s pretty much on the move non-stop for the next hour. Abigail Culper relieves him at eleven, and then it’s straight to the grind with the mounds of schoolwork they’d received in their four classes jammed in between 6:15 and 8:15.

He starts with pre-calc, figuring his mind’s already on numbers and he may as well make use of it.

It’s back to work again at noon, but then they’re breaking for lunch at 12:30 until a short floor session at two. He catches John coming out of a much smaller conference room in the Hart building as he makes his way down to the lower levels, looking a bit traumatized, and he pulls him aside in an alcove off the lobby and frowns. “What the hell happened to you?”

“Aging, Alexander.”
“I…sorry, what?”

“There’s a special committee… on aging.” And there’s really not much to be said, in response to that. “It was awful.”

“Who’s chair?”

“Don’t laugh.”

“Who?”

“Franklin.”

Alexander shrugs. “If there’s an authority out there, I guess.” John snorts. “Did he sleep through it?”

“I know you’re kidding, but I swear to God I heard him snore at least twice.”

He grins, delighted, clasps John on the shoulder, and heads for the stairs to the basement levels.

“Lunch?”

“Yeah, there’s a carry-out place downstairs.”

“Hm…” he pulls out his little pocket notebook Jefferson had tossed his way the morning prior and consults his notes. “No, sorry.” Cross-checks the ideal spots for quality and efficiency with the amount of time they have until the session. “We’ll be going to the Rayburn café.”

“That’s the other side of the Hill. Literally. Total opposite side.”

“I have notes, John.” He waves his hastily jotted scribbles in John’s face. “Notes.”

He stares, and then throws up a hand in resignation, falls into step behind Alexander. “What the hell goes on in Jefferson’s office?”

X—X

The Rayburn café is moderately busy at the tail end of the usual lunch rush, and they fill in at the end of the queue of hurried suits looking to grab a bite between conference calls and committee meetings. John grabs a plate and begins piling it a bit absently from the salad bar. Alexander is more cautious, peering between some of the foods and the little labels above indicating what they are (pickled beets? really?), but piling some fruit on more liberally.

John veers for a hot food window serving pizza and burgers; Alexander stares around in indecision between the soup counter, the open fridge with prepared cold sandwiches and sushi, and the frozen yogurt corner (because duh), until he settles on simply taking his tray to the coffee station where he studies the little creamer flavors in delight.

A tray lands beside his own as he’s finally settling on one of the eight brews on offer; John reaches over him unapologetically to grab a mug, and sets about filling it without paying much mind to what he’s doing. “Burr’s here,” he jerks his head over towards the hot counter.

Aaron manages to make the page uniform look stiff and severe in a way none of the others do. He’s already tall and thin, and then holds himself so severely straight all the time, it makes Alexander’s back hurt. “Should we… like… invite him to eat with us?”

It’s not that he’s averse to being friendly – it’s just that Aaron’s, well… not particularly receptive.
“Think he’s with someone,” John glances over his shoulder, and Alexander sees a familiar face from his morning’s labors.

“Oh. He was on the Finance Committee. Forget his name.” Blond hair cut short, but not short enough to hide its natural unruliness, the senator in question stands out for his youth, amplified by the fact that he’s forgone his jacket and stands chatting with Aaron in his shirt and obligatory red tie.

So many red ties.

John’s brow furrows thoughtfully, but he comes up empty. “Yeah, I got nothing. Whoa, here,” he reaches into a fridge, plucks one of the pre-made sandwiches from the rows, and flips it onto Alexander’s tray. “Your meal voucher covers more than a salad and coffee, and do you exist on anything besides caffeine, by the way?”

He gets an elbow to the ribs, which he vows to return at some future point when he doesn’t risk upending John’s slice of greasy pizza.

“Gentlemen,” Aaron intones neutrally from the next register over.

“Oh dear,” the senator looks up from where he’s sorting through bills in his wallet, smiling faintly. “You’ve fled far as possible from the torturous boredom of your morning and I’ve ruined your escape.”

It takes Alexander a moment to realize that he’s a) talking to him and b) teasing him.

The cashier clears her throat impatiently, John nudges him in the back with the edge of his tray, and he stumbles forward, flustered. “Oh.”

She swipes his meal card and sends him on his way. He hovers just inside the bustling seating area, waiting for John. Aaron ducks around him and heads for an empty table, but the senator lingers once he pays. “You’ll have to forgive me, I caught Miss Culper’s name but not your own, Mister…” He peers down at his name tag. “Ah! Mister Hamilton. Your reputation precedes you.”

“Well, that can’t be good,” John remarks, scanning for an empty spot.

“Won’t you boys join us?”

 Unsure of the proper etiquette for declining a senator in such an offer, Alexander shrugs, exchanges a look with John, and they trail after him. Aaron looks indifferent as to their presence, and he wonders if this was a set rendezvous or if the senator, shockingly more personable than most of his counterparts Alexander has encountered to date – like, making an actual effort to learn their names? what? - had simply pulled him along in his wake as well.

Then Aaron offers, “John, Alexander, Senator Conway sponsored me to the program; Senator, two of my roommates – Alexander Hamilton and John Laurens.”

“Oh, Speaker Laurens’s boy, of course,” to which John nods and smiles with the air of one used to being identified as such in this sort of setting. But then Conway shifts his attention back to Alexander, and reassures him, “I simply meant that Senator Jefferson had remarked upon your unusual circumstances following yesterday’s session.”

“Oh.” He blinks, aware of Aaron’s curiosity finally being stoked, piercing dark eyes peering over at him.

“How is the mainland treating you?”
“Um. Well.” He casts about for something insightful. “It’s cold, and you folks put a lot of weird stuff in your salads,” is what he comes up with.

Conway laughs loudly, and jabs a fork into his own bowl of greens that is, blessedly, free of pickled beets. “What is standard fare back home?”

He knew that question was coming, and he hates it. It plays into a certain exotic notion of otherness, like Saint Croix is this mystical getaway, cut off from the world and the ravages of globalization – save, somehow, magically, for the thriving tourism industry that keeps the island economy afloat these days.

But he also has fond memories of roaming about Christiansted with Edward as a boy, eating heaping piles of curry chicken and rice from street carts, and he’s speaking to a senator, so he says, “Oh, probably what you’d think of typical Caribbean. Jerk chicken, rice, beans, plantains. Lots of seafood. Fruit. But, like… we also have McDonald’s, so.”

John looks at him blankly. “Wait.”

“Oh, and we drive on the left, so if I look the wrong way and step out into traffic, you can blame our eclectic, shifting, colonial history.”

“Oh,” Aaron nods to himself and returns to his meal, “the Virgin Islands, then?” Because of course Aaron Burr would be the person to know off the top of his head that it was the one U.S. territory that still did so.

Conway looks affronted. “Jesus Christ, we fought a revolution to be rid of such nonsense.”

“I mean really, what was the point, then?”

“I’m introducing legislation to rectify this egregious travesty.”

John’s still catching up. “You’re not from Virginia?”

“No, but since they’ve both got virgin in the name, Senator Washington’s office figured it was alright.”

Biting his lip on a grin, Conway just shakes his head and focuses on his meal. “Why do I get the feeling you’re going to be trouble, Mister Hamilton?”

He takes a long sip of his coffee and winks exaggeratedly over the top of his mug, and decides to take that as a compliment.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Angelica appears, bearing caffeine and gossip.

Chapter Notes

A mid-week bonus chapter! For those of you following along at home, writing progress goes well - midway through chapter 15 as we speak. So the plan is an extra chapter now, because this weekend I'm heading out of town for a week and am not sure if I'll be taking my computer. So chapter 6 will still be up Friday, and then there might be a bit of a lag on 7. BUT then once I'm back, I should be in a position to post more frequently as I wind down the writing. Still figuring on 23 or so chapters in total.

Their first week ends with a funeral.

Friday morning dawns with the first snowfall Alexander’s ever seen with his own two eyes, and he spends fifteen minutes before classes start just staring out the window. There’s not much – some overnight precipitation accumulating along street curbs, but barely enough to stick and certainly not enough to impact the usual hustle and bustle of city traffic, already well underway at 6 a.m. Regardless, they’ve got a free day anyway, after classes. A large portion of the Senate and the Congressional leadership are making the sojourn across the river to northern Virginia for Washington’s stepdaughter’s service, and official business has been canceled for the day out of respect for the grieving majority leader.

Because there’s no Senate business for them to attend to, the school block is scheduled more than an hour longer, and it’s not quite so rushed, gives them an opportunity to catch up and clarify a bit from the three days prior of shoving information at them and throwing them out the door. John, Eliza, and Aaron get permission to leave midway through though, and as Alexander and John leave their English class, armed with pages upon pages about the importance of symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter*, John heads upstairs to get dressed, leaving Alexander to fend alone with Mister Seabury in Civics and Government.

As the fourth block ends just shy of 9:45, Lee and Shippen arrive with a pronouncement that has the vast majority of them groaning – given the unanticipated day free of duties in the Senate, they’ve arranged an extra day with the language tutors who come in a couple times a week to make sure the students aren’t left behind when they return to their usual schools in the fall. And so those of them studying intermediate French and Spanish grudgingly stay behind in the basement, to be replaced by the students at more advanced levels in an hour, plus two of them who are due to enroll in AP German in the fall.

Most of those waiting take advantage of the computer lab in the basement to make use of the hour to get started on the veritable mountain of coursework they have to finish over the weekend. Alexander takes his increasingly dog-eared copy of Hawthorne upstairs – he does his best writing at night,
anyway. The common room is empty, save a quiet, serious boy from Connecticut, if he remembers their quick introductions from Sunday – a lifetime ago – correctly.

“Heya, Abe,” he tosses a vague wave at the boy sitting at the table by the kitchenette, intent on a heavy book open in front of him, jotting notes as he reads. He has an additional pencil tucked behind one ear. “No language for you, either?”

“Hm?” He glances around, like he’d missed the other boy’s entrance entirely. “Hey, Alex. Latin, actually, but since I’m the only one, I’m just emailing weekly progress reports to my teacher back home.”

And he’s a bit envious that’s even an option for Abe. “Wow, Latin. The language of law.”

“That’s the idea,” Abe mumbles around his pen, now tucked in his teeth. “Bit of a family tradition.” He glances over as Alexander settles on the couch with his novel. “How about you?”

“Hm, no, my mother was a shopkeep and my father was mostly just sort of useless. Or, well, hell, maybe still is, miserable bastard is probably still kicking around out there somewhere in the world.”

The blank look on Abe’s face suggests this is far more information that he was seeking. “I meant, uh… how’d you escape the morning add-on lessons?”

“Oh. Mom grew up with French on Saint Martin, my father’s from Puerto Rico. My high school doesn’t offer anything I didn’t pick up as a kid, and they weren’t about to let me start German from scratch here, thank Christ.”

Abe smiles faintly. “Oh, so you’re just trilingual, no biggie.”

“…well, there’s also the local Creole, if we want to count that…”

Abe lobs the pencil at him.

X---X

After language lessons, the group scatters in a way that hasn’t really been possible since they arrived five days prior, what with no class, no work, and ten hours until curfew. There’s a high demand for rations, after a week of capitol cafeterias and quick meals grabbed as they stumbled back to the dormitory after a long day of school and work and homework. A handful of them go on a shopping endeavor to one of the nearby markets, some head down the Mall to take in some part of D.C. beyond the immediate radius of Capitol Hill. A few head to the closest metro stop, just a couple blocks south, to buy SmarTrip cards and go on some sort of an adventure.

Far as Alexander can tell, they don’t have any specific destination in mind, simply want to enjoy being on their own and free to use their time however they damn well please.

Hercules and Robert, the fourth roommate of Caleb, Ben, and Abe, corral those remaining behind and declare the need for a vote on lunch delivery to the dorm, which is good and democratic and all, except the vote splits three ways between pizza, sushi, and Indian.

They end up ordering an absurd amount of food from all three. Alexander pitches a bill at Hercules to cover his share and then slips downstairs to take advantage of the emptied computer lab, with instructions to bring him a couple slices if he hasn’t surfaced and the food’s in danger of running out.

Once downstairs, he forces aside the running commentary in his mind about all the work he has to get done, and logs into his personal email for the first time since he left for the airport last Sunday
morning. He sifts through the accumulated ads and spam and college recruiting emails until he finds one from Wednesday evening from Edward. He selects it, forwards it to his government account (while still being somewhat awed at having a government account, even if it’s one that’ll be closed down as soon as the term is over in June), and logs out.

Then he logs onto his Senate email and reads.

FWD: Recipient: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov

Sender: Ned!@iMail.net

Recipient: EhhDotHam@iMail.net

Subject: I SAW U ON CSPAN

Did you know floor proceedings are live-streamed and archived? I can now tune in on the daily and watch you twiddling your thumbs while a bunch of old dudes talk about emission standards and N.Korean sanctions and whatever else it is you people do over there and IT IS GREAT.

No, but dad’s gone full-on dork about it. He’s very proud. You might have clinched the enviable position of favorite son, though I’ll insist that the title cannot be claimed in absentia, so come home and FIGHT ME.

Everyone misses you – it’s so much harder to get away with shenanigans at school when your loud mouth isn’t going off & fighting with the teachers all the time.

Think the school is going to get renamed after you. Maybe the airport (who the hell is Henry Rohlsen, anyway?). You are, for your fleeting moment of glory, St Croix’s favorite son. Christiansted’s, surely. Or, well, at least the neighborhood’s.

I know you’re busy, drop a line when you can. Wish they’d let you take your phone. Catch myself ten times a day trying to text. In the meantime, we shall spy on you on C-SPAN, from time to time, and be reassured of your good health.

Cheers- Neddy

sent: 01/24/18 17:57

Alexander smiles to himself and composes his response.

Sender: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov

Recipient: Ned!@iMail.net

Subject: OK, so we’re doing this

OR… I shall make you a deal. The neighborhood can claim me, but I shan’t upset your place in your father’s heart. Seems only fair.

It is indeed a rather hectic life – the long days do not bother me, but the structure is ill-suited to my usual habits. As one who takes time to get into the proper mindset for some work, and just as long to be pulled back out of it (as you well know by now), the constant back-and-forth of our daily
schedule, an hour of Senate work alternating with an hour of schoolwork, leaves me unable to give
certain tasks their proper due.

Being ‘allergic to a good night’s sleep,’ as I believe your father once put it, works to my favor
however. We have a building curfew and a light’s-out curfew an hour later, but the only one who
ever seems perturbed if I creep downstairs late at night or early in the morning to do work is one of
my three roommates, who appears to be very concerned with the designated order of things. Not
even to complain to one of the resident proctors (and really, how petty would such a thing be?),
so I think my eccentricities are safe.

Said roommate and one other (Henry Laurens’s son, actually) are gone at the moment, across the
Potomac in Virginia for a funeral. If you (or your father) have been following news about the Senate
this week, you probably saw that George Washington’s stepdaughter died Monday morning.
Epilepsy – she was seventeen. A rather somber introduction to the Senate, and one which altered my
own Monday schedule, as I was due to meet with Sen. Washington’s office.

Instead, I spent the morning with Thomas Jefferson, the other Virginia senator (and the minority
leader, you might recall). I detest his politics, but my reluctant impression is that on the whole, he is
a decent enough human being, though he hides it behind a veneer of equal parts apathy and
absurdity.

Time to get some work done. Most of the Senate is at Washington’s side today, so the day is ours.
Most of those remaining behind ventured out into the city, and I’m taking advantage of the relative
quiet.

Give my best to your dad – Ham.

sent: 01/25/18 13:12

Before getting started on schoolwork, he sleuths around a bit online while no one’s there to think him
a total creeper. First, he satisfies the mystery of Jefferson’s French visitor, who had relayed the news
of the Washington family tragedy – it takes very little effort. Lafayette seems to be a well-known, if
behind-the-scenes player, and he suspects John could have answered the question for him had he not
felt so awkward about asking it. A foreign policy advisor for Washington, he’d left his Senate staff to
join the campaign when his candidacy was announced late the year prior.

Finding Aaron Burr’s story is even easier, because as it turns out, he’s Aaron Burr, Jr. and there’s a
picture of him, a few years younger, with Aaron Burr, Sr. and President John Hancock. Oh. A quick
perusal of his father’s wiki fills in that story – a minister, longtime Princeton president, he’d served as
an early friend and mentor to Hancock and, only months before his untimely death, had dragged
himself from his sickbed in New Jersey to deliver the invocation at his inauguration.

Okay, so he can see where his orphan rising from obscurity story hadn’t really resonated with Aaron
that first day. Talk less, indeed.

Then he dives into an essay for Seabury’s class on The benefits of American federalism, and it had
been made abundantly clear to Alexander that there aren’t any was not an appropriate thesis around
which to base his paper.

A little over an hour later, Robert comes downstairs with a plate that’s not supposed to be in the
computer lab, but Lee and Shippen are on their own usual afternoon breaks so there’s no one to tell
them off. He presents it with a flourish and a dry, “Compliments, from Mister Mulligan,” and returns
back upstairs.

Alexander contemplates the work of art for a moment – a samosa balanced atop half a salmon avocado roll, perched on a slice of jalapeno-pineapple pizza.

He disassembles the creation and starts from the top-down; two bites in, he digs his pocket notebook out of his school bag and jots the name of the Indian restaurant on his places to eat about the Hill list.

X---X

Just after three, a car drops off Eliza, John, and Aaron. Alexander can hear them up the stairs, and a deeper voice that might be Senator Schuyler, but he’s focused and trying to get a last thought to organize itself into something comprehensible on paper. Hercules must be tired of his self-imposed seclusion though, because it doesn’t take long for John to come bounding down to the basement, a green sweater and khakis swapped for his black suit.

Alexander spares him a quick glance and then stares grumpily at his computer screen. “What are your thoughts on the Knesset?”

John blinks. “What.”

“The relationship between the American federal and state governments reflects the era when it was designed, when life as a whole was a much more local thing; not a modern reality of instant communication and information dissemination, where people move from state to state on a whim, and people are less and less identifying any more strongly as a South Carolinian or an Ohioan than as an American on the whole. Culture is becoming a more fluid animal, but it’s shared increasingly along educational and economic lines rather than geographical, and as that’s transcended into the political, the polarization of the two parties and representative suppression practices like gerrymandering in a winner-take-all system increasingly marginalizes certain - ”

“Oh my God,” John cuts him off, “take a breath. Take a break.”

“But-”

“Nope,” John clasps Alexander’s upper arms and leans down to rest his chin on one shoulder. “It’s Friday. It’s been a long week. I’ve just buried a friend and I need all the distraction I can get.”

Okay, so that makes him feel a bit guilty for his absorption in his work.

He saves his essay and tucks the flash drive back into his backpack. They make their way upstairs, where a distraction seems readily available in the form of a commotion rising from the common room. Never ones to pass up some available drama, Alexander follows John to duck inside the door, where Hercules, Robert, and Aaron are watching Eliza, hands on her hips, staring down an older girl, maybe twenty, who’s contently ignoring her as she pushes aside takeout containers on the counter in the kitchenette.

“Lee’s not going to like it.”

“Who the hell cares?”

“Me, if I get in trouble!”

“Say it was an anonymous donation.”

“And another thing!” Eliza points her finger, stern. “You shouldn’t be spending your money on-”
“Eliza, it’s a hundred dollar coffee maker, not a car.”

Alexander’s eyes go wide, and he looks down to the large bag at the stranger’s feet, the word *Keurig* peeking out over the top. “Oh my God, my hero, you beautiful stranger.”

Eliza spares a moment to glare at him, and then goes straight back to glaring at the other girl’s back. “You’re an intern. You don’t even get paid!” She’s completely ignored. “Angelica!”

“Nope.”

“Bullshit,” John declares, nursing his second coffee from the new machine. “I am calling bullshit. You are now just fucking with us.”

Angelica reaches over to muss his hair. “John Laurens, if your father could hear you swearing so.”

“B’cause he’s mighty disappointed,” he drawls. “Nevertheless, desperate times call for calling you out on how completely full of shit you are.”

The standoff between John and Angelica lasts several long moments, before Abigail gets up from the table, gingerly inserts herself into a spare spot amidst their group lounging on the floor, and primly announces, “I could see it.”
“Ha!” Angelica high-fives her. “Good woman!”

“I mean, have you seen the man’s office? He is obsessed with his wife. Like... no kid pictures. Just... Missus Adams. Everywhere.”

“So John Adams loves his wife!” John cries, hands thrown over his eyes in distress. “That absolutely does not mean they almost started a diplomatic crisis by slipping off to a coat closet at a state dinner!”

Hercules muses, ever the voice of reason, “I do feel like we – the collective ‘we’ – the global ‘we’ – would have heard about this.”

Alexander sort of has to concur. “If the secret is that open, it seems like John probably should have heard about it?!”

“Thank you,” John lowers his hands.

“There was some damage control,” she allows. “Fortunately, the chancellor has a, ah... quirky sense of humor, and Jefferson’s man, André, could charm Canada into letting us annex Nova Scotia.”

He remembers André’s suave apology to Proctor Shippen, and thinks she might be on to something.

“Besides,” Angelica scoffs. “It was three years ago, you think Henry Laurens went home and told his fourteen-year-old good southern boy about half the German delegation hearing Abigail Adams screaming for-”

“I beg you not to finish that sentence,” Eliza finally says, practically blandly.

“Too late,” John despairs, falling backwards onto the floor. “It’s too late. I can’t un-see it. I have to go gouge out my eyes, excuse me.”

Alexander leans back on his elbows to look at John by his side and whispers, “You can’t gouge out your mind’s eye, John.”

The speed with which John whips the throw pillow out from under his head, sits up, and pummels it into Alexander’s face is really quite astounding, sending them both tumbling back to the ground. John drops the pillow on his face and jabs him in the side for good measure.

He squeaks. Muffled, because there’s a pillow on his face.

“Yikes,” Angelica says.

“You know what else happened three years ago?” Eliza perks up suddenly.

“Jesus fucking Christ,” John mumbles, too softly for anyone besides Alexander to hear, which makes his poorly-concealed snort difficult to explain.

“President Hancock’s inauguration,” she answers her own question.

John changes tune immediately and sits up. “Oh, Patsy,” he goes a bit misty-eyed.

“What happened?” Hercules prompts.

Angelica tells it. “Our parents left us – me, Eliza, Peggy; Patsy and her brother, Jack; John; Jefferson’s older daughter, Marty – in a hotel suite together while they attended the big inaugural ball. I’m seventeen and about to start the page term, Jack’s sixteen, so we’re quote-unquote in charge. Have fun, keep the noise reasonable, stay in the building, whatever. We, ah... well.”
“We hit one out of three,” John pitches in. “We did, indeed, have fun.”

“We were such assholes,” Eliza bemoans, “oh my God. Peggy’s only twelve, and doesn’t want to get in trouble, but Patsy just had to go traipsing about the Mall at night. In the middle of winter. But Angelica’s a terrible chaperone, as it turns out, so we all bundle up and head out, a bunch of teenagers in Dupont Circle, and head to the Metro.”

Alexander imagines that there’s little Metro-riding among this crew, with bullet-proof-windowed government vehicles to take their fathers everywhere.

“I’m the terrible chaperone?” Angelica cries, indignant. “Patsy would have gone whether or not I tagged along. Jack is the one who stayed in and just went to sleep!”

“Which I think made Washington more furious than any of the rest of it,” John smiles, reminiscent. “Ah. What a night.”

Silence falls over the room, a wistful pause while Angelica, Eliza, and John reflect back on their long friendship and the rest of the group gives them space to do so. When Abe and Robert, sitting at the table, turn their attention away from the main group and begin murmuring softly, Alexander clears his throat.

“Let’s go, then. We’ve still got hours ‘til curfew.”

John blinks over at him. “Go where?”

He shrugs. “It’s winter, it’ll be dark outside soon – let’s go traipsing about the Mall.”

Eliza beams at him like he’s just solved world peace.

X---X

The snow flurries have started up again. Alexander tries not to act too much the tourist – none of this is new to any of the group, even Hercules, who is not a politician’s child. He doesn’t have a phone, anyway, to take pictures – none of them do, they’re not allowed them for the term, but Angelica flits about, snapping shots of the group with promises she’ll email them to Eliza, to distribute accordingly.

It’s a cathartic thing for John and the Schuyler sisters, maybe even for Aaron, who John dragged out of their room to come along, and he tries to be present but unobtrusive, like he’ll get in the way of their memories of their friend.

John always finds his way back to Alexander’s side though, and the best moment of the night is when he calls Alexander over from halfway across the World War II memorial, grinning and pointing, and insists on a photo of him standing next to the pillar marked for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Then John clasps his shoulders, says very quietly and very seriously, “This was a wonderful idea-thank you,” and pulls him into a fierce embrace. Alexander tucks his nose into John’s coat collar for warmth and rests a hand carefully over the wild, snow-dampened curls.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

His name is Samuel Seabury, and Alexander is not a fan.

“Who the hell does he think he is?"

“Alexander, please.”

He rounds on Aaron as soon as the door to their room closes behind them. John and Hercules take up seats on Hercules’s bed, eyeing the pair of them with an expression that suggests they wish they had popcorn on hand. “I’d rather offer radical ideas for discussion than simply discuss without end the faults of the system.”

“You advocated dissolving the union!”

“Hey,” he jabs a finger at his roommate, “I did not. I mentioned a twenty-year-old theory in which the United States is a huge outlier per the relationship between global economic integration and political disintegration. Seabury thinks anyone who doesn’t unthinkingly subscribe to the notion of manifest destiny is fundamentally un-American!”

“They kinda are, man,” Hercules contributes from the peanut gallery, and Alexander wants to throw something at him. “It’s the unwritten twenty-eighth amendment.”

Alexander crosses his arms. “And you still couldn’t be satisfied. Alaska. Hawaii. Do you know how many of my people died when the U.S. took over?” There’s an uncomfortable silence while John, Aaron, and Hercules look awkwardly at one another, unsure. “Just kidding, y’all bought the islands a century ago from the Danes for like, twenty-five million bucks. I’m still not really sure why. Sugar cane and rum, I suppose.”

Hercules jams an elbow into John’s side, draws out a pained oof. “It took you a week to get this poor, virgin soul saying y’all. How long until you start in on the sweet tea?”

“Pretty sure the sweetest of the sweet tea could never tempt Alexander away from his coffee.”

“You are not wrong,” he concedes.

Aaron rolls his eyes and turns to grab his things for the shower. “I’m only saying, Alexander, it’s a course on American government. Government as it is, not as Alexander Hamilton wishes it to be. If you approach every topic from a perspective of what would be better, then - ”

“Then I’ll have demonstrated a functional knowledge of the subject at hand, as well as an innovative approach to considering it with an eye towards improvement.”

“Or you’ll just find yourself failed in the class and bounced from the program.”

And he disappears through the door, eager to beat the rush for the hall bathroom in the ninety minutes until they’re due on the Hill. Alexander stares after him, fuming. “I hate him.”
“You do not,” John climbs to his feet, show over, and begins rummaging through his own dresser. “Burr just lacks imagination.”

“Burr lacks anything even closely resembling a controversial bone in his body. He excels at toeing whichever particular line he’s guided to on whichever particular day.”

Hercules falls back on his bed and turns to eye Alexander. “Not all of us are trying to completely rewrite the whole system as high school students, dude. I don’t think that’s necessarily grounds for writing off Aaron’s integrity just yet.”

“We’re not just high school students, we’ve got a front row seat to the function of the legislative branch, we are exceptional high school students, and the notion that critical thinking and the capacity to entertain radical theories doesn’t kick in until college is an absolute crock of utter bullshit.”

Unmoved by his impassioned outrage, Hercules closes his eyes and shifts on the bed, burrowing in for a quick nap before the work day starts. “Man, I don’t always agree with the shit that comes out of your mouth, but I sure as hell love listening to it.”

He bows with a flourish, though only John is watching. “I’ll be here all week.”

x---x

By mid-week, however, the rest of the students are pretty well over it, and Seabury increasingly looks like he’s walking to the gallows as he comes in to start the lesson during Alexander’s block. They walk back upstairs on Wednesday, Alexander vibrating at the seams in his outrage over the injustices of the day, and walk into their room. Burr goes straight for his shower things, per usual, and Hercules falls back onto his bunk.

John turns the moment the door closes behind Alexander, meets his eyes steadily, and just says in a quiet, even voice, “Alexander, I’m tired.”

It feels like more of a rebuke than any of the semi-bigoted refutations to come from Seabury’s mouth, and he starts, snaps his mouth closed, stares wide-eyed for a moment, and then turns towards his own corner of the room, face hot. “Oh.”

“I’m not.” John cuts himself off, sounds frustrated, and Alexander glances over his shoulder to see him rubbing at the bridge of his nose. “Literally, just in this moment – my brain needs a rest before we head to work. That’s all.”

“Okay.”

“I love listening to your ideas. And I love listening to you completely eviscerate Seabury on the regular, he’s the worst. But mostly I love hearing your thoughts because you’re possibly the smartest person I’ve ever met and, I’m just saying, I’ve met the president and a third of the Supreme Court.”

He laughs and lobs a sock at John. “Alright, alright, now you’re laying it on a bit thick.”

“Lunch in Dirksen today?”

He smiles. “Of course.”

Mortification sets in anew over lunch though. They stake out a corner of the cafeteria, heavy textbooks for Seabury’s class propped on the table, ready to take advantage of a long break before
afternoon committee meetings and such, but Alexander is Alexander and so barely two minutes into their self-imposed quiet, reading time, he proclaims:

“I have a theory.”

John’s forehead hits the table with a clunk, and their trays rattle; Alexander makes a quick grab to preserve the integrity of his coffee but continues on otherwise undeterred. “My theory is that my upbringing as an observer of, but less than full participant in, the U.S. federal political system gives me an advantage over the other twenty-nine of you in seeing the deeply severe flaws within said system.”

“Alexander, I think that has exactly nothing to do with growing up on Saint Croix and everything to do with the fact that you’re the smartest in the room, including the teacher himself.”

“By rights, everyone in that room should be among the best and brightest teenage minds in the country.”

John picks his head up and cocks it sideways. “So I’m not stupid, I’m just brainwashed.”

“Exactly!” he exclaims, apparently delighted by the speed with which his point has been grasped. “And it’s not your fault.”

“Thanks?”

“It’s not even the fault of the fact that you grew up with a family values, God and Country, American exceptionalism-peddling congressman of a father.”

He holds up a hand. “I wouldn’t necessarily go that far.”

“It’s just… the way this subject is taught. Winners write history and all that, and boy did they scrub their own slates clean in the process. You know what happened on British soil while the colonies were getting all keyed up and ready to fight for independence?” John raised a brow. “They abolished slavery, John. They abolished slavery back home, and then lost a war about oppression and independence in a place that almost tore itself apart a century later over whether you could own human beings! American history has been crafted around this sense of smug, moral superiority over the fact that they managed to create a monarch-free government, like that’s the only line that matters.”

“I’m confused, did they leave the Civil War out of your history texts, or…?”

“It’s bullshit! Let’s theorize on the reasons for this war, like somehow states’ rights concerns can justify the rest of it. The tenth amendment is stupid. There, I said it. You know the real reason for the Civil War?”

“Oh good lord, do I even want to?”

“It’s our bullshit, precious founders who didn’t have the balls to say nope, sorry – a country built on the backs of slaves isn’t a country worth building. American exceptionalism is an arrogant notion built almost solely on the fact that the United States has the exceptional ability to bomb anywhere in the world at a moment’s notice. Meanwhile it incarcerates its citizens for profit and perpetuates a system that says some people are too sick to have access to health care, let alone poor. It’s the richest country in the world – Jesus Christ, get your fucking priorities in order.”

His rant ends and John just keeps staring at him, a bit expectant like he’s waiting for more, but then a shadow looms over the table and they turn in unison to look up at an amused man, lips quirked, who
Alexander recognizes after a moment as the junior senator for Iowa or Nebraska or somewhere in that general vicinity, but his name escapes him utterly in the moment.

“Hey, kid – love your passion, but you’re getting a bit of an audience.” His cheeks flare hot and he glances around, sees occupants of surrounding tables eyeing them with expressions ranging from bemusement to irritation at their meals being disturbed. “Maybe save your plans for overthrowing the system for the dorms, yeah?”

He smiles vaguely and turns away. Alexander half-rises in his seat, protest on his lips, and is forcefully yanked down by John’s hand at his elbow; his knees clatter into the table and shakes their trays, upends the salt shaker. “He’s just being funny,” John hisses at him. “Please, please, do not start a fight with a senator in the middle of the Dirksen cafeteria, please?”

It takes him a moment to tamper down on the irritation, but he keeps his seat and settles for twisting around and watching the senator return to a table two rows over. Already sitting at it is Senator Conway, who they’d met with Burr the week prior – he exchanges a quick word with his companion, and then looks over and catches Alexander’s eye with a grin and half-hearted little shrug.

x---x

“The thing about British abolition.”

The voice cuts into his focus like a shot and he jerks, surprised, spits out the pen he’s been absently chewing, and spins in his seat to find Conway hovering at the threshold of the little reading nook in which he’s ensconced himself on the top floor of one of the library buildings. It’s late – the building closed at six, but capitol staffers have access until nine, and Alexander had deemed it best to wrestle through the rest of his homework for the night away from his unsuspecting classmates who were tired of his spectacles.

This particular spot had come at Jefferson’s suggestion that first day – not the main building, it lacked the tourist crowds, and the after-hours programs generally took place on other floors, making this little foyer on the fifth floor ideal for working uninterrupted.

Or mostly so. “Did you and I get the same capitol tour from Senator Jefferson?”

Conway seems to take that as invitation enough to come further into the space, which is a bit touching, but Alexander supposes he probably got a decent sense of his overinvestment into his studies in the cafeteria earlier in the day. “I daresay he needs new material. But I shall gracefully cede any claims of seniority in the interests of the rights of first-come, first-serve, and do my own reading on the other side of the hall.”

He smiles, warm and kind, not irritated in the least in finding the spot occupied. The temptation to seize on the easy retreat, to put his head back in his books and his essay, is briefly overwhelming.

But then Conway turns away, and Alexander finds himself calling after him, “What’s the thing about British abolition?”

The senator turns back, looks faintly pleased at his curiosity. “The British were hypocrites, of course – no less so than the eighteenth century notion of all men are created equal referring only to a particular subset of men. Abolitionists were given the moral victory at home, while slavery continued in the rest of the empire. It had nothing to do with politics, or the notion of home rule, or any other facet of rights.”
“It was economic,” Alexander cuts straight to his point. “Same as the northern versus southern divide here – agrarian economies, more bang for your free labor buck. Far more incentive to overlook the questions of basic decency and morality.”

“That’s right.”

He shoots him a wry look. “But please, sir, tell the Caribbean kid more about imperial European slave-driven colonial economies.”

There’s a brief flicker of surprise, and he fears it will merge to anger – but Conway instead goes a bit pink and murmurs, “Fair enough. But I do think you give our forebears too little credit.” Alexander begins collecting his notes and books off the neighboring armchair and stacks them precariously on the table in the middle – a silent offer, and one Conway takes him up on immediately. “There were plenty of abolition and manumission-minded men during the revolution, and the prospect of foregoing a unified republic must have been a daunting one.” He lowers himself slowly into the seat, angled in to face Alexander. “The effort to compromise, with the ban on trade -”

“Was the greatest con ever pulled by special interests in policy-making history. Screwed over the merchants, sure, but any cursory glance at the demographic shifts in smaller colonial holdings – the Caribbean, for starters – was proof enough that the existing slave populations would be sufficiently self-propagating to ensure the long-term survival of the institution.” He draws a deep breath, frustrated, willing himself not to lose his chill so thoroughly as he had over lunch. “The compromise was a cowardly agreement to put off the inevitable conflict, and the tenth amendment all but guaranteed that conflict would be bloody.”

“But the country survived it, in the end, which it may well not have done had an ultimatum been issued on the heels of the British ouster.”

“A great consolation to the slaves who suffered during those eighty years in between, I’m sure.”

It’s another moment where he fears he’s gone too far as soon as he’s closed his mouth, but Conway just cocks his head sideways, studying him, curious. He fidgets under the attention, keenly aware of the other’s position – and even if he is far more junior of a senator than Jefferson, he lacks that disinterested, dismissive air.

It adds a certain pressure he was not expecting. An impulse usually reserved only for those rare teachers who have actually listened to him, an impulse to impress, or perhaps to just not disappoint.

“I don’t mean to be so -”

“No,” Conway frowns at him, “no, don’t apologize for your convictions. Argue them until you’re blue in the face or persuaded otherwise, but don’t apologize.”

He grins, dry. “A week and a half into the term and I think my government teacher and most of the class are sick of me arguing until I’m blue in the face.”

“Then come and share your work with me some time,” the senator says.

Alexander stares. “Really?”

He shrugs. “Sure. You seem… a bit beyond the typical high school civics curriculum, if you don’t mind my saying. You engage with the past, it’s not about names and dates. I enjoy your perspective – and wouldn’t mind a chance to argue for the importance of an appreciation for nuance, even in the most retrospectively black and white issues.”
“Hm, phrasing.”

There’s a moment of confused silence, and then Conway groans and puts his face in one hand. “Really should have just worked late in the office.”

“I am delightful.”

“You’re a terror.”

“A delightful terror then, let’s split the difference.”

His eyes crinkle as he smiles and glances down at his watch. “Reasonable. Alas though, my delightful terror, I’m going to have to retreat to the other side of the floor. I have an hour to get through a briefing book on childhood respiratory illness as it correlates to coal mine proximity.”

“Yikes.”

“See, now I’m worried that there’s a thesis on renewable energy brewing in that brain of yours.”

He barks a laugh. “No, not tonight. And you can have the space, Senator, I have curfew in an hour anyway.”

Conway watches him while he shoves a couple of heavy texts, a notebook, and an inexplicable number of pens into his bag, and then rises when he slings the bag over his shoulder. “Here,” he reaches out and folds a section of Alexander’s collar back into place, “you’ve got yourself all mussed up.”

He abruptly recalls the numerous times he’d swept a hand through his long hair, tugged absently on the ends, fidgeted with his tie, in between biting the ends of his pens. Hastily pulling his hair back into what is hopefully a passable ponytail, he mumbles a quiet, “Thank you, sir,” as Conway tugs his tie gently back to center.

“Have a good night, Alexander.”

John, Hercules, Aaron, and Robert are playing cards in the common room when Alexander returns to Webster Hall. He doesn’t know the game, and it becomes readily apparent that Aaron and Robert don’t either – indeed, as he observes over the course of several long minutes, he begins to suspect that John and Hercules are inventing the rules as they go along, and he wonders what the other two have done to merit such a scheme.

After several rounds of frustration, Robert lays down an ace of diamonds, looking quite confident in his choice; he starts and nearly drops his hand when Alexander exclaims, “Good God, man, do you not realize that the three successive black suits played prior render your red to the lowest possible value and thereby negating the superiority of the ace card at all?”

Hercules snorts and claps a hand over his mouth; John buries his face in Hercules’s shoulder, his whole body shaking with poorly-suppressed laughter. Robert glares about the table, gingerly puts down the six cards remaining in his hand, and scoots his chair back. “If you’ll excuse me, gentlemen, I think this is an endeavor I can safely say I never wish to pursue again.”

He leaves without further commentary, while John is still attempting to regain his composure. Aaron lays his cards down, expression neutral, and Alexander expects him to depart too, but he just waits out John’s fit.
“You two are brilliant,” Alexander plops himself down in the abandoned seat. “You two are mean.”

“Us?” Hercules asks, affronted. “Us?” He points an accusing finger across the table to Aaron.

“Wait, really?”

Aaron smiles, sharp. “The best revenge is that which can be delegated to another.”

“And what did Townsend do to merit such cruelty?”

“Cleaned us out in poker,” John finally regains enough composure to answer for Aaron. Then elaborates, “Monopoly money. But seriously, you should see the man bluff.” He looks Alexander over, frowns at his unchanged garb so many hours after the workday ended. “Where’d you run off to? Thought I’d find you barricaded in the computer lab soon as we got back.”

He offers a lopsided grin. “Library. Thought maybe it’d be best to focus on Seabury’s class without an audience, after my lunchtime performance.”

There’s a moment where he almost mentions his run-in with Conway. But then he thinks about the offer to further bounce his ideas about his coursework with the senator, and his simple, unassuming, You seem a bit beyond the typical high school civics curriculum, and he refrain.

True, he’s mostly started to look past the connections of some of his classmates – but he thinks about John and Eliza growing up in this world, about Aaron standing at the president’s side during his inauguration. He thinks about Jefferson dismissing his indignation over territorial representation because he’s too young to actively participate in the process yet anyway, and next to it, Conway’s sincere engagement with his ideas feels… special. Like something to protect.

He doesn’t allow himself much time to marvel over that instinct. But as they’re all getting ready for bed that night, while John and Hercules are down the hall in the communal bathroom, he does ask Aaron for the senator’s email. “We had a conversation cut short earlier,” he explains at Aaron’s cocked-brow curiosity.

And because Aaron Burr is a fundamentally unobtrusive person, he shrugs and jots down the address he of course memorized. Alexander tucks it in his little pocket notebook with a vague, “Thanks,” and finally goes about changing from his uniform.

Lights off is at ten, and he knows well enough by now that Lee and Shippen retreat to their respective rooms by eleven, so at quarter-after, he sneaks quietly down to the computer lab and begins to type up his accumulated notes from the day into a semi-coherent start of his essay for Seabury’s class. Midway through, he takes a break to respond to an email from Edward back home. When he’s finished, just shy of one, he hesitates a moment before pulling up his email account again and retrieving the scrap of paper with Conway’s email on it.

Sender: Page.A.Hamill@senate.gov
Recipient: T.Conway.NJ@senate.gov
Subject: The THING about renewable energy...
Just kidding.

Aaron Burr gave me this email, I hope you don’t mind. Just wanted to say I appreciate you taking
the time to talk to me – I hope I didn’t keep you from getting your work done. Our govt & civics teacher is indeed more interested in, as you said, memorizing names and dates, and does not take critique of the system well from a teenager, much less one he seems to view as barely American.

Perhaps we shall talk more later, but in any case, my classmates would probably thank you for tonight’s reprieve.

-Alexander Hamilton

sent: 00:58 02/01/18
Chapter 7

January fades into February with no discernible change in the weather, and the novelty of a real winter is starting to wear off. John tucks an extra scarf around Alexander’s ears on Thursday morning, a purple and orange monstrosity that clashes horribly with their navy uniform, and tells him he ought to come to South Carolina for college, forget his plans of the Ivy League and bitter New York winters.

Alexander points out that if he were that put off by the cold season, he would remain on Saint Croix for the rest of his days.

He doesn’t get a response to his email before they head up to the Capitol for the work day, and he starts to second-guess himself a bit in sending it at all as the day wears on. Worries that it was presumptuous, that he’s being a nuisance, that Conway’s relative youth and inexperience on the Hill simply means he hasn’t yet honed the art of interacting with and humoring the ever-revolving cohort of pages flittering about underfoot.

But the senator smiles brightly at him when they do cross paths in the halls of the Capitol, nods a greeting as they pass in opposite directions without breaking the stride of his pace, nor his conversation with Senator Paterson at his side. Which just makes him feel more ridiculous in the end, ridiculous for his impulsive late-night email, ridiculous for his over-analysis after the fact, and ridiculous for getting this wrapped up in a bit of attention and ego-stroking at all.

His nerves subside when he returns to the dorm late that afternoon and heads down to get some work done in the computer lab before dinner. He has an email from an unfamiliar sender, and he almost dismisses it as spam until the subject line catches up with him. A wry grin pulls at his lips, and he clicks it open.

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net

Recipient: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov

Subject: The balance is swinging towards terror

I nearly refrained from opening your message, for fear it would embroil me in an hours-long effort to read and adequately respond, possibly involving consultation with leading climate scientists and maybe a conference call with the EPA.

I certainly do not mind Aaron passing on my contact information – for the sake of my own sanity, however, I make a point not to check the .gov address outside of the office or normal work hours during a recess. Unless you plan to start discussing upcoming votes on healthcare and immigration policy, feel free to write this account instead. My chief of staff helps manage the work correspondence, he was quite perplexed.

I’m not much familiar with anyone in the page program besides Director Gates, but it truly is a shame if they’ve appointed someone to teach about our government and its history who rejects any ideas outside the mainstream – and anyone unwilling to humor the thoughts of teenagers has no business teaching them in the first place. To dismiss a radical thought simply because it is radical is folly – the very origin of our country was a radical thought.

That said, do I dare ask what issue(s?) you raised in class that your instructor found presumptuous?
p.s. I may be reading too much into your words, but are you being treated differently than your peers on account of your birthplace? If so, that ought to be taken up with Mr. Gates, and is far more unforgivable than a simply lazy teacher who does not care to be challenged by his charges.

sent: 13:22 02/01/18

He needs to finish his essay for Seabury’s class and get started on his pre-calc for the following morning, but he takes a minute to fire off a quick reply.

Sender: Page.A.Hamill@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net
Subject: The thing you must understand…

…is that I am treated differently than my peers mainly because none of my peers dare be as big a pain in the ass to Mr Seabury’s face. Like Mr Gates, he is a traditionalist in the extreme, and I believe it caught him off-guard to find me there. Rest assured, it is nothing I cannot handle.

As to specifics, Mr Seabury has thus far been most offended by:

1 – my suggestion that the relationship between the federal government and the states needs to be drastically revised (and not in the states’ favor)

2 – my suggestion that Congress needs to be redesigned from scratch (no offense)

3 – my attempt to discuss the theory of optimal country size w/r/t the U.S.’s huge outlier status

Not necessarily in that order; it was #3 that drove him closest to apoplexy.

-A.Ham.

sent: 16:03 02/01/18

Once that’s sent, he closes the browser and throws himself into his homework with a single-minded passion. He’s vaguely aware of others coming and going – Maria and Anna murmur quiet hellos to him, aware by now that he may or may not notice them at all. Caleb settles into the seat beside him for a while to do some research for his physics assignment, and swears quietly at the computer most of the time he’s there.

John delivers a cup of coffee that isn’t supposed to be in the computer lab at all, and Alexander could kiss him – settles for tugging the scarf more snugly around his neck, and tries not to fidget with the ends for fear of fraying them.

His watch beeps at him at quarter after six, and he spends ten minutes trying to find the perfect blend of confidence and smugness in the conclusion of his paper. It’ll need another go-over later in the night, but with the draft done, he saves it and closes it out, and logs back into his email one more time, grinning to himself to see a response.
Friday upends the normal order of things. Early floor time to deliberate a lunchtime vote means their classes are abbreviated – enough time to hand in assignments and seek clarification for work due the following week. They’re back upstairs and changing for the Hill less than an hour later, and stumbling out of Webster and blinking against the bright morning sun before eight.

Long-booked flights and trains mean people are rushed and irritable – the following week is a recess, and the senators and their staff who don’t live locally are eager to get home for a full weekend with their families. If Alexander follows properly, today’s vote was rescheduled after last week’s rearrangement of floor business to accommodate Washington’s absence – no one wants to push it off ‘til after the recess, no one’s particularly happy about the rush, and no one much wants to be the one to voice their displeasure, all things considered.

So it’s just a snappy sort of a day. Himself included, because he did not have enough time to grab a coffee either in the dorms or on the way to the floor session, and he thinks he just might die of caffeine-deprivation and why, dear god why did he sneak downstairs late again to get more work done? He can probably grab a cup of the weak stuff available in the cloakroom after his first hour on the floor, but it’s quickly shaping up to be a day where the notion of hour on, hour off breaks is a bit quaint. The phones were already ringing in both cloakrooms before eight, hurried messages to senators and congressmen across the building checking in on the whip count, and the group of them on the floor is just as swamped, dashing queries on figures back to office staffers and delivering the hastily-compiled briefing memos back to the senators in turn.

At quarter of ten, he jots down a message in the cloakroom and darts back into the chamber to slip it onto Senator Clinton’s desk. On his way back down towards the dais- where Senator Franklin looks on the verge of dozing again- and the doors back out to the cloakrooms, a hand snags his elbow and he finds himself steered around and led the other way from the chamber, to the doors that open at the top out onto the lobby.

He glances up at Jefferson, bemused, wonders if the senator is this direct with all pages or just the ones he feels some sense, however grudging, of responsibility over. “Sir?”

Jefferson pulls his phone out of his pocket and taps at the screen, speaking distractedly, “I was informed, early in my first term, that sending pages off the Capitol premises in search of some decent coffee, was something of a gross abuse of power.” He tucks the phone away and shrugs. “Honest-to-God still can’t figure out why, at least y’all are paid, unlike most of the interns we actually use for that purpose.”

“Well, I can keep a secret if you can, Senator.”
The senator scowls down at him. “I’m the minority leader, kid; I may not understand why, but I’m not going to compound my gross abuse of power by swearing you to secrecy about it, Christ.”

“Um. Well…?”

A throat clears behind him and he jumps. Madison is standing there, brow raised coolly, and how does he do that? He’s got a coffee cup in either hand, and he passes one to his boss and another to Alexander.

He stares at it, longing. “Who is this for?”

Jefferson rolls his eyes. “You, I’m tired of staring at your tonsils while you yawn your way through the morning. You know how many millions of people tune in to C-SPAN every week?” His phone buzzes and he fumbles for it again, and nods towards Alexander’s cup as he turns away to respond to his message. “Two shots of espresso – drink up.”

Well, he doesn’t need to be told twice. He eyes Madison over the top of his cup as he takes a long first sip, the liquid just barely on the wrong side of too hot, and he doesn’t even care. “Isn’t this a bit below your pay grade?” he asks.

Madison glances over and Jefferson, sees he is still distracted, and leans in. “I have to do it – he trusts me.”

“What, to not poison him?”

A smirk pulls at the corner of Madison’s lips, and it might be the most emotion Alexander has seen from him yet. “He thinks he’s got a triple-shot latte.”

“How many does he really have?”

“He’s drinking decaf.” It takes everything he has not to spit out a mouthful of his own beverage. “That man’s keyed up enough as it is.”

It’s diabolical; it’s amazing, and Alexander stares at the smaller man in awe. “The senators really are just a veneer for the public’s benefit,” he muses, “aren’t they? The semblance of elected representation while the staff really runs the show?”

Madison huffs softly. “I don’t know I’d go that…” He cuts himself off as a new murmur of voices approaches from the top of the stairs, and turns in surprise. “Tench.”

A young man who looks barely past his mid-twenties comes into view, laden down with a briefcase and a coffee cup of his own. Behind him, deeply engrossed in conversation is the majority whip, John Adams, who Alexander can no longer look at without thinking back on Angelica Schuyler’s outrageous allegations… and by his side, George Washington.

They spoke on the phone once, when he was formally offered the spot in the program, and he’s seen him all over the news since he announced he was running for president – but this is the first he’s seen the senator in person, the first he’s been on the Hill since last week’s tragedy as far as Alexander knows, and he can’t help but stare.

He’s taller than Alexander expected, towers over Adams’s frame, is of a height with Jefferson, though the latter’s lankiness adds an illusion to his stature lacking in Washington’s sturdier build. There’s a weariness behind his eyes, but a command in his tone and posture that speaks to his years in the military, and utterly belies the assertion he’d just posed to Madison – he can’t imagine anyone managing Washington in such a way.
“Thomas,” he greets Jefferson with a handshake. They exchange a few low-murmured words, and the older man clasps his younger counterpart’s shoulder once, warmly, and then turns towards the spot where Madison is greeting the young man accompanying him. “James.”

“Senator,” Madison shakes his hand and inclines his head deeply.

Washington’s eyes land on Alexander, and take on a mildly bemused tinge, the page standing in the foyé, clasping a cup of coffee. His gaze drifts down to his pin with his name stamped on it, and recognition flares in his eyes. Alexander opens his mouth to introduce himself and –

“Don’t you have somewhere to be?” Adams snaps at Washington’s side, and his mouth clamps shut again as he recoils slightly. “Your peers are all hard at work and you’re having coffee hour in the lobby, go on!”

Adams is a surly sort, and he’s extra snappish today – eager to get home to his wife, Angelica’s traitorous voice rings in the back of his mind.

Alexander turns on his heel and beats a hasty retreat.

x---x

The vote finally gets called just before one, and it’s the first chance most of them have really had to rest their feet since arriving. There’s a fifteen minute window for any late-deciders or stragglers to declare their Yea and Nay, and the pages spend those fifteen minutes slumped on the platform at the foot of the dais. They’re mostly running on whatever quick breakfast they snagged on the way out the door five hours ago, and eager for the day to be done – on to a long, relaxing lunch, an afternoon and evening free, and their own special outing the next day: an overnight trip to Philadelphia.

Alexander thinks to re-attempt his introduction to Washington, but it seems everyone in the chamber seeks to greet the man and inquire after his family, and he has no delusions about where he ranks in the hierarchy of priorities.

Conway, however, does come to chat with the lot of them, and settles himself on the floor opposite the ledge where John is half-slumped against Alexander and Aaron holds himself as straight and stiff as ever. He perks up slightly at their visitor, but even Aaron is too tired to rise to his feet to greet him properly. “Senator Conway.”

“Mister Burr,” he smiles and nods, “Mister Laurens. Mister Hamilton. You’re all looking a bit worse for wear.” John sits up and glares, as if this one junior senator were responsible for all of their collective exhaustion. Conway just laughs and reaches over to pat his knee consolingly. “Now, now, cheer up, young Master Laurens – surely a reprieve lies ahead for you as well, with next week’s recess.”

Alexander barks a laugh. “You can’t be serious. When do you think we’re expected to catch up on a semester’s worth of schooling, if not when the Senate is out of session?”

“Also, we’re taking a bus to Philly tomorrow.” John finally pulls himself together enough to sit up. “Liberty Bell, First Bank, Carpenter’s Hall, all that jazz. And that trip’ll come with its own work next week.”

Conway turns a delighted grin on Alexander. “A revolutionary road trip for our revolutionary young friend here.”
Aaron gives him a cautioning look. “I see your reputation is spreading.”

Heat rises in Alexander’s cheeks, but Conway steps in before he can get too flustered. “As a conservative-minded man myself, I believe change ought to be approached with great caution – a well-thought and measured response, not an impulsive reaction in a moment of extreme emotion, and certainly never simply change for the sake of change. If we upended the system at every slight provocation, the integrity of our institutions surely would not have withstood the test of time so long as it has. But,” he holds up a cautioning finger as Aaron throws a triumphant look Alexander’s way, “that does not mean rejecting change either, simply for its difference, nor shunning any slight critiques and those who utter them. Something tells me we’ll all be hearing more of Alexander Hamilton in the years to come.”

And if he weren’t pink before, that certainly makes him flush. He turns away from John’s proud expression, looking off at anything and nothing, and then double-takes to where Eliza is rising from her spot at the other end of the dais to greet her sister, who’s just walked through the door. Work business, he supposes, watching as she seeks out the two New York senators – George Clinton and, of course, her own father – to pass over a message of some sort.

A hand at his knee draws his attention back to their motley gathering and Conway’s warm smile. “Have a safe journey, alright? Maybe when we’re back from recess, we can begin delving into those topics you raised the other day.”

“Oh, I’m sure I’ll have new ones by then, sir.”

He stands up, chuckling under his breath. “I don’t doubt it. Until next time, gentlemen.” He turns and heads back to his desk, offering a vague nod to the Schuyler sisters on their way back to the dais.

Angelica throws a terse smile their way as she passes, but seems to be in a hurry to get back to her usual side of the building. After a brief moment talking with his sister just inside the door, she slips out with a last glance back at their trio.

And when Alexander remembers his determination to make Washington’s acquaintance and turns back to scan the room, he finds the man has slipped out as well at some point during their conversation with Conway.

x---x

That night, Eliza comes to the common room looking for Alexander and John. It’s late and most everyone has cleared off to get ready for bed before lights out, but Alexander is engrossed in a physics tome and John and Hercules are tossing a rubber band ball back and forth, waiting for him to resurface to the land of the living.

Eliza’s words do it effectively enough.

“Angelica said you guys ought to be careful about getting too chummy with Senator Conway.”

His head snaps up. “Huh?” John looks over, mildly curious; Hercules lobs the ball and clips him in the shoulder.

She shrugs, visibly awkward about it. “I don’t know. I guess he, like...starts friendly, makes a bit of a point to learn everyone’s names, each term, but then after a certain point just kind of gets...particular about a handful of favorites. Been doing it since he was first sworn in, the term Angelica was a page.”
Alexander gapes, more than a little affronted. “We were talking during a break.”

“I know.”

“He sponsored Aaron, of course he’s going to be a bit friendlier with him.”

Her jaw works tersely. “I know; that’s why I’m telling you two.”

“Jefferson literally sent his chief of staff to get me coffee this morning because I wouldn’t stop yawning, is that too chummy, too?”

“Oh my God,” John stares, wide-eyed, “really? I saw him manhandle you out of the room, that man is the most amazingly eccentric son of a bitch, I swear.”

“Okay well, Senator Jefferson shouldn’t be manhandling anyone either,” Eliza allows. “But that’s not…” Alexander doesn’t respond, just looks expectantly at Eliza while she frowns and struggles for the right words. “Alexander, why are you getting so… defensive about this? It’s just… Angelica thought you should know. That he just kind of makes people… uncomfortable sometimes.”

“Okay, well, we didn’t all have a thorough advance introduction to this world by Senator Daddy, either.”

She pulls back, hurt flashing in her eyes; he regrets the words the instant they’ve left his mouth, before she’s even turned to dash back out the door.

…but he turns and sees a mirrored hurt in John’s wide, expressive eyes. “John, wait…”

But he’s up and after Eliza before Alexander can even finish the thought.

Hercules tosses the ball up in the air and catches it, again and again. “Not cool, man,” he says quietly, watching the ball and determinedly not meeting Alexander’s eyes.

“Yeah.”
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Coffee confessions, and the return of Lafayette.

Chapter Notes

Heads up for brief discussion in this chapter about past homophobia in regards to political expediency and cynicism.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Their bus on Saturday morning doesn’t leave until ten, so Alexander gifts himself the luxury of wallowing in bed. Which doesn’t actually help at all, makes him feel like a lazy asshole instead of just an asshole, but after the way John had avoided the room last night, only ducking in moments ahead of Lee’s eleven o’clock bed check, he figures the self-recrimination will only do him good.

And so he’s still in bed, lying stiff and staring at the ceiling from his spot in the top bunk, three hours after he’d normally be up, when he hears a heavy sigh and feels the bed shake as John extracts himself from the mattress under his. Hercules is still asleep, sprawled across the lower bunk on the bed across the room, and Aaron got up quietly and departed an hour prior. Alexander expects John to follow suit, but then his curls are popping up over the edge of his top bunk.

He folds his arms along the mattress, rests his chin atop his hands, and stares balefully with those painfully expressive eyes as Alexander turns his head to the side to meet his gaze.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers.

John’s lips tighten into a grimace. “I know,” he acknowledges with another sigh. “Come get coffee with me.”

The curls bob back down out of sight, and Alexander levers himself up to sitting, feeling drained and off-kilter. The sun is up, the day trickling by, and he never finished his physics homework after the encounter with Eliza. He’ll have to take it with him to do in their hotel tonight if he wants to keep ahead of his assignments for the next week, and –

And it doesn’t matter. Because he watches John tug a Myrtle Beach hoodie over his head and pull his mass of curly hair back out of the neck, and he thinks this is something worth protecting, this fledgling friendship. It’s been some years since he’s felt much use for people as a general concept, Edward and Mister Stevens as the notable exceptions. But here, with the promise of common interest, common purpose, where his first efforts at striking a chord based on a commonality of background with the ever-aloof Aaron…

John had proven that approach short-sighted, which made him all the more ashamed for lashing out at Eliza, who shared only the same crime of coming from a political family.
He drops heavily from the bunk at last and grabs the bin under their bed with his things for the bathroom – toothbrush, hairbrush, face wash – and heads quietly down the hall while John finishes getting dressed. It’s a slapdash effort anyway, and he resolves to make it back to the dorm with enough time to shower before getting on the bus.

They’re on their way barely five minutes later without another word spoken between them. There’s noise coming from the girls’ floor, it sounds like most of them are awake, socializing in the common room and taking advantage of Angelica’s gifted coffee maker, but they push on past and out the stairwell door that opens directly into the tiny stone courtyard, the sidewalk just on the other side of a low wall.

Alexander lets John take the lead, finds them heading towards the vegan-friendly place they’d scouted out on their second morning on the Hill. For its proximity, or its almond-milk macchiatos, he cannot say. But the only words either of them speak are those to place their orders and thank the woman who hands their drinks over, and then John leads them to a tiny table tucked away in a corner, despite the relative emptiness of the place – none of the weekday office crowd, and still too cold for much of a tourist presence.

They drink in silence for a few long minutes, warming their hands around hot mugs, until John shatters the quiet with a soft proclamation of, “I’m gay.” When he pulls his gaze up from his cup a moment later, Alexander must be a little bug-eyed, because he laughs and goes a bit pink and assures him, “That’s not – don’t look like that, God, that wasn’t a come-on.” And then: “Alexander Hamilton, have you ever been this quiet for so long a stretch in your life?”

Yes, he thinks, remembers the vague blur of the two years following his mother’s death. “I, uh – didn’t think it was, I just… wow, not where I thought this outing was going to go.”

John’s brow furrows. “Pun intended, or…”

He thunks his head down on the table. “Oh, fuck’s sake.” Lifts his gaze, and asks, “Why are you telling me this?”

“Because I don’t know anything about you,” John returns easily, and it’s not said critically. A simple statement of reality. “That’s okay. I thought maybe you were shy at first, but I don’t think that’s it. Insecure crossed my mind, when we had that lunch with Burr and Conway and you seemed reluctant about the whole Saint Croix thing, but I don’t think that quite hits the mark either.”

There’s something unsettling, in being assessed so openly like this.

“I think ambition hits closer to home.”

“Anyone who’s here is ambitious,” he counters, uneasy.

John shrugs. “Yeah, maybe, but we’re done competing now that we are here. You’re still trying to get ahead. You don’t avoid talking about your home, or your family, or your friends because you’re shy or insecure – it’s just… unimportant, isn’t it? Unlike Eliza’s situation; my own. We have a leg-up in whatever game you’re still playing – and yeah, maybe we wouldn’t be here without that boost, but what does it matter now that we are here? – and maybe a senator who plays favorites is your way to level the field.”

It stings, if only because it so closely reflects his own passing attempts to rationalize his behavior.

“For the record,” John backtracks after a swig of his drink, “I don’t know what the hell Angelica is on about. He just seems like a friendly guy. Make an impression, make some contacts, maybe get an
internship with his office in a couple years, what’s the harm?”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” he mumbles around the lip of his own mug. “So, um… what is it that you want to know?”

The way John’s face falls tells him he’s not making much improvement on this whole friends attempt. “I’m not trying to pry information out of you, Alexander.”

“Then why -?”

“I’m making a point,” John says quietly. “You don’t talk about your life, your home, and that’s your privilege. I don’t have quite the same privilege but, at the end of the day, you don’t really know anything about me either – except that my father is, as you said, a family values, God-and-Country southern congressman; and, as I’ve just told you, that I’m gay.”

The point he’s making slams into Alexander like a freight train. “John, I…”

He holds up a finger, urging him to wait. “Jefferson said something on the floor last week, when he was talking about Patsy – he said that we politicians’ kids live vicariously through our parents’ successes and failures and yeah, he’s right. But the whole truth is a lot messier, and it can be cruel – because their political careers can also live and die through us.”

“Your father doesn’t know?”

“No,” John sighs heavily, “he does. I told my parents in much the same way I just told you, just… out of the blue. And they’ve got their religious hang-ups but, at the end of the day, I know they love me and want me happy and all that. But it’s politics, and optics are everything, and no matter how much I know my father doesn’t really care, deep down, it still didn’t stop him from asking if I can’t wait to do something about that until college.”

Alexander sucks in a sharp breath. “Wow.”

“Maybe he figures it can be brushed aside for a few years as an experimental phase. And maybe I’m a coward, because instead of refusing him outright, I promised him that, at the very least, he could be assured of my discretion while I was still under his roof. But cowardly or not, it’s not a simple life, to be a political asset or liability, to be… yelled at by classmates, like I’m an extension of my father’s voting record. I don’t know what struggles Eliza or Angelica face in this world but… it wasn’t their choice to join it like that. Don’t punish Eliza for who her father is.”

“I really am sorry.”

“Tell her that.”

“I will.”

John offers a cocked half-grin. “Though fair warning, experience says she might need a few days to fully come ‘round.”

“I’m more worried about her siccing Angelica on me.”

And that earns him a wide, sincere smile. “Knew you were a smart one.”

Alexander fiddles with his half-empty mug, realizing that he needs… something here. That pushing his way through the term on smart ass remarks and confrontation with Seabury and a growing reputation as a radical revolutionary might keep John as an ally, but won’t gain him a lasting bond
beyond the limits of their months together hard at work in close quarters.

He struggles for the right words though. “I, ah… haven’t had much use for proper friends in a long time now,” he confesses. “And it’s not without cause that I struggle to form such attachments…” He pauses. “Hold on, that just makes me sound like a sociopath.”

John frowns at him. “I told you, I didn’t bring you here to interrogate you about - ”

“I don’t have a family, okay?” he mumbles down at his cup, watching the swirl of chocolate in his mocha separating from the milk and coffee. “Abandonment, death, abandonment,” he ticks off his fingers, “and a suicide that, to a twelve-year-old, just felt like both. A year being bounced around with Youth and Family Services, and I learned to place my trust in the one thing in life I can control – myself.”

There’s compassion in John’s eyes, but not the pity Alexander braces for. He says softly, “You’ve mentioned writing a brother,” and the question is in the words, if not in his tone.

“Edward,” he smiles faintly. “Neddy. Not my real brother, but it’s… simpler. His father got me out of the system, and I owe him a lot, and love Edward like a brother, but they aren’t family. They’re the kind people who I’ve been living with for the past two and a half years.”

There’s more he could say on that – that it’d taken him the better part of a year to settle into the house with any semblance of normalcy, to accept that no one was expecting some sort of quid pro quo for their generosity. And then, that their kindness and concern didn’t automatically equate to pity, that he wasn’t someone’s charity case.

It seems like a lot. But it occurs wryly that maybe there’s more insecure happening in his brain than John gives him credit for.

“So,” he steadfastly stares at the table, “if it seems like I’m always fighting for that next rung on the ladder… it’s just that there was a brief but rather, uh… impressionable period of my life where that was just… doing what it took to survive.”

And John, bless him, doesn’t tell him sorry for your loss, or pat his arm with a there-there sort of sad smile. Just says simply, “Thank you for trusting me with that,” and stands up to take his empty mug to the counter.

He’s lost track of the time and his surroundings during their unexpectedly deep conversation, so when John comes back to the table wide-eyed, looking flushed and flustered and hisses, “Ten o’clock,” Alexander starts and scrambles to look at his watch, swearing they had way more time. “No,” John sits back down and leans across the table, “your ten o’clock.”

“Oh.” He glances to his left and sees, in the short line at the counter, a mop of light curls over a face that’s familiar, but takes him a second to place. “Oh.”

“That’s Washington’s campaign strategist.”

“We’ve met.”

John makes a cut-off strangled sort of a sound that draws Alexander’s attention back to his coffee companion, brows raised. “What on earth is the matter with you?”

“Alexander, I’ve just told you I like men and have you seen that one?”

He chokes out a laugh. “Oh my God, really?”
“Shut up.”

“How old is he?”

“Shut up, it’s like… a celebrity crush, it doesn’t matter.”

“Well, with age comes experience and all that -”

“I hate you, you are the absolute worst, you should go back to the Virgin Islands and may you be forever plagued to remain one yourself and uhhhh…”

He trails off and stares as the man in question heads straight for their table, tipping his head low to get a better look at Alexander before exclaiming, “Ah! Monsieur Hamilton- je croyais que je t’ai vu! Ça va?”

“Oui, ça va.” He bites his lip on a grin as Lafayette swoops down and pecks a light kiss over each cheek. “Monsieur Lafayette, mon ami, John.” John, with his high school French to back him up, takes his cue and clambers to his feet.

“John Laurens,” he offers his hand.

If Lafayette connects the name to his father, he chooses not to comment. “Enchanté.” He kisses John’s cheeks in slightly less exuberant fashion, and Alexander thinks John will die anyway. “How is the job treating you, Alexandre? Thomas says you are a, quote, loudmouthed bother, end quote,” John snorts and claps a hand over his mouth, “which is Thomas’s way of saying he kind of likes you, I think. George says you haven’t had the chance to talk yet, but that Thomas seems to be keeping you well-plied with caffeine.”

*Oh my God*, John mouths, looking frankly delighted by this unexpected turn of events.

“The job is going just fine,” he answers. “Busy. We’re headed to Philadelphia soon for the night.”

“Ah! L’ancienne capitale! The city of brotherly love! Très bon!”

His excitement is cut short by the barista calling, “Guy?”

“Gil,” he turns, effusive grin widening, if possible, “Gil, mon coeur.”

“Gus?”

"Gil.”

“Giovanni?”

He clutches his heart. “You tease me; you wound me. Go on a date with me.”

The woman behind the counter blows a curly lock of dark hair out of her eyes. “Go win an election.”

Lafayette looks back at John and Alexander and shakes his head. “Once upon a time, candy and flowers.” He heads over to the counter and takes his to-go cup. “But for you, Addy, the presidency. Au revoir, mes amis! Enjoy your trip!”

And he’s gone just as suddenly as he appeared.

The subject of his attentions meanders over to their table to collect Alexander’s empty mug, shaking her head and *tsking* lightly under her breath, a reluctant smile stuck on her lips. “Marry that man,”
John begs her, and she thwacks him on the shoulder with a dishtowel.

They stay and chat long enough to discover that the barista, Addy, is in fact Adrienne, whose name is on the sign, and that she’s been fending off Gilbert Lafayette since she opened the place two years ago (“He just wants me for my madeleines, honest.”). They’re on a schedule though, and she sends them on their way with a scone apiece, claiming the excuse that she made too many for a cold Saturday devoid of tourists, and Alexander suspects that the place has advanced significantly in their hierarchy of coffee venues around the Hill.

John heads straight upstairs to shower and pack in the forty-five minutes they have left until the bus comes to collect them; he leaves Alexander on the first floor to seek out Eliza, and attempt at least an initial patching over last night’s damage before their journey. He finds her in the common room with two of her roommates, Maria and Iris, who seem to take great pleasure in watching him squirm while Eliza decides whether or not to deign to grace him with her presence.

He keeps it simple; doesn’t delve into any of what he and John spoke about.

“I got defensive and became rude and snappish,” he clasps his hands behind his back. “Whether or not I agree with whatever Angelica told you, I know both of you were only trying to be helpful. Who your father is has nothing to do with it, and I’m sorry for treating your family like it’s something to be ashamed of here.”

And true to John’s word, she accepts in the absolute barest of terms and remains distant. “Thank you for apologizing,” she tells him, and heads back to her friends with her head held high.

It’s the best he can do, for now.

Before returning upstairs, he dashes down to the computer lab to print off their trip itinerary. He’s got an email from Conway that he quickly scans while the printer hums to life.

**Sender:** TJC-3@iMail.net

**Recipient:** Page.A.Hamill@senate.gov

**Subject:** Philadelphia

A consummate New Jerseyan, I generally refrain from praising too strongly our neighbors across the Delaware; every politician seeks reelection, after all.

**HOWEVER, for you, my delightful terror of a revolutionary, an exception, and I beg your everlasting discretion. But if you’ve the chance, you must have a meal at the Olde Colonial Tavern, near the Liberty Bell. It’s a tourist trap and everything that is wrong with America, and it is wonderful.**

**sent:** 23:07 02/02/18

He hesitates a moment, staring unseeing at the screen. The printer has coughed up its page, and he has less than forty minutes to get ready to go.
And yeah, maybe he feels a little weird in general after the altercation and subsequent apology with Eliza.

You’re the one who started these emails, he reminds himself, and clicks to reply.

Sender: Page.A.Hamill@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net
Subject: Gastronomy as the dark-horse manifesto candidate
OR: How food is dominating American (global?) social habits, and its implications for the health of a society.

God, I’m not sure I could be paid to read that, let alone write it.

Going back to yesterday’s conversation, however, let’s talk about how the consummate New Jerseyan is also a consummate originalist. Or, well – I think you are? You sound like you are? I have to admit, I know nothing about your politics, but you’re something like 92nd in Senate seniority, so what did you expect?

(Sorry)

Point is, you channeled the spirit of one of our illustrious founders – change ought to come slow if at all and blah blah blah – but in the next breath, he acknowledged that the progress of time and the human mind might well render our institutions into irrelevance.

He was a racist, slaveholding, aristocratic son of a bitch, but at least he was aware enough to realize that society would view him as such two centuries down the road.

Off to ring the big Freedom Gong, or whatever it’s called.

A.Ham.

sent: 09:29 02/03/18

Chapter End Notes

Spoiler alert: it's Thomas Jefferson. The racist, slaveholding, aristocratic son-of-a-bitch is Thomas Jefferson.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

A trip to Philadelphia, a snowstorm, and a nerd-outing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The Philadelphia trip passes smoothly enough; Alexander offends their tour guide at Independence Hall by asking, “Is there anywhere else in the world that accords its government’s founders such hero-worship, practically demigod status, and is that really healthy for a functional democracy?” and he thinks Aaron might actually die of embarrassment.

He opts not to call the Liberty Bell a freedom gong in the presence of his ever-uptight roommate.

John and Hercules have to practically pry him out of the First Bank, where he effectively co-opted the tour with a series of highly pointed questions and a running critique of the poor financial decisions in the early days of the republic.

“How is it,” John asks as they stroll up the street towards their rendezvous point where the bus will pick them up and take them to the hotel, “that you’re a raging liberal who thinks the banks are the solutions to all of our problems?”

“That’s not what I -

“You probably think Wall Street is great.”

“I really don’t -

“And that Citizens United was the best SCOTUS decision since McCulloch.”

“Okay, now you’re just - ”

John darts in front of Alexander, grasps him by the shoulders, and shouts, “Trickle-down economics!” and gets more than a few odd glances from random passers-by.

Eliza walks by, primly sidesteps their obstruction of the sidewalk, and says, “John Laurens, you shut your filthy mouth this instant.”

“Miss Schuyler, a good progressive girl,” John turns and rushes to catch up with her. “Allow me to escort the fair lady to the waiting carriage.”

She wraps a hand around his proffered arm, leans over, and smacks a kiss against his cheek.
“Socialist.”

Hercules asserts himself at Alexander’s side and together they watch John and Eliza stroll up the street arm-in-arm. “Is this some sort of weird mating ritual?”

Alexander snorts at the question, made all the more humorous by John’s morning disclosure. “They could be good together, ya know? The union to unite the feuding government, and restore peace at last to the republic.”

“Two parties, both alike in dignity.”

John flips them off behind his back.

At the hotel, they’re told to split off three to a room. Hercules branches off to room with his friend Robert, leaving Alexander, John, and Aaron to keep the spirit of their Webster living arrangements alive. Which means, predictably, that Aaron displays little interest in joining them for any adventures during their four free hours and settles in with the schoolwork he lugged along on the bus.

“I live in Princeton,” he talks down at his calculus text, “it’s not even an hour away; I won’t miss any great once-in-a-lifetime Philadelphia experiences if I stay in.”

They’re riding the elevator back down to the lobby, when Alexander muses, “I can’t figure him out – is he an introvert, or just a dick?”

“Why can’t it be both?” John asks blandly.

A handful of their peers are already milling about the lobby, making plans and debating dinner options. Caleb comes dashing back to the main group, a pamphlet in hand taken from the giant shelf of local attractions next to the reception desk, and announces, “Guys! Guys, there’s something up the road a ways called the Please Touch Museum.”

“Kinky,” Ben offers.

Abigail, who is actually from Philadelphia and seems to share none of Aaron’s qualms about enjoying the city, gives them both a scandalized stare. “It’s a children’s museum, you degenerates!”

Caleb and Ben high-five one another.

Alexander likes the idea of getting a bit of culture to go with his afternoon history tour, but everyone else is tired of museums and they all closed an hour ago anyway. They end up settling on a restaurant, a few blocks from the Penn campus where their hotel is, that doubles as a live music venue. Abigail calls from the desk to reserve a table for the ten of them heading that way, and to make sure they’re allowed in at all on a Saturday night anyway.

It’s eight by the time they’ve finished eating and the show is starting downstairs. Once the bill is settled, the group seems to collectively decide to go enjoy the music for a while, before they have to head back to the hotel for their ten p.m. headcount. It’s not really Alexander’s scene though, and he leans over to John as they’re all rising from their chairs. “I’m going to head out.”

“Oh.” John looks around, sees no other stragglers. “Are you… do you want me to come with you?”
“I’ll be fine. Go have fun. Meet friends. Do your pit-moshing, or whatever it is you hooligans get up to at these things.”

John offers him a crooked smile. “I don’t think it’s that kind of concert. And I don’t think I’ve ever heard mosh pit rendered into a verb before.”

“I am nothing if not innovative.”

“Know your way back to the hotel?”

“I’m fine, mom, promise. Burr and I can hang out. Get to know each other better. Bond.”

“If you’re going to burn down the hotel, it’s most sporting to do so before all the guests are in bed.”

He sketches a sardonic salute and turns to weave his way through the growing crowd. Once he gets out the front doors though, he stops and takes a moment to acclimate to the cold night air, and glances up and down the sidewalk. He should go straight back; remembers something vague about not wandering off alone in a strange city, and it’s probably stranger to him than most.

“Mister Hamilton.”

Or perhaps it is a smaller world than he could have imagined. He turns, surprised, and finds himself face-to-face with Jefferson’s man, André. “Oh. Uh- hi?”

Lafayette and André in one day, it’s like reliving his first hectic day on the Hill.

André seems unfazed by his lackluster greeting. He tucks a scarf more securely about his throat and stuffs gloved hands into his pockets. “Bit brisk, isn’t it? Step out for a breather?”

“Ah, no, I’m heading out, actually.” André smiles vaguely, looking around, clearly making small talk while he waits on something or someone. “Sorry, what are you…?”

“Due to meet Miss Shippen,” André shifts his gaze back down to look at Alexander. “She’s yet only five minutes late, which may yet still put her in the realm of effectively early, but you musn’t tell her I’ve said that.”

“Next time, tell her to meet you at quarter ‘til, and then arrive per usual.”

André grins. “Clever boy.” Which makes him feel vaguely like a show dog, but he just goes with it. “Ah!”

Shippen comes gliding down the sidewalk, a fluffy hat tucked about her ears and her cheeks flushed pink with the cold. “John.” And then catches sight of the teen at his side. “Alexander? Is everything alright?”

“She’s not – John is a family friend.” There’s a doth protest too much hint of a tone in her voice, but then the responsibilities of her job seem to catch back up with her and she frowns at him. “You aren’t supposed to be on your own outside the hotel, Alexander.”

Damn. “I’m heading straight back,” he promises. “Everyone else wanted to stay for the music.”

That does little to reassure her apparently, and she winces. “Oh – I didn’t even think – is the whole group here?”
“Ten of us, I think?”

“John,” she turns and looks up at him beseechingly, “it’s supposed to be their free night, I don’t want

to make them feel like…”

“Say no more,” he nods. “I completely understand. In fact,” he casts about for where Alexander is

edging his way out of the conversation, “why don’t we walk young Mister Hamilton back to the

hotel, so we might ease your mind on that front as well.”

“That’s really not - ”

“Rules are rules,” Shippen tells him sternly, and then sighs. “Honestly? I hate that they won’t let you

bring cell phones, even if just for trips like this, it’d make me feel so much better if you had a way to

get in touch on hand.”

It is what it is. And what it is is apparently being escorted back to the hotel by the proctor and her

maybe-possibly-not-quite-beau, who Alexander suspects fully read his intention to wander off and

explore the area a block east along the Schuylkill in the time he still has until curfew.

It’s a short walk, during which he learns about André coming to Philadelphia a decade prior from

Europe to continue advanced studies in art and the romance languages. “I boarded with the Shippens

for a term,” he explains. “Peggy here was this little starry-eyed thing just finishing high school.”

“Oh, stop,” she pleads, but she’s laughing. “I was horrid, no wonder you only stayed that first

semester.”

“Oh, contrary, you were a most excellent muse.” Yikes. “My career,” André turns to Alexander

just as he’s beginning to suspect they’re forgetting his presence, “obviously took something of a

detour from those studies, but I am of the mind that language and art can give one great insight into

the human condition, no matter the occasion.”

Which is a little deeper than Alexander was expecting for a ten minute Saturday night stroll, but he

nods along, wide-eyed.

When John comes back an hour and a half later and collapses on to the foot of the bed where

Alexander is sitting and finishing his physics work at last, he informs him neutrally, without looking

up from his text, “I think Shippen is fucking Jefferson’s office manager.”

“Cool, bro.”

Aaron slams his book closed and puts his head back against the headboard, staring up at the ceiling.

“What is the eternal obsession with the sexual habits of others?”

“We’re seventeen-year-old boys, we’re supposed to be obsessed with sex,” John rationalizes.

He sniffs, haughty. “Well I’m not.”

“Aw, Burr’s not getting any.”

“S’okay,” Alexander assures him at his sharp glare, “John condemned me to eternal virginity in the

Virgin Islands today, welcome to the celibacy club.”

“You,” Aaron points at him from the other bed, “could probably stand to get laid, then you wouldn’t
be so goddamn high strung all the time.”

John rolls off the bed, laughing.

X---X

When they make it back to D.C. the next afternoon, Hercules steps off the bus, pauses, looks up at the sky, and declares, “It’s going to snow.”

“There’s always one,” John laments, throwing his bag over his shoulder and trudging up the steps and into Webster alongside Alexander, who glances up at the low-hanging clouds.

“One what?”

“Mid-Atlantic blizzard.” They head up the stairs to the boys’ floor and fall into the room, depositing bags just inside the door and earning disapproving glares from Aaron as he follows last in line and steps over them. “No matter how much the globe warms and the climate changes and the bees die and the coral reefs-”

“I understand,” Alexander interrupts the spiel, “that unpredictable fluctuations of extreme weather is one of the most problematic impacts of the…” He trails away as all eyes land on him, incredulous. “What?”

“Nothing, man,” Hercules flops down on his bed. “You’re just so… varied in your areas of knowledge.”

“He does live in like, hurricane central,” John reasons. “I mean, I’d probably pay more attention to that shit too if I lived in -”

"You live in Charleston,” Aaron throws his hands up in the air, perplexed. “Didn’t you guys just get hit by like, a category four storm a couple years ago?”

John shrugs it off. “It was a four when it hit Florida – just a one by the time it made its way north. And,” he holds up a finger, “we have like… evacuation routes. We’re not like, trapped in a little box and waiting for the wrath of God to descend on us with nowhere to go.”

“I have literally never until this moment felt anxiety about hurricanes,” Alexander informs him blankly, “so thank you, very much.”

“Cheers.”

He checks his email that evening.

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net
Recipient: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Subject: Freedom Gong? FREEDOM GONG?
You’re an ungrateful, unappreciative wretch.
Interestingly, said racist, slaveholding, aristocratic son-of-a-bitch also advocated for a generational
rewriting of the Constitution, from scratch. Not hard to see why the idea never took off, but it’s an intriguing one nonetheless. Of course, two centuries ago it was probably hard to fathom the average person living to such an advanced age as to see four or more such 20-year cycles in the span of one life.

And because I must now make it my mission to teach you the error of your ways before it is too late, I’m going to send you a link with an invite to an event next weekend. I believe young Mister Burr is attending.

T.Conway

sent: 23:16 02/03/18

He clicks the next email, an event invite which contains a flyer for a roundtable discussion event at the National Archives the following Sunday.

**27 : Progress vs Institutionalism**

*The Slow Change of a Living Document and its Implications for Societal Evolution*

Participants listed include:

*Sen. Josiah Bartlett (F-NH)*

*Sen. Thomas Conway (DR-NJ)*

*Rep. George Mason (DR-VA)*

*Dr. Timothy Matlack, American Philosophical Society*

*George Wythe, esq., William & Mary Law School*

“Hey, John,” Alexander calls over to where John is curled up on a sofa by the door with *Walden*. “Want to do nerd things with me?”

He holds up the Thoreau book and raises his brows. *Point.* But he asks, “Whatcha got?”

“Panel discussion at the National Archives next weekend.”

“Wow, nerd,” John climbs to his feet and comes to hover over Alexander’s shoulder, peering at the event information. “I dunno, are you going to heckle from the peanut gallery?”

“Assume the answer to that is whichever will convince you to come.”

John claps his shoulder. “Good man. I’ll buy the popcorn.”

So he RSVPs for two seats.
True to Hercules’s prediction and John’s weather lament, it starts snowing on Monday afternoon.

Classes run later since there’s no session to get to, and then they have a language tutoring block. Once everyone is free at lunchtime, they largely disperse to go out and grab a bite and run some last minute shopping errands ahead of the promise of several inches of snow.

When Alexander steps outside, there’s the barest hint of flurries falling already, and he peers around and finally feels the change that was apparent to Hercules twenty-four hours earlier. The clouds hang over the city like a blanket, and the air feels stifled, too still – unnatural. Waiting.

Within a couple of hours, the snow is falling steadily, and it doesn’t stop until Tuesday night, just before curfew. The sidewalks are buried in snow plowed off the streets, but Robert finds a ruler and takes it outside to determine the height of the snow piled atop the low wall separating the sidewalk from the small courtyard of the building.

“Seventeen inches,” he declares. “A respectable haul.”

Indeed, respectable enough to shut down nonessential government offices in the city for two days, and they’d already had their Tuesday lessons canceled. It’s an unexpected boon that significantly lightens the load of schoolwork, and they can only hope that it doesn’t mean it’ll be piled on double the next week, when Congress is back in session.

They alternate work with snowball fights for the next two days. When it’s not hanging up to dry, Alexander keeps John’s purple and orange scarf wrapped snugly around his neck and half his face nearly constantly.

There’s an unexpected downside of their mid-week weather break. “My father,” John grouses, “decided we needed a weekend catch-up tomorrow,” he tells Alexander on Friday afternoon, skimming his email with a frumpy frown on his face. “But he had to rebook his flight back from Charleston for tomorrow evening, so it looks like he’s co-opting my Sunday instead. Sorry,” he glances over, “I don’t think I’m going to be able to make our nerd date.”

So he finds himself hopping the metro to ride to the opposite end of the Mall alone. It’s only a twenty minute walk, so the three-stop-plus-one-transfer ride to the station closer to the Archives feels more than a little ridiculous, but the snow makes the sidewalks unpredictable and it’s twenty-five degrees outside and to hell with all of that.

Conway spots him a few minutes after he meanders into the theater on the lower level of the building, and comes over, beaming. “Good, you made it. I’m pleasantly surprised by the turnout, considering the weather. Senator Bartlett’s flight from New Hampshire got delayed until tonight, so there was a last minute scramble to replace his seat.”


“Brat.” He steers Alexander around and guides him up towards the middle of the auditorium, where a familiar head is near the end of one of the rows. “Mister Burr arrived just a few minutes before you.”

“Oh.” He hadn’t exactly planned on seeking out his roommate, but there was hardly a non-rude way to explain such.
Aaron turns and looks up as they hover on the edge of the row. His eyes narrow warily, and he shoots a pointed look at the senator as Alexander shrugs off his coat and drapes it on the seatback. “Shall I tell you how he scandalized the guides at Independence Hall, sir?”

“Was it with this outrageous fashion sense?” Conway eyes his eye-popping scarf overtop a burgundy sweater. “My God.”

“You’re both terrible,” Alexander announces primly, pulling the end of his scarf that Conway is studying out of the senator’s grasp. “You’re both terrible, and I protest this treatment, emphatically.”

“Noted.” A chime signals throughout the building, and Conway glances up at the stage, sees the other panelists starting to make their way towards their seats at the long table. “I’ve no doubt you’ll get your revenge, in spades.”

A volunteer sidles past the senator, holding up notecards and announcing, “Write your questions for the Q and A at the end – someone will be by to collect them from the aisle a few minutes in advance.”

Alexander reaches out a hand to snag a notecard, and Aaron smacks it down. Conway laughs uproariously and makes his way back up to the stage.

There’s a small hors d’oeuvres reception afterwards in the big gallery on the ground floor, and Alexander finds himself staring dumbly at a seven hundred year-old copy of the *Magna Carta* while the attendees mingle and discuss ideas with the panel speakers. Aaron, who seems to find someone he knows wherever he goes, split away from Alexander as soon as they left the theater and hasn’t yet resurfaced. May have gone home, for all he knows.

He feels a presence arrive over his shoulder and announces solemnly, “This is really old.”

“Come here,” Conway taps his arm and then beckons with a crooked finger when he turns around. “I want to show you something.”

“Oh?”

“You haven’t been here yet, right?”

He shakes his head and follows the senator around the edge of the gallery to a door marked as a stairwell. A young man with a staff badge waves it in front of a sensor and the door buzzes and clicks. He pulls it open and nods Conway through with a quiet, “Five minutes – don’t touch anything.”

“Thank you, Silas.”

Alexander follows, perplexed, as he leads him up a level in the darkened stairwell, illuminated only by emergency lighting. They exit on the upper floor into a similarly dim hallway, footsteps echoing eerily on the marble floor with only the sounds of the building ventilation system in the background. The noise of the gathering downstairs is trapped behind two closed doors, and there’s a keen sense that something is off-kilter, being here alone.

*Liminal space,* Alexander’s mind supplies. “What…?”

“Shh,” Conway hushes him, and leads him around a last corner, then steps back to let Alexander precede him into the gallery beyond.
He sucks in a breath. It’s not just a gallery – it’s the gallery. The rotunda. The huge murals framing the curved walls are lit only by the gentle glow of the display cases, three of them, housing –


He swallows thickly, vaguely surprised in the back of his mind by how dumbstruck this has him. The space devoid of tourists, the hustle and bustle of the usual day’s business… just him and the country’s history, the foundations for all of her successes and failures, trials and tribulations…

“You have five minutes,” the senator reminds him, barely above a whisper. “How will you choose to spend them?”

There’s the briefest moment of hesitation, but it’s not even a question, not really. The documents, tucked carefully behind inches of specially sealed and climate-controlled cases, are displayed left to right chronologically.

He goes left.

The script is faded, more so than the document he’d been studying downstairs that was five hundred years older. But he already knows what it says, so that isn’t really the point.

“The Declaration,” Conway follows, and there’s a gentle but wry humor in his voice, “of course. My young revolutionary.”

*When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another…*

“The British occupied the Danish West Indies, twice, during the Napoleonic wars,” Alexander finds himself recounting. “They did it without firing a shot.”

Conway’s hands descend on his shoulders and he starts and pauses, glances up and around. The senator is peering over his head at the document, listening. “Tell me.”

“Saint Croix, it… it’s a place that’s bought and sold – the Danish from the French, the Americans from the Danes – not a place worth conquering. Not even worth defending. Not a place worth… this.”

“You’re American,” Conway says softly from above him. “This is your history, too.”

“Maybe.” He stares blankly down, not seeing the document any longer, preoccupied by the effort to articulate his thoughts. “But Saint Croix isn’t a place that has inspired these sorts of ideals – the conviction to stand up and say, *I will rise up; I will fight for this land.*”

The hands at his shoulders squeeze tightly a moment, thumbs kneading circles at the back of his neck. “It’s inspired *you.*”

It’s a simple statement; it makes Alexander flush, and he’s suddenly hot and crowded, *confused*, and he needs space, physical space, to breathe, to *think*, and –

-the sound of a throat clearing from the doorway snaps his head around so fast it nearly gives him whiplash. Conway removes his hands and pivots to face the door with such finesse that he’s left fumbling, half-wondering if he just imagined the utter bizarreness of the whole exchange.

Aaron Burr is standing there watching them. Impassive. Inscrutable. “The gentleman downstairs says
he needs to lock it back up, Senator.”

“Of course. Mister Hamilton,” he waves him along in front and then follows several paces behind. “You’ll have to come back for a more thorough examination when you’ve another free day.”

“Of course,” he echoes back faintly.

He makes for the stairs, passing by Aaron in the entryway to the rotunda.

The other boy shoots him an unreadable look under raised brows as he watches him go.

Chapter End Notes

We've entered bi-weekly update time. Still have probably 6 chapters left to write, but it's coming along nicely. Except for the part where the last 6 chapters are where everything devolves into a bit of a dumpster fire. Whoops. I'll probably be updating tags a bit too at some point soon - this whole thing was mapped out when I started posting, but in the writing, the timeline has ended up stretching out a bit more than I anticipated in the middle, so a couple plot points towards the end might need to condense a bit.

And specifically, because someone bookmarked this with a note wondering where Maria is - if you're here for the Alex/Maria tag, it's probably about to get downgraded from 'minor' to 'fleeting.'

Seriously, if you're here for an Alex/Maria plot, you're going to be disappointed. There's a reason it wasn't included in the main relationships.

/stops trying to warn readers off this story now.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Alexander meets Henry Laurens; Alexander is not a fan.

He walks the mile back to Webster, mostly by accident. Gets three blocks down the Mall towards the Capitol before he realizes that the metro stop was in the opposite direction, and it just seems silly to backtrack. Even with the cold night air, a wind picking up that threatens to render the night from chilly to downright unpleasant, and it’s fine.

This is fine.

(He might be losing his mind.)

Be careful about getting too chummy with Senator Conway…

So the man picks favorites. Favorites for whom he’ll commandeer the whole upper floor of the National Archives for a private viewing of the three most important documents in the nation’s history. Except –

Except, his brain supplies, you’re reading too much into it. Special circumstances, given the panel event. Special case, given the fact that this is all new to him, and Conway knows that. The opportunity arose and he did a nice thing and, well, if he can’t figure out what to do with that briefly claustrophobic moment –

Aaron hadn’t said a word – just slipped back into the crowd. Conway got pulled off for a few photos with the other panelists.

Alexander took the opportunity to collect his coat and slip away.

He wants to talk to John.

And there’s this incredible moment where the heavens seem to align.

The pretentious café where he ate with Jefferson that first morning on the Hill is only a block out of his way back to Webster. He’s still got more than an hour ‘til curfew, he skipped the hors d’oeuvres and is starving, and figures maybe he’ll have just enough time to gain feeling back in his face before covering the last few blocks of his trek to the dorm.

The menu prices are still stupid expensive, but he’s getting paid now so, to hell with it.

So he sits at the long counter in the front of the place and warms up with a cup of coffee tucked between his gloved hands while he waits on a bowl of soup.

And then he hears his name.

John’s hovering behind him, looking surprised to see him there. The feeling is mutual. “I thought you were –?”
“Is your nerd outing –?”

They talk over one another and then pause, each waiting for the other to go first. “Last stop on the father-son bonding tour,” John answers at last. “Heading back to Webster now, we just finished eating. If I’d seen you come in…”

“No,” Alexander waves him off, “don’t be – I’m good,” he smiles tightly. “I, uh… yeah, I’m just…”

“What’s wrong?”

“Uhh…” he glances around, sees Henry Laurens making his way from the table to meet his son at the counter, and knows this is not a conversation he wants to have in front of the Speaker of the House. “Nothing. Just – walked from the Archives, yeah? Think I’m finally getting some sensation back in my toes.”

John glances around, sees his father has finished paying. “Maybe we could wait and give you a lift back.”

“That’s really not -”

“Jack,” Speaker Laurens says like a command, and Alexander fights down an initial wave of distaste, tries to remind himself to see more than a person’s politics.

“Dad,” John half-turns, tries to draw his father in closer to the conversation. “I told you about my roommate, Alexander.”

Laurens looks at him finally, eyes scanning him as he sits there sideways on the stool, leaning in to talk to John and hunched over a cup of coffee. His coat is on the floor under his seat but the gloves are still warming his hands, and the scarf is still bunched around his neck and halfway up his chin.

Somewhat grudgingly, he sets down the mug and pries the glove from his right hand. “Alexander Hamilton,” he offers.

“Henry Laurens.” He shakes his hand firmly, eyes gleaming with an interest that sets Alexander a bit on edge. “My son did indeed mention you; though I’m not sure he mentioned everything.”

Laurens plucks the end of the scarf from where it’s dangling down across his left arm and runs the knitted fabric between his fingers, peering at it a moment. He gets a sudden shock of deja-vu – Conway had done the same thing.

“What-?”

“Subtler than a letterman jacket, Jacky,” Laurens turns and glances at his son. John has gone beet red, mortification setting in on his face, mouth opened in the beginnings of a protest. “I’ll give you that.”

“That’s not – father!” he gasps, indignant. “You can’t just assume…” But Laurens is already making his way to the door, leaving his shocked son and a baffled Alexander in his wake. “I’m sorry,” John tells him, “I need to go. I’m sorry.”

“Uh.”

His soup arrives and he stares at it, mistrusting, like every aspect of his night is just doomed to some sort of bizarre turn and God only knows what butternut squash and hazelnut will bring. The first spoonful presents no great incident, but then he remembers the damned scarf and scrabbles for the
edge of it and sees, in tiny lilac stitching that barely stands out against the darker purple threads –

C.P.S. ‘19

J.Laurens

“Oh,” he says to no one.

X---X

He beats John back to the dorm, and that feels ominous. They could have added another stop – it’s still twenty ‘til nine, he’s not late yet. But it seems altogether more likely that the delay is related to their unexpected rendezvous with Alexander at the restaurant. That they’re arguing. Or perhaps simply talking, maybe he’s being uncharitable, but he remembers John’s weary resignation about his father’s attitude when he’d come out to his parents, and nothing that happened in those brief seconds tonight gives him much cause for optimism.

It’s eight minutes to the hour when John finally walks into the tiny foyer of the building, where Alexander is sitting on a bench and tapping his feet, anxious. His eyes are a little red but the energy seems mostly sapped out of him, and it breaks Alexander’s heart a little bit to see the way he tenses up and eyes him uncertainly when he sees him sitting there waiting.

“Aaron and Hercules are finishing up their Philly reports downstairs,” Alexander offers, and John nods, leads the way to the stairwell and up a floor to their room. As soon as the door closes behind him, Alexander turns and asks, “Are you alright?”

John pauses, midway through stripping off his heavy coat. “Yeah. Yeah,” he repeats, resuming his stilted movements and Alexander follows suit, hanging their things on hook on the back of the door. “I – we’ve quarreled before. That was positively mild.”

“No,” he counters emphatically, “it’s really not, and - ”

“I told him that was uncalled for,” John gets out in a rush, desperation behind his pleading eyes. “That it was unfair to assume anything about you, who he’d never even met, and unfair to assign motivations to me based solely on - ”


“No,” he counters emphatically, “it’s really not, and - ”

“No, I mean – with me. I’m not… offended. Stop looking scared. I’m fine. We’re fine, yeah?”

The nerves clear from John’s eyes a bit, and he decides that he does hate Henry Laurens after all, for working his son up into this paranoid fit. “Yeah,” he breathes. “I – of course. I don’t… are you… do you…?”

“I don’t know,” Alexander replies quietly, honestly; steps forward and takes John’s hands carefully in his own and squeezes them tight. “Maybe. J. Laurens, I like you – a lot.”

A strangled laugh escapes John’s throat and he removes his hands from Alexander’s grasp and places them gently on either side of his face. And he leans in and places a light kiss on his lips.

It’s short – sweet, simple. Chaste. His eyes are shining when he pulls back, and then he rests his
forehead against Alexander’s and whispers, “I can’t.”

“I know.” He can’t either, really – not now, not like this, buried under school and work, and the five months that they’re here together never seemed like so short a time before, and then he’s off, back to Saint Croix, John back to South Carolina and then God knows where the next year, once high school is done. “Do you want your scarf back?”

“Keep it,” John smiles at him, warm but a bit sad. “It suits you.”

“This thing suits nothing, who the hell picked your school colors? Honestly.”

The answering laugh is a bit forced, but he gives it his best. “I know.” He pecks Alexander on the cheek once and pulls away. “I need to reread my report and print it.”

“I’ll come down with you.”

And just like that, it’s over – locked away, this thing, there for a moment and then pushed behind a door that, in all likelihood, they’ll never have the chance to open again.

And it’s not until he’s lying in bed that night, listening to his roommates’ gentle breathing and searching in vain for some sleep of his own, that he even remembers the events of the Archives at all.

X---X

Here’s the thing about working during sessions: the cloakrooms are terrible. Phones constantly ringing, and easily two-thirds of the callers talk to whoever answers with thinly-veiled hostility at best. Sometimes, they yell and berate outright, and seem not to care that the subject of their ire is a teenager who has nothing to do with whatever has their blood up.

The cloakrooms are terrible, but they’re less physically exhausting. Sit at a table, take notes, dictation, write out quick messages to be delivered to senators on the floor. And they’re a good place to hide without really hiding.

So Alexander hides. Or, well… maybe he rests. He’s not sure at this point.

The first two days back pass in a whirlwind of activity. Everyone’s found a wholly inconvenient and renewed vigor after the break, including most of his peers, and plenty of them are eager to trade out shifts in the cloakroom for those running errands on the floor and around the Hill.

So Alexander sits and gets yelled at and writes messages, and then after every few calls takes the slips to whoever is posted at the door of the chamber to be distributed appropriately by whoever is sitting at the dais. Every other hour, he lugs a textbook out to the lobby and curls up in an oversized armchair and forces his mind to focus so he can start chipping away at the extra workload that, as they’d feared, got piled on this week as a result of their lost snow days.

He and John do their usual lunchtime routine. There’s something a bit off between them, which Alexander supposes was to be expected, but he doesn’t know how to fix it. If he can. He hopes it’ll settle on its own once John is less keyed up about his father’s behavior.

Speaker Laurens actually passes through the senate lobby one morning while Alexander is on break. He’s sitting and staring at a book of Whitman poetry with Iris, Caleb, and Hercules scattered about the room as well, when he hears heavy footsteps passing through and glances up.
“Mister Hamilton,” Laurens offers him a stiff nod that he has no idea how to interpret, and that’s pretty much that.

Because he’s avoiding the floor, he only sees Conway in passing. On Monday, he gets his usual friendly smile when the senator walks past, otherwise engaged in conversation with his chief of staff, a man named Edwards. By Tuesday, the smile changes to a somewhat quizzical look, and he must realize by then that Alexander is trading off his shifts on the floor.

On Wednesday, Conway catches him first thing in the morning, as the pages are setting up the chamber for the day’s session. “Ah – Mister Hamilton. Can I trouble you for a favor, once you’ve completed your present task?”

Eliza passes by, stops long enough to pluck the stack of today’s Congressional Record out of his hand, and continues on to the chamber to lay them out on all the desks. Alexander thinks he might die. “How can I help you, Senator?”

“I just got a call from Evan, we’ve had something of a mix-up with the Visitor Center – can you run across the drive and get a packet from the reservations office that’s flagged for me and take it over to Russell? Expedited constituent passes and the like.”

“Of course.”

“Hey,” Conway puts a hand at his elbow as he goes to turn away, halting him. He pulls a folded piece of paper from his pocket and reaches over to slip it into the breast pocket on Alexander’s blazer. “Come see me if you have time after the session today, hm?”

His hands twitch against the urge to pluck the paper straight back out of his pocket to examine it. “Are you going to give me a private tour of Statuary Hall?” he finds himself asking.

Conway blinks in surprise, and then covers it quickly with a wry smile. “If you have time,” he reiterates, and turns to enter the chamber.

Alexander dashes off, trying to decide if he regrets the remark. Runs it back over in his mind, trying to decide if it came off joking or snide. Trying to decide how the senator took it, if the latter.

The hallways are busy, the start of the session so soon, and it’s not until he veers off in the tunnel network towards the Visitor Center that he finds a moment of quiet, alone, still too early for tours to have started. He pulls the paper out of his pocket and flips it around a couple times to orient it properly.

It’s printed map of the basement level of the Capitol building, the tunnel level. There’s a room circled in blue pen on the Senate side, one of the numerous tiny rooms with just a number, no name or other designation posted on the door and not listed in any directory to which Alexander has access, at least. This particular room is in an interior corner, tucked under one of the more private inner stairwells that ferry staffers around the building without the tourist masses, and it only takes Alexander a brief moment of confusion before he realizes what he’s looking at.

It’s Conway’s hideaway office.

They tell him at the Visitor Center that it’ll take a few minutes to get the paperwork he’s after, so Alexander strolls around the gift shop as they’re preparing to open and gets a good chuckle at Founding Fathers Pez dispensers and Lego Capitol kits and pocket Constitutions and the like. There’s a whole section devoted to board games and playing cards, and he’s awfully tempted to drop
an absurd amount of money on Revolutionary Risk until a card set catches his eye that’s got no special government shtick to it but seems like the kind of thing John and Hercules will go crazy for.

He asks the young woman setting up at the checkout counter if he can buy it now – she takes a minute to log into the system and chats with him while the computer boots up. “That’s the most infuriating game in the world.”

“I’m feeling better by the minute about the eighteen dollar price tag,” he grins and winks.

She reaches into a drawer and pulls out a stamp, presses it against the box, and tells him, “Now it’s Congressional Fluxx, it’s worth the extra five bucks.”

“Does that work every time?”

“You’d be surprised.” He laughs. “Then again, most people don’t come in here for card games they can pick up at any bookstore.”

He picks up a box sitting in a small display by the counter and studies it intently. “More in it for the six dollar congressional M&Ms?”

She reaches back into the drawer, pulls out a nearly identical carton and slides it over the counter to him. “Have some White House M&Ms, on the house. Someone screwed up a shipment, we stole a few before we exchanged boxes.”

They really do look the same, minus the presidential seal in place of the congressional one. “Pretty sure you could sell these, too,” he offers, because cool.

“And deny people all of the lines and crowds at the White House Visitor Center too?”

All in all, Alexander is left with the impression that he needs to spend far more time hanging out in Capitol gift shops.

x---x

In the few weeks he’s been here, Alexander has gathered that hideaway offices are allotted on the basis of seniority. Leadership gets first pick of any open spaces at the start of a new session, and then it goes on down the line until the newly-joined senators get whatever dregs remain.

Conway is halfway through his first term, and Alexander is reminded of that fact as he picks his way around the labyrinthine corridors in the basement after they’ve finished cleaning up the chamber.

He taps twice on the designated door, and immediately hears, “It’s open.”

The door is old and heavy, and it creaks as it swings in. Backpack slung over one shoulder, gift shop bag tucked in the front pocket, Alexander walks into the space and glances around and it’s… not as cramped as he might have expected. Certainly not spacious, either, but there’s enough room for the door to open without hitting the small sofa or the desk, which is more than he can say for their four-man room at Webster.

“So this is what ninety-second in seniority can buy you,” he nods appreciatively.

Conway chuckles and gestures towards the couch with a questioning glance. Alexander deposits his bag on one side and sits at the other, and watches the senator from across the desk, where he appears
to have been doing a newspaper crossword puzzle. “Tied for ninety-first, I think actually,” he’s corrected. “Four of us started back in fifteen, another six last year. Bad election for incumbents.”

“But a good one for you elevating your place in the world.” A faint sound comes echoing down from the ceiling, rhythmic. Foot traffic on the stairs, he thinks, bemused as he glances upwards. “In the basement, anyway.”

“I made some concessions for space,” he acknowledges, and then sits up and purses his lips, hands clasped on top of the desk, peering at Alexander intently. Curious. Assessing. “I think…” he starts, then trails off and reconsiders. “You’ve been… quiet this week. I hesitate to read into it, and there’s a certain amount of ego in even asking, but have I done something to discomfit you?”

Oh. He blinks, surprised at the straightforward approach. “I… no,” he hedges. “I’m just… confused, maybe?”

“What?”

“I…” he frowns and glances around. This cramped space. The earnest concern on the man’s face opposite him. The open door into the narrow hallway, utilitarian, none of the ostentatious ornate décor of the floors above. “Can I - ?” Conway smiles faintly and nods, and he pushes the door mostly closed.

He makes a valiant effort to collect his thoughts into something intelligent and intelligible, and ends up just blurting out, “What is this?”

“What is -?”

“I was told you play favorites. Among the pages.”

A slow brow raises, vaguely unimpressed. “By whom?”

“I…” He realizes far too late the inevitability of that question. “Just… lots of my classmates have friends who have been here in years past.”

The smile returns and his eyes narrow shrewdly. “I don’t play favorites, Alexander – I treat you like people, not interchangeable pieces of office furniture. And people are complicated creatures who form relationships on any number of factors, and it is only natural that in a group of thirty, one might develop a more particular rapport with a small handful.”

“The, um…” he looks down and fights from cringing, hating how ungrateful this could come off. “The Archives? That seemed a bit grand gesture for a particular rapport.”

“The – oh!” Conway’s eyes widen, “That wasn’t… it wasn’t planned, Alexander. Silas, who let us upstairs? He’s a friend, a former intern in my office back home. The opportunity arose. You’ve an appreciation for history far beyond your years, you’d been staring at the Magna Carta for five solid minutes,” Alexander feels himself go pink, “Knowing you’d likely not had the opportunity yet, I simply thought it was something you’d enjoy.”

“I did,” he finds himself rushing to assure the senator who looks like he’s verging on distraught, and of course that’s all it was, he’d told himself that’s surely all it was and he’s letting the Schuyler sisters get in his head and… “It was. I’m sorry.” He’s not exactly sure what he’s apologizing for. Great. “It’s just been… a weird week. The recess. Never mind.”

Conway nods slowly, and concern edges into his expression as he looks Alexander over. “Are you okay?” he asks, somber and serious.
As he mulls that question, makes a serious effort at self-reflection, thinks back on his overreaction to the thing at the Archives that was then subsequently dwarfed by the emotional turmoil of the thing with John and his father that really probably stretched back to his coffee shop confessions with John a week earlier, it occurs to him for the first time since he got on a plane that he might be homesick. But then: “I miss my brother,” he adjusts that theory, because it’s not the mountain-framed beaches or the morning rainstorms in the spring or the small cottage that felt cozy to him as a boy visiting, and stifling now as a teenager feeling like a usurper in someone else’s life.

“Older?”

“Young. How did you…?”

“Just a guess – that you miss the advice or support of an elder sibling, if you’re feeling overwhelmed.” Alexander opens his mouth to argue with that assumption, but Conway sighs and shakes his head. “We ask too much of you here – the unpredictable schedule, the intensive schoolwork. And sure, most of you will undoubtedly be going off to live away from home in another year and a half, come time for college, but this experience really can’t be compared. Not least for the way the program cuts you off from the wider world.”

He shrugs. “The program has been around far longer than cell phones and the internet.”

“Of course – but as a society, we’ve adjusted our expectations. Instant gratification. Does your generation particularly even trade in emails anymore? We’ve tied our online presences into these various social media spheres, and otherwise use the quick interplay of a text exchange for more direct interpersonal communication. Depriving the thirty of you of both of those things while you’re away from home, in all likelihood for the longest block of your lives to date, is far harsher an exercise than most realize.”

Alexander can’t exactly disagree, though he hasn’t quite thought about it in those terms. Perhaps because he, personally, feels so few particular connections back on Saint Croix and because his closest friend here came with preexisting friendships and acquaintances, has his father right across the building.

Regardless, he’s somewhat fascinated by the thought Conway’s put into this. “Is an essay on generational adaptations of internet use in my future?”

“You jest, but the rejection of physical socialization with our neighbors in favor of highly selective, easily-pruned circles of self-created echo chambers that only serve to feed our own confirmation biases is going to be the biggest threat to the fundamental fabric of society. Just you wait.”

“Yikes.”

“I’m sure you know this, but there are services available to you – counseling and the like – covered through the program.”

He grimaces and looks down. “I’m really not sure I need a shrink trying to pry into my daddy issues,” Conway chokes on a laugh and coughs behind his hand, “but thanks.”

“And… in the meantime, my door – and my inbox, as it were – is always open. If you need a… well, I’d say mentor, but we’d only argue the whole time and you’re leagues smarter than me, besides.” Alexander can’t really argue with the former, and offers a cheeky grin towards the latter. “But if you need an ear to bend, a fresh perspective… hell, if you need somewhere quiet to work alone during your breaks,” he nods at the couch where Alexander is sitting.
“Wait, I – really?”

He shrugs. “Sure. Someone may as well get some use out of the place.” It is rather bare, now that he mentions it. There’s a laptop on the desk but no permanent fixture equipment. It’s clearly more of an occasional crash space than a second office.

Still, the offer is incredibly generous. “Thank you, sir,” he murmurs as Conway begins packing his laptop away, slides his crossword into the front pocket. “I’ll… I’ll keep it in mind.”
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

A little backstory, a little teenage angst, and a little Robert kicking everyone's asses at card games.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He keeps it in mind. It's tempting. It could help him narrow his focus during the day, without the distractions of the lobby upstairs.

He keeps it in mind but it feels weird. Intrusive. Even with a direct invitation, even knowing that logically anytime he'd be down there, Conway would be occupied in the ongoing session upstairs, it feels presumptive somehow, commandeering this space that, by its very definition, is meant to be private. An escape.

So he sticks to the lobby outside the chamber, competes with the others on the same break schedule for the best spots to sit – it varies, depending what he's doing. The sofa with a long, low table in front of it for calculus and physics, so he can spread out. The squishiest armchair when he's just reading for English.

As for government and civics, he can only work on those to his satisfaction given a proper block of time to focus. Which means a lot of reading and note-taking in the library or in the dorm right up until curfew; a lot of nights downstairs after Lee and Shippen have retired so he can type his thoughts up into a presentable essay.

He does get an email from Conway at the end of the week – it doesn't mention anything about their Wednesday conversation – in fact, it doesn't really mention anything at all.

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net

Recipient: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov

Subject: I forgot to ask [file attached]

?  

sent: 08:54 02/16/18

The file is a poorly-lit picture of a notecard on which Alexander recognizes his own scrawling handwriting. He barks a laugh and claps a hand over his mouth as he rereads the question he'd submitted to the panelists at the Archives.

Does it not strike any of the panelists here tonight that the inclusion of the preeminently qualified Ms.
Hoof-Green only as a last minute resort given the absence of Sen. Bartlett is an excellent example of everything that is wrong with the argument against progressivism?

There’s even a little scribble at the end where he’d clamored to snag the card back from Aaron when he’d tried to steal it.

Needless to say, the hosts of the discussion had opted not to pose his question to the five speakers.

Sender: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net
Subject: :-D
[body blank]
sent: 16:28 02/16/18

A reply populates in his inbox even before he has time to dig out his notes on Whitman.

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net
Recipient: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Subject: Knew it
[body blank]
sent: 16:31 02/16/18

X---X

He gives John and Hercules the small box containing [Congressional] Fluxx that night. John is oddly tickled by the blue stamp adorning the outer wrapping and Hercules seems to share in Alexander’s suspicions that there’s a yet-untapped source of great information and amusement regarding their Capitol surroundings among the staff at the Visitor Center.

Aaron begs off when they invite him for the inaugural game, but much to everyone’s surprise, Robert accepts with a neutral, “Well, why not,” and then proceeds to roundly kick all of their asses. Twice.

“Did we just get hustled?” Hercules stares down at the cards left in his hand and the cards laid out in the middle of the table, flummoxed.

“At a game with no rules?” Robert asks archly as he begins collecting the played cards and shuffling them together with the remnants of his hand.

Anna and Abigail join in for the next game, so they move to the floor to have more space. As
winner, Robert calls privilege of choosing starter’s rules, and John begs for something simpler than residential longitude, in descending order.

“Very well,” he looks supremely bored. “Youngest to oldest. If we’re going to be boring about it.”

They all glance around at one another. “My birthday’s not until April,” Anna offers.

Alexander smacks an opening card down. “Pretty sure I win this one.”

John frowns at him. “Thought you had a winter birthday.”

“Mnhm. January eleventh.”

“Well, then Anna’s got you- ”

“Of 2002.”

Anna cocks her head sideways. “Wait – really?”

“Hey,” he jabs his cards in her direction, “I made the cutoff by a week, week and a half, easy.”

Hercules shakes his head. “I’m just not going to comment on the thing where this kid’s a solid year and a half younger than me and about ten times smarter.”

John winks over at him and clicks his tongue. “Think you just did, mate.”

They’re getting ready for bed that night and as John pulls a t-shirt over his head he glances over at where Alexander is perched in his bunk, engrossed in his government text and says, “Are you really going to make me ask?”

Alexander looks up and over to where John is standing at his dresser. “Hm?”

“I didn’t realize you’d only just turned sixteen,” he prompts.

“Oh! It’s not… skipped the first grade. Not really an interesting story.”

But he’s already inwardly cringing as John shrugs and says, “Okay,” because they’d just had this conversation two weeks ago. This is something he can share. This is a nice story, in its own way, and it serves as a reminder of how much he owes his mother for where he is today.

So he waits until John is climbing in his bed and then leans over the side a bit precariously and peers down at his bunkmate. “You’re going to laugh.”

“Oh?”

“As a little kid – I wouldn’t talk.”

He blinks. “What.”

Alexander grins, broad. “Swear to God. I turned two, and then three, and wouldn’t say more than a handful of isolated words. Mama. Milk. Cat.”

“Sic semper tyrannis, I assume.”

“Haha. Anyway, so I’m due to start pre-k and I’m talking at like… an eighteen-month level or
something. And the school wants all this developmental testing and therapies and autism screenings and so on and so forth, but my mother wouldn’t agree to more than a speech therapist. They wanted to put me in a special classroom until he catches up, and she told them I was caught up just fine. That I understood everything just fine, and needed more time to sort out the languages in my head.”

John’s eyes widen. “Oh! You know, I’ve heard that before, actually – about bilingual kids.”

“It’s a tragically understudied phenomenon,” Alexander laments. “Late-talkers in general, not just bilingual ones. I don’t know if there’s science to back it up just yet, but my mother insisted I just needed time, refused to let them put me in a special room for pre-k, refused the suggestion that I spend an extra year in pre-k. So I just… did my own thing, drove my teachers crazy, and got reports home about the importance of milestones like singing the alphabet and counting to twenty and what a disservice she was doing to my future education by not addressing my problems now.”

“Wow.”

“So one day midway through kindergarten – and I remember this, actually – we’re getting ready to go home for the day and I couldn’t find my lunchbox. So I looked around, got reprimanded for not standing in line with everyone else, and then when I still couldn’t find it…” He chuckles, a bit self-deprecating. “I walked up to one of the classroom aides and said I can’t find my lunchbox, very matter-of-fact.” John laughs. “And he kind of stared at me blankly, and reminded me that we’d picnicked outside. So I went outside and got it, came back in, and that was that.”

“And they stopped harping on your mom about the talking?”

“Oh,” he rolls over and stares up at the ceiling, wistfully reminiscent, “they realized by the end of the year, as I opened up more, what she’d realized all along. That my refusal to, I don’t know – point at letters in lieu of naming them wasn’t because I didn’t know them. It was because I’d figured it out at home, with her, ages before. It was boring and I wasn’t going to be a show-pony.”

John lobs something at the underside of Alexander’s mattress. “Wow, what changed?”

“Better audience,” he deadpans, and feels another thump against his back. “So while the class spent the year memorizing the alphabet, I taught myself to read. They learned how to count and I taught myself basic addition and subtraction. And so on and so forth for a year, by the end of which they were forced to conclude that I was past even the next year’s standards and possibly one beyond that, but my mother couldn’t fathom my skipping more than a grade, which is good because then I really wouldn’t have been able to be here.”

There’s a few minutes silence while John mulls over that tale. Aaron and Hercules wander in a few minutes ahead of bed check, and as they’re getting ready to turn the lights out, John murmurs up at Alexander, “I’m not even kidding, I think you’ve just inspired me to study speech pathology.”

“Thought you wanted to be a lawyer.”

“My father wants me to be a lawyer,” John corrects drily. “But he’s got other kids to funnel into the family trade, he can deal with the oldest being a disappointment of a doctor.”

Alexander suspects that it’s less of a joke than he makes it out to be.
what he did – is pretty sure the answer is *nothing*, that it’s just a self-preservation strategy on John’s part due to having the pressure of his father a stone’s throw away. He hopes he didn’t do or say something to cause his friend to pull back but, either way, he can’t really fathom a way to fix it, either.

And so it feels a bit inevitable when John upends their usual lunch routine one day, a month into the term, with an apologetic, “I brought a couple energy bars to eat in my dad’s office – I need to get some work done.” And then does the same two days later. Aaron’s not the sort to comment on the quiet friction that seems to be building between them, but Hercules is starting to give them perturbed glances every so often, so the day after *that*, Alexander collects his school things from the cloakroom during his break from eleven to noon and makes his first foray down to Conway’s hideaway office.

He’s almost to the bottom of the stairwell before it occurs that this is going to be a short and ridiculous trip if the office is locked, but he pushes right inside and figures that, between Capitol security and the relative emptiness of the room, the senator probably isn’t too fussed about it.

His watch is set to go off at five to noon so he can run back upstairs and either swap out on the floor or break for lunch, so he doesn’t really register the pickup of footsteps echoing down through the ceiling, or the heavy set just outside the door until it’s swinging open. It catches on his feet, dangling off the arm of the couch, and bounces back.

“Oh,” Conway peers around at the unexpected obstacle. “Hello, then.”

Alexander scrambles upright, hand darting out to catch the notebook that’s threatening to slide off its perch on his stomach. “What time is it?” he demands, then adds a barely redemptive, “Sir,” on the end.

“Eleven forty, you’re fine. We broke early for lunch. Back at one thirty.” Conway settles himself into the chair at the desk and starts digging through drawers. “Nominally the long break is something to do with a whip count and a CBO score, but I’m pretty sure the chairman is just done with all of our shit this morning, so.”

They’re trying to get a budget done; it’s not been pretty. “Why is this one such a…” Alexander searches for a slightly less crass word than initially springs to mind. “Debacle?”

Conway presses his lips together, sighs, and throws his hands up in defeat. “Honestly? Because the federalists are reaping what they sowed when they put a centrist veteran at the head of their party. Washington and Adams are at each other’s throats behind closed doors, and Jefferson’s starting to think he might be able to pull enough moderate federalists to garner a majority without the concessions we’d otherwise be making on our side of the aisle, but…”

“But Washington won’t commit to calling a vote unless there’s something on the table that the majority of the federalists support,” Alexander guesses.

“And that is, unfortunately, his privilege.” He levels a shrewd stare across the desk. “This isn’t going to end today and it’s not going to end prettily – best prepare yourself for a marathon session next week.”

Classes have finally settled to a more normal pace after the breakneck speed of the recess week and the subsequent snow-day catch-up. So at least there’s that. “Caffeine can power me through a lot,” he assures him.

“Well, far be it from me to deprive you.”
It’s said a bit dismissively, and Alexander blinks in surprise. “Oh. Sorry, yeah, I’ll get out of your way.”

“I’m not kicking you out,” Conway frowns, “I just thought you and the Laurens boy usually took the lunchtime opportunity to drown yourselves in the bad cafeteria coffee.”

He grudgingly supposes he can understand John keeping a bit of distance if their routine has become that obvious. “I’ll stay then, if it’s alright? John’s catching up on work during his lunch breaks this week, I may as well do the same.”

Conway looks curious; can tell something’s off and, as Alexander suddenly remembers, apparently noticed that he was wearing a scarf with John’s name embroidered on it the night of the talk at the Archives. He doesn’t ask – of course he doesn’t, and Alexander certainly isn’t going to volunteer any details, so he shrugs off the curiosity and asks pointedly, “And are you going to eat?”

“I’ve got a granola bar in my bag.” He thinks. Somewhere. Smooshed down at the bottom, undoubtedly.

“A granola bar.”

“Um… a protein bar?”

“Uh huh.”

“I think it has peanuts?”

Conway shakes his head and leans down to his right, muttering, “You really have appalling dietary habits, don’t you?” Alexander hears the distinctive sound of a mini-fridge opening and realizes that he’s overlooked the true valuables in this office the whole time. He places a bottled Starbucks drink on the desk and holds up a halting finger as Alexander’s eyes go wide and he makes an instinctive move towards it. Follows it up with a protein snack tray that has cheese, nuts, and dried fruit. “Real food – then the caffeine.”

“The caffeine has sugar and fat, it’ll sustain me.”

“I don’t want to see you bouncing off the walls all afternoon when the session resumes.”

Alexander stares dully as he reaches across for the tray and tears the wrapper off the top. “Hi, have we met?”

X---X

He sneaks downstairs late the next night – not for homework, for once, and it’s a Friday anyway. He just can’t sleep. At the computer, he stares at an email from Edward, just a daily life update, nothing particular, nothing special, and every time he hovers the cursor over the reply button… he freezes. Can’t think of what to say.

Writer’s block. Or something like it. That’s what he tells himself. He knows it’s a bit more complicated.

Edward might be the one person left on this earth who can reliably see through his bullshit. And he really doesn’t intend on telling him about developing something of a crush on his closest friend here in D.C. who promised his father – the Speaker of the House – that he’d stay in the closet until
college.

He feels… weak. To be affected so by the slackening bond with John. Fights the first inkling of feelings of resentment towards him for stealing so quickly and thoroughly into his heart in the first place. Fights to remind himself that John hasn’t gone anywhere, has simply carved some emotional space between them as is perfectly well within his rights. Alexander isn’t oblivious to the fact that John’s taking a strategy straight out of the playbook he perfected during the tumultuous eighteen months after his mother died.

The good Reverend Knox had lamented his emotional shuttering – had seen it long before Edward and his father, the most constant presence in his life through the whole affair, even if Alexander had mostly found himself disillusioned with his faith by the end. Knox hadn’t held that against him, either, was content to offer counsel of a less overtly religious nature.

He’d written one of the recommendations for his application to Senator Washington’s office, even though their encounters grew rarer as he eventually settled in with the Stevens family.

The other letter was written by his sophomore history teacher. Mister Pendleton. It was with Pendleton that he first haltingly raised the prospect of applying for the program, and he’d endorsed it wholeheartedly. Was perhaps the first teacher he’d had who truly listened to him, who didn’t mind that his brain took him off on subjects only tangentially related to their studies. He was the first teacher Alexander had, in turn, found himself truly desiring to impress; to please.

Edward called him on it, called it an infatuation, much to Alexander’s horror. Edward shrugged it off and tapped him on the temple and said He’s smart, he thinks you’re smart, and he’s paying attention to you, of course you’re infatuated; you haven’t had that in your life since your mom passed, and you haven’t had that from a man since your dad left.

Which wasn’t perhaps the entire truth, given his relationship with Reverend Knox, but what Edward was really acknowledging was that, even after a year, Alexander wasn’t willing to afford the Stevens family such intimate access to his heart, to his mind.

But with Pendleton, it had been one sort of a thing, confined within the bounds of school propriety. Nods and smiles of acknowledgement in the hallways; bringing in a journal article he thought would catch the teen’s interest and staying after class to discuss it. An afternoon passed in the library after school researching the Page Program and trying to discern if there was any outright rule that would disqualify a resident of the Virgin Islands, and then arguing over whose office to apply with on such a longshot chance.

Alexander is self-aware enough to realize he’s developing a similar sort of, as Edward would say, infatuation with Thomas Conway, craves that same sort of intellectual satisfaction Pendleton had offered, that rush he gets from their banter, from Conway’s active attempts to further stimulate his mind even across the political divide. And he has no particular intention of clueing his somewhat-brother into that situation either.

Because with Conway, it’s an altogether different sort of thing. The senator doesn’t acknowledge those bounds of propriety, or simply doesn’t think they exist. That, he is forced to conclude, is what Angelica Schuyler was trying to convey through her sister. Most of the senators viewed their role on the Hill as an extension of their time in Webster’s classroom, if they paid the pages any mind at all. But Conway… it’d be like Mister Pendleton texting Alexander about things school-related and otherwise, and then inviting him to do his homework in his office after-hours.

Yet clear as this picture is finally forming in his head, and as clear as the sense of looming disaster if he stays the present course…
…he can’t help but court that disaster anyway.

Chapter End Notes

I have no reason to suspect whatsoever that real!Alexander Hamilton started talking late in life and fell into this group, but fic!Alexander is describing a phenomenon known informally as the Einstein Syndrome. Which was partly a fun way to give context to his precocious genius and partly (mostly) a self-indulgent detail brought to you by my 4-year-old, who did not start developing much of a functional vocabulary until after he was 3.5 (albeit under a broader developmental delay umbrella, not the Einstein phenomenon).
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Alexander has revelation; proceeds to make poor life choices.

The first clue that this scheduled ‘marathon’ session is going to be brutal is Gates – *Gates* – passing down the call to cancel classes Wednesday morning before the session and Thursday morning after it. “Sleep in, if you can,” Lee grumbles as he does his ten o’clock headcount on Tuesday night. “Usual 9:45 start on the floor. Make sure you stock up on snacks and drinks to keep on hand through the night before all the cafeterias and shops close down.”

There’s at least something novel and exciting about the notion that they’ll actually be out of Webster past curfew. Alexander suspects he’s not the first to have ever thought so, because Shippen yells at the group on their way out the door the next morning, “You are due back here thirty minutes after the session ends! I don’t care if it’s over at eleven thirty or four in the morning – thirty minutes.”

The *vote-a-rama* doesn’t actually start until that evening, so their morning is typical, practically dull. Everyone else steeling themselves for the late-nighter, he supposes. After Washington, Jefferson makes his opening remarks for the session with a cup of coffee clutched in his hand, and Alexander has half a mind to stop by his office during the day and ask Madison if he’s permitting his boss actual espresso today.

There’s a ninety minute lunch break, and then a two hour block to make any final preparations for the long haul from four to six. Lunch is a group affair with John, Hercules, Robert, and Abe in the Longworth cafeteria over on the House side of the Hill. Hercules sets down his tray last at the big round table they’ve commandeered and tells them around a mouthful of club sandwich, “There’s an entire storage closet in the Capitol basement dedicated to cots.”

“Cots,” Abe echoes.

“For sleeping. Cots.”

“Is it… is it a *naptime* closet?” Alexander asks hopefully.

Hercules looks as disappointed by his own response as Alexander feels. “They’re folded up, sadly. And I think only just enough for the senators. But can we just talk for a minute about the utter masochism of this institution that has enough of a tradition of overnight debates that it felt the need to allocate space for everyone to go when they collapse?”

“So like… I don’t get it,” Abe frowns, thoughtful. “If they’re *in* the Capitol, does that mean like… slumber party on the floor?”

John shakes his head. “Partisan slumber parties in the big meeting rooms on the first floor.”

“While we’re undoubtedly left to fight for space in the lobby,” Robert sniffs.

“This is why civility in politics is on the decline,” Alexander muses. “The parties won’t even sleep together.” Everyone stops, bites midway to mouths, and stares at him. “Wait.”
“Senate floor orgy,” Hercules smacks his hand down on the table, resolved. “By the end, we’ll have achieved single-payer healthcare, a universal basic income, and possibly world peace.”

“Socialist.”

“Senators above the age of sixty-five will be exempt,” Hercules continues, undeterred. “Pending a thorough physical.”

Abe shakes his head. “Franklin’ll be first in line.”

“Ew.”

---

Everyone goes their separate ways for the most part during the later break – ostensibly because they want to either make a last push to get homework done or steal a nap back in the dorm, but also possibly because their lunch conversation was mildly traumatizing. Alexander commandeers Jefferson’s favorite reading spot at the top of the smallest library building and lets himself get absorbed in his calculus work for Friday. A nap sounds ideal, but he’s strategized poorly for it and realized it far too late – he should have woken at the usual five a.m. hour and done his work then. Instead, sleeping until nearly eight and drinking coffee until hitting the floor means he’s too keyed up to sleep now, and he knows he’ll regret that later.

He stops by one of the little tunnel bodegas and grabs some chips, candy bars, iced coffee, and soda to throw in his bag. Recalling that this marathon budget process could go on easily until two a.m. or later, he stares at his pitiful haul and realizes he planned poorly on this front too, should have used these two hours to go off-premises and find something more substantial to keep on hand, but there’s nothing for it now.

Turns out, he needn’t have worried – he’s barely set foot back inside the senate chamber at ten to six when Jefferson’s beckoning him over to the front and center of the room, where he and Washington sit side-by-side during sessions. Ben is already there, divvying out a stack of papers between the two desks. “Sir?”

“Hamilton – I have an unenviable task for you.”

“I thrive at the thankless jobs, Senator, what can I do for you?”

He nods over Alexander’s head towards the middle of the dais, where Washington and Franklin are conferring in low tones. “The three of us are buying the pages late dinner tonight. Mister,” he turns and peers closely at the name pin on Ben’s jacket, “Tallmadge here is collecting orders from his peers on the federalist side, you can do the same on ours.”

“Oh.” He picks up one of the pieces of paper, which has a very simplistic checklist menu. “That doesn’t seem so bad.”

“In about,” he checks his phone for the time, “nine minutes, all hell is going to break loose, and the orders need to make it back to Washington’s office by seven.”

“Yikes.” He snags the pen out of his pocket, jots his name on the top form, clicks the boxes for a turkey sandwich, a cherry coke, and an oatmeal raisin cookie (Jefferson scoffs), and tucks the form into the back of the pile as he gathers it up into his arms.

Jefferson calls after him as he jogs over to the half-dozen pages already sitting on the right side of the dais, “For the love of God, Hamilton, no special orders, no substitutions. Ham and cheese, turkey,
A vegetarian – they have to pick one.”

He gets nine of the other fourteen pages before six. Aaron is already on the phone in the cloakroom and waves him off irritably every time he tries to shove an order form under his nose, and the other four must slip by while he’s corralling orders from the cloakroom and are already sent dashing about the Hill by the time he makes it back to the chamber.

It’s running close to seven before he finally corners John in the lobby, his last outstanding order, and threatens to sit on him if he doesn’t take thirty seconds to tell him what kind of goddamn sandwich he’d like.

John smiles at him bemusedly and bites his lip, mumbling as he sits down with a pen, “We’ve had lunch together almost every day since we got here and you can’t guess what I’d get?” But he clicks his boxes and hands the sheet back and offers, “I have to go pass a message on to Senator Clinton that’s bound to send him into low orbit – want to come watch?”

“And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the best offer I’ll get all night,” Alexander tucks his forms under his arm and dodges the jab at his side. “I gotta get these to Hart, though.”

“See you on the floor, then.”

He’s late, but only just, and can only hope that three minutes won’t be the difference between a hearty meal and sitting pathetically on the democratic-republican side of the room watching longingly as the federalist pages eat dinner.

He realizes, as he pushes his way into the outer office, that this is the first time he’s actually been to Washington’s office. Which is… weird, in its own way. The initial indignation at being shuffled over to the other side of the floor has faded away as he’s settled in around Jefferson’s eccentricities, and Washington seems content enough to yield any remaining sponsorship duties to the other Virginian. Which is fine – he understands not wanting to add any unnecessary responsibilities right now – Christ, it’s barely been five weeks, of course he understands.

Still, it seems strange that his only connections to this world prior to arrival were Senator Washington, who he’s still not really had the chance to talk to, and his chief of staff, Mister Arnold, who he’s never so much as seen. He thinks the latter might change right now, but it’s Washington’s aide, the young Mister Tilghman, who greets him in the mostly vacated office.

“Oh, good,” he takes the forms from him, “Ben was just by not five minutes ago.”

He hands them over, relieved to be done with that particular task. “How are things going for -?”

He’s cut off by a sudden storm of shouting and swearing from some unseen point in the inner office.

“What the hell do you mean, he’s not going to support… for fuck’s sake, Reed, you couldn’t have called us with this before tonight, of all nights?”

Tilghman turns a blank stare and bland smile on Alexander. “Things are going just swimmingly, Mister Arnold sends his regards.”

“Clearly.”

“And how goes the activity on the floor?”

He pauses at the door and glances around. “Based on the frustrations of collecting dinner orders from fourteen people, I’m guessing a bit hectic.”
“Best of luck to you then, Alexander.”

He manages to watch a few minutes of the proceedings before getting dragged into a new task, and it’s... well. He can see why no one is pleased to be there. Budget considerations are tedious at the best of times, he realizes, and in a 51-49 Senate and the House with the federalists in the minority it must be more tenuous than ever. But this is just ridiculous. An amendment is called, allotted a whopping minute of debate, followed by a ten minute block to vote. Rinse, repeat. The ten minutes afforded after every amendment is read and “debated” would theoretically mean frequent breaks, except those ten minutes are then used to figure out what’s coming up next and, in some cases, amendments are withdrawn and the order upended entirely depending on the progression of earlier votes.

So there’s a constant back-and-forth between staffers in the cloakroom and their bosses on the floor, the pages serving as intermediaries. Everyone’s on a phone, everyone’s yelling at somebody, half the amendments Alexander glimpses text of seem to be symbolic nonsense, at best, and there are no breaks for any of them. All thirty pages going full tilt at once, and the only saving grace is that most of the senators have closed their main offices for the night so there’s less running back and forth.

Franklin calls a thirty minute recess at nine thirty. The pages collectively stomp out to the lobby and collapse in various states of disarray. Eliza’s braid is frayed and John’s hair has curled up around his face and won’t stay contained in his ponytail. Even Hercules’s tie is askew, and Alexander reaches over and straightens it for him with a cheeky grin.

“Little grasshopper,” Hercules smiles tiredly over at him from where he’s sprawled against the arm of one of the big sofas. “You’ve come so far.”

Alexander basks in the praise for about half a second, and then does exactly what everyone’s come to expect of him by now – he sits up and starts ranting about the night’s proceedings. “Can we just talk about the absurdity of this whole sideshow?” he asks everyone and no one. “Half of these amendments were always going to be D.O.A. and just exist so the radicals on either side can go home and say Why yes, I supported the failed resolution on relocating half the military-industrial complex to North Dakota, like they should be reelected on wasting the taxpayers’ time and money on useless fantasy bullshit.”

“Preach,” Abe mumbles from halfway across the room, eyes drooping closed roughly in proportion with his own slouching posture.

“And while we’re on the subject,” he hears a groan that might be Aaron; opts to ignore, “has a democratic-republican ever met a domestic spending bill he liked or a military spending bill he didn’t? I mean honestly, there’s supporting the idea of global American leadership, and then there’s a complete and utterly irresponsible equating of more money with better results, and when is the last time the Pentagon has even been audited?”

“That,” a deep voice sounds from the doorway to the chamber, “would be never, Mister Hamilton.” He whips around and sees Washington watching their little gathering, a half-smile quirking the corner of his mouth. “As someone who dedicated twenty years of his life to military service, I appreciate the conscientiousness of some of my colleagues to maintaining adequate support for our troops, both at home and abroad. But I was also in a position to see much of the wasteful and redundant spending, and so I struggle here to support wholesale increases in the defense budget without some measure of accountability.”

Aaron clears his throat. “It sounds like a difficult line to tread, sir.”
Washington shifts his gaze, frowning thoughtfully. “Hardly, Mister Burr. We must all accept certain responsibilities, relative to our stations. My responsibility as an elected official is not to be popular, but to do my part, in the functioning of this government, to the best of my abilities based upon my particular background and talents.”

“Will you order an audit of the Pentagon when you’re president, then,” someone asks across the lobby, and there’s a smattering of laughter.

The senator smiles indulgently. “I shan’t be presumptuous, but should that come to pass, I would first need to find someone equal to the task. It promises to be quite daunting.”

“I’ll do it,” Alexander offers, and gets an elbow in the ribs from Hercules.

“Thought you were going to be a lawyer,” Aaron snarks.

Indignant, Alexander huffs, “I’m a man of many talents.”

“Call me when you finish school, Mister Hamilton,” Washington chuckles, “and we’ll see where things stand. In the meantime… I think your food is here.”

Tilghman, André, and a woman Alexander doesn’t recognize who might be from Franklin’s office come up the stairs to the lobby, weighed down by paper bags full of their boxed meals. There’s a few minutes of chaos while they start rattling off names in no particular order, and Maria’s ham and cheese gets mixed up with Mary’s vegetarian sandwich. Caleb is the first to pop the tab on his can of soda, an experience from which the rest of them quickly learn to let theirs sit for a few minutes.

Come ten o’clock, they’re fed and watered, possibly caffeinated, and feeling revitalized. Alexander thinks he could do this all night.

By one a.m., Alexander realizes he was tragically, hilariously wrong. There’s not enough coffee in the world, let alone the bad cloakroom coffee that’s constantly being brewed and fought over by the dozens of staffers and senators and pages, especially now that it’s too late to bring the better stuff in from off-premises. He’s even used to being up this late, given his frequent late night forays down into the computer lab in the Webster basement, but this is a whole different thing. Dinner break aside, they’ve been going nonstop since six and he did homework straight through the two hour break before that.

Franklin calls a half hour break, and Washington and Jefferson call the pages together on the floor. There’s a brief moment where Alexander thinks they’re going to be cut loose, given mercy, but then realizes that he himself would rebel somewhat against the suggestion, for the sake of his own pride. They’re young and vital – should have vastly more stamina than the likes of Senator Langdon, who is eighty-two and still going strong.

“Has anyone had a real break all night?” Jefferson asks dully around a sip of coffee – bad coffee, by the grimace that follows. No one says anything. “Alright – half of y’all look like you’re about to fall over standing here, so find somewhere to close your eyes for the next half hour, all of you. Whichever half of you are most functional come one thirty, come back for an hour and then trade off an hour. If we’re still going in here at three thirty, God help us all.”

Then he and Washington turn away and huddle together, and Alexander suspects they’re trying to negotiate some sort of cease-fire in the whole affair.

He ends up grudgingly climbing to his feet after the half-hour has passed, reluctantly conceding that
the likes of Eliza and Abe and Iris are more desperately in need of the rest. The chamber is late getting started back up, which has something to do with an ongoing dispute between Washington and Adams, an argument over which amendments to prioritize and bring to the floor as part of an agreement across the aisle to bring this thing to a close.

They reconvene finally at quarter of two with an accord that each side will bring four more amendments to a vote. In theory, that shouldn’t take more than an hour and a half, but Alexander isn’t taking anything for granted. And so when two thirty rolls around, he gladly stumbles off with a half-hearted salute to John as he walks in, bleary-eyed, surveys the mess of pages and staffers slumped in the cloakrooms and the lobby, decides to hell with it, and goes downstairs to collapse in Conway’s office.

There’s a little travel pillow and a throw blanket on the couch – he could cry, if he weren’t so damn tired.

---x

Vague noises register in the back of his dozing mind – the echo of faint footsteps, the click of the door latch. Not the shrill beeping alarm on his watch, and so he drifts on the edge of consciousness, tries to force himself back under. Too soon, too tired, his body aches, muscles protesting even the thought of moving. His awareness is fading and he’s falling back into the beautiful oblivion of sleep when the gentle touch of a hand cards through his hair, at once threatening to pull him out of his slumber and soothe him back down into it. He groans low in his throat and leans into the touch, such an unfamiliar comfort after all these years, and –

-the hand stills, a warm weight resting over his temple, thumb stroking absently along the shell of his ear.

“Time to wake up, Alexander,” a low voice murmurs, and that pulls him out of his half-awake daze enough to remember where he is. His eyes snap open. Conway is crouching in front of the couch, smiling fondly at him and – “We’re done upstairs. Thought you might have come down here to crash.” The hand is still stroking a gentle line across the top of his ear, and he shivers, wonders if the man even realizes he’s doing it. “Are you alri – ?”

“Oh,” Alexander rasps. Watches the senator’s eyes shift from something almost… longing, to something more wary, akin to worry, fear, and repeats like a revelation, “Oh.”

Conway snatches his hand back sharply, as if burned, and Alexander knows he’s hit the mark; wonders if it should have been obvious before now, but retrospect is such a tricky thing. “You should go,” the senator croaks out, but doesn’t back away from where he’s effectively blocking Alexander on the sofa.

For his part, Alexander has never been very good at listening to the suggestions of others and often neglects the ones stemming from the back of his own mind, especially when his curiosity is piqued. He props himself up on his elbow and tilts his head, assessing. “I don’t mind, you know. It’s alright.”

Conway’s eyes widen at first as he sits back on his heels, and then he closes them and drags a hand down his face. “Jesus,” he mutters. “It’s really not.” There’s a heavy pause, and he adds, defeated, “I’m sorry.”

“You didn’t do anything.” Conway watches him, unmoved, eyes wide and dark and intense and, yeah, maybe that does things to Alexander. To have that effect on someone. Someone older,
someone taboo, it pulls at a different place deep inside him than the fledgling feelings and tentative reciprocations from John. It’s heady, a rush, and he acknowledges in a quiet murmur, “But you want to.”

He sweeps a hand through his already-mussed hair. “Alexander, it’s not -”

“It’s alright,” he repeats, not even entirely sure what he’s granting permission for – the wanting, or the doing something about it.

“You’re in high school.”

“But my mind is older,” he protests softly, and the senator’s eyes fly back up to his, incredulous. “That’s why you like me.”

“Jesus,” Conway repeats in a murmur, but Alexander can already see he’s losing the battle being waged behind his eyes, and then he’s leaning forward slowly, carefully, and reaching a hand back out to cup his cheek.

Their lips meet, and Alexander’s first wholly out-of-place thought is that it’s not all that unlike his brief kiss with John. This one keeps going though, and then a tongue is running across his lower lip and he gasps, and it turns into an entirely different sort of a thing. The tongue is licking into his mouth and a hand is at his waist, and his elbow gives out and he finds himself falling back onto the couch, the weight of the older and decidedly larger man pressing him against the cushions, and he lets out a surprised squeak and –

-and just as abruptly, the weight vanishes and he’s left gasping, trying to catch his breath, surprised and confused. Conway’s already on his feet, back turned, palms pressed flat against the desk and heaving great breaths as well, trying to regain some control. “I’m sorry,” he grinds out. “You need to go.”

“It’s really -”

“It’s not alright,” the senator slams a hand down onto the top of the desk, and Alexander starts upright. “Get. Out.”

He snatches his bag off the floor and flees.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

A reprieve, unlooked for, courtesy of Mister John Andre.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“…think he’s okay?”

“Are any of us?”

“Let’s not pretend we don’t all know he barely sleeps anyway, this isn’t normal.”

Alexander groans and rolls over, buries his head in his pillow as one of his roommates makes yet another attempt to prod him awake. “See? He breathes.” Aaron, then. “I’m not planning on being late, personally.”

He hears the door open and close, and then determinedly tunes out the hushed whispers of John and Hercules. After another half-minute, the door opens and closes again, and then the bed shakes with the weight of someone climbing up to the top bunk. John, he assumes, but then his legs are being shoved roughly aside to make room and he blinks up angrily and sees Hercules settling himself with his back against the wall and his legs draped across Alexander’s feet.

“John went to cut in front of all the early birds to get you a cup of coffee,” he explains casually. Alexander rolls his face back into the pillow. “Seriously though, do we need to tell Lee you’re sick?”

He grunts. “Uh… are you sick?”

There’s a tempting moment where he considers seizing on the excuse to avoid traipsing up to the Capitol today. But Lee would never believe it and it would only delay the inevitable of having to be in the same room with Thomas Conway again at some point between now and June. So he shakes his head and forces one eye back open. “I couldn’t fall asleep,” he explains, voice raspy.

Hercules blinks. “What.”

“Power nap must have revitalized me,” he lies through his teeth, “I lay here awake until the sun was up.”

He’d been the last to come stumbling back into the room, but only by a few minutes. Aaron was still clumsily shrugging his way out of his uniform before collapsing unceremoniously on top of his blankets in just his boxers. If he’d looked as keyed up as he felt, no one had been awake enough to notice or comment on it, and then he’d been left alone with his thoughts and confusion for hours, feeling vaguely sick to his stomach with nerves and sleep-deprivation.

This morning’s session is delayed starting, but only by an hour. “It’s almost quarter ‘til already,” Hercules pokes his foot through the blanket, and laughs when Alexander hisses and pulls it away defensively. “You gonna make it?”

“Yeah,” he groans, “yeah, I just… I’ll be a few minutes late.” Considers. “Doubt I’ll even be the
“Fair,” Hercules concedes, and then leaps down on to the floor. “Now get your ass out of bed.”

It takes another few minutes, but he does, makes the mistake of leaping down like Hercules had done and then has to grab the bedpost to keep himself from overbalancing and falling over – and he knows that if he falls down, he’s liable to just go back to sleep on the floor. John finds him there, braced against the side of the bed, head resting on the hard wood, fighting to keep his eyes open as he stands there barefoot in only a pair of sweatpants.

“Guh,” he makes grabby hands for the paper cup in John’s hand; his friend hands it over a bit skeptically.

“I have concerns,” John admits.

He tips the cup towards him in acknowledgement and then gulps down a mouthful, barely notices that it’s still entirely too hot. “Go to work, Laurens.”

“Do you want me to wait for you? No one’s going to care, considering.”

Alexander sighs and closes his eyes, and thunks his head back against the bedrail. “John. Go to work.”

“Ohh-kay.”

“Dammit,” Alexander mutters to himself when the door closes behind John about ten seconds later.

A savior arrives, unlooked for, in the form of John André, who is just reaching the bottom of the stairs from the senate lobby as Alexander is standing there and bracing himself for the climb and the unknown beyond.

It must show in his face. “Why, Mister Hamilton, you look as though you were ready to ride headlong into battle and come face-to-face with death himself.”

“You have a fantastic way with words,” Alexander tells him honestly.

“And flattery will get you everywhere – care for a tedious job this morning?”

He narrows his eyes, suspicious. “Does it involve hunting people down and threatening them until they give me their lunch orders?”

“…Um, no. No, it does not. But it does involve sitting down.”

“I’m in.”

André leads him to one of the big conference rooms on the ground floor of the Capitol where several folders are already laid out in the middle of the long table. André picks up the closest one, which says CANADA in scrawling script across the top, and Alexander frowns. “Are we drawing up invasion plans?”

“Would that we were.” He gestures vaguely across the gathered files. “You may have heard that there’s a summit of sorts next week, a multilateral affair.”

“Oh!” He peers at the countries gathered with a bit more interest. “Some sort of NATO powwow,
“Ehh,” André wavers a hand, “technically no, as we’re not well-equipped to host twenty-eight heads of state at once. If we only invited the principals, we’d be obliged to omit Germany and Chancellor von Steuben would cease plying President Hancock with his favorite spirits, and nobody really likes Luxembourg right now anyway.”

This right here is why Alexander is pretty sure Jefferson runs the best office in the whole Capitol. “What did Luxembourg do?”

“Luxembourg knows what it did, and that’s all that matters,” André sniffs. “Point being – these,” he gestures again, “are the delegation details. Friday evening is a state dinner, and most of the respective staffs will be formalizing and finalizing plans at the White House that morning, while the leaders themselves will be having sit-downs with a preselected assortment of congressmen and senators, as well as their translators, where necessary.” He flips open the Canada folder and produces a sheet from the top. “At the front of each file, you will find a list of the team designated for the Friday morning meeting. Behind it,” he flips a page, “will be the team that, in this case, Prime Minister Montgomery is bringing along – no translator, naturally, but his foreign minister is accompanying, and Minister Simcoe is always a delight.”

“He’ll be a real joy when he finds out about the invasion plans.”

André grins. “This is why you’re not invited.”

“I came all the way to D.C. and all I got was this self-started diplomatic crisis.”

“Our job,” André jabs a finger at him, “is to figure out how much space each meeting is going to require, and then figure out where the hell to put everyone.” And yeah, that does sound pretty boring, actually. He flips open a laptop sitting on the table between Italy and the U.K. and pulls up a spreadsheet. “This is the current booking schedule for all of the available meeting spaces across the Hill, and their capacities.”

He stares across the arrayed files. “Wow. Okay. That’s… not so bad.”

“When we’re done with that, we get to make lists of the specific needs for each space so the facility staff can have the rooms set up properly.”

“Ugh.”

An hour into this endeavor, as Alexander is finally putting aside Portugal, André’s phone vibrates on the table. He glances at it, frowns and picks it up, then laughs and slides it over towards Alexander. He blinks over, confused, but André has his head buried anew in the Italy folder, so he reads the message on the screen.

From: T.Jeffs.

The Laurens boy & some other kid (Heracles? Hesperides? wtf r ppl naming kids these days) think Hamilton is dead in a ditch somewhere, plz snd proof of life.

“May I?” he holds up the phone, and grins to himself when André waves him on absently.

To: T.Jeffs.
My friend is Hercules; Heracles is Roman mythology. The Hesperides were gardening nymphs or something, one of his labors was to steal their immortal apples. –A.Ham.

The reply is quick in coming.

From: T.Jeffs.

I meant a pic or something but yeah, that does the trick.

It buzzes again a second later.

Might need proof of life 4 Andre now tho.

And once more.

R immortal apples the Monsanto end-game, or.?

Alexander bursts out laughing and slides the phone back to its owner. “Your boss texts like a twelve-year-old.”

“And you text like a post-grad,” André reads over the exchange, “Did you ever find time to be a kid?”

“There was a hot minute when I was about six or so,” he returns lightly, and then reaches for a new folder. “Ooh! Denmark. My ancestral homeland. Sort of.”

“Is there a drop of Danish blood in your body?”

“Highly unlikely.”

They have a working lunch. Madison and Jefferson show up with an armful apiece of Chinese takeout sometime after one. Alexander ignores the box of chicken fried rice that Madison shoves under his nose while he gnaws on his pen and frowns at the spreadsheet on André’s computer and then back to the notes he’s drawn up on Iceland.

He vaguely registers Madison scowling and asking, “Shouldn’t he like… be on the floor?”

“He’s doing… Senate things,” Jefferson shrugs. “It’s fine.”

Alexander is actually pretty sure this isn’t quite within his job purview, and why the hell hasn’t André conscripted some poor intern for the task instead? Regardless, it’s hardly the most egregious offense he’s committed in the last twelve hours even, and he’d rather be here instead of dodging Conway upstairs, so he will organize heads-of-state meetings with the best of them.

Speaking of – “Ah-ha!” He pulls the pen from his mouth and points at a line on the spreadsheet. “If we move Turkey to the small conference room on the second floor of Cannon, that’ll free up the bigger space in Longworth for the Estonian delegation, who are too small to need the whole Trumbull room which can then go to France, freeing up the Hale room for Germany and the Ross room for the U.K.” He pauses and chews on his pen some more. “Will Estonia get offended at being booted from the Capitol for Longworth?”

André waves him off. “They’re not a nuclear power, I wouldn’t worry about it.”

“Oh my God,” Madison mumbles somewhere in the background around a mouthful of lo mein.
He pencils Iceland into a free room in Dirksen and grabs for the rice. “What will we be doing while a bunch of world leaders are roaming about the place?” Jefferson stares at him blankly. “The pages,” he clarifies.

“Nothing whatsoever, you’ll have the day off.”

“Oh.” He’s torn between excitement at an impending long weekend and disappointment. “Can I come anyway? I want to ask Prime Minister Stirling if he thinks Britain’s long-term prosperity wouldn’t be better served by –”

Three voices offer him an emphatically resounding, “No.”

X---X

The session ends at three, and Alexander helps André carry all of their papers back over to Russell a few minutes after Jefferson texts that the pages have been cut loose for the day. They pass Conway in the lobby of the building, laptop case slung over his shoulder and looking like he’s heading out for the day. “Senator,” André nods in greeting as they pass, and gets a sharp jerk of Conway’s head in response.

Alexander just gets a lingering look through tightened eyes, lips pressed firmly together.

“Late-nighters make everyone grumpy it seems,” André murmurs to him once the senator is out of earshot, and Alexander can’t help but snort out a laugh. They continue up to Jefferson’s office on the third floor, Alexander panting as he struggles to keep pace with the taller André and his longer legs. The folders are deposited in the conference room in the back of the office, and Alexander goes to make his way out and head back to Webster when André calls him to a halt. “I think I owe you, Mister Hamilton, for today’s assistance. Coffee?”

He stares a moment, and asks, “Was that random, or has my reputation as a caffeine-whore really started to spread?”

A passing intern shoots him a scandalized look, and André just busts out laughing.

They end up at one of Jefferson’s preferred coffee places – not Lafayette’s, which is a shame, because Alexander really wants to know if the owner ever agreed to go on a date with the charismatic and possibly eccentric Frenchman. This place is a bit more run-of-the-mill, and fairly empty given the odd hour. André retrieves their drinks from the counter and weaves his way around to the table Alexander has staked out by the window, staring out and watching the foot traffic pass by. The heavy coats have given way to lighter spring jackets and oversized hoodies, and it only occurs to him then at the visible reminder of the changing seasons that February faded into March last night as they ran about in the Senate chamber.

André follows his gaze. “It’ll be warm enough to open up the patios soon.” And then chuckles at Alexander’s unimpressed stare. “You poor, spoiled creature. Whatever are you going to do when you migrate north for school?”

“We have college in the Caribbean,” Alexander pouts.

“You expect me to believe you could ever be satisfied with the University of the Virgin Islands?”
“American University of the Caribbean,” Alexander offers.

André frowns. “Isn’t that a med school?” He raises his brows over the top of his cup as he takes a sip. “I can know things, too.”

“But that's your job, isn't it? Information. What comes in, what goes out.”

“Ahh,” he smiles, “you were paying attention. You seemed a bit… overwhelmed, that first morning, but I daresay you’ve settled right on in.”

He doesn’t exactly phrase it like a question, but there’s an expectant pause that Alexander struggles to fill. He thinks of all the things he couldn’t put in an email to Edward last week, thinks about the glaring addition of *oh, and I kissed a thirty-something-year-old senator*, and he just kind of stares blankly until the corners of André’s mouth start to pull down a bit. “Yeah,” he gets out at last, “sorry. Think my head is still stuck in the Belgium file.” André nods down at his coffee, so he picks it up and buys himself another few seconds while he takes a cautious first sip. “It’s… I still can’t quite wrap my head around how different my life is, from six weeks ago? But it’s a good different, you know?”

“It’s addicting,” André confesses quietly. “It changes you. Long hours and late nights and bitter partisan feuds be damned… hard to imagine doing anything else.”

“I’ve wanted to go to New York for ages,” Alexander admits. “Columbia. Found myself wondering more and more in recent weeks if I should start looking down here, too. There’s just…” he struggles to articulate. “Being here. Where it’s happening.”

“We are of a mind, then,” André taps his cup against Alexander’s. “Having been an Ivy man myself, Columbia sounds an excellent fit, and I can’t imagine you’d much struggle to get in and get by. But the opportunities in D.C. for students are undeniable and invaluable.”

That’s logic he can’t really argue with when he’s curled up in the Library of Congress doing his homework later that night. It’s a calculus night – he needs the absolutism of it. The unambiguous nature of mathematics. He hardly needs the library for that, has yet to actually make much use of the reading rooms, but it’s after normal business hours and so it’s quiet, only the occasional staff person passing through.

Of course, he undermines everything comforting about his hiding spot by choosing the one space Conway sometimes utilizes too, and he’s not really sure if he’s done it on purpose until he hears the slow footsteps exit the elevator and halt on the edge of the threshold into the small reading nook where he’s got the text propped in his lap, sitting criss-cross in the armchair, jotting down equations furiously in his notebook that’s balanced on the arm of the seat.

The steps continue on after a pause that might last ten seconds or two minutes, for all of Alexander’s determination not to focus on it, and it’s not until he hears the man settling himself into the neighboring chair that, still writing, he murmurs, “Please don’t apologize again.”

“Okay.”

It’s quiet for a few minutes while Alexander finishes the section he’s working on. He hates falling out of his groove, so close to being finished and with forty-five minutes until he has to head back to Webster, but the silent senator sitting at his left is making him twitchy, so he slams his book closed and sighs. “Was there something you wanted, or…?”
Conway isn’t looking at him when he finally forces his gaze over. He looks down at his fidgeting hands, and then out the window overlooking Second Street, five stories below, and says lowly, “Should I be worried?”

“About…?”

“About whether I should be drafting my resignation letter,” he says drily.

Alexander chokes on air and coughs. “What?” he demands, and then turns his head and glances back towards the elevators, checking that they’re alone. “What the hell?” he hisses. “You think I’m so spiteful that I’d goad you into kissing me and then go shout about it to the world when you kick me out of the room?”

Conway looks a bit reluctantly amused at that, which mostly serves to heighten Alexander’s indignation. “Is that how you see it? You goaded me?”

“I mean… yeah, kinda? You told me I should go, and I wouldn’t drop it, and - ”

“And I still put my hands on you,” Conway finishes for him, and Alexander can feel his face go red. “Knowing it was indefensible, unethical…”

“Was it illegal?” Alexander cuts him off. The senator regards him a moment a bit strangely, and shakes his head. Alexander shrugs. “Then nobody needs to know.”

“That simple?”

“That simple.”

Conway nods slowly, appreciative, and looks like he’s trying to tamp down on the curiosity but can’t help but ask, “Where were you today, then?”

And then Alexander gets it. He’d been so keen to avoid seeing Conway that it never occurred how his absence must look in turn to the senator. Then paired with seeing him with one of Jefferson’s senior staffers in the afternoon… “I ran into Mister André on my way in, he asked for some help in one of the conference rooms downstairs. Ended up taking all day.”

He still looks worried, a bit perturbed, but he nods and drops it, pivoting to the inevitable, “I know you don’t want to hear it, but… I am sorry.” Alexander ducks his head against the flushed embarrassment. “You’re an extraordinary kid, and the last thing you need in this environment is the distraction of - ”

“Don’t get patronizing,” Alexander bristles, staring unseeing down at the cover of his textbook. “We’re high schoolers – we’re preoccupied with sex. Whether at home or working twelve hour days on Capitol Hill.”

“Which is all the more reason not to take advantage of your preoccupation.”

It’s a gentle enough way to call him on his bullshit, Alexander supposes – he can’t tout the line about his mind being older in one breath and then blame teenage hormones in the next, and what the hell is he even doing?

Except even that answer comes quickly enough – he’s smarting over his wounded pride. He can still recall Reverend Knox’s chiding voice in those months after his mother, after Peter, after James, and his determined stoicism against the repeated upending of his universe. Your mind could get you anywhere if your pride doesn’t sabotage you into an early grave.
So he swallows it down and forces himself to meet the senator’s eyes when he says, “Thank you, for coming to… address the issue directly. If your concerns are satisfied, I don’t think we need to discuss it again.”

“Are your concerns satisfied?”

He opens his mouth to say he has none, that Conway is the one who hunted him down here, but then he hesitates and haltingly asks, “You’re not married, are you? You don’t wear a ring.”

“No.”

“Girlfriend?” He shakes his head. “Boyfriend?”

Conway chuckles. “Not since grad school.”

And boy does it sound like there’s a story there, because Alexander would bet all the money in his pockets (which, in fairness, is something like twenty two dollars, but) that the voters of the great state of New Jersey aren’t aware that they’ve elected a senator who isn’t quite straight, but he also feels very firmly that it’s none of their business and not particularly any of his own, current awkwardness aside, so he does not ask.

So he just repeats instead, “Nobody needs to know.”

Which does little to assuage the sudden clench of fear coiling cold in his gut when Lee finds him a week later in the common room after classes and tells him in his ever-grousing tone, “Hamilton, they want you up on the Hill. Senate room one-oh-nine.”

He stares blankly for a few moments, frozen. It’s Friday, their free day, most of his peers are still downstairs doing language lessons or working in the computer lab. Abe glances over with mild interest but returns to his Latin text. Maria and Iris don’t even spare a look, huddled in the corner over their physics homework.

“Who wants to see me?” he manages at last.

“Jefferson and Washington. Right now.”

Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck. “I… I’m doing laundry, I don’t have my uniform.”

“Just take your ID. C’mon, kid, they haven’t got all day.”

So he fumbles for his things and dashes upstairs, and wonders if this isn’t going to also be his last day on the Hill.

Chapter End Notes

I am SO CLOSE to being done writing this monstrosity. Next week we shall progress to a MWF update schedule, because I really am very impatient.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Me: while fun, the driving plot situation of this chapter might just strain the suspension of disbelief too far.

Also me: ::reminds self I'm writing about founding fathers transplanted into 2018::

Finally me: Okay, so we're doing this.

They’re far enough into the term that he’s recognized and able to slip through security with ease, despite being out of the usual distinctive page uniform. He’s panting and sweaty though by the time he makes it to the first floor of the Capitol, and he fidgets against the urge to roll up the sleeves of his light sweater, worries the cuffs around his fingers instead.

He turns a corner and heads towards the indicated room, mind racing and heart beating just about as fast. There’s a pair chatting outside the room – he doesn’t recognize either of them, a middle-aged man and short, frail old woman, but the man has a congressional lapel pin. He turns his attention, frowning, towards the nervously-approaching teenager just as Alexander realizes where he is.

Because Senate room 109 is one of the large conference rooms in the Capitol, often used for committee meetings and the like. Except it’s more commonly known as the Hale Room, by those who already know where it is, and he flashes back to the Thursday prior, pouring over lists and spreadsheets with John André.

“Huh,” he muses, and reaches for the doorknob. A hand darts out and stops the door from opening, and he looks up in surprise at the congressman.

“Did you get lost from a tour or something, kid?”

He scowls reflexively, much as he realizes some random congressman has no particular reason to recognize one of the senate’s pages, much less one out of uniform. “I, uh – was asked to come see Senators Jefferson and Washington,” he digs in his pocket for his ID badge.

The man peers at it, distrustingly, and Alexander fights from rolling his eyes. “You’re out of uniform.” Loses the fight, but the congressman is turned away to open the door. “Senator Washington,” he sticks his head inside, “you have an errant page out here to -”

“Ah!” Jefferson comes flouncing to the door instead, grabs Alexander by the arm, and pulls him inside. “Monsieur Hamilton, viens ici, viens ici.”

“I – what?”

The room is almost empty, but it’s clearly set up for the impending meeting. A tray of scones and danishes, a pitcher of water, and a carafe of coffee are in the middle of the conference table, little plates and mugs set in front of each chair, along with a briefing book.

“Did we screw something up?” he finds himself asking, and then flushes when he hears chuckling from the corner of the room and whips around to find Washington watching with a sort of resigned
Jefferson just frowns. “Why are you always so convinced you’re in trouble?” Pause. “Don’t answer that.” He pulls his attention away from the table and back to Jefferson, and finally pays attention to the two men Jefferson’s led him over towards.

And he stares.

“Alexander Hamilton, if I may present Chancellor von Steuben.” He starts and takes the proffered hand, stiff with shock. “And his aide, Pierre DuPonceau.”


Von Steuben is a big man – probably around Washington’s age, somewhere in his fifties, he’s tall and a bit portly, and has a shrewd face and stern eyes that Alexander recognizes from seeing the man in the media. In person though, there’s an underlying mischief that comes out in his expression, in his voice, as he clasps both of Alexander’s hands and leans in, speaking in rapid-fire German of which he can’t understand a lick.

The spiel ends with a wink that is undeniably flirtatious. Alexander blinks; Jefferson coughs. DuPonceau rolls his eyes a bit and says blandly, “’Ee says ‘allo.”

“I… think he said a little more than that…” Alexander glances between them, unsure, but then Jefferson is pulling him a few paces away.

“We’re having a bit of an interpreter problem.”

He waits for more of an explanation; gets none. “Um. I don’t speak German?”

“And Monsieur DuPonceau doesn’t particularly speak English.”

“He – hold on,” he glances over at the pair, now conversing in low tones. “The chancellor speaks German. And his aide speaks German and French?”

“And you speak French and English.”

“That’s insane.”

Washington wanders over and offers a more comprehensible explanation than Jefferson has yet managed. “Chancellor von Steuben’s interpreter came down with food poisoning last night, some bad sushi apparently.”

Alexander winces. “Did he go to the place in Foggy Bottom? Everyone knows the best sushi is in Foggy Bottom.”

Jefferson cackles. Washington runs a weary hand down his face and shakes his head. “I will be sure to pass that on to State for future orientation materials.”

“When you do, you should ask them for someone who speaks German,” Alexander suggests, and then snaps his mouth closed at the realization that his ratio of people he probably shouldn’t piss off is unusually high in this room and the smartass level should probably be adjusted accordingly.

Washington takes it in stride, save a brief quirk of a brow. “As it happens, I did. And as you might imagine, the unusual number of foreign delegations in town has strained certain departmental resources. A lot of people went home early ahead of the state dinner at the White House tonight, and
a lot more are already at the White House assisting with preparations. They’re working on getting someone here, but our sit-down is due to start in ten minutes and Senator Jefferson suggested a rather, ah…” he glances skeptically at his colleague, “unorthodox solution than simply letting our guests sit, ignored, while we wait.” And then he rushes to add, “You are of course more than free to decline.”

“What? No, this is awesome. Ridiculous, and awesome. But, uh…” he glances up at Jefferson. “Why can’t you play trilingual telephone with the chancellor, sir?”

“Because Vice President Middleton apparently said something offensive about cheese or baguettes or something recently, and I have to go hold President Rochambeau’s hand in the Trumbull Room.”

Washington looks like he wants to melt into the floor; Alexander shakes his head, nonplussed. “And Mister André thought I was going to start an incident?”

Washington watches, bemused, as Jefferson takes Alexander for a more involved introduction. The conference table begins to fill in, Congressmen Van Ness and Muhlenberg, Senators Izard and Wingate, some aides taking up chairs along the perimeter of the room. Von Steuben takes up the designated seat in the middle of the opposite side of the table, and then his aide at his right and Alexander to the aide’s other side. Jefferson hovers another moment to converse with DuPonceau, exchanges a brief farewell with the chancellor, and then murmurs some quick last instructions in the page’s ear, but Alexander is already immersed in conversation with the young Frenchman at his side.

“Oh good,” a new voice breaks in from the doorway, “we’re not started yet.”

He turns and clasps Senator Conway’s hand in a quick greeting. “Nearly there. Our interpreters are, ah… getting to know one another.”

“What in God’s name is happening?”

Jefferson returns in that moment and claps his hands together, looking fairly satisfied and pleased with himself. “Okay. I think we’re fine. Hamilton’s Caribbean French might have a few vernacular differences, but he’s smart enough to figure it out, and if my piecemeal German I picked up two decades ago is serving me well, von Steuben is too busy flirting with him to much notice either way.”

“Thomas!” he splutters, hears Conway cough around his sudden alarm.

Jefferson waves it off. “You know what von Steuben’s like. He’s harmless, it’s fine. DuPonceau isn’t relaying those bits.”

“Maybe we should just wait on State.”

Jefferson bites back a sigh and watches as Hamilton goes off on an animated tangent, practically bouncing in his seat with excitement, leaning over an annoyed DuPonceau to talk directly to von Steuben, even as the chancellor has one ear tilted to catch the running translation. “The first fifteen minutes are just going to be the bullshit introductions and greetings, let him have his moment. Have you had the chance to actually talk to the kid, yet? He’s in his element.”

“No really. Though I did catch the tail end of a rant about the irresponsibility of runaway defense spending.” Conway snorts, still watching the scene across the table. Washington sighs and adds, a bit wistful, “He reminds me a bit of Patsy.”
“Patsy knew how to be opinionated without being obnoxious,” Jefferson retorts drily, clasping the older man on the shoulder briefly before heading to the door. “Let him do his thing; what’s the worst that could happen?”

It takes about half an hour to answer that question.

“Wait, really?” Alexander looks up at Congressman Van Ness, pen poised over the notepad he’s commandeered from Washington’s man, Tilghman. “That’s what you’re opening with, really?”

“Excuse me?”

“None of what you just said has anything to do with Germany.”

Van Ness stares like he’s grown an extra head, and then glances around the room as if waiting for someone to intervene. Alexander watches Washington close his eyes and prop his head in his hand, looking like he regrets every decision he’s made so far today, and quickly averts his eyes from where Conway looks like he’s trying not to burst into laughter.

No one speaks up though, so Van Ness asks sarcastically, “The export of German cars and car parts has nothing to do with Germany?”

“Well… no, not really, once you’re talking trade policy. You’d have to speak with the European Trade Commission.”

“But I’m not talking about the rest of the EU, I’m just talking about Germany.”

Alexander opens and closes his mouth a couple of times, flummoxed. “I… Congressman, that’s… not how this works. That’s not how any of this works.”

Washington clears his throat. “Mister Hamilton, if you wouldn’t mind just… doing the task for which you were asked here?”

He shrugs and spouts off Van Ness’s question, glancing at his notes a couple of times for the specific figures he’d raised. DuPonceau gives him a nonplussed look, but repeats the question in German and then turns back to Alexander with a matter-of-fact, “On doit parler avec la Commission Européenne.”

Biting the inside of his cheek to force a straight face, Alexander blandly repeats in English, “You’d have to talk to the European Commission.”

Van Ness looks like he’s contemplating strangling him. Conway smacks a hand across his mouth to contain the bark of laughter, and Washington barely spares him a reproving glance.

So it’s probably for the best when the flustered man from the State Department comes falling into the room about ten minutes later. “Oh, thank God,” Washington mutters.

“Hey,” Alexander objects, and then presses his lips together as the senator turns a quelling stare on him.

The newcomer introduces himself first to the chancellor in German, and then addresses the rest of the table and particularly Washington, as the ranking U.S. official. “Benjamin Walker, at your service. Apologies for the delay.”

“No apologies necessary,” Washington nods to him. “Unpredictable circumstances for poor Mister
North. It was brought to my attention, however,” he gestures across the table, “that we have a francophone page this term, so we’ve been making do, with Mister DuPonceau serving as intermediary.”

Walker’s brow furrows, and he looks back and finally seems to take in the scene before him, eyes raking over Alexander’s face and taking in his informal garb, alongside all the suits and ties in the room. “Good gracious,” he breathes, “there’s protocol to these things! Who did you say authorized this… this child to be in the room? You don’t need to relay this part!” he orders shirilly, and Alexander sits back upright from where he had been leaning across to murmur to DuPonceau and von Steuben.


“And I still say it was inappropriate for them to discuss much beyond the weather in Berlin!”

“We didn’t talk about anything important,” Alexander promises, climbing to his feet so he can yield his chair. “Adding some countries to NATO… tweaking the wording in Article 5, no biggies.”

Walker’s eyes look like they’re about to pop out of his head, and Alexander grabs his coffee cup and notepad and scurries around the table and out of the man’s way. There’s a single free seat left on the end next to Conway because they’re seated down the table by seniority and of course it is, and Alexander settles himself down in it. The rest of the room collectively eyes him, save Washington who is staring at the ceiling, silently pleading with a higher power for patience. “What?” he asks.

“Go away!” Walker snaps, “You shouldn’t even be in…” He trails off as von Steuben starts talking, listening attentively, and then repeats dutifully, “The chancellor would like to extend his heartfelt gratitude towards the charming boy with the lovely smile and such disarming eyes, and wonders if he might be permitted to attend tonight’s din-”

“Mister Walker!” Washington barks, “Can you please convey to the chancellor that addressing any of the Capitol staff in such a manner, much less the student pages, is quite inappropriate.” Though from the way DuPonceau is looking briefly panicked and is hissing at his boss, it seems to be covered.

“I’m charming,” Alexander protests, and then from the corner of his eye catches the way Conway’s hand flexes involuntarily where it’s pressed against his leg under the table.

“You,” Washington levels a stern finger across the table, “will be silent. And no,” he preempts the question on his lips, “you will not be attending tonight’s dinner.”

Contrary to popular belief, he actually does know when to quit, sometimes, and he mumbles a contrite, “Yes, sir.”

Von Steuben catches his eye and offers an apologetic smile, and he feels himself blush and ducks his head to hide the color rising in his cheeks. Conway pulls the pad on which he’s been jotting notes through the meeting off the table, props it against the edge so it’s angled slightly towards Alexander, and writes BRAT, underlines it twice, and then casually scribbles it out, illegible.

Two weeks ago, he’d have grinned cheekily, and probably sent a smart-assed email later in the night about the absurdity of the day’s events. Now, after the events of the week prior, he doesn’t know what to make of it, and he fidgets in his seat, hot and flustered and trying not to show it and wishing he’d just left. If he does now, it’ll just make more of a scene.
The remaining hour passes without incident. Von Steuben doesn’t let him leave without a last
gushing litany of incomprehensible praise, which ends with something along the lines of, “Tschau au
francais!” and a surprisingly appropriate peck on each cheek.

“’Ee says goodbye,” DuPonceau translates unnecessarily, and then herds the chancellor to safer
pastures.

Alexander goes to collect his things from the end of the table; picks up the legal pad where he’d been
jotting down the names of the congressmen present he doesn’t know, the occasional reminder of
specific facts and figures as someone was speaking while he waited to repeat in English or French.
And amidst the random jumble of his disorganized thoughts, he almost misses where a single word
has been jotted down and circled in the middle of the page, between his notes on Van Ness’s
ridiculous trade question and his hastily-drawn shorthand chart of the three people sitting directly to
his right.

_Downstairs._

He forcibly keeps his expression neutral, eyes focused down at the table as he tears off the page and
folds it up, slips it into the back pocket of his jeans. Mind working overtime, behind what he hopes is
a calm veneer, he scans the room for Tilghman, to return the notepad, and considers.

He’s not an idiot – he knows where this is heading – _if_ he follows the simple direction he’s been
given and goes down to the tiny office to wait.

He could feign obliviousness – didn’t see the innocuous word added to the page. Could simply
refuse, knows the senator won’t hold that against him, return to the forced casualness of the last week
where they smile and nod in acknowledgement and share none of the email correspondence, no more
trips down to the basement to commandeer the private space.

Washington claps him once on the shoulder as he exchanges a quick word with Tilghman, and
there’s another wrench of nerves working their way up his throat. On the heels of the senator’s sharp
words to the chancellor, to go and brazenly flout the basic standards of decorum for his station, and
Conway’s…

And at that, he finally catches Conway’s gaze, standing near the door, staring at Alexander with
dark, discerning eyes over the shoulder of the elderly woman who’s talking to him and Congressman
Muhlenberg, who seems to be paying somewhat better attention to her words.

“…you alright?”

He starts and refocuses on Tilghman. “Hm? What?”

“Are you alright?” he repeats.

“Yeah! Sorry, yeah, just… wow. Not every day you get to…” he gestures vaguely around the room.
“Well – I guess for you it is a bit everyday probably, but.”

“The novelty does wear off a bit,” Tilghman admits. “But glad you got to experience it. Thanks for
coming up here – and uh,” his brow furrows a bit, “sorry if that got… weird.”

“It’s fine,” Alexander rushes to assure him.

“Von Steuben has always been a bit, ah… ostentatious.”

_Oh God._ “It’s okay, really.”
“Honestly, he’s so used to his interpreter filtering for him, I think it’s become something of a game.” Alexander smiles tightly and wonders vaguely if there’s any chance of a sinkhole opening up in the next several seconds. “Rumor has it he’s involved with North or DuPonceau – or both – anyway.”

Whether or not that’s true, Tilghman is now clearly messing with him as well, and once he’s recovered enough to regain his wits, he fires back, “Or perhaps he’s simply getting his own form of sweet vengeance for the time Senator Adams and his wife caused an incident when they snuck off during a state dinner to -”

Tilghman claps a hand over his mouth to cut him off, all levity dropping like a stone from his face, and hisses, “Jesus Christ, who told you that?”

Alexander smiles broadly, ducks away from the hand at his face, and winks. “Page secrets.” And grin plastered from ear-to-ear, he heads for the door, putting him straight in Conway’s path. “Senator,” he acknowledges, and pushes out into the hallway without a backwards glance.

x---x

Less than a quarter hour passes before Alexander hears footsteps approaching the closed door. He tenses, where he’s sitting on the sofa, anxiously kneading the denim of his jeans just above his knees – there’s no explaining this away, if it’s not the senator, if he’s not alone… not really. Out of uniform, not even supposed to technically be on the Hill today, he’s got no homework to pretend to work on, like he’s just taking advantage of a bit of preferential treatment, sitting down here alone in a senator’s private, secret office…

The door knob turns and he swallows thickly, climbs to his feet, hesitant, watchful, waiting. Conway walks in, eyes sweeping the small space, eyes him up and down and he can see a muscle twitch in the senator’s jaw, like he’s angry almost, and then he turns around.

And locks the door.

There’s a brief moment where he pauses, facing the door, gathering thoughts or steeling courage or something that maybe Alexander could better read if he could see the man’s face. And then, still facing the door, he asks lowly, voice almost ragged, “Did anyone see you come down here?”

“No.”

“Is anyone expecting you back at the dorm?”

They’ll be wondering where he is, but… “No,” he whispers, eyes fixed down at the floor, and then snaps his gaze up when Conway turns abruptly, and he’s on Alexander before he can say a word, hands cupped around his face, ravaging his mouth as he backs him up against the desk, and all he can do is cling reflexively to the senator’s arms as he’s manhandled across the small space.

“I want you,” Conway mutters into his ear, then trails his lips down his neck while Alexander is still trying to catch his breath and catch up to this abrupt turnabout. “God help me, but I do, you… mischievous, intelligent, sassy thing.” The hands fall away from Alexander’s face and land instead on his hips, and he’s being hoisted up to sit on the desk. A noise escapes him, somewhere between a surprised squeal and a gasp, and he’d probably be embarrassed if he had the time to consider it before the senator’s gripping his chin and kissing him firm on the mouth. “However,” he grumbles as he pulls away, pressing his hands down flat on the desk on either side of Alexander’s thighs, boxing him in, “do you manage to find yourself in such predicaments?”
“It’s a skill,” he admits in a gasp. “Wait – which predicament? Getting dragged into a job well above my paygrade, or getting hit on by the German Chancellor?”

“The former,” Conway replies, dry, “von Steuben has never been particularly shy about his proclivities.”

And there’s something unsaid there, something in this newfound urgency, this sudden… possessiveness, the dark set of the man’s eyes as he’d watched him upstairs, and he realizes with a startled laugh…

“You’re jealous.”

He surprises him by acknowledging it with a simple, “Yes.” Runs a hand carefully down the side of Alexander’s face, ghosts it across his shoulder, along the nape of his neck, making him shiver. “Also shockingly, embarrassingly smitten with the way you can run circles around most anyone you meet, and what an absolute brat you can be about it at the same time.”

Alexander shifts uncomfortably on the hard surface of the desk and then slips off, eyes averted from the senator’s piercing gaze. “I wasn’t… after everything last week, I wasn’t trying to – I didn’t even realize you were in the room until we’d already started introductions.”

“I know.” A hand tilts his chin up and he raises his eyes to meet Conway’s, who probably has a good four or five inches on him. “But you weren’t wrong – you are charming. Adaptable. Responsive,” he leans in slightly to murmur against his ear as his hands drop down to Alexander’s waist, “to those around you.”

“I, uh,” he sucks in a sharp breath as fingertips slip under the hem of his sweater, tease along the bare skin of his stomach, “I’ve never been accused of being a people-pleaser before.”

Conway chuckles and ceases his random explorations. “Of course not,” he retreats a couple paces and then turns to sit on the couch, “your response is far too often to antagonize.” And yeah, he can’t really argue with that point. “But when presented with a challenge… a room full of people who might impress or intimidate you – you’ll rise to the occasion.”

“And antagonize just a little bit.”

“The man from State was something of a dick, I concede.”

He meets Conway’s teasing eyes, something curious and assessing behind them as he watches Alexander shuffle awkwardly where he’s still pressed against the side of the desk. “And uh… what happens now?”

A half grin quirks his lips and he props his elbows on his knees and leans forward. “That’s up to you. You’ve gone a bit cornered rabbit on me.” Alexander starts upright, surprised. “What do you want?”

Biting his lip, he doggedly challenges, “To know if you’re going to freak out and kick me out again, I suppose.”

Conway frowns up at him, lips pursed. “This is not a game, Alexander, and if you think my job isn’t one of many considerations in this whole affair, you’re more naïve than I would have thought.”

And that… actually relaxes something in him, the straightforward, stark establishment of priorities. “I don’t much want to be that kid who dallied with a senator either,” he confesses wryly, “I get it.”
“Oh?” said senator grins. “Is that what we’re calling this then? A dalliance?”

“It has a certain Elizabethan flair, you have to admit.”

“Hm,” his eyes go dark as Alexander crosses the small distance between the desk and the couch to stand in front of him, lets his hands drift up to settle on his hips. “I was thinking more Austen, but you’d likely know better than me.”

“Stop talking,” Alexander whispers and, figuring he may as well fully commit to this folly, climbs up to straddle the older man’s lap. “Can I…? Is this…?”

“This is perfect,” the hands tighten at his hips and he leans in to capture Conway’s lips in a decidedly more measured kiss than those they’ve yet shared. His heart is stuttering along far too quickly and he can no longer differentiate the nerves in his stomach, climbing his throat, fear of being caught and a stark awareness of the fundamental wrongness of this and the simple teenage excitement of anything physical and – “You have five minutes.”

He squawks indignantly. “What?”

Conway twists his arm around so he can peer at his watch over the top of Alexander’s head. “Sorry, make that three minutes.” He laughs at Alexander’s outrage. “Some of us still have work today, you selfish thing.”

Right. Foreign delegations and state dinners and flamboyant German leaders and, Christ, he really should get back to Webster. “How, uh… how does this work, then?”

“Carefully?” Conway suggests blandly, letting his hands again slide under the hem of Alexander’s sweater to rest on the flushed skin of his lower back. “When nobody sees you and you won’t be missed.”

“And if by some lucky happenstance that aligns with your schedule, we can sit down here and make out a bit?”

“That’s right.”

There’s an obvious follow-up he doesn’t ask, for the sake of time and the sheer level of awkward he doesn’t much feel like delving into at present. “Okay.”

“Okay.” Conway leans forward and captures his lips in one more firm kiss, and then hoists Alexander off his lap and back down onto the floor. “Away with you now, before I change my mind and whisk you back to New Jersey with me for the weekend.”

“Aw, I have to be in my own bed at eleven, think someone would notice.”

Or maybe they’ll skip the awkward follow-up in favor of vague innuendo.

He straightens his shirt and reties his hair back, and leaves without much else said. There’s not a lot else to say.

And that’s how it starts.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

In which Alexander just sort of realizes he has no idea what he's even doing with his life.

Chapter Notes

::points vaguely at the dubcon tag through the next few chapters, but particularly for ch 17::

It takes until the end of the next week for Conway to ask the question Alexander has been privately dreading, and it’s made almost worse by the innocuous, almost innocent setting in which is happens. Alexander is reading a book of Hemingway short stories and chewing on a granola bar during their lunch break, stretched out on the couch in the tiny office downstairs. When the senator walked in five minutes after him, he’d simply moved his feet, sat down, propped them in his lap, and then let Alexander continue reading in silence while he tapped about on his phone with one hand and absently rubbed at his ankles with the other.

“Don’t ask me that,” Alexander murmurs, turning a page in his book.

Conway’s hand stills and he puts the phone down on the arm of the sofa. “I’m sorry,” he turns a perplexed look on the teenager propped opposite him, “what?”

“It’s none of your business.”

“I -” He spreads his hands, a bit flummoxed, and haltingly says, “I’m not asking for names and dates, you realize.”

"And I’m saying,” he finally closes the book and meets the senator’s eyes, level, “that if you can’t trust me to draw the line when I need to, what the hell are we even doing here?”

“That’s, uh… one way to look at it…”

Alexander rolls his eyes. “It’s really the only way to look at it. Past experiences don’t grant consent for future ones, nor does a lack thereof discount it.” Now Conway’s just starting to look frustrated. “What are they teaching kids these days? Affirmative consent?”

“Ohh,” Conway nods indulgently, “okay. Alexander,” he says lowly, very seriously, “I’m going to put my hands on your feet – is that okay?”

“A lovely girl named Betty-Jane Johnson once touched my feet, so I guess I’m comfortable with that.”

A snort of laughter escapes the older man and he shoves Alexander’s feet out of his lap. “You can be such a little shit.” He shifts sideways in his seat and then grabs Alexander under his knees and drags
him into the middle of the couch so his head is flat on the cushions. He squeaks, affronted, but just watches otherwise silent while Conway leans over him, one arm braced above his head and the other propped on the back of the couch, and captures his mouth in a deep, slow kiss. “And, ah,” he mouths a line across his jaw, down to his collar and back up to his ear, “you’re not going to tell me if anyone’s ever kissed you like this before?”

“Mm, no,” Alexander mutters, face turned and half-pressed into the back of the couch, hands working to further loosen his tie until Conway sits up slightly, swats them out of the way, and does it for him. “But I’ll tell you that you can.”

“Hm.” He leaves the knot in place but loosens it enough to pop open the top button on Alexander’s white dress shirt – the navy blazer is draped over the back of the desk chair. “And what about,” he opens another two buttons and strokes his thumbs along his bared collarbones, watching him shudder and press his face further into the cushions, “like this?”

“You can do that, too,” he manages.

“Hm,” Conway murmurs thoughtfully, brushing some stray hairs that have worked loose from his messy bun out of his face. Alexander turns into the hand and opens his eyes, peers up at him under hooded lids, looking lazy and content. “You’re really quite beautiful.” The haze clears a bit from his eyes, and he scowls. “Even now, despite looking like something of a disgruntled, spoiled cat.”

“I will nap in a sunbeam with the best of them.”

“Be honest now, do you ever wind down enough midday to even take a nap?”

“Nope,” he pops the P at the end of the word. “No good windows in Webster though, not enough natural light. No good napping sunspots.”

All the while, Conway is just sort of… exploring. Running light fingertips across his cheekbones, stroking over the sensitive spot under his ears, skimming over the exposed skin at the base of his throat, until he runs both hands down Alexander’s sides and feels the muscles twitch even through the material of his shirt. “Ticklish?”

“I will fucking scream, I swear to -”

He cuts himself off abruptly when the hands settle at the waist of his pants, absently toying with the button there. “Well, we certainly can’t have that.”

“Ahh…”

“And you’re not going to tell me,” the senator braces his hands on Alexander’s hips and leans down one more time to kiss him, hard, before returning to this teasing exploration, hands running lightly down each leg to the knee and back again, and then migrating back to the front of his pants and pressing a palm gently against him, half-hard, overtop the zipper, “if Betty-Jane Johnson ever touched you like this?”

Alexander whips his head back and forth best he can, splayed on the couch as he is, half-trapped under the man’s weight. “She, ah…” he clears his throat, “she drew the line at the feet.”

“Kinky girl.”

“Now Mary-Sue McSweeney, on the other hand…”

“My god,” Conway’s eyes crinkle with amusement, and he settles his hands higher, up on his waist,
thumbs stroking absentally across his hipbones instead. “By the time we get to Debbie-Ann Anderson, you’ll be positively debauched.”

“Nah, she was a prude.”

He snorts again and shakes his head, and then takes Alexander by both hands and urges him upright. “Come here, you horrible boy.”

It takes a bit of shuffling, as his feet are mostly trapped under Conway’s weight, but he manages to pull himself to sitting and then onto his knees, swinging one leg over and settling himself in the other man’s lap, facing the senator. He leans down and presses his face into his neck, just above the collar of his blue shirt, and murmurs, “You can, you know.”

“Mm, don’t tempt me.”

“Isn’t that the whole point of my be -?”

“Not today,” he amends softly, and then sets about fixing the tie he’d pulled out from under Alexander’s collar. “You should get yourself sorted and head upstairs. Get something to eat, it might be a bit of a late night.”

“Oh yeah?” Alexander perks up, interested.

He gets a tap to the nose for his trouble. “Not that late. The usual Thursday push ahead of people trying to scheme their way out to catch flights on Friday afternoon.”

Which means working through lunch, if they’re still in session; which means no illicit hideaway rendezvous tomorrow. Even if there is a normal break, coming down here two days in a row seems like a bad habit to get into, in the name of discretion. “Next week, then.”

“Next week.” Conway straightens his collar, tugs the tie once more back to center, and taps his hip. “Up with you.”

Alexander climbs to his feet and circles the desk to grab his blazer from the chair. The senator just sits and watches him while he checks all his pins are in place and straight, and then collects his schoolbag from the desk. He pauses at the door, glances over with affected innocence, and says, “I’ll see you on the floor, sir.”

Conway blinks once. “Ohh, that’s…weird.”

He grins broadly and ducks out of the room.

x---x

He runs into Hercules, Robert, and Abe in the Dirksen cafeteria and plops his tray down at their table sans invitation. They take a moment to collectively stare at his balanced meal of coffee and frozen yogurt, and seem to accept in tandem that it’s just to be expected at this point. Hercules stuffs his last bite of a cheeseburger into his mouth and mumbles around it, “Wher’yoo’bin?”

“Fucking Hemingway,” he says by way of explanation, and Robert and Abe groan in commiseration.

Hercules, on the other hand, crinkles his nose and says, “Ew, man, kinky – he’s old.”

“He’s dead,” Robert corrects drily, and Alexander just sighs and hides his face behind his coffee
They resume whatever conversation Alexander interrupted, and he largely spaces out. Something about the upcoming spring recess, their midterm exams, another getaway trip planned for the pages as a brief reprieve between quarters.

He can’t really bring himself to focus on the details, caught up instead in the realization that they’re rapidly approaching the halfway point of their time here. Nearly two months already, since they arrived.

Abe gestures vaguely towards the registers and asks, “What do you think?” Alexander turns and looks, sees John and Eliza conversing in low tones, heads bowed together, waiting their turn to pay for their pre-made sandwiches, looking like they’re in a hurry. “Lines in the pagecest sands being drawn?”

“What the hell does that even mean?” Robert frowns.

“Pagecest. The ill-advised, doomed-to-fail romantic entanglements forming among our brethren.”

“Oh.” Robert intones dully, turning back to his drink, “so like, you and Anna making eyes at each other all the goddamn time.”

Abe goes abruptly pink and opts to elaborate no further.

Hercules gives Alexander a knowing look that sets him on edge. “What?”

“I dunno, man – you think John and Eliza are going to form that political-power-couple we talked about in Philly?”

Oh. Because Hercules and Aaron had the best front row seats to the odd not-quite-falling-out between him and John, and Aaron determinedly doesn’t get involved, which just leaves Hercules to whatever assumption and speculation he might have drawn in the last few weeks. He wonders if John might have told Hercules at some point that he’s gay, or about his father, but it seems unlikely.

But then he wonders if he ever told Eliza. Which could kind of explain the two of them banding together a bit more as John and Alexander have drifted apart, but as they stop by to say hello on their way to whatever project has them grabbing food to go during their long lunch break, he can’t stop the juxtaposition from flashing through his brain – the sweet, chaste kiss with John, and the lingering sensation of Conway’s hands all over him barely fifteen minutes earlier.

He murmurs a quiet, “Hey,” around his coffee mug, and can’t bring himself to meet John’s eyes. Anxiety and something akin to guilt curl deep in his stomach and he has to fight back the wave of nausea that threatens to send the coffee straight back. A chill races through him, and he shivers, hunches in his seat and sucks in a deep breath through the nose.

“You okay?” Abe leans across the table and peers at him.

“Fine,” he forces. “Upset stomach.”

Everyone just stares pointedly at his coffee and frozen yogurt, and he forces a laugh.

x---x

Sender: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net

Subject: a GOOD weird?

Or a bad weird? SIR???

(Some people are into that kind of thing, right?)
sent: 21:56 03/15/18

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net

Recipient: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov

Subject: I regret everything right now

[body blank]
sent: 23:27 03/15/18

Sender: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov

Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net

Subject: Oh, come on

What the hell am I supposed to call you? 100% serious right now, you want me to get in the habit of calling you by name in private and then be all HEY, TOMMY on the floor?
sent: 00:12 03/16/18

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net

Recipient: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov

Subject: re: Oh, come on

Somehow, you don’t strike me as the careless type.

My middle name is James, is that an acceptable compromise?
sent: 00:16 03/16/18

Sender: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov

Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net

Subject: ABORT. ABORT.
Nope, sorry. Whole lotta nope on that one.

sent: 00:21 03/16/18

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net
Recipient: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Subject: Oh dear lord
Do I even want to know?

sent: 00:23 03/16/18

Sender: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net
Subject: Respect the daddy issues, dude
[body blank]

sent: 00:24 03/16/18

Sender: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net
Subject: Actually, while I’m thinking about it…
My present guardian is Thomas, so I just can’t win on this front.

sent: 00:25 03/16/18

Sender: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net
Subject: I just made this really weird, didn’t I?
Sorry.

sent: 00:35 03/16/18

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net
Recipient: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Subject: Don’t apologize

I’m just realizing that I don’t really know anything about you. I’d heard mention that you’re an orphan (sorry, if that’s something you prefer kept private?), but it’s so easy to get wrapped up in what a spitfire of an intellect you are, I never really stopped to consider the implications for life back home for you.

sent: 00:51 03/16/18

Sender: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net

Subject: Yeah, we don’t really need to do this

It was a cheap joke (they both were, really) on the absurd misfortunes of my oh-so-tragic life and really just served to reinforce that whole thing were I’m still a “kid” still dealing with questions about legal guardianship and given that whole thing where we weren’t going to do this, and then said to hell with it and did it anyway and…

Yeah I’ll stop talking now.

p.s. you misspelled “Aaron Burr told me you made an ass of yourself to his face your first day here.”

sent: 01:02 03/16/18

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net
Recipient: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov

Subject: I haven’t forgotten in the last week that you’re in high school, promise.

I don’t want you to feel like you can’t talk about things because they might emphasize that you aren’t 18 yet.

sent: 01:09 03/16/18

And that’s when Alexander panics a bit, hands freezing over the keyboard, sitting there in the dark of the basement computer lab at Webster after hours. What was it he’d asked, during the awkward hashing out in the Library of Congress? Was it illegal? Conway said no but, like all of his peers in the program, the senator might well expect he’s already seventeen, and he knows the law isn’t the same in every state and that yes, what they’d done this afternoon would be illegal in Saint Croix.

Cringing, he opens a new tab on the browser, verifies that the age of consent in D.C. is, in fact, sixteen, and then hastily deletes the search history. He doesn’t respond any further, and closes up the civics essay he’d been working on before getting caught up in the quick back-and-forth of the emails; knows that now he’s going to lie awake wondering if it’s worth finding the least awkward way possible to point out that he’s probably a year younger than Conway thinks when it doesn’t technically matter from a legal standpoint, if he’s sixteen or seventeen.
And he stares up at the ceiling of the dorm wondering how this is his life, that he’s wasting brain power on justifying things as not technically illegal and lying awake at night, staring down less than four hours of sleep, fretting over his relationship, for lack of a better word, with a goddamn United States senator who’s twenty years his senior.

_Just email him_, he tells himself, _email him and tell him this is more stress than you bargained for._ _Stop going down to his hideaway office. Just don’t engage, and he’ll leave it be._

Except that was the choice he’d faced a week ago, and found himself unable to follow through on what he can hardly deny is the right thing, the proper thing, because there is something dark and dangerous and irresistible in it, but more than that…

It’s an escape. It’s something private, in this cramped world with the thirty of them living on top of each other. It’s… good, when it’s not fundamentally stressing him out, and he’s not oblivious enough to his own shortcomings to fail to realize that there’s a simple ego-stroking element to the notion that this man would risk everything for him, this upstart orphan who shouldn’t even really be there in the first place.

---

The workday passes on Friday, uneventful. They’re all cut loose at two, and John comes to find him as he’s gathering his things in the cloakroom. “A bunch of us are going to that pizza place on Independence.”

“Is that the one with the inexplicable cowboy theme?”

“No, it’s the one with the action-claw machine that gives you an extra turn if you bang on it just right.”

“Oh, score,” he slings his bag over his shoulder, “I’m in.”

“You gonna win me a Spiderman that’s been stuck at the bottom for the last twelve years?”

He grins. “Only the best for you, John Laurens – it’ll be the Pikachu that’s been in there since 1997.”

They head out towards the lobby, where a gathering of the usual characters is waiting. Eliza and Hercules, Abe, Caleb, Ben, and Robert, Anna (who is not presently making eyes at Abe), Abigail, Maria, and Iris. Even Aaron decides to tag along, and they walk together as a big group, all still in uniform, laughing and chattering and taking up the whole sidewalk for the several block stroll.

John tucks himself in at Alexander’s side and asks, “You okay?” Alexander looks over at him, surprised, and he smiles and shrugs. “Haven’t heard you argue with Seabury in like, three days.”

“Saving up my energy for midterms,” he replies lightly. “Trying to figure out a way to work an argument in to my essay about term limits for the Supreme Court.”

“Seabury is going to have a stroke before June, I swear.”

“The olds are keeping us down, John, it’s time to fight back.”

John nudges him in the side. “My father would probably refer that comment for an FBI investigation into sedition or anarchy, or something.”
“Oh, and I really thought Speaker Laurens and I had a lot in common until you said that.” John snorts with laughter and he winks, before sobering up and asking, “Everything alright on that front?”

“Ohh,” he mumbles, “yeah. Awkward of… well, all that shit aside, I think it might actually be kind of good for the both of us, me being here?” Alexander blinks up him in surprise. “My whole life, he’s been in Congress, home for weekends, a week here and there, holidays. Constantly running for the next election, always campaigning, and this—it’s his world, in a way I’ve never gotten to know it. At home, he’s just been a visitor for too long.”

Alexander tries to keep the sharp surprise out of his voice when he tells him, “I’m really glad for you, then.”

A minute passes in silence, save the bustle of the city around them, the chatter of their peers a few steps ahead, and then John murmurs, “I’ve missed you lately.”

“John, we literally sleep in the same bed.”

He laughs at the light smack to his arm and laughs harder at John’s pink face.

They file in to the pizzeria, where a long table has already been set up for their group. There’s a single person already sitting at it, in the center facing the door, arms spread across the backs of the chairs on either side and looking like something of a mafia boss, and John groans, “Oh no.”

“Hello to you, too, John Laurens,” Angelica grins, and then sets her sights on Alexander. “You. Hamilton. Front and center.”

“What?”

She points imperiously at the chair across from her own, and he cautiously sits down. Eliza goes to sit by her sister, John and Hercules fill in on either side of him. The rest of the gang are still sorting out their seats when Angelica says, “I heard a rumor about you, Alexander Hamilton.”

He promptly stands back up, prepared to go sit on the far end. John laughs and tugs his elbow so he falls back into his chair. “Go on,” Hercules leans forward with great interest.

“What’s this about George Washington verbally bitch-slapping Friedrich von Steuben for hitting on you during last week’s summit?”

John chokes on air, and Eliza whips around, scandalized. “Angelica, you can’t just make up shit like that, you’re going to get yourself in oh my God, Alexander, your face is beet red.”

He sinks down as low as he can in his chair, mortified. Angelica cackles and whips her phone out of her purse, unlocks the screen, and sets it down on the table.

“Guys,” Hercules snatches it up and stares, “guys—find someone who looks at you like Chancellor von Steuben looks at our Hamilton here.”

“Where did you get that?” John reaches over to snag it out of their roommate’s grip, and Alexander cringingly leans over to see.

It’s just a picture of him leaning over DuPonceau to talk to von Steuben, and the chancellor smiling at him, maybe with a bit of a conspiratorial gleam to his expression.

“There’s always a photographer at shit like that.” Angelica grabs the phone back and swipes around a moment, and then pulls up a picture of them shaking hands, Jefferson looking on. “Photos for press
releases and such. Lots of random extras that never get used. I have a friend in the press office.”

“Of course you do,” Eliza sighs.

“No one was bitch-slapped,” Alexander finally finds his voice. “Von Steuben was just a bit, uh… flamboyant.”

“This is the best day of my life,” Hercules muses in wonder.

“I hate you.”

“You’re something of a legend among the staffers who were there, apparently,” Angelica informs him. “There’s been running speculation for years on what it would take to make Washington lose his cool at work, they figured that given another ten minutes, you would have made it happen.”

And, okay, he grins a bit at that. “Well, now that I know what I’m working towards.”

Aaron groans, long-suffering, from the right end of the table. “Your complete lack of situational filter is going to be the doom of us all, isn’t it?”

“Now you’ve got something to work towards,” Angelica rolls her eyes.

"Doom is a bit vague, but I’ll see what I can do.”

“Well I heard that you’ve been spotted about on the town with a lady-friend, Aaron,” Caleb volunteers, and the table collectively turns to peer in interest down at the impassive boy on the end.

“That’s really none of your business, or anyone else’s.”

“So long as said lady-friend isn’t a G-20 leader,” Ben snickers.

Aaron presses his lips together, considers a moment, and rises to his feet. “I think I’ll be going now.”

A chorus of Awws rises around him as Aaron heads for the door without looking back. “What’cha trying to hide, Burr?” John calls after him, and Alexander bites his lip and makes a split second decision to follow. “Whoa, hey,” John grabs at his elbow.

He smiles faintly and waves him off. “Just want to make sure he’s alright.”

Aaron glances over as he catches up and seems unsurprised, if a bit resigned, to see him. “I don’t need to be babysat back to Webster Hall, Alexander – go back to your friends.”

“They’re your friends, too.” Aaron offers him an arch, sidelong look as they walk, and he amends, “Well, they would be, if you’d give anyone the time of day in return.”

“Yes, I’m clearly missing out on some great connections.”

He groans and plants himself in front of the other boy at a street corner, waiting for the light to change. “C’mon, Aaron, they’re just teasing. I don’t know if you’ve even got a girlfriend, but like – no one actually cares. If you do. Bring her by sometime, we can all hang out like a big happy family.”

Aaron’s dark brows shoot up at that, and then he’s ducking past Alexander to continue on into the crosswalk. “It’s not that easy.”

“Why not?”
She’s an intern. For Congressman Contee.

“Oh. I see.” They hit the other curb and continue on, and he confesses, “I don’t see, actually.”

“Of course you don’t. You’ve got something to prove and nothing to lose.” He stops walking and pulls Alexander into the shadow of the doorway for some little French bistro that’s not open for dinner yet. “You think they’d let her stay on the Hill if they knew?”

Who is they? “Uh – do they care? Especially if she’s a House intern?”

Aaron sniffs and shrugs, scuffs his polished shoes on the ground a bit. “Well, we’re not risking it. It’s no one’s business but our own.”

“So why’d you just tell me?”

He shrugs again, and lifts a cool brow. “We both know what we know, Alexander.” And then he takes off, back towards Webster, leaving Alexander standing behind, bewildered in his wake.

He’d think it was bluster – but then he remembers the look Aaron gave him, nearly identical to his parting glance just now, when he’d come to retrieve him and Conway from the rotunda in the Archives.

Worry nagging at the pit of his stomach, he winds his way through the crowded sidewalk back towards the pizza place. He almost walks straight past Maria outside the door, her head bowed as she taps away at a small cell phone. But then the image catches up to him and snaps him out of his reverie, and he turns and asks, “Did you sneak a cell phone in?”

She starts and looks up, chagrined. “Oh. Hey. Didn’t realize you were coming back.” Glances back down as the screen lights up with a text, and then closes the old style flip phone and slips it into her pocket. “Bought it here. Just a little pay-as-you-go thing.” She grins at him, bites her red lip and asks coyly, “Don’t tell on me, ‘kay?”

Apparently everyone’s got their secrets today.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Some poor decisions, some shameless fan service, and someone's paying more attention than Alexander realized.

Chapter Notes

The closest thing to anything 'explicit' is in this chapter of Bad Choices.

“You have to be quiet.”

“I can be quiet.”

“I have yet to see any true evidence of that.”

“Okay, you know what, go to hell, you terrible tease of a – ah!” he gasps out breathlessly as the hand that’s been grinding against him through his unfastened pants finally works its way down inside, eliminating the thicker of the two layers between them and running gentle fingertips up and down his length through his boxers instead. “Ah – fuck - !”

Conway’s other hand clamps down over his mouth; he jerks once, surprised, and then sinks his teeth into the fleshy part of the man’s palm. “Ow!” he hisses. “What the hell?”

“Not cool.”

“Be quiet, then!”

“No,” Alexander grips Conway’s wrist to halt his teasing ministrations and cranes his head around to peer up at him, “I’m serious. Don’t do that. I don’t like that.”

“Oh,” Conway blinks, shaking his head a bit to clear it. “Jesus, yeah, no, I – sorry.”

Alexander twists around as best he can, half-reclined in the senator’s lap, back pressed flush into the man’s chest. The hands migrate down to hold his hips steady as he arches up presses his lips against Conway’s, neck straining at the odd angle. “Don’t need to be sorry. This is good.” Conway glances down at the red mark on his palm, skeptical. Alexander grins and plops back down in his lap, and earns a pained grunt that he suspects has less to do with the force of the motion and more to do with the hardness he can feel through the fully-clothed lap beneath him. “I told you – I’ll draw the line.”

“You bit the line, but point taken.”

“So you’re not into that, either?”

He barks out a surprised laugh, wraps an arm under Alexander’s knees, levers him sideways, and
deposits him in the middle of the couch. Alexander props himself up on his elbows and scoots back so his legs are freed from Conway’s lap, and watches under hooded lids as the senator climbs off the couch and kneels by his side instead. “I’m not sure,” he uses one hand to push loose hair from Alexander’s face, stroke his face, brush a thumb against his lower lip, which he leans forward and captures between his teeth, gently, a mischievous gleam in his eyes, “that the trial and error of kinks is the best way to go about things.”

He affects the best innocent face he can muster and asks, “But then how am I to know what they are?”

“Alexander, I’m Irish Catholic, we think everything that isn’t missionary sex in a bed with your spouse is a kink.”

“Well, I’m a lapsed Presbyterian, we’re very progressive.”

“Presbyterians, or just the lapsed ones?”

“Especially the lapsed ones,” he grins, and then lightly bites the hand at his face again.

“Is there some connection between the lapsed Presbyterianism and the oral fixation, or is that a separate issue entirely?”

“Who says it’s an issue?” Conway opens his mouth to retort, pauses, and then snaps his jaw closed. Alexander laughs, bats the hand away from his face and the other from where it’s resting at his hip, and sits up, fixes the top couple of buttons on his shirt, and begins straightening his tie. “Have fun with that one for the rest of the day.”

He sits back, frustrated, and gives Alexander room to climb to his feet and begin tucking his shirt back into his navy pants. “I’m not entirely sure I deserved that.”

“Don’t be such a tease, then.” He finishes fastening up his pants and runs his hands down the front, as if they’re any more rumpled than when he sits for an hour, curled up in a ball in a chair in the senate lobby. The jacket is laid across the desk, and Conway snags it before he can, holds it out for him to slip his arms into. “Chivalrous.”

“Hardly.” Once the sleeves are pulled up over his shoulders, Conway spins him around and grips his hands tightly, holds them down against the desk while he ravages his mouth, presses him backwards so his back is arched, pinned as he is. “Come back after session,” he whispers in his ear.

“Mm, can’t.”

“Why?”

He withdraws and stares incredulously up at the senator who’s this close to pouting. “Because I just spent my lunch break getting felt-up on your couch, and I have midterms in a week and a half.”

“Tomorrow, then.”

An exasperated huff escapes him. “I thought we had a sort of unspoken agreement about consecutive days.”

“Well, Fridays are never good and I don’t want to wait until Monday to see you again.”

Alexander grins, cheeky, and presses a gentle kiss to the corner of his mouth. “I’ll be in the library tonight.”
“I can’t touch you in the library.”

He pulls his hands free and ducks around the imploring man. “Guess you should have made better use of your time, then.”

x---x

It’s not really any great surprise, then, come Monday, that they finally cross that line they’ve been toeing for the past couple weeks. Conway gets him in his lap again and makes short work of opening his pants, pulling him free, and stroking him to hardness while mouthing at his neck, under his ear, his other arm wrapped around his middle under the hem of his shirt, hot against his bare skin.

He doesn’t last long – tries not to feel self-conscious about that – and whimpers as he feels the heat curling up low in his belly. Conway moves his arm and reaches up to grip his chin, pulls his face sideways and kisses him rough, demanding, swallowing the noises being pulled out of him as he spills across his hand, and a tissue he snatches up to preserve the integrity of their suits. He keeps stroking him through it until Alexander gasps and pushes his hand away, oversensitive and trembling.

“Okay?”

“Mm,” he murmurs, awkwardly shifting to tuck himself back into his boxers, pink in the face, “very.”

“What I wouldn’t give,” Conway pulls him back against his chest and nuzzles into his neck, breath hot against his ear, “to have more time.”

Alexander tilts his head, shifts his body enough to cause the senator a bit of distress, based on the darkening of his eyes and the way he presses his lips tight together. “What would you do with it?”

“Doesn’t matter; whatever you wanted.”

“Hm, boring answer. What if I wanted to play chess?”

“Then we’d play chess. Once I remembered how the pieces move.”

“Watch a Disney marathon?”

“I’m partial to Ratatouille.”

“Go fishing?”

“Well, we all have to draw the line somewhere.”

Sated and starting to feel warm and sleepy, Alexander flops sideways out of Conway’s lap so he can sprawl across the couch. “Maybe just a nap, then.”

Conway checks his watch. “I can wake you up in twenty, if you want a quick power nap.”

“What about you?”

“I actually sleep, unlike some people.” Alexander goes pink all over again and looks awkwardly askance, and Conway takes his meaning and chuckles. “Oh, you sweet thing. C’mere.” Alexander reorients himself, lets the older man guide him as he settles back down, head resting in his lap, one
hand stroking lightly across his forehead and the other rubbing soothing patterns across his stomach and hips. “It’s not a quid pro quo; don’t worry about it.”

“Seems a bit unsporting, is all.”

He grins down at Alexander. “Everything’s very needy and urgent at your age.”

“Everything’s very needy and urgent when condensed into fleeting lunchbreaks a couple times a week, as well.”

“How are you going to survive the spring recess?”

It’s coming up – two weeks for the Senate, which means crunch time for the pages – midterms at the beginning of the first week, a couple days actually free, and then another weekend trip, this time to Yorktown in southern Virginia.

“We’ll be busy; I’ll barely notice you’re gone.”

“Ouch.”

“Don’t you have to go host some town halls and tell the lovely libertarians of New Jersey about how you’re faithfully standing up to the dastardly big government scourge here in the swamp of D.C.?”

Conway taps his nose. “I’m not a libertarian.”

“Right, you just play one in the movies, I forgot.”

“Alexander Hamilton, have you been researching me?”

He winks and offers a lazy smile. “I like to know who I’m dallying with.”

“Lord help me.”

“So about that first bill you sponsored when you were in the state legislature…”

x---x

The last day before the recess is full of tedious, procedural minutiae, but the vote itself isn’t a contentious one and spirits are generally high. Senator Adams remains the constant outlier to that rule, and is scowling and surly as ever, and Alexander has the misfortune of crossing his path walking between the cloakroom and the chamber just as they’re returning from a fifteen minute break late in the morning.

Quite literally crosses his path, that is, and Adams is one of the sorts who expects the pages underfoot to be silent unless spoken to and invisible unless summoned; he treats them accordingly, resulting in a near-collision three feet from the doors back to the chamber.

“Oh,” Alexander backs hastily away to let the senator precede him, “excuse me.”

For the strength of Adams’s glare, he may as well have sent his briefcase tumbling to the floor and spilling open. “How is it,” he scowls, “that midway through the term, you still bumble about like it’s the first week?”

Alexander frowns at the man’s back as he pushes on through the doors without further comment. “If
you walked in on the federalists’ side,” he grumbles under his breath, “we wouldn’t be having this debate, you fat motherfu- heyy,” he turns at the sound of a throat clearing, going abruptly red in the face in the face of Washington’s stern look. “Um. Let me get the door for you. Sir.”

“If you’d rather, Mister Hamilton, I can enter the chamber on the proper side as it relates to the party with whom I caucus.”

“Oh my God,” he mutters, pulling open the door with one hand and planting the other one squarely over his face. Washington steps through, humming a vague thanks, but Alexander can swear he hears him chuckle under his breath after he clears the threshold.

And because he can’t have nice things, of course Conway is sitting on the ledge below the dais chatting with Aaron when he finally makes his way into the room. John is already sitting on Aaron’s other side, so Alexander files in along the line, listening absently and catching key words that suggest they’re talking about New Jersey, and Aaron’s regret that he can’t return home during the upcoming recess.

“What’s wrong with you?” John asks as he slumps down, arms crossed sullenly over his chest.

“Nothing. Washington just crept up behind me in the middle of calling Adams a rather, uh – uncharitable name, and no man that tall has any right being so goddamn sneaky.”

John grins. “What’d you call Adams?”

He sits up a bit and sees that Conway is peering amusedly down in their direction, and he declines. “Ask me later.”

He resumes his slouching and closes his eyes, intent on staying put for the few minutes they have remaining until the session resumes. There’s a faint grumbling from John’s other side, and then a sharp, “Oh, chill the fuck out,” snapped towards Aaron, followed quickly by a, “Sorry, sir.”

Conway laughs lightly. “I’m, uh, chill, as they say,” and then there’s a rustling as he climbs to his feet. “Back to the grind, however – best of luck on your exams, boys; Aaron, I shall give your regards to the garden state.”

“He has a safe flight, Senator,” Aaron says.

“Alas, I’ll be driving, because what I thought would really cap off this interminable week was Friday afternoon traffic out of D.C.”

Without once opening his eyes, Alexander mumbles lazily, “Must be nice not to have to rush out to try and catch a plane, though.”

There’s a slight pause, and then, “True enough,” and it feels a little reckless but he’s confident the senator has taken his meaning.

He likes the way Conway stares down at him – a bit awed, a lot smitten, pupils blown and eyes dark – as he kneels between the senator’s spread legs in front of the couch, his hands splayed across his upper thighs, blinking up shyly at him through his lashes.

“Can I?”

“We shouldn’t.”
“Yeah, but can I?”

He’s practically pouting, and yeah, maybe it’s a bit of a show but it’s one he thinks Conway likes based on the way he mumbles, “Jesus Christ,” and jerks a quick nod.

Alexander fumbles clumsily with the button on his pants and tells him teasingly, “You have to be quiet.”

“You’re a minx.”

It’s quiet for a minute, save Conway’s ragged breathing as Alexander works him free and runs light fingertips up and down his length, studious, observing the way it twitches involuntarily when he strokes certain spots, cataloguing reactions while planning his next move. He presses his lips gently to the head of his cock, swipes a curious tongue at the liquid that’s already slowly leaking from the tip, and then starts as a hand carefully cups his cheek and pulls him back slightly to look up and meet the senator’s eyes.

“You do know,” he says low, a bit strained to be sure, “that we don’t have to do anything you don’t want.”

“Why ever should you think I don’t want?” he asks with affected innocence.

“Have you ever -? Sorry, sorry,” he sighs and runs a hand through his hair, letting the fingers at Alexander’s face caress his cheek lightly, thumb pressing gently at his lower lip until Alexander takes it between his teeth and grins up at him.

And because he’s feeling charitable, Alexander concedes, “Mary-Sue McSweeney never let me suck her dick,” which is probably the closest thing to a straightforward answer to the question the senator aborted that he can muster. “Don’t worry though – I know the rule about teeth.”

“Because that’s what I was worried about,” Conway replies drily.

“Isn’t that what all guys are worried about?” Alexander winks, and ducks his head forward to lick a quick line up his shaft. The hand falls away from his face, and the senator groans above him. “In any case, I hear that practice makes perfect.”

“You’re going to kill me, waiting until the eve of a two week recess to get coy here.”

He sits back, affronted. “You never let me touch you before!”

“I didn’t want you to feel obligated!”

“Oh, so if I’d gotten down on my knees and begged you last week, it’d have been a different story?”

Conway considers a moment, and then says honestly, “I mean yeah, probably.” Alexander smacks his thigh. “Ow. You’re hard to read sometimes – I don’t want you to agree to something in the heat of the moment that you might regret later.”

“Well I don’t want to just lie back and think of England,” Alexander retorts, and Conway shoves a fist in his mouth to smother the bark of laughter. “I realize to some, it might be like yay I get all the orgasms, but it’s starting to feel like something that… happens to me. Rather than something I’m doing with you.”

That sobers the senator rather abruptly, and he frowns down at him where he’s still absently stroking fingertips up and down his cock. “I’m sorry – that certainly wasn’t my intent. I wish you’d said
something.”

“I am saying something,” Alexander points out, and squeezes lightly for emphasis, enjoying the corresponding tightening of Conway’s face. “And getting on my knees and begging.”

“And you’re doing it, ah… very effectively,” he manages.

“Excellent,” he refocuses, brusque, all business. “Now, would you recommend swallowing, spitting, or alternative clean-up measures for an inexperienced practitioner of oral sex?”

Conway coughs violently, and Alexander thinks he actually might die when he leans forward again and takes as much of him in his mouth as he can fit.

x---x

When he walks back into Webster more than an hour after the pages were dismissed, he can hear the raucous sounds of his classmates celebrating the weekend and the upcoming break, short-lived though the excitement will necessarily be, what with exams coming up on Monday and Tuesday. He ducks into the stairwell and heads upstairs, away from the laughter pouring out of the first floor common room, pushes open the door to his shared room, and finds he’s not alone.

John is sitting up in his own bed, head bowed over a textbook, curls wild and going every which direction. He’s toed off his black shoes and thrown his tie over the bed rail, but otherwise declined to change out of his uniform, and he glances over Alexander, still clad in his navy blues as well. “Hey,” he murmurs, returning to his book. “Where’ve you been?”

The library is his first thought, but John knows him well enough by now that he’d never believe he only spent an hour in a sitting on schoolwork, so he instead offers, “That sandwich shop by Addy’s. Didn’t eat enough at lunch.”

“You never eat enough at lunch,” John rebukes absently, and then pauses and asks, “The place with the cheddar-jalapeno wraps?”

“Ew but, yeah.”

“And the shaggy carpet in the bathroom that looks like it belongs in a 1960s pot circle?”

“That’s the one.”

“So, the place that closes at two on Fridays,” Shit. He opens and closes his mouth, but there’s not a lot he can really say to that, and John just sighs and looks back determinedly at his text. “It’s okay if you don’t want to tell me where you disappear to,” he says evenly, “But you don’t have to lie about it.”

“Where you disappear to,” he echoes dully.

John snaps his book shut and glares up, annoyed, verging on angry. “Is it because I kissed you?”

Alexander recoils, taken aback. “If it is, I’m sorry, okay? You don’t have to… I’m not going to tell anyone, if you’re ashamed, or whatever. I mean, I guess I was still pretty confused at your age, so I get it if -”

“I’m not confused,” he contests hotly, face burning at John’s words at the sheer condescension of the implication. “That isn’t even – you’re the one who stopped eating lunch with me so you could keep
up appearances to your dear old dad.”

“For like, a week, I did that,” John shakes his head. “And once I had my bearings again, you got cagey as hell.”

“Okay, well, not everything is about you, John Laurens.”

And because John Laurens is fundamentally just a good person, he straightens up, brow furrowing, and sweeps his gaze back over Alexander’s tense form, still standing barely inside the doorway, as if he’ll see something he missed the first time. “Is something wrong?”

“That’s not what I said.”

“Yeah,” John sighs, resigned. “You just don’t say much these days, is all.”

He wants to wipe that look off of John’s face, but knows there’s nothing he can say to particularly reassure him, not after telling an obvious, bald-faced lie. It’s not like it’ll particularly improve matters if he confesses what he was really doing in his absence, and oh how he dearly wishes he’d just stuck with the initial impulse to claim a quick trip to the library.

x---x

They sit their exams; to exactly no one’s surprise, Alexander writes until the very last possible second of Seabury’s, and hands over his essay booklet, smiling at the strained patience in his teacher’s face. Then he’s massaging out his cramped hand and heading to the computer lab to prepare for English and physics the next day.

Wednesday and Thursday are totally free days – no schoolwork yet for the second half of the term, no classes, no Senate in session and so no work to attend to. Wednesday is rainy, spring showers come to D.C. just in time for April, and most of them stay in, swapping card games and board games they’ve accumulated over the last two months of their smartphone-free living and ordering epic amounts of food to be delivered.

Aaron sneaks away at some point, off to see his intern girlfriend, Alexander supposes, and he wonders if John is keeping tabs on his whereabouts as well.

Thursday dawns bright and sunny – warm enough that Hercules dons a pair of cargo shorts, while Alexander is still pulling on long sleeves, about ten degrees too chilly for him yet. Their usual crew assembles in the common room mid-morning to muse how to make the most of their day ahead of tomorrow’s departure for southern Virginia.

“I miss nature,” Abe bemoans, and Alexander is surprised to find himself agreeing a little bit.

“Cherry blossoms are in bloom,” Eliza reminds them all blandly, and there’s a collective laugh following the collective groan; the tourists are out in force and few of them have dared venture down the mall since the festival began.

“Zoo?” Caleb suggests.

Abe nudges him. “Not the kind of nature I’m thinking of, exactly.”

“Kalorama,” Ben starts listing off ideas, “Rock Creek, Arboretum…”
“How,” Anna butts in from the other side of the room, “can you all be so fundamentally terrible at this? We’re getting out of the city tomorrow – why go hunting down artificially crafted nature spaces in D.C. when we haven’t yet gone to the single coolest museum in the city?”

There’s a confused silence while they all exchange befuddled glances, until Robert quietly says, “The Spy Museum.”

“The Spy Museum,” she grins, wicked.

---x

Alexander earns a long, perplexed stare from their tour guide when he asserts at Yorktown that, “The battle could have ended three days earlier if the Continental forces had unloaded their weapons and fixed bayonets under cover of darkness.”

After a few drawn out seconds, Aaron shrugs and says, “Yeah, he just kind of does that, you can ignore him.”

After the tour though, the guide pulls him aside while the rest of the group breaks apart to explore on their own, and beckons him over to a doorway at the back of the main part of the visitor center that just says Staff. “Where’d you get that line?” she asks. “About a bayonet charge?”

He shrugs, and glances back to where John and Hercules are hovering inside the door, waiting for him. “Read up on the battle last night. So much manpower was wasted capturing the ninth and tenth redoubts that neither was really the victory they ought to have been.”

She bites her lip and shrugs, and ducks her head inside the office and exchanges a quick word with someone, comes back with a thick packet that she hands to him, still warm off the printer. “You’re not the first to say it. Senator Washington did his thesis at the Army War College on Revolutionary War tactics when he was still Major Washington.”

He stares down at the stack of paper in his hand. “Whoa.”

“It was a short section, the redoubt strategy at Yorktown, but we’re all such nerds at heart here that it’s become something of historical site lore around these parts. Especially from Virginia’s favorite son.”

“Ohh, I bet Senator Jefferson would take great umbrage to hear that.”

She makes a vague, high-pitched sound and claps her hands together over her mouth. “Oh my God, do you know them? Dumb question, I guess you kind of work for them, but… sorry, I’m just – George Washington. Is he as awesome in person as he seems?”

“Uh – yeah? He’s off on the campaign trail a lot, but… I guess? He’s kind of intimidating but like… in a good way? Maybe?”

“In a would totally have kicked British ass in the Revolution kind of way?”

“Oh, absolutely.”

With a last broad smile, she shoos him off towards his waiting friends and goes to collect her next tour group from the front of the lobby.
“What was that all about?” Hercules peers curiously at the packet he’s tucked under his arm.

“I,” Alexander announces solemnly, “just met an honest-to-God George Washington fangirl, and it was everything.”

x---x

Alexander returns to Webster on Saturday to three new emails. First is his exam results, and he takes great pleasure in imagining the look on Seabury’s face when giving him full marks. Second is Edward checking in, and a bit of guilt rises in him at the gently prodding reminder that he’s not been very communicative of late. Third is Conway.

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net
Recipient: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Subject: How did your exams go?

It feels somewhat obligatory to ask, though I don’t doubt you’ve passed every subject with flying colors.
The libertarians of New Jersey send their kind regards.

sent: 22:02 04/06/18

Sender: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net
Subject: Aw, you told your constituents about me?

;-)

Scores were posted while we were gone; ‘A’s across the board, though only a 97% in physics. I’m slipping.

sent: 15:37 04/07/18

When he checks his email later that night before bed, he has a reply, and he spends several minutes staring at the screen and gnawing on his lip after he reads it.

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net
Recipient: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Subject: Where did you go?
I wanted to ask you something last week before the recess, but I was, uh, distracted. I can’t decide if this might kind of freak you out, and for the love of God, say no if it does – but if I come back down south before the weekend, would it be possible for you to get away from the dorm for a few hours so we could spend some actual time together?

sent: 18:38 04/07/18

It doesn’t freak him out in the way he suspects Conway means, but it kind of does in others. The prior Friday felt reckless, essentially propositioning the man in front of John and Aaron, who may or may not have guessed that there’s something going on between them, and boy does he not know what to do with that particular dilemma.

This, though, is a different sort of crazy thought, but the longer he thinks about it, not all that much more so than constantly returning to the little hole in the wall office in the Capitol basement and trusting that no one will ever notice his regular practice of coming and going from that spot.

Fingers poised above the keyboard, he sucks in a steadying breath.

Sender: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net
Subject: Yorktown

The proctors don’t keep tabs on our whereabouts outside of work, school, and curfew. We’re trusted with our free time. That said – how on earth would that work?

sent: 22:12 04/07/18

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net
Recipient: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Subject: Carefully, as always

I’d pick you up from the Metro closest my place.

sent: 22:15 04/07/18

Sender: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net
Subject: Neighbors?

You have a Wikipedia page, you can’t exactly invent a cover story of me as a wayward nephew or something. Hilarious as that sounds.
I live in a drive-under townhome; I could sneak you in with nary a neighbor any the wiser.

That said – the unit to my left is unoccupied and the unit to the right is inhabited by an elderly couple that, I swear to God, think C-Span is a boring game show.

Can I think about it?

Of course.

And because you overthink things, the lack of further response from me is because curfew is in half an hour, not because I’m freaking out.
He’s maybe freaking out, a little. Mostly about John, he realizes when he walks into the room and gets a faint smile from his roommate, still pink in the face from a hot shower, his freckles standing out more sharply than ever. John’s been paying attention, more so than he’d realized, and Alexander doesn’t generally vanish from Webster on weekends unless it’s to go hole up in the library. Any attempt to explain an hours-long absence with some notion of touristy type things comes with the threat of someone volunteering to accompany him.

And so on Tuesday, when John grumbles about his whole family flying up on Friday evening to take advantage of his younger siblings’ spring break to come visit and do all of those oh-so-touristy things, Alexander knows that any attempt at talking himself out of it is dead.

Sender: Page.A.Hamill@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net
Subject: Saturday

Any time in the afternoon should be good. I won’t be missed, provided I’m back by curfew.

sent: 14:17 04/10/18

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading, and see you Monday, when we'll begin the process of driving this train straight off the rails.
He’d thought there was something weird about being in the National Archives after hours, alone, a public space full of constant crowds rendered into a private viewing gallery, but this is a different sort of disorienting. He’s never seen the senator outside of, well… the Senate, dressed in a suit and tie, wearing his corresponding page uniform, and he keeps shooting sidelong glances at the man behind the wheel as they make the ten minute drive from Crystal City to Conway’s townhouse.

The sunglasses are enough to throw him off on their own. The man looks so damn… pedestrian, navigating the busy lanes of traffic, and that’s before he even gets to the faded jeans and the rolled-up sleeves on his grey button-up.

“I’m realizing,” Alexander muses in awe, “that I don’t think I’ve ever seen your arms before.”

Conway smiles wide. “Well, hopefully they live up to expectations.”

“I don’t think I had any, just sort of thought you existed in a suit and tie.”

“Yes, well – look at you,” the senator glances over. “Out of your blues.” He digs his fingers into the denim just above his knees, self-conscious. “No arms though – aren’t you hot?”

So he shifts to fiddling with the ends of his sleeves instead. “Give it another five degrees and I’ll pull out the short sleeves.”

Conway hums noncommittally at that, and the rest of the short drive passes in silence. Alexander watches the scenes out of his window pass by, watches the rapid shift from city to suburbia as they move just a couple of miles away from the city center, and then they’re pulling down a tree-lined boulevard that’s… cozy. Quaint. Kids outside playing in small front yards and couples strolling down the sidewalks with their dogs on leashes…

It’s domestic, is what it is. And it makes his stomach churn, because this here, this thing with Conway, is not domestic, it’s rushed and forbidden, and more fit for the cramped office in the Capitol basement than this innocuous scene of tranquility, and –

“Hey.” He pries his eyes open to see that they’ve pulled into a little one car garage, the shadow of the door closing shifting quickly along the far wall. “We’re not -” He bites his lip on whatever he was going to say, and starts over. “Are you nervous about being here, or nervous about being caught?”

Which is something he’s come to appreciate about the man – he doesn’t shy away from the sheer stupidity of what they’re doing. He knows that one slip is the end of his career, and he’s given Alexander all of the power in that regard. Trusts him with it, though Alexander can’t fathom any world in which he’d voluntarily throw himself under that particular bus along with the senator, so maybe it’s more of a mutually-assured destruction thing.

“Mostly the latter,” he answers at last, and Conway nods slowly and unbuckles his seatbelt.
Alexander follows suit, and follows him up the narrow staircase to the living space above. It’s small, cozy, if a bit utilitarian – lacks any great amount of personal touch, which probably speaks partly to the place’s role as Conway’s home away from home and partly to his bachelor status.

He migrates naturally over to the bookshelves built in along either side of a gas fireplace and starts scanning titles while Conway moves to the kitchen and, by the sound of it, begins filling a couple of water glasses. There’s a loveseat and two armchairs arranged around the room, four tall stools along the long counter of the galley kitchen, and a curved staircase that must lead up to a bedroom and bathroom.

“Sit with me,” Conway requests quietly, and Alexander abandons his casual exploration and accepts the water. “I don’t want you to be nervous here,” he murmurs as Alexander curls up against the arm of the sofa. “I told you before – we can play chess and watch Disney movies, for all I care. And if you say the word, I’ll take you back, no argument about it.”

He grins, despite himself. “Do you even have a chessboard?”

Conway falters a bit. “Well – no.”

“For that matter,” he glances around, “do you even have a television?”

He laughs. “No, actually. I just use my computer, I find I’m a monumentally happier person absent the temptation of cable news.”

“Fair.” Alexander bites his lip and glances down, runs a fingertip absently along the rim of his glass. “I guess I just don’t want to… waste your time?”

“Alex…” the couch shifts and Conway edges closer to him, touches a hand to the side of his face and draws his eyes up. “You’re a gorgeous young man, but that’s hardly what first drew me towards you, what makes me want to spend time with you. You’re not wasting my time.”

“Okay.”

“We can spend this time however you want. We have hours.” Which is true; it’s only four o’clock. “We can watch something, or just sit here and talk. Are you hungry? It’s a bit early for dinner, but if we start fighting about it now, we could probably settle on something to have delivered by a more normal mealtime.”

The likely truth of that makes him laugh, and it calms his head a bit. “I’m alright.”

“When did you eat lunch?” He opens his mouth, thinks about, and closes it again, brow furrowing. Conway just shakes his head mournfully. “And there was naïve me, thinking it was just at work that meals somehow completely slipped your mind.”

“I don’t forget, I just prioritize other things sometimes.” He grins, flirtatious, starting to feel a bit bolder again. “Thought you liked that about me.”

“Yes,” Conway deadpans, “I like you neglecting your physical wellbeing so we can canoodle in my office.”

He bursts out into laughter and sets his glass down before climbing across the couch to sit astride the senator’s lap, a familiar pose, the familiar feeling of hands moving up instinctively to rest at his waist. “Canoodle, huh? How long did you spend looking for a way to one-up dalliance?”

“About two weeks, if we’re being honest.”
“Honest is good.” He fiddles with the buttons on Conway’s shirt and doesn’t meet his eyes when he offers, “I’ll tell you about it, if you promise to stop bringing it up.”

He doesn’t answer right away, and Alexander glances up at the conflicted, perturbed expression on his face. “Are you going to tell me something about which I might feel obliged to intervene?”

“What? No, Jesus.” How that would even work, Alexander can’t fathom – *I became worried for this student’s health while we were cuddling on my couch* doesn’t exactly ring with resounding promise. “I, uh – I spent a year in and out of a group home. A couple of ill-contrived family placements that never lasted more than a month, and then back to the group home. And, um, funding budgets being what they were, they were always very particular about our daily food rations. Enough to sustain, sure – never quite enough to satisfy.”

Conway wraps his arms more snugly around him, splays his big, warm hands along Alexander’s back, under his shirt. He tentatively lets himself move into the touch, accept the gentle offer of comfort, however small.

“So you spend enough days not getting quite enough to eat – spend enough meals making sure the older punks aren’t skimming food from the little kids – give enough food, as time goes by, to the new kids who still don’t quite get it – your body kind of adjusts to eating irregularly. Spend enough nights consoling the little kids crying for their parents, crying for the sister who got sent to the girls’ home or the brother who got fostered straight away, ‘cause he’s younger and cuter – you learn to make do on half the sleep. Until eventually, you learn to expect half the sleep.”

“What happened after the year?” Conway asks softly. “A placement that finally worked out?”

It’s too simplistic to explain it, but he shrugs and nods. “Yeah.”

“How long has it been?”

“Few years.” And now they’re verging on that whole *talking about it* thing that Alexander despises. “Anyway – there you have it. A little corner of my sob story.”

Conway tips his head with two fingertips at his chin and kisses him, slow and sweet. “It’s okay,” he murmurs when he pulls away after just a few drawn out seconds, “to be vulnerable once in a while.”

“Mm, I’m not vulnerable, I’m exchanging information for the assurance that you’ll stop mocking my eating habits.”

“Well in that case, I’m feeling a little guilt-tripped.”

He grins, baring teeth. “Well would you look at that, I’m better at this than I thought.”

“Incorrigible.”

Alexander smacks a loud kiss on the man’s cheek and tucks his head against his shoulder, chuckling. “How about I tell you how I’d like us to spend our time together tonight?”

“That would be some most-welcome guidance.”

He tilts his head, murmurs hot against his ear. “I want to argue with you about dinner. And then I want to argue with you about what a misguided conservative, maybe-sort-of-libertarian you are while we wait for food to be delivered, and then I want to argue with you about a topic of your choosing while we eat.”
“That sounds like a lot of contention for one evening, I have to say.”

“And then,” he adds, “maybe you can show me the upstairs and we can defuse some of that contention together.”

Conway leans back into the cushions so he can peer down at Alexander, blinking up at him through his lashes. “Yeah?” He nods, solemn, and the senator arches a brow. “Well, we’ll see how it goes.”

x---x

Alexander goes upstairs alone while Conway packs away the leftovers from their meal and he stares around the space blankly for a minute before heading to the bathroom instead and taking a minute to wash up, splash some water on his face, and stare at himself in the mirror for a long moment. He checks the time – barely seven, he still has three hours until he’s due back at Webster, which is…

…it’s a lot of time.

Into his mind, unbidden, pops Edward, the memory of the older boy falling into his room one summer night, nearly two years ago, a dopey smile on his face and a faraway look in his eyes, and he’d just said, “Sex,” like it explained everything. Yeah? Alexander had asked skeptically, still just fourteen and yet uninterested in such pursuits. How’d that go? And Edward laughed and admitted, “It was awkward and quick and messy, but it was perfect.”

Edward, who had been all starry-eyed and smitten over that girl, who had insisted that it was perfect because she was perfect, and none of the rest of it mattered, and never mind that they had broken up maybe six weeks later and he’d moved on without much regret, far as Alexander could tell – that Edward would soundly kick his ass right about now, he’s pretty sure. Because there’s something incongruous in this, this isn’t where he’s supposed to be right now, and he knows that, he does. There’s no foolish teenage notion of love here, none of this sentiment that the most awkward encounter with the right person is perfect nonetheless, because it goes without saying that Thomas Conway could never, ever be the right person in this, in any moment.

He feels like he’s on a ride which he can’t get off. That feeling he’d finally put words to, vocalized to the senator, that this whole affair is happening to him, hasn’t gone away, not with his bold assertion that day in the tiny office, not with his determination to direct the course of their night here and now. And the problem is only compounding itself, because despite the fact that he knows – he knows – that if he walked downstairs right now, asked to be taken back to the metro, Conway would follow through on his earlier assurances…

…he’s built up expectations, for both of them. Every single moment along the way – leaving the meeting with von Steuben, agonizing over emails from Edward, the wrench in his heart with every inch of distance further separating him and John – every single moment that has made him reconsider, that has prodded him to ending this before it gets out of hand… he’s rejected them all. Rebelled against them, practically, trying to reassert his own sense of control and only entrenching himself deeper in turmoil in the process.

Because he likes the man – he really does. Likes the way he makes him feel, physically, emotionally, intellectually; likes the way Conway’s grey eyes go dark, in turn, when he’s aroused and staring at Alexander like he’s something to be devoured whole. It’s its own sort of power, one he’s come to crave, and the smaller corner of his mind that can still rationalize his motivations realizes the true danger in this moment isn’t that he’ll say yes to anything Conway asks of him, it’s that he’ll freely offer whatever he thinks will garner the most satisfying response.
When he finally returns to the bedroom, he stands at the foot of the bed, fidgeting with his shirtsleeves and gnawing on his lip, but it’s only a minute until he hears Conway’s heavier footsteps coming up the stairs. The steps pause in the doorway for just a moment, and then come to hover behind him, before hands are drifting around his waist and lips are descending on the back of his neck, making him shiver.

“I want to see you,” Conway murmurs, lips pressed just behind his ear. “I want to touch you.” The hands around his waist toy with the hem of his shirt, inching it up slowly, baring his stomach. “Can I?” he whispers.

That pulls Alexander out of his daze finally, and he twists around in the older man’s arms and bats his hands away. “I can do it,” he rebukes softly, and pulls the shirt over his head in a hurried motion, barely has his arms freed before hands are skimming across his bared skin, exploring, tickling, if he’s being honest about it.

Then he’s being slowly walked back ‘til he bumps the edge of the bed and then lowered on to it. “Shh,” Conway shushes his surprised squeak, smiling fondly down at him and caressing a hand along the side of his face. “You beautiful boy.”

Hands are at his face and Conway is mouthing at his throat, his collarbones, until his tense stillness registers enough to pull the man out of his own sort of haze, and he pulls back. “Whoa,” he must read something in Alexander’s eyes. “Hey. Relax. Breathe.”

They’ve done more than this – lord, have they done more than this – in the cramped confines of the hideaway office, and he’s surprised himself at his sudden reticence. “I’m not sure – I don’t know -”

“Shh,” Conway repeats, and Alexander really wishes he’d quit doing that. “Nothing you don’t want; nothing you’re not ready for, hm?” He retreats enough for Alexander to sit up again, and he runs his hands down his face, squeezes his eyes shut. “What’s wrong?”

“My brother,” he starts, and then abruptly cuts himself right back off. Conway looks at him expectantly, if a bit perplexedly, and that rational corner left in Alexander’s mind shouts at him. Just say it. Finish the thought and he’ll end this now.

When he doesn’t say anything for what must be a minute or more, Conway hesitantly says, “Do you want me to take you back?”

“I just -” He glances around, frustrated, and his eyes land on an armchair in the corner by the window, a reading nook by the looks of it. “Can you just… sit there?”

He obliges without vocalizing the myriad questions flitting across his face, and Alexander uses the newfound space to breathe, to get his bearings. When he’s settled in, elbows propped on the arms of the chair and peering curiously across the room to where Alexander is perched on the edge of the bed, Alexander climbs to his feet and approaches him slowly.

“This is… the bed is a bit too much. Too soon. Let me… can I…?” He climbs into the other man’s lap, wriggles his knees into the space between Conway’s legs and the arms of the chair, and settles himself down on his thighs.

Hands settle around his waist. Still gentle, a bit more hesitant now. “Is this better?”

“Yes.” And it is. He leans in.
A faint beeping drags him, grudgingly, back to wakefulness; lips are pressed gently against the warm skin of his upper back, and fingers are tracing random patterns against his hip. He whines low in his throat and tries to roll to his stomach, to bury his face into the sinfully soft pillow under his head, but a low chuckle rumbles against his back and the hand at his hip holds him firmly in place.

“I’d keep you here if I could,” Conway confesses softly behind him. “But you should start waking up.”

So he lets himself fall back the other direction, into the arms that wrap tight around his middle, warm and comforting, pressed into the man’s bare chest. “Hmmph.”

“How do you feel?”

“How do you think I feel?”

“What are you thinking, then?”

Conway slides a hand between their bodies, finds where Alexander is half-hard already, again, and gives him a couple of firm strokes. Alexander squirms against him, just on this side of oversensitive, and he chuckles low in his throat. “I’m thinking,” he murmurs lowly, “that I have just enough time to get you off one more time, get you cleaned up, and get you back to your dorm by eleven.”

“How do you think I feel?”

“How do you think I feel?”

“Mm,” he twists around, burrows determinedly against the warm body there. “Sleepy. Sated. A little gross, actually.”

“I’ll take two out of three, I guess.”

He cracks an eye open and cranes his neck back to look up at the face smiling softly down at him. “How about you? How do you feel?”

“How do you think I feel?”

“What are you thinking, then?”

Conway slides a hand between their bodies, finds where Alexander is half-hard already, again, and gives him a couple of firm strokes. Alexander squirms against him, just on this side of oversensitive, and he chuckles low in his throat. “I’m thinking,” he murmurs lowly, “that I have just enough time to get you off one more time, get you cleaned up, and get you back to your dorm by eleven.”

“Mm,” Alexander relaxes into the touch a bit more, his interest piqued. “Ten.”

“Hm?”

“Ten,” he mumbles lazily, eyes drifting closed. “Curfew is ten.”

The hand stills and disappears, and Conway tenses just long enough for Alexander to crack his eyes open again, and then he’s shuffling blankets aside and ordering, “Get up.”

“What -?”

“Get up, Alexander. Get dressed.”

“I don’t…” he turns and squints at the alarm clock on the opposite nightstand, and promptly feels his heart sink down into his stomach.

9:53

“What the hell?” he breathes, scrambling up and off the soft mattress, all exhaustion vanquished in a moment of complete and utter panic that’s threatening all too soon to morph into something much more akin to terror. “Jesus fucking Christ.”

He’s too stunned to verbally lay blame, but his eyes must be doing enough of it as he hastily pulls his shirt back on and digs his jeans out from where they’re half buried under the comforter, because
Conway, already buttoning up his shirt and looking mostly presentable, just says bleakly, “I’m sorry, Alexander, I thought…”

“You didn’t ask before you set the alarm?” he demands, voice shrill.

“We – when we were emailing last weekend, discussing… this… you said you had curfew at eleven, you wrote me at ten thirty and said…”

He trails away as Alexander smacks a palm over his face, heat rising in his cheeks. “It… Jesus,” he does up his belt and pulls up his hair with trembling hands. “It’s – we have to be in the building at ten. We have to be in bed at eleven.” But he interchangeably has referred to them both as curfew, knows exactly what Conway’s referring to, and he can’t bring himself to accept the entirety of the blame, because seriously, but…

…but yes, he can. Because for the hundredth time, he shouldn’t have ever been here in the first place.

“It doesn’t matter. Just… just get me back to the metro.”

Conway follows him down the stairs, talking to his back. “I’ll drive you into the city, it’ll take half the time.”

Alexander aborts his grab for his shoes and rounds on the man, rage exploding with a suddenness that shocks him. “And what?” he demands. “What do you think happens then? You think walking in forty minutes late from the metro looks worse than getting dropped off at the door twenty minutes late by you?”

“I’ll drop you at the Capitol South station, just let me take you - ”

“No.”

“It’s Saturday night, Alexander, it’s late, I don’t know if you should be…” He trails off, bites his lip anxiously on the sentence, and Alexander can’t help but bark a derisive laugh.

“I dare you – I fucking dare you to look me in the eye, after what we just did, and finish that sentence.” Silence. “Take me back to Crystal City.”

They don’t speak in the car, and it just might be the ten longest minutes of Alexander’s life.

x---x

He must look a mess, from the looks he gets on the train ranging from curious to sympathetic, and it’s not until he stands up as they approach the L’Enfant Plaza station and catches his reflection in the window that he realizes that somewhere along the line, he started crying. He switches onto the orange line for two more stops, and then wipes furiously at his face as he traverses the couple of blocks from the Capitol South station to Webster.

He’s panting, out of breath, probably red in the face anyway when he finally walks up to the doors, and then stops short as Lee steps out to greet him, eyes flashing. “I…”

“Get in here,” he seizes his upper arm and hauls him over the threshold, and then pulls the door closed and locks it with his free hand. Grip still tight around Alexander’s arm, he pulls him into the stairwell and leans down to his right in his face, “You have eighteen minutes to get yourself together
and get in bed, or I swear, I don’t care who on the Hill, among the leadership, treats you like a little pet, I will have Director Gates expel you from this program. Are we clear?"

He nods, wide-eyed and frantic, and turns and dashes up the stairs the second Lee relents his grasp. The room is blessedly empty when he darts in to grab his towel, a pair of sweatpants, his shower caddy, and he manages to snag the last free shower stall down the hall, noting Hercules’s things at the one on the far end. Aaron and John must be downstairs in the common room or the basement.

Turning the water up as high as it will go, he takes a moment at last to just stop and breathe, arms wrapped around his middle, drawing air in short, desperate pants, leaning against the cold tile wall and shaking.

When he slips out of the shower in his sweats, towel thrown around his shoulders, John is at the sink brushing his teeth. His eyes widen, catching sight of Alexander in the mirror, and he talks around a mouthful of toothpaste. “OuhmahGawd,” he spits and tries again. “Dude, what the hell? Shippen was about to call the-”

“Don’t, John,” he breathes, and just rushes back down the hall to their room, three minutes shy of the hour. Hercules shoots him a curious look overtop a book of Frost poems, and Aaron just watches through narrowed and calculating eyes as he throws on a t-shirt and all-but throws himself into his bunk, trembling.

Lee does the obligatory rounds; doesn’t linger in their room, isn’t any more or less sullen than usual as he accounts for the four of them, and then moves on to room next door shared by Ben, Abe, Caleb, and Robert. Once the sounds of their door opening and closing have passed, and Lee’s footsteps have faded down the hall, the bed shifts, the rustling fabric of John climbing out from under his blankets, and then the bunk is shaking with decidedly more force as he climbs up the side of it.

Alexander has just enough time to roll stubbornly away, face inches from the wall, before John’s slender form is slotting in behind him on the narrow bed, undoubtedly somewhat precarious by the edge. There’s a creak with the added weight, and he can hear Aaron scoff under his breath from the other top bunk.

A hand slides down his arm, seeking out his own, and he shakes John off. It’s too much, and too much like the way he woke up barely an hour earlier in a different bed, someone else at his back. John settles for stroking a hand through Alexander’s damp hair instead, whispering after a couple of minutes, “Are you in trouble?”

He hesitates, and then shrugs dully, still trying to parse Lee’s harsh words. Who on the Hill, among the leadership… is he giving him a pass because he’s more closely tied to Washington and Jefferson than the others? Because they’d specially sought his assistance, however much Washington might have come to regret it, with the German delegation?

“Are you okay?”

He nods; it’s a bit automatic, but he also thinks he might mean it, mostly. His racing heart has settled, he might not be doomed to be expelled from the program, and if no one’s going to ask questions, his secret is safe.

“You know I love you, right? Just… as a friend, as someone who cares about you?” Fresh tears well up in his eyes and he nods again. “It’s alright, if you don’t… or can’t… feel the same. But I’m just telling you – I’m here, alright? If you need help… if you need to talk… I’m here.”
“I know,” he whispers against the wall, and then flops on his back again once John climbs back down to his own bed a minute later.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Things spiral in unexpected ways.

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net
Recipient: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Subject: I’m sorry
I’m truly so very sorry about the hour, Alexander – are you okay?
sent: 23:21 4/14/18

Sender: Page.A.Hamil1@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net
Subject: [blank]
I don’t think I’m even in trouble? I don’t know. Lee was pissed but he just sent me upstairs to bed.
sent: 05:59 4/15/18

He sighs and closes out the browser, and debates internally whether he should go up to the common room and get some coffee, or skip caffeine in the interests of attempting more than his disjointed few hours of sleep. Restraint naturally lasts all of about five minutes, and then he’s trudging upstairs to the quiet hallway off the girls’ wing and setting up a chipped Smithsonian mug and waiting for the machine to heat up.

It’s not all that long before his classmates begin stirring, most of them keen to keep their weekend schedules fairly comparable to their early weekday arising. Maria pops in, looking far too presentable for the hour, chirps, “Oh hey, there you are,” grabs a to-go cup of coffee, and then darts off again, slipping her illicit cell phone into her purse.

Abe and Ben appear not long after and ask where he was. “It’s really a very boring story,” Alexander comments mildly, having settled on a vague and fairly impossible to confirm one way or the other explanation for his late arrival. “And you’ll only make fun of me forever.”

“Well then you kind of have to tell it,” Abe reasons.

He scowls for effect. “I maybe got on the red line heading the wrong way.” Which he’s actually done before, because fuck the red line and the way both ends of it curve back up into Maryland. “And then got preoccupied with a book and maybe didn’t notice until we got to Shady Grove.”
“I can see it,” Ben confesses, and Alexander flips a stray playing card in his direction.

John doesn’t even bother to ask for an explanation, which at once makes Alexander grateful and makes him cringe, because his friend has just flatly accepted that he won’t get anything approaching an honest response. What he *does* do, however, is sit quietly at his side and murmur, “My family’s picking me up in half an hour – we’re going out to Great Falls, it’s a National Park further north on the river. Do you want to come?”

He turns and looks at him sharply. “What’s your father going to say about bringing *me* along on family vacation day?”

“I don’t care,” John says with a shrug. “Do you want to come?”

It’s tempting in its way, but the last thing he wants is to spend the day squirming under Henry Laurens’s scrutinizing gaze and have the man make more unfounded assumptions about him and John, when it’s another matter entirely that would be preoccupying his thoughts.

“I should probably stick around here today,” he declines at last. “Keep Lee’s blood pressure down.”

John cracks a smile, doesn’t argue, and responds with a simple, “Okay,” that tells Alexander he hadn’t expected him to accept anyway.

So he stays in, like a good boy. Checks his email periodically downstairs, keeps up a somewhat teasing correspondence that doesn’t quite match his mood, but he knows Conway will be fretting and he wants to reassure him. He gets started on the homework already accumulating, a week into the new term, and starts mentally preparing himself for the return to Senate business as usual the next morning.

But sleep, once again, eludes him that night.

x---x

In English on Monday morning, Mister Trroup has to tap Alexander’s desk, twice, to get his attention, and then has to repeat the question he’d posed. Miss Cooper, in calculus, takes one long, good look at him when he comes in and collapses at his desk in a half-awake daze and sends him on his way.

“But - ”

“I don’t need you suffering from mid-semester burn-out sitting through a class that, based on your midterm performance, you could test straight out of right now. Go get some rest.” So he shuffles awkwardly back out of the room, and glances over his shoulder when she yells after him, “I’ll tell Mister Seabury not to expect you next period, don’t you dare sneak back down here,” and he supposes that she has gotten to know him pretty well over the last couple months.

He dozes fitfully, inner clock all thrown off kilter, and drags himself back out of bed to get dressed for the Capitol a little over an hour later... and then stares blankly when Shippen frowns at him as he comes down the stairs and tells him, “You’re excused for the day, Alexander, your teachers said you aren’t feeling well. I already spoke with Senator Jefferson’s office.”

So he trudges back upstairs, again, and pulls off the uniform he’d only just donned, swaps it out for a pair of flannel pajama pants and a hoodie with drawstrings frayed from worrying them between his fingers and his teeth over the years. He listens for the clamor of the last of the boys heading downstairs, waits another twenty minutes for Lee and Shippen to undoubtedly take their own breaks
while they’re all on the Hill, and then heads downstairs to make himself a cup of coffee, well aware that sleep will elude him now.

Mug in hand, he proceeds back to the basement and sits down at a computer, sighing, and sending an email that feels somewhat obligatory.

---

**Sender:** Page.A.Hamill1@senate.gov  
**Recipient:** TJC-3@iMail.net  
**Subject:** I guess my insomnia has its limits

One of my teachers kicked me out of class after I nearly fell asleep at my desk, and then had me called off work for the day for good measure. Of course, I didn’t realize the latter at the time, so after getting up and dressed and ready to go to work, now I’ll never be able to go back to sleep, and have resigned myself to my usual morning coffee.

**sent:** 09:11 04/16/18

---

He messes around on the computer, waiting to see if he’ll get a response in short order or if the senator is already embroiled in work for the day. He *does* get a ping of a new message about eight minutes later, but it’s short enough to suggest other things are preoccupying the man.

**Sender:** TJC-3@iMail.net  
**Recipient:** Page.A.Hamill1@senate.gov  
**Subject:** Feeling ok? What’s keeping you up? Still worried about the missed curfew?

**sent:** 09:19 04/16/18

---

**Sender:** Page.A.Hamill1@senate.gov  
**Recipient:** TJC-3@iMail.net  
**Subject:**¯\_(ツ)_/¯

No one’s brought it up and I’m not going to ask.  
Maybe my Sat night power nap has just thrown me off.

**sent:** 09:21 04/16/18

---

He heads upstairs to the common room after that to spread out with his calculus work, and feels a little guilty for all the time he has to catch up while his peers are working. A bit before noon, he
snags a banana that’s in that dubious more brown than yellow but not yet total mush stage from the counter in the kitchenette, and then heads upstairs to take a shower.

Then it’s back to the basement to start typing up an English paper, and he exercises a fair bit of self-control in waiting until he’s done with his detailed outline to check back in to their email correspondence.

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net
Recipient: Page.A.Hamill@senate.gov
Subject: Sorry, not sorry
Did I do that right? Is that what the kids are saying these days?
No, but I am. You know that, I hope, and I’m only glad that my oversight did not land you in any apparent hot water.
That said – if you’ll permit me a moment of sentimentality – I cannot get the thought of you in my bed from my mind. After these past weeks of stolen moments where we could seize them, to be able to take my time, to touch you, to hold you - well. Perhaps it’s for the best you were banned from the floor today, or the memory might drive me to distraction.
sent: 12:26 04/16/18

Sender: Page.A.Hamill@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net
Subject: LOL
Sure, yeah, we’ll go with that. #sorrynotsorry
sent: 13:41 04/16/18

He can’t bring himself to address any of the rest of it in email form, his own emotions still a tangled ball of chaos, the panic of the rush back to Webster having overshadowed any attempt to assess his feelings about anything else that had happened during that night.

Conway is nothing if not perceptive though.

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net
Recipient: Page.A.Hamill@senate.gov
Subject: Library?
I’ll be taking some work to the usual spot after hours tonight.
And that’s… actually tempting. Somewhere that’s thus far been proven to be a suitable place for a private conversation but without the implications or pressure of being alone, without the ever-present risk of being caught out doing something inappropriate. Just a senator and a page, who happened on the same quiet corner of the library…

Except.

Sender: Page.A.Hamill1@senate.gov
Recipient: TJC-3@iMail.net
Subject: I would, but…

John’s started to sort of… pay attention. After the Sat night debacle. Considering I’ll have had all day to work quietly, I’d rather not risk rousing further suspicions by sneaking off to “do homework.”

sent: 14:09 04/16/18

Conway messages back a quick acknowledgement, a vague hope that they’ll find time to talk during the week, and that’s that. He digs back into his essay, finishes a rough draft by four, and then grudgingly starts putting together thoughts for a project for Seabury’s class due the next week. But because it’s Seabury’s class, he loses himself in it a bit, and then startles when a voice behind him yanks him out of his writing.

“Hey – feeling better?”

It’s Maria, already changed out of her blues, looking quite pretty in a red sundress with lipstick to match. “Yeah,” he nods. “I’m not – I’m just exhausted. Long weekend.”

“Hm.”

The building is still too quiet, though, and he checks the time – nearly twenty to six, it’s late, far later than he’d realized it getting. “Where is everyone?”

“Leadership’s treating everyone to dinner at some fancy place in Dupont Circle. A welcome back from recess, you’ve made it halfway yay congrats kind of thing, I guess.” She shrugs. “Someone called your room, but I guess you were down here all day.”

“Yeah. They just leave?”

She nods, studies her nails while she leans in the doorway, disinterested. “Mhm. Worked late. You know how everyone gets after a break.”

There’s an obvious question here, so obvious he sort of feels like he shouldn’t ask it, but… “Why, uh – why aren’t you with them?”

Her dark eyes dart up to meet his, and she grins, sly and dangerous. “Oh, I have a ‘migraine’.” She
even air-quotes it, for good measure. “But you know how it goes.”

For a solid minute after she slips away, dress fluttering behind her, he just stares at the doorway in a little bit of awe, to be honest. He’s doing it wrong, he realizes, doing all of this wrong. No one pays attention to Maria Lewis flouting the rules because she’s so goddamn no fucks given about it, and here’s him, getting all nervous and cagey and just inviting the concern which leads to the questions, which leads to lies and more nerves and –

He draws a deep breath. Saves his civics work and goes upstairs. Digs an energy bar out of the cupboard in the common room and gnaws on it thoughtfully for a minute, debating, and then figures – well, fuck it. Everyone’s gone. By the sounds of it, won’t be back for quite some time, and he needs to get this conversation out of the way, needs to clear his head and get back in the game, now that the Senate is back in session and time management priorities go back up.

A quick detour to his room to grab his ID, and he’s out the door and on his way to the Library complex around the corner, and hopes Conway didn’t change his plans for the night.

x---x

All the times he’s used this spot to sit and work on schoolwork afterhours, he’s maybe seen someone else on the floor, besides Conway, thrice. After six, the building is only open for special events, which are always on one of the lower floors, and Capitol staff, who are more likely to use the primary reading room in the main building, or the congressional reading room and law library in the other auxiliary building.

So it surprises him, as he emerges from the stairwell and turns the corner towards the middle of the floor, to hear the ding of an elevator arriving on this level. Surprises him enough to back up and wait, see who it is, because if it’s yet another beneficiary of Jefferson’s absurd welcome to the Capitol tour, this excursion is over before it even started.

He doesn’t recognize the man who emerges, but he looks Capitol staffer enough, he supposes, watching quietly from his semi-concealed spot – sharp suit, neatly cropped brown hair, narrowed eyes and a tersely set, prominent jaw he can see even in profile, and he strides purposefully out of the elevator looking determined and… confrontational?

The man heads straight for the opening of the little alcove where Alexander always sits. The spot where Conway told him he’d be. Alexander creeps out, steps as softly as he can manage as he passes the short bank of elevators, and starts to peer around the corner to see if Conway’s there, if it’s just a random happenstance of someone looking to take advantage of the same quiet spot – and then whips his head back around the corner just as quickly when he hears the hiss of an angry voice.

“You goddamned, stupid fuck.”

There’s a vague sense of familiarity in the voice, despite his confidence that the man is not known to him, but he doesn’t have much time to ponder that before –

“Lovely – is this the bad cop portion of the program?” That dry voice there is unmistakably Conway, and Alexander feels his heart rate speed up.

“Go to hell, Senator – you think I want to spend my time cleaning up another one of your messes?”

There’s a scoff, and then, “It’s handled. It’s fine.”
“Yeah, that’s what you told the good cop what? Six weeks ago now? I thought,” the man speaks lowly, dangerously, “that we had an agreement about this shit.”

There’s a terse pause, and then Conway mutters, “It’s different this time.”

“Oh, Jesus fucking Christ.”

“He’s… he just - ”

“Yeah, believe me, I know, I’ve been hearing about how awesome Alexander goddamn Hamilton is for months now.” Alexander thinks his heart might actually beat straight out of his chest, and he claps a hand over his mouth to muffle his ragged breathing. “You know the difference? Everyone else who thinks he’s great? They wonder where he’ll go to school, what he’ll do with his life,” there’s a rustle of fabric, some scuffling, and then an even more quietly hissed, “They don’t stick their cocks up his ass!”

“Get your hands off of me,” Conway orders softly.

“You think I’m the bad guy here,” the other man muses, tone dark and dangerous. “Fine. Yeah. I have a partisan interest that means I’ll throw your ass straight under the bus the second it becomes politically expedient to do so. But the next time you go running to your good cop buddy because you fucked up, just remember – he will fucking ruin you if you become too much of a liability. If you really piss him off? He’ll ruin your boy too, for good measure. And if you don’t believe that, you don’t know him at all.”

“Leave Alexander out of it.”

“That’s sweet.”

“I’m serious." 

“And we were serious the first time we told you to keep your hands off the goddamn teenagers on staff, or at least wait until they’re off the Hill and turned eighteen for Christ’s sake, but here we are. Congratulations.”

x---x

He’s never quite sure how he makes it back to Webster. Knows in an abstract sort of way that he crept just as quietly back to the stairwell, heart in his throat, pushed open the door and prayed to a god in whom he hasn’t believed in years that the soft click of the latch would go unnoticed.

Knows he fled down four flights of stairs faster than was probably prudent, and dashed across Second Street without adhering to any basic semblance of pedestrian safety, darted back into the blissfully empty building and up to the second floor, where he leaned against the wall outside their room, catching his breath, until it registered in his mind that he was going to be sick.

So now he’s crouched over a toilet down the hall in the bathroom, retching while his stomach decides if there’s enough in it to even throw up, and wondering where along the line he became such a goddamn idiot; wondering why it had somehow never occurred to him, despite Angelica Schuyler’s vague warning, despite the initial unsettlement about the night at the Archives, that this was just… how Conway was. A new batch of pages, a new plaything to coax into his bed, and he’d fallen for it, hook, line, and sinker. The ego-stroking, the fretting, and anxious concern over pushing too far, too fast…
And apparently, despite the constant urge for discretion, he told someone, has at least two someones enlisted for help with damage control, two anonymous people on the Hill who know what they did, watching and waiting… deciding if they’re liabilities.

A twisted spot in the back of his mind thinks that maybe he’s glad that his mother isn’t around anymore to see how far he’s fallen.

Once that thought catches up to him, he sits down in the cramped stall and starts sobbing, which at least shocks his body out of trying to vomit up the measly granola bar.

He gives himself a few minutes to wallow in self-pity and self-recrimination, until the grossness of sitting on the floor of the bathroom stall starts to outweigh the rest, and he drags himself up, ducks over to the sink, throws some frigid water on his face, and stares down at his hands propped on the counter, trying to think; rationalize; prioritize. His writing hand twitches, and he yearns to jot things down, to map out his thoughts, what he knows, what he suspects, but he’s not that stupid, can’t leave a paper trail.

So he retreats to his bunk and wraps himself up in his comforter and stares at the ceiling.

The biggest priority seems to be figuring out who the man in the library had been, as well as his corresponding, so-called good cop figure, but that looks… next-to-impossible. Someone with a Capitol pass, someone with access to the library after hours – which doesn’t much narrow it down, there are thousands of people who work on the Hill. He’d mentioned a partisan interest that apparently did not include Conway, so he presumes he’s connected with the federalist party in some way. And that’s… about all he has to go on.

The second biggest priority is… figuring out where he goes from here. Figuring out what should be done – figuring out what can be done.

Figuring out if he’s willing to do it. Because any attempt to alert someone – who? – that this is apparently a habit of the senator means confessing his own role in the affair, and… and…

And what does it change? that sinister voice in the back of his head murmurs. You knew it was fucked up, what you were doing, and you chose to do it anyway. What makes you special? Why should it have been any different with any of the others?

He can’t wrap his head around that one just yet. Why he should condemn Conway for engaging in the exact same activity which Alexander had encouraged provided only the barest of assurances – Was it illegal? It wasn’t – he’d googled the fucking age of consent to make sure it wasn’t, for God’s sake.

Can he condemn the man, kill his career, simply for the audacity of treating someone else as he had Alexander? He frowns, as he considers the immediacy of the impulse, and perhaps better understands Conway’s fretting after that first kiss and subsequent panic.

He’s no closer to untangling any of the confusion raging through his mind when he hears the rest of the students return just after eight. He sits up on his bed, legs dangling over the side, head bowed and arms wrapped around his middle, waiting, and still looks up sharply at the sound of the doorknob turning.

It’s John, just John, and Alexander is unendingly grateful for that when the other boy offers him a vague smile, a half wave, turns towards his dresser while reaching up to loosen his tie – and then
double-takes and stares wide-eyed at Alexander’s stricken face. “What’s wrong? What happened?”

He shakes his head. “I…” Sees John brace for the disappointment of another unanswered question, and manages quietly, “Can we… go for a walk?”

They end up on the steps of the Longworth Building. A Capitol Police officer approaches them, shines a flashlight in their faces, and then laughs and greets John like they’re old friends (maybe they are). Once she’s moved on to continue her patrol, John nudges Alexander’s knee with his own, tries to catch his eyes, sitting in the dark as they are. “Hey.”

He stares down at his feet as he talks. “I, uh… I did something stupid. Really, really stupid. A can’t tell you what I did kind of stupid.”

“Okay,” John responds evenly. “A… damage you can never undo, kind of stupid?”

“Well… no,” he hedges. “I mean… gosh, what would that even be?”


“Yes, because those two things are totally on the same plane of insanity.”

“Ehhhh…” John hums, and Alexander smacks him in the arm.

“Just more of a… didn’t think this through… kind of stupid. I guess.”

John hums again, considering. “I, um… I asked you the other night, if you were in trouble?” He nods in acknowledgement. “I didn’t necessarily just mean, like… trouble with Lee and Shippen.”

Alexander blinks over at him. “Sorry, are we still talking about knocking a girl up, or…?”

“I… don’t even know why I try.”

He thinks about it, honestly does, and shakes his head. “No, I don’t think… I’m not in trouble, I’m just… I have to figure out what to do. And depending what I do, I could screw things up for someone else. If that makes any sense at all.”

“It… makes sense. S’not very reassuring, to be honest, but it makes sense.” He pauses and sighs, clearly frustrated and trying not to show it too much, and tilts his head sideways. “Want to know what I think?”

“Hm?”

“I think,” he reaches over and takes Alexander’s hand in his, just holds it there, clasping gently, “that sometimes, you just need to do what’s best for you. Take care of yourself. Be a little selfish. You can’t always save the world and everyone in it.”

And that’s… maybe a bit helpful, actually. Because if he takes all the rest out of it, the mysterious man in the library, the considerations of what sins Conway has committed in the past, what he might yet do in the future – if he removes the anxiety of the notion of potentially giving himself away in this, he’s really only left with one option.

It’s time to put an end to this once and for all. Just get the stress of it gone from his life, refocus on his classes, his work, in the last two months he has left in D.C.
He needs to talk to the senator, alone, one last time.

---

He darts down to the hideaway office from where he’s doing homework in the lobby as soon as the lunch break is called, can’t risk John seeing him leave, trying to follow. When Conway walks in five minutes later, Alexander is sitting on the edge of the couch, arms wrapped around his schoolbag that’s sitting in his lap. He’s not sure what it is, exactly, that Conway reads on his face in that moment, as he looks up at him when he comes in the small room, but from the faint, resigned smile that touches his lips, Alexander knows that it’s enough.

A month ago, a week ago… yesterday… the prospect of this conversation would have made him wonder if the man would be sad, or resigned, or ask him to reconsider. The memory of harsh, whispered voices – it’s different this time – keeps such trivial sentimentalities at bay. How many times were there?

“I think,” Conway perches on the edge of his desk, crosses his arms and bows his chin to his chest, thoughtful, “that I knew this was coming before we even got in the car on Saturday night.”

“It’s not…” he squeezes his eyes shut and tries to force the words out, explain without explaining, without admitting what he now knows. “I got a pass on that one,” he starts slowly, “that I don’t quite understand. But now it’s… one of the proctors is pissed, the other one is worried, and worry leads to questions that I can’t answer. Questions that my friends have already started asking.”

“I get it,” the senator murmurs. “I guess I just… is that all?”

“What do you mean?”

He looks up, and there’s an anxiousness in his eyes that catches Alexander off guard when he asks, “Did I hurt you?”

“What? No.”

His answering smile isn’t quite disbelieving, and he shakes his head. “But you weren’t ready.”

“I…” God, is this the last direction he wants to take this conversation, but what choice does he really have? “I…don’t know.” Conway bites his lip, eyes tight. “I can’t… separate those emotions from the panic afterwards.”

“I’m really sorry,” he whispers, and Alexander needs to get out of this room before he starts feeling guilty for something.

“It’s my fault,” he stands up, awkwardly slings his bag over one shoulder. “And it’s done now. It’s okay. Right? This is… it’s okay.”

Conway smiles reluctantly, fondly, and steps forward to rest his hands on Alexander’s shoulders. “Of course. I told you a long time ago – you don’t need this distraction, anyway. Much as I came to enjoy it.” He goes pink, and Conway leans forward to place a soft kiss against his lips. “I’ll miss you.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” he reminds him. “Just… can’t come down here, anymore.”

“Take care of yourself, Alexander.”
He forces a strained smile. “I always do.”

John’s still in line to swipe his meal card when Alexander makes it to the Longworth cafeteria. He grabs his usual cup of coffee, plucks a sandwich out of one of the open-display fridges, swings through the shortest cashier line, and takes his haul to the small table where John’s set his tray, already pulling a book out of his bag. “This seat taken?”

He pauses with *Gatsby* halfway to the table and looks up, surprised. A beat passes, and then a wide, slow smile spreads across his face and he nods Alexander into the empty chair opposite.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Alexander might be a bit pissed and resentful. Just a little.
Meanwhile, John still ships Laf & Addy, hard.

Chapter Notes

Friday chapter coming to you a few hours early, because I have Places To Be in the morning and don't do that whole 'waking up earlier than necessary' thing. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Things for Alexander return to normal; or, well, as normal as they ever were on Capitol Hill, he supposes. He still goes through some days powered on caffeine and sheer obstinacy, sleep can still be elusive…but his mind is calming. The fits of keen anxiety that have intermittently plagued him over the past several weeks are slowly abating, but he can’t deny the sharp twinge he still feels every time he sees Conway, the way it twists even deeper when he catches the senator’s eyes lingering on him for a moment too long.

It’s not enough to make anyone else look twice. He wonders if it’s something that just sort of always happened, that he simply never took notice of before, and he can’t figure out how he’s supposed to interpret it, how he’s supposed to respond. Is it concern? Longing? As Conway had put it in that last series of emails they’d exchanged, memories driving him to distraction?

Mostly, he just ducks his head to hide the tinge of color rising in his cheeks. There’s a certain surrealistic quality to his own memories, now that he’s looking back on them from outside the haze of nerves and secrecy, the dangerous allure of the thing.

You did that, he finds his brain reminding him multiple times over the course of the week. You went home with a senator, a man more than twice your age and touched him, let him touch you, put your mouth on his dick and let him put his fingers inside you and –

Well. Anyway. Rising sense of mortification aside, there’s a relief in it, in the feeling that he’s regaining certain mental faculties that he hadn’t quite realized had left him in the first place. John had remarked some time ago about how he’d grown less confrontational in Seabury’s class, and he attributed it at the time to having someone else to bicker with, someone who would fire back without rolling his eyes, but he realizes now that there was something more to it, an instinct not to draw attention to himself.

Seabury brings up voter ID laws in class that Friday, and Alexander can safely say he’s shaken off that tendency towards reticence. John grins and winks at him, and Seabury looks like he doesn’t know what hit him.

That afternoon, he follows John back to the senate floor from lunch, and forces himself not to break stride at the door when he sees Conway sitting at the dais chatting with Aaron. It’s not an uncommon
picture, not from before their little fling and not even during it, but it takes his everything to take up his usual spot by John, to greet Conway with a nod and a casual, “Senator.”

“Mister Hamilton,” he smiles faintly, “Mister Laurens,” and then goes back to listening to Aaron, who is…

…talking about their class that morning.

“…will never understand the argument that the most basic of expectations, that a citizen hold some form of legitimate identification, somehow equates to a poll tax.”

“Because acquiring identification costs money, don’t be purposefully obtuse,” John snaps.

“You can’t function in society without it! Who are these mythical legitimate voters who go through life never needing a state-issued ID but finding the time to vote?”

He can feel John vibrating in righteous indignation at his side, and Alexander speaks up blandly. “High school students,” he suggests, “who are eighteen and don’t drive yet. College students who don’t need a car and function just fine in society on their student IDs. For starters.”

“Someone who can’t afford to get their license renewed, someone who relies on public transportation,” John adds, ticking off on his fingers. “An older person who doesn’t drive anymore and lets their license expire.”

“You can get a state ID that isn’t a driver’s license,” Aaron bites back. “But no, it’s a lot easier and more politically expedient if we just never expect any amount of personal responsibility from anyone, isn’t it?”

“Right, because the college kid who’s turned away from the polls because her university identification isn’t enough to verify her identity is such a lazy fucking slob, am I right?”

Aaron rolls his eyes so hard it looks painful. “Stop treating the outliers like the rule.”

Alexander just stares, dumbfounded. “I – what? Stop treating the outliers like they’re the failures for not being middle-aged and middle-class!” Conway opens his mouth, like he wants to speak up, to break up the brewing spat, but Alexander talks over him. “Or, heaven forbid, join the civilized world and issue a national ID card.”

“There’s no problem that more government spending can’t fix,” Aaron nods, tone snide.

Conway smiles a bit apologetically, and adds, “I, for one, would have severe privacy concerns at the notion of mandating such a thing at the federal level.”

“Right, because it’s more fun to let states set arbitrary policies that let them pull you over and demand your papers if you look too fucking Mexican.”

John shuffles awkwardly at his side. “Alexander…”

“It’s such an extraordinary amount of cognitive-dissonance bullshit!” he exclaims, hands gesticulating wildly. “My God. Can’t trust who someone is without a government ID but God forbid the government actually, you know, issue IDs; unless, of course, it’s a military ID, because all things at the federal level are total overreach unless it involves fighting for our freedom, in which case you can do no wrong.”

He sees Conway’s eyes drift over his head, where he’s turned sideways on the ledge, and then the
shadow falls over him; he turns and looks up at Jefferson’s unimpressed stare, “Hamilton,” he deadpans, and reaches a hand down to take him by the elbow, “a word?”

Alexander yanks his arm away, violently. “Could you refrain from manhandling me about the place, sir?” he grumbles as he climbs to his feet. Jefferson takes a step back and puts his hands up defensively, brows shooting up his forehead, and then turns and leads the way back out into the hallway without once looking back to see if he’s following.

When they reach a relatively vacated stretch of hall, he turns and crosses his arms over his chest, and cocks a cool brow. “Well?”

“Sir?”

“What’s your problem?”

“I…?” He stops and breathes, and realizes what he just did, what he just said, where he just said it, and… “Oh.”

“You can’t do that, kid,” Jefferson says slowly. “I know you’re… opinionated, and smart enough to back it up, but you can’t talk like that on the floor. You’re a messenger, okay? Keep the politics to yourself, while you’re working, and be glad that Washington wasn’t here to hear you swearing at a senator loud enough for half the chamber to catch. He’d have your ass out the door before you knew what hit you.”

“Yes, sir.”

Jefferson waves him off towards the cloakroom. “I’d tell you to take a few minutes and chill, but something tells me you’d be better served arguing with angry lobbyists on the phones for the next hour.”

Okay, yeah, he’s probably right about that one.

And maybe there’s a little bit of anger and resentment lurking beneath the relief. Resentment that reaches its peak when he checks his email before bed that night and sees his first message from Conway since their Tuesday conversation.

Sender: TJC-3@iMail.net

Recipient: Page.A.Hamill@senate.gov

Subject: [blank]

Should we talk?

I’m worried about you.

sent: 19:04 04/20/18

He doesn’t write back; tries to clear his mind until curfew with his calculus homework for the next week, and then physics after that when it hasn’t quite yet done the trick; ignores John’s occasional anxious looks, Aaron’s curious ones, and by the time he heads to bed just shy of eleven, he has an idea.
And he’s pretty proud of himself for stewing over the idea until he falls asleep, and waiting to commit to pursuing it until he wakes up and it doesn’t yet sound like a terrible plan. He goes downstairs and drinks his coffee, absently plays a couple of card games with Abe and Caleb, and then when it reaches a more human hour, he ducks awkwardly into the hallway where the girls’ rooms are and knocks at the door on the end.

Proctor Shippen opens the door after a few seconds, and blinks in surprise. “Oh – good morning, Alexander.” She’s already dressed, hair curled and make-up done, looking as put together as always. “What can I do for you?”

“Can I talk to you for a minute?”

“Yes, of course…” she ducks back into her room for her key and then steps out into the hallway, closes the door, and leads the way back out towards the common room and the main lobby. “I’m sorry, is Mister Lee out, or…?”

“Uh…” He grins sheepishly at her, wrings his hands a bit, and shrugs. “Far’s I know, he’s upstairs, but, well… he’s a bit of a… jerk?”

A surprised huff of laughter slips out before she can stop it. “Well – you might be right.” She takes up a seat on the bench between the entrance of the building and the door to the stairwell, and smiles patiently up at him. “What’s on your mind?”

He draws a deep breath. “I want to spend the rest of the term on the other side of the floor.”

A drawn-out moment passes, where she just blinks up at him in polite befuddlement. “Come again?”

“When I got here, I was expecting to work on the federalists’ side.”

“I recall.”

“And Mister Gates was annoyed that moving me threw the usual numbers off.”

“Uh-huh.”

“But Senators Washington and Jefferson agreed that they’d move my file to Jefferson’s office since Washington was taking an indeterminate leave.”

“Mmhm.”

“Well…” he shrugs again and spreads his hands. “Senator Washington is back, and yeah, he’s gone a lot for campaign things, but I don’t think I really need the babysitting anymore anyway, at this point in the game?”

“I shouldn’t think so,” she agrees, still sounding bemused. “But none of that explains why you want to swap sides.”

Oh. Right. “It’s just… um. Well. I’m interested in the other perspective, you know?” She blinks coolly. “And want to get the chance to make the acquaintance of more people on the other side of the aisle.” Brows go up. “And honestly, we have all of our classes together and we room together, and if I have to keep sitting next to Aaron Burr on the dais every day, I’m liable to punch him.”

“Ah,” she points at him with a thin, manicured finger. “Now that one I believe.”

“So I can move?”
She sighs. “I’ll ask if you can move. It’s not up to me. And it’s not how things are done, or else we’d just swap everyone over after the recess. Letting you alone do it just sort of makes it look like you’re prowling for future internship opportunities, I have to admit.”

He can live with that, he thinks, remembering John’s frank assessment of him and his ambition the morning of the Philadelphia trip; remembering Aaron’s assertion, that he’s got nothing to lose and everything to prove, why not fulfil the image? And in the process, get away from Conway, send him a message without saying a word.

No more chance of being a liability, he thinks, swallowing hard as he remembers the hostile stranger’s words in the library.

“I can live with that,” he tells her.

“Okay,” she shrugs. “I’ll email Mister André and Mister Arnold, and let you know what the leadership says.”

“Thank you,” he says, sincere, and heads back to join the common room, slowly filling with his classmates as they get up and ready for the day.

x---x

He tells John about his request, in an effort to head off some potential hurt in the event it’s granted, but the questions are there regardless. He tries to explain that he needs a change of environment without explaining that he’s avoiding one specific person who, granted, he’ll still see every day on the floor, but won’t have an excuse to get drawn into conversation with him anymore, will never be called upon to run his errands about the Hill.

“I’m not crazy, right?” John frowns at him from across a table at Adrienne’s late Saturday morning. “I mean, this has something to do with… whatever the hell we talked about on Monday night, right?”

“You told me,” Alexander traces the rim of his mug absently, looking down at his cup of chai, “to do best for me, and I just… haven’t you ever just needed a change? After a break up or a fight with your parents or something?”

“Like the coffee-fiend drinking chai,” he glances pointedly.

“Ha, ha,” Alexander rolls his eyes. “I’ll have you know, it’s dirty chai.”

“Uh.”

“Espresso shot.”

“Aha.” He pauses to think. “I painted my room hot pink after my dad asked me to not be gay until college,” John confesses drily after a moment of thought. “I don’t even like pink, I just wanted to annoy the old man.”

He stares. “That’s… one way to do it, I guess.”

“I lasted a month before it drove me crazy, it’s sea green now.”

He pulls a face. “Isn’t that like… just as bad?”
“You’re thinking of sea-foam green, I’m talking about sea green.”

Apparently it’s not too late in the term to learn new things about John Laurens, including that he’s a walking Crayola box. “Anyway. Point is, my life needs a shakeup, and there’s only so much of one I can get here.”

“Oh, but imagine Lee’s aneurysm if we painted our room chartreuse one weekend.”

“I pity your future college roommate.”

Adrienne comes by not long after and pawns off some baking misfires on them – today, iced cookies that got smudged in the decorating process. John shoves half of one in his mouth in one bite and then asks her, crumbs spilling out of his mouth, “Yoo go’n’a dat’wif Laffy’it yit?”

“What.”

Alexander graciously translates. “He wants to know if you’ve yet succumbed to the charms of our eccentric French friend.”

“You’re incorrigible,” she shakes her head, and then bites her lip and looks a bit conflicted.

“Yes!” John punches the air, and gets flicked in the shoulder.

“No,” she corrects. “But like… okay, here’s the problem. I don’t have time to date; I don’t even know if I want a serious relationship right now. But if I don’t say yes before November, I’ll have basically locked myself out of the possibility for eight years because, let’s face it, Washington is going to be president, twice, Gil’s going to have a job at the White House, and I don’t want him to think I just said yes finally because he’s working for the president and I find power sexy, or something.”

“In fairness,” Alexander adds reasonably, “if Washington wins and Lafayette works in the White House, then he won’t have time to date either, so.”

Her face falls. “Oh great, that’s two problems.”

“Get married now and have lots of sex and babies before the election,” John suggests.

Alexander frowns at him. “I’m really very concerned about the state of sex ed in South Carolina.”

“What sex ed? It’s South Carolina,” and yeah, okay, point.

<x---x>

There’s no further word from Shippen before they go back to work on Monday morning, but then Jefferson walks into the chamber early while the pages are still setting up for the day and beckons Alexander out into the lobby, where Washington is waiting. He stands in front of the two men, waiting, until Jefferson waves a hand impatiently. “Well?”

“…Sir?”

“What’s the deal? We had this conversation three months ago. I thought we were getting somewhere; bringing you over to the light side of the whatever.”

Washington glances sidelong at him, brow raised, and says nothing.
“There is absolutely no way whatsoever you thought our political views align in the slightest, Senator Jefferson.”

Jefferson grins, all teeth. “Okay, maybe not. Doesn’t change the fact that it doesn’t matter, ‘cause that’s not your job.”

If he were just having this conversation with Jefferson, he feels like he could probably bullshit his way through it. Washington strikes him as an altogether different story, and so he throws a bit of caution to the wind and goes for a bit of veiled truth. “I think, sir, that you know me well enough by now that it would not shock you if I said I was experiencing something of a… personality conflict… with someone I can’t help but cross paths with on the dem-rep side.”

Jefferson’s brow furrows deeply. “Student or staffer?”

The fact that he doesn’t even suggest senator reassures Alexander slightly. “Due respect, sir, I’m not looking for someone to fight my battles for me, I’m just trying to avoid them altogether.”

The retort on Jefferson’s lips dies when Washington breaks in with a calm, “I’ll allow it.”


“Hm; we ask a lot of the young men and women we bring into the program, and they are afforded a great deal of trust. I will trust Mister Hamilton’s judgement, if he feels his success in the remainder of the term would be best achieved from the other side of the floor.”

“I – thank you, sir.”

“Your file will remain with Senator Jefferson’s office, as I am often away, but Benedict will keep the office running here in my absence, if you have any questions with which he might assist you.”

He nods his thanks, and turns to head back into the chamber.

“And, Mister Hamilton?” He turns back. “Don’t forget, Senator Adams is in charge of the pages on the federalist side when I am gone.”

Smile a bit fixed, he nods once more, and darts through the wide, ornate doors.

The two senators watch him go, and Washington murmurs, “Keep an eye on him.”

“Thinking there’s more to that story?”

There’s a contemplative silence, broken only by the occasional acknowledgement of their colleagues filing in to the room ahead of the hour, ready for the work day to begin. “Maybe, maybe not. And there’s something commendable in seeking help, however hard he tried to veil the request. But he also wouldn’t be the first page to burn out during a school term.”

“No, but he never struck me as the type.”

“Hm. Who did you say he was arguing with on Friday?”

“Ah… Aaron Burr and Thomas Conway.”

“Did Conway take offense?”
Jefferson snorts. “Hardly; I think he’s always gotten a kick out of the kid’s cheek though.”

“He did seem to particularly enjoy Hamilton making Congressman Van Ness look the fool during the fiasco with the German chancellor.” He pauses. “In fairness, I rather enjoyed that as well.”

“Most would.” He thinks it over for another minute, finds no satisfying answers, and shrugs dully. “I told him Friday that another display like that was liable to land him out on his ass. Mighta just scared him into heading off something else before it started. I’ll keep an eye, but… he’s impulsive and a smartass, but he’s not stupid.”

“No, he is not.”

“Were we more or less tolerant of the antics of pages before our own kids were teenagers?”

Washington turns and blinks at him, smiles, claps him on the shoulder, and leads the way into the chamber.

x---x

Hercules elbows him in the ribs when he wedges himself in at his side on the dais, but no one pays him much mind. Adams gives him something of a dirty look when he hands a manila folder to Abe to run off and deliver somewhere on the House side of the building and yeah, that’ll be fun from here until June, but he can deal with John Adams’s attitude.

He spends the second hour of the morning out in the lobby chatting with John, and then takes up a shift in the federalists’ cloakroom with Hercules and Abigail, who introduce him to Mister Knox, the jovial man in charge of keeping the place running.

After forty-five minutes, they break for lunch; Alexander finishes up his phone call and then darts down the hall that runs behind the chamber to the democratic-republican cloakroom so he can retrieve his schoolbag that he’d deposited there that morning. The room is already cleared by the time he gets there, and he hoists his bag over his shoulder and turns to the door so he can go catch up with John for lunch.

He nearly barrels into Conway in the doorway.

There’s a terse moment, a few seconds at most, where they stare at each other, mirrored stricken expressions on their faces – and then the senator smiles tightly, nods once, and stands aside to let Alexander through.

And that’s that.

It feels like releasing a breath he didn’t even realize he was holding. The tension he’d been holding onto melts away as the week progresses. It’s the old routines with enough novelty to reengage his interest, and he finds himself more often than not squeezing in pieces of conversations with Mister Knox around his calls and errands from the cloakroom, and even finds himself chatting about policy with Senator Greene one morning after running into the man getting coffee and walking with him the rest of the way to the floor.

Aaron isn’t particularly shy about implying exactly what Shippen had said people would assume, regarding his switch, and Alexander finds himself unable to care. Which seems to surprise John, who looks resignedly braced for an argument.
He’s content; it’s calm. And it’s not until much later, after things blow up in his face one last time, after the dust settles, that it occurs to him that the calm was reminiscent of that unnatural stillness before the snow, the momentary quiet at the eye of a hurricane – the calm before the storm.

Because that’s when James Reynolds walks into his life.

Chapter End Notes

My apologies to South Carolina, which The Google tells me at least in *theory* has comprehensive sex ed laws, though I gather schools are less than stellar at meeting the standard. John goes to private school, anyway, because of course he does.

Also, I appreciate all the love, guys. This story turned into something of a monster I wasn’t anticipating even when I started posting it and I’m *still* trying to hit the epilogue just right and keep rewriting parts of it and scrapping other sections and GAH. I think I’m going to have to lose a scene I wrote AGES ago because it just doesn’t fit but by god I’m trying to jam it in there.

Have a lovely weekend and see you Monday!
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Alexander sees injustice in the world, and Maria tells it to back the fuck off.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

During the last week in April, the pages are dismissed early on Thursday afternoon to attend a reception kicking off *Passport DC*, a month-long international festival featuring an assortment of cultural events and dozens of embassy open houses. The reception is near Dupont Circle, at the aptly-named *Embassy Row Hotel*, and so Alexander and John, and an assortment of their classmates, hop on the metro after changing out of their sweltering suits.

Many of the attendees are not so lucky, clearly having come straight from work; which is fine, for mingling over drinks in the big ballroom and the lobby, but there’s a sign reminding people to venture to the rooftop terrace for further multicultural exploration, and Alexander is pretty eager to see these stuffy politicians and diplomatic corps staffers pretending to enjoy themselves lounging around by a pool that isn’t even open yet for the season.

Alexander roams about with John, plucking tiny appetizer samplings off of tables decked out in flags and art from the country in question. They just go in a circle around the room, unlike Caleb and Ben, who dart about alphabetically, and Abe and Anna, who organize their tasting according to hemisphere.

About three quarters of the way around, by which time John has been stopped twice for greetings by friends of his father, they get to France, where a familiar face is waiting. “Oh my God,” John says. Adrienne shrugs.

“No,” he exclaims in delight, and she shrugs again. “This is the best day. Where is he?”

“Panicking over a speech he’s supposed to be giving soon, because he accidentally brought the notes for one of Washington’s stump speeches instead.”

“And he just abandoned you here in France?” John tsks pitifully. “For shame.”

Now this is the best day, Alexander decides. “How long has that bar been open? Has he considered that no one might notice?”

They rescue Adrienne from France and escort her about the room, earning more than a few quizzical glances towards the woman on the arm of two teenage boys half her age, but they keep her entertained with an absurd running commentary on the familiar faces they pass while she identifies the random odd person by their regular drink order at her café or, in Congressman Lee’s case, “a strawberry cake pop, but only when no one else is in the store to see him eat it.”

Just before six, they migrate up to the rooftop where the real party seems to have been hiding, and Alexander stares around at the visible flags, brow furrowed. “Did they…? They did.”
“Hm?” John leans in to hear him over the music at the chatter.

“They put the tropics up here. Brazil,” he points, “Fiji, Papua New Guinea. The Bahamas.” He spots a tiki torch on his final turn. “I think I’m offended.”

“I think I need a piña colada,” Adrienne eyes the bar, “excuse me.” And she ducks out from between them, long skirt swirling around her legs.

He turns, exasperated, back to John, who’s already shoving a conch fritter into his mouth off the Bahamian table. “Et tu, Laurens?”

“I’m embracing the theme, in all of its cheesy glory,” he mumbles around his bite, and then plucks another off the table. “You eat these in Saint Croix? I’ll come visit you if I can get some of these.”

“I’ll let you know when conch season starts back up.” John blinks at Alexander, then down at the fried food in his hand, and then back up at Alexander. “Hey, and if you’re eighteen by then, you can buy the piña coladas for the both of us.”

“I am coming to Saint Croix,” John vows solemnly.

Adrienne winds her way gracefully through the throngs of people back to their side, drink in hand complete with a toothpick umbrella, which John promptly steals, sucks the liquid off, and sticks in Alexander’s hair above his ear. “Finally caught sight of Gil again,” Adrienne informs them, nodding towards a small pavilion at the far end of the roof. “Think he found some fellow expatriates.”

John hums thoughtfully. “Ditching you for his bro friends on the first date, bad form.”

“Who said anything about the first date?”

“Oh my God,” he turns and stares desperately at her, “when’s the wedding?”

They meander along in the general direction of Lafayette in anticipation of the upcoming speech for which he may or may not have acquired the proper notes, and then find themselves watching as another familiar figure approaches the gathering. Lafayette bounds exuberantly over to Jefferson, kisses his cheeks, and clasps his hands tightly while speaking a mile-a-minute.

Their little trio just stops to watch. “There’s fanfiction of this somewhere on the internet,” John declares.

A moment’s considering pause, and then: “I’d ship it,” Adrienne declares neutrally.

“John would write it,” Alexander points out, and gets a sharp elbow in the side. “Oh, hello,” he watches a young woman join the two, already tall and then unapologetically towering over Lafayette in heels that put her at a height with Jefferson. The yellow of her sleeveless dress stands out against her dark skin, and red highlights flash under the sunlight in her black hair. The senator puts a hand around her shoulders and gestures like he’s introducing her, and then she gets the same treatment from the effusive Frenchman. “Jefferson likes ‘em young, I guess.”

“Dude,” John turns, scandalized, “that’s his…” a shriek cuts him off, and then Eliza Schuyler is barreling into the newcomer and practically dragging her away from the others, “…daughter.”

Eliza must have seen their little gathering hovering on the edge of all the activity, because she leads her friend straight to them. In watching them go, Lafayette catches sight of Adrienne and beams and beckons her over.
“They let you out for cocktails with foreign dignitaries?” John grins and pulls the newcomer into a hug. “What the hell kind of place are the nuns running over there across the river?”

She grins, mischievous and dangerous, and Alexander can see entirely too much of her father in her smile. “It’s been years since Catholic school; Polly’s still stuck with the nuns until eighth grade though.”

“I like the red,” Eliza admires the streaks in her hair.

“Dorm dye-job.”

“Well, the nuns certainly would never have gone for that,” John nods, and gets an affectionate eye-roll in return.

“Alexander Hamilton, Martha Jefferson,” Eliza introduces them, when she sees the girl eyeing Alexander curiously.

She sticks out a hand and corrects, “Marty.”

She clearly inherited the curls from her father, but they’re softer, cascading across her bare shoulders and down her back; his first thought is that she’s very pretty, and then he catches Jefferson watching their introduction through narrowed eyes, and just puts a whole lotta nope on that vein of thought.

“Hamilton,” Marty considers, brows pulling down thoughtfully. “Page or Congressfriend?”

“Page, resident prodigy and, let’s be honest here, probably all of our future boss someday,” John explains with a flourish.

They exchange pleasantries, but she’s clearly old friends with both Eliza and John, and Alexander finds his attention wandering as they catch up, regaling Marty with tales of their months as pages and listening to reciprocal stories about Marty’s boarding school in northern Virginia from which Jefferson has apparently liberated her for the evening.

Hotel staff set up a microphone at the pavilion and turn the music down, but Lafayette and Jefferson are still deeply engaged in conversation. With the noise diminished though, Alexander catches bits and pieces of passing conversations as the crowd moves around their little group. It’s background noise, until one voice stands out.

“…PR nightmare…front page of the Post tomorrow…how the hell’s he supposed to get Washington to the White House when he’s so busy fellating Jefferson?”

Alexander whips around – he knows that voice, he knows it, knows the muttered derisive tone, can still hear it daily in his mind, He will fucking ruin you if you become too much of a liability, standing stock still and petrified around a corner only a few feet away and…

“Hey.” John touches a light hand to his elbow. “You okay?”

Alexander turns and stares at him blankly a moment, and then shakes his head to clear it. “Yeah. Yeah, I just…” he glances back into the crowd of people, trying to pinpoint the speaker. John might know who he is, or Eliza, but then they’d want to know why he’s curious, and…

“Ah! Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.” He turns back as Lafayette begins speaking. “Tous mes amis, bienvenue, welcome – a pleasure to see so many familiar faces another year, as we kick off our annual celebration of the innumerable global cultures to be found right here, in D.C., and pay honor to our diplomatic community that is kind enough to host us tonight and at dozens of events through
Lafayette has no notes in his hand, but he does have a glass of wine. Adrienne bites her lip as she stands a bit off to the side, looking faintly amused.

“Tomorrow, I will be journeying to the great state of Ohio, where Senator Washington will be speaking with political and business and community leaders about his vision for the future of this country and the future of Ohio; this is perhaps not of interest to any of you here tonight, but those are the notes I brought with me. I’m sure the fine men and women of Toledo will be delighted to hear about my appreciation for the diplomats who keep the world running just a little bit smoother each day.”

There’s some appreciative laughter, a smattering of applause. Lafayette takes a good-sized mouthful of his wine and plunges onward.

“I have been privileged, from the start of my career, to work closely in a multilateral community, first with coalition forces at NATO headquarters in Brussels, and then with the United Nations, where I fell in love with New York and America, and the rest, as they say, is history…”

He keeps talking. Alexander largely tunes him out. He’s still scanning the crowd, but everyone has shifted as Lafayette speaks, more people coming up from the lobby. Opportunity lost.

At some point while Lafayette was speaking and Alexander wasn’t paying attention to his surroundings, the tables swapped hors d’oeuvres out with desserts. “I… I’m really full,” Eliza stares longingly at the cassava pudding on the Fiji table. “I just… I didn’t know I had to ration myself…”

Marty takes her by the shoulders and stares her down. “Buck up, Schuyler – this is war.” And the two begin to systematically make their way back towards the elevators, hitting up every table in between for the new samplings on offer.

“I swear to God, Hamilton,” he turns in surprise to hear his name, and yelps when Jefferson plucks the umbrella out of his hair and a few strands along with it. “If you conned a drink out of somebody…”

Adrienne reaches over and snags it out of Jefferson’s hand in turn. “Sorry – that’s mine. Alexander and John kept me company while Gil was off schmoozing.”

“And the only thing we ever successfully con out of Addy is a scone, and maybe a crumbly cookie or two.”

“Oh!” she taps John lightly on the arm, “Come by next weekend, I’ll be testing out some new recipes for the summer.” Jefferson looks affronted, and then pouts until she sighs and rolls her eyes. “Yes, you can come too, Senator Jefferson.”

x---x

They get back to Webster around dusk. Alexander is preoccupied and irritated on the metro, mostly at himself for letting a passing snippet of conversation undo all of the hard work he’s put into just moving on from the whole sordid affair, now that he’s put a bit of distance between himself and Conway.
If John notices his distraction, he opts not to comment on it, instead keeping up a running commentary on the homework he still has to jam in before ten p.m. and a paper for English they have due the following week. Alexander murmurs and nods in all the right places, half-paying attention as they stroll through the thinning crowds back to the dorm, until John slows and says haltingly, “Hey…”

He glances up in the fading light to where a car is parked, illegally, at the curb in front of the building. Maria Lewis is leaning against the closed passenger door, engaged in what looks to be a rather heated conversation with a man standing entirely too close for comfort, hovering aggressively over her and gesturing harshly.

They don’t see them approach right away, and they get close enough to catch a brief bit of their argument, which does little to settle the tight coil of anxiety and outrage in Alexander’s gut.

“…told you, I can’t. I don’t understand why you -”

“I don’t understand why you need to be such a fucking bitch about it.”

“Whoa,” Alexander speeds up, draws their attention his way, and he can see Maria’s red eyes, her companion’s irritation. He looks older but not by much, has a snotty sneer that Alexander suspects to be set on permanent, and his gut instinct says spoiled, rich, frat-boy. “Is that how you talk to a lady?”

“I’ll letcha know if I see one,” he shoots back, half-jesting, testing the waters to see how serious Alexander is.

“You know what?” Maria spits. “Fuck you, Jimmy.”

John holds up his hands. “Okay,” he says, placating, “maybe this isn’t the time or place…”

“No,” Maria agrees, “it’s not. I’m done.”

She goes to move past him, and he grips her by the elbow. Alexander has just enough time to gape in his outrage, take a step towards the pair, when Maria rips her arm from his grasp and shoves him hard in the chest. “Back the fuck off.”

Alexander ushers her past him, nods at John to follow her up to the doors of the building, and then turns back to the older boy. “You about ready to head on home, Jimmy?”

Jimmy has a solid half a foot on Alexander, and he stares down at him in bemusement. “What are you, the resident pit bull?”

“Why don’t you just climb on in to your car and drive away and leave the teenage girl alone? Think she’s done with you, man.”

“Ohh, you aiming for a turn? She’ll probably let you, but you’ll regret it once you’re – oomph,” he stumbles back, caught off-guard by the solid shove to the chest. Once he has his feet, his straightens up and glowers, “Listen, pip-squeak –”

“Hey!” Alexander whips around, and sees Proctor Shippen stalking down the steps of the building. “I just called Capitol Police, so if for no other reason than to avoid the damned parking ticket, I suggest you get the hell out of here.”

The punk aims a last glare at Alexander and then hurries around to climb into his car, peeling out into traffic with nary a glance and earning a couple of honks in the process.
Shippen sighs as she watches him go, and then turns to Alexander with a resigned look on her face. “Just once, I’d like to get through a full term without having to chase someone’s asshole boyfriend off the premises.”

“Two curse words in a row, Miss Shippen, you must really be spitting nails.”

“And you,” she levels a cool glare and jabs a finger at him, even as she shepherds him around and back up towards the door, “need to be careful, for starters. I don’t need you earning yourself a black eye or worse, and I really don’t need to be explaining to Director Gates or the leadership that you got yourself in a fight outside the dorm, hm?”

“I was just -! She…!”

“Yes, yes, you’re very chivalrous; now inside with you, come on.”

He finds John in the hallway just outside the common room. “She’s alright,” he assures him. “Went back to her room with Iris. Bit shaken up, but I kinda got the sense that maybe this wasn’t the first time that had happened, so…”

“That sucks. That dude was a prick.”

There’s a fleeting notion of surprise that Maria, give-no-fucks Maria, would put up with it more than once. But she’s retreated to her room, and Alexander and John do the same in order to start chipping away at homework in the couple hours they have left until bed, and it’s not until Alexander sneaks downstairs late that night, as he is wont to do, that he gives it any more thought.

It’s quarter ‘til midnight when he pads into the computer lab in his bare feet. He’s halfway to his preferred station on the far end of the row when he hears a faint shuffling and turns in surprise, squinting in the dark. “Er – hello?”

“Hi, Alex,” she murmurs, voice sounding a little hoarse. “Hey,” he offers.

She’s been crying, his mind supplies. “So it’s true, what they say,” she climbs to her feet and flips on the light, wincing against the sudden brightness. “The boy genius, just as big a procrastinator as the rest of us.”

“Hey,” he repeats, a bit affronted. Boy genius? “I’m not procrastinating, there’s just not enough time in the day.” She grins, still a bit shaky, standing there looking awkward in sweatpants and a t-shirt, with her arms wrapped around her middle, and he offers haltingly, “I don’t need to get anything done tonight… I can go, if you -”

“Stay?” she asks, uncertain, and he nods, not quite sure what he’s supposed to do, since sitting and starting on some schoolwork and effectively ignoring her in her distress seems a bit like bad form. “I, um… you didn’t have to stand up to James, like that,” she mumbles. “He’s a jerk.”

“Oh. Well, he shouldn’t be yelling at you and grabbing you like that.”

Her lips twist drily. “I had it handled.”

“I know. I just…” he shrugs helplessly, and follows her lead to go sit on the couch next to the door. “Don’t like standing by, I suppose.” He wrings his hands anxiously in his plaid pajama pants, feeling a bit ridiculous. “How, um… who is he? How do you know him?”
She huffs a derisive laugh. “Doesn’t matter.” Her eyes narrow shrewdly. “Are you going to ask why I don’t just ditch him?”

“No.” But he’s thinking it.

“But you’re thinking it.” Damnit. “Maybe I’m just not so confident and self-assured as you are, Alexander Hamilton.”

There’s a teasing tone to her words, but not mocking – it still catches him off-guard. Is that how she sees me? he can’t help but wonder, thinking back on the stresses of his past couple months, the gnawing anxiety in the pit of his stomach, the fears for his reputation, his future in the program and ripples beyond.

“You always seemed it to me,” he offers after a moment, and it’s true, lord how it’s the truth.

“Well, we’re all just a hot mess of secret insecurities when you peel away the layers, I suppose.”

He thinks about John, then; and he barely knows Maria, has no idea what she’s gotten herself into here, but he thinks he can better understand a bit of John’s frustration at the height of Alexander’s distress, watching him slowly unravel and having no idea as to why, or what to do about it.

So he offers the best he can, thrust into the opposite role here tonight. “If you need help… if you’re in trouble…?”

She smiles, a shade self-deprecating, and glances down. “You’re sweet. Thanks. I think I’m good, but…I won’t say no to the company.”

So they sit and talk for a while – innocuous topics, school and college, their hometowns, the culture shock of D.C. when they’d first arrived and the shock of how thoroughly normal it all seems now.

He never does get any work done, and finally concedes defeat when he glances at the clock on the wall and sees it’s fast approaching two a.m. They say their goodnights at the bottom of the stairs.

She kisses him on the cheek; he blushes. She laughs lightly at his bashfulness, squeezes his hand once, and bounds up the stairs, a renewed vigor in her step despite the hour.

He’s an hour-deep in his government essay the next night when Maria wanders downstairs, looking a bit hesitant. “Hey,” he murmurs distractedly, glancing back and forth between his text and the screen, and then rolling to the next computer over where he’s got a journal article pulled up online.

“You look busy.”

“Hm? Oh,” he scoots back and starts typing away furiously. “Yeah, let me just… finish this thought, if you want to wait?”

She does, lounging on the couch and tapping periodically at her little, illicit cell phone, which seems to still be quite active with messages, despite the lateness of the hour.

When he finishes his thought and looks at the time on his computer, he’s alarmed to see the better part of an hour has passed. Maria has put the phone away and is just watching him, a gentle smile quirking her lips when he finally looks her way. “There you are.”

“Sorry,” he hastily saves his work and pops out the thumb drive. “Sorry.”
“It’s alright,” she assures him, sitting up and propping her elbow on the arm of the couch and leaning her head against her hand, watching him curiously. “I think we all kinda know what you’re like, at this point.”

“Yikes,” he intones drily, setting his things on the table closest to the door and moving to collapse by her side on the couch, sinking wearily into the cushions after so long sitting in a hard computer chair. “And just what am I like, Maria Lewis?”

She taps his forehead. “Smart; maybe a bit of a smartass. Relentless; determined. Infuriating when you’re arguing about something and you just know you’re right, inspiring when you’re passionate and….” she grins, lopsided, and kisses the tip of his nose, “cute when you’re flustered.”

“I, ah… I’m not flustered,” he insists, sounding not flustered at all.

Which is maybe a lie by her broad grin. “Yeah, you are; it’s okay. The innocence is half the charm.”

“Ohh,” he shifts his eyes down, feels his cheeks go pink, “I’m not so innocent.”

He wants to take the words back before they even leave his mouth, and even more so when she murmurs a soft, “Oh,” searching out his eyes. He doesn’t know what she reads in them – isn’t entirely sure he wants to, either – and then she repeats, “Oh,” once more, with an air of understanding that puts him on guard, on edge. “Can I kiss you?”

“I – what?”

She leans forward and catches his eye. “I want to kiss you; do you want me to?”

The hell yes part of his mind wars for entirely too short a time with the big angry boyfriend part of his mind before he’s nodding dumbly. “Um. Yes.”

Eloquent.

So she presses her lips gently against his and it’s… nice, he thinks, in the back of his consciousness. Lacks the emotional freight of his tentative kiss with John and is more self-assured for it; holds none of the looming expectations he felt at every turn with Conway. It’s just… simple. Curious. And Maria is soft and kind, and a little vulnerable and he shouldn’t like that, but it’s nice in its way, feels like a change from the norm and –

“Yikes.” He rears back and turns to see Eliza hanging just inside the door, hand poised over the light switch like she was about to flip it off before catching sight of them. He drops his hands from where they’ve moved, quite without his permission, to rest lightly at Maria’s waist, and Eliza coughs awkwardly. “Um… sorry.” Shifts her gaze over his shoulder to where Maria is looking far less abashed. “Woke up and saw you were gone, I was worried. Ah… guess I needn’t have been.”

And, red in the cheeks, she turns and darts back up the stairs. “’Liza!” Maria calls after her, and then sighs. “Sorry, I should…”

“Yeah, no,” he backs away, more flustered than ever. “I’ll, uh… see you around this weekend, yeah?”

She smiles bright, eyes shining. “Yeah. Goodnight, Alexander.”

“Goodnight,” he mumbles, but she’s already gone, dashing up the steps after her roommate. He flops down onto the couch and presses his face into the cushions, groaning.
Guys, we're almost done. Eeek.
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Things collide in ways Alexander never could have imagined.

“So, ah…” Alexander looks up from his book and over at John, sitting on the other side of the couch in the common room, glancing awkwardly between Alexander and Eliza, who is standing with Iris in the kitchenette, waiting on coffee, and staring at him with poorly-veiled hostility. “Did you, um – piss off Eliza again?”

It’s Sunday, and he’s been wondering as to that since she started giving him the cold shoulder the day prior, after their accidental late-night run-in. “Well – apparently?” he supposes. “I may have done something a bit, ah… ill-advised, but I can’t fathom what personal offense to it she’s taken.”

“Oh good lord,” John groans. “Ill-advised?”

“Maria came downstairs the other night while I was working and -”

“Oh no.”

Alexander glares. “And, he continues, “we may have, um… kissed. Once.”

John frowns. “And Maria told Eliza?”

“And… Eliza came downstairs looking for Maria and walked in on us.” John looks dubious. “One kiss! Once!”

“That really a situation you want to find yourself in the middle of?”

“Urgh.” He puts his face in his hand and sighs. “I know. And no, it’s really not, it just sort of… happened.”

“Sounds romantic.”

“Shut up.” John lobs a pencil at him; it bounces off his shoulder and into his lap. “Anyway, Eliza’s been throwing me shade ever since.” Maria, by contrast, had taken to beaming at him whenever their paths crossed, and he had to frequently remind himself that anything even approaching the semblance of a relationship was the literal last thing he needed right now; which could be hard, in the face of her red lips and mischievous eyes. “I guess she’s worried for her honor, or something, but…”

“No,” John cuts him off, and then goes abruptly pink when Alexander turns to look at him, curious.

“I don’t think that’s it. Actually. Um…” the pink deepens to red, and he avoids Alexander’s eyes when he mumbles, “’scuse me,” and climbs to his feet and crosses the room to where Eliza is leaning against the counter.

Alexander watches, dumbfounded, as her brow furrows and then she nods, following John out of the room. They aren’t gone long, just a few short minutes, and then both walk back into the room pink in the face. Eliza throws him an abashed, apologetic smile, and John doesn’t quite meet his quizzical
gaze when he comes back to resume his seat by Alexander’s side.

“John. What the hell.”

“She knows,” John mumbles under his breath, staring determinedly down at his notes. “About me; about my father, about our run-in with him back in February. We’ve been spending more time together again, and she thought…”

He chokes and coughs. “She thought I was cheating on you?” he hisses.

“Um, more leading me on, she knows I wouldn’t get into an actual relationship here, under my father’s nose.”

“Jesus Christ.”

Romance is a minefield, he is forced to conclude, both the emotional and physical components of it, and after ignoring that unfortunate aspect of his teenage years with relative success up until his arrival here in D.C., he is obliged to wonder at his own foolishness, waiting until he’s living in these close quarters with such a small number of people to start delving into the concept in earnest.

Though as lapses in judgement go, Maria Lewis hardly seems noteworthy in light of other indiscretions this term, so. At least there’s that.

x---x

The Senate closes out the month of April and ushers in the month of May with two grueling days deliberating tax reforms, and Alexander is glad for his move to the federalists side of the aisle for fear that he’d thwack a democratic-republican over the head the next time he heard some roundabout way of justifying a tax cut for big corporations and the wealthy as trickle-down economics without actually calling it trickle-down economics.

By the second day though, Alexander can’t help but enjoy the nifty trick he’s noticed Jefferson using whenever the debate is irritating him. Someone on the opposite side of the aisle will be engaged in a long-winded spiel about taxation as the price we pay for a functional, civilized society, and Jefferson will follow it up with a bored comment about, “My colleagues in the House…” and it doesn’t matter what he says after that, it serves as enough of a reminder that the two bodies are going to be hard-pressed to come to any sort of agreement on a workable bill.

Wednesday dawns in perfect monotony; another early wake-up, another spar with Seabury. Another day running errands for committee meetings after an abbreviated morning floor session, another lunch with John and Hercules in the Dirksen cafeteria. It’s a perfectly normal sort of a day, and absolutely not the one Alexander would ever have thought would be his last on the Hill, right up to the moment that he’s staring at a printed airline itinerary in his hand with a deep voice, stern but not unkind, perhaps a bit regretful, echoing in his head.

Go home, Alexander.

x---x

John and Hercules split duties for the Transportation Committee, which wraps up business a bit ahead of schedule, and they venture to the meeting room where Alexander and Maria are waiting for
the Judiciary Committee to finish up for the day in the Russell building. Maria, as much as she’s latched on to Alexander, remains otherwise a minimally sociable sort with their classmates, and she smiles and waves a goodbye when she sees his friends waiting outside the room.

“So that’s like… a thing,” Hercules surmises, watching her walk away.

“I – no? I don’t think so?”

John snorts. “Has anyone told her that?”

They haven’t kissed again, and there have been no more late night chat sessions down in the computer lab, he’s pretty sure she’s not operating some assumption of something being there that isn’t. But she’s stuck fairly close at work and they’ve gotten a couple of raised brows for it. Alexander doesn’t mind; there are only five weeks left in the term and better late than never to start forming some bonds, he supposes.

The three of them make their way down to the lobby, discussing their evening plans. They bandy about the idea of going out for early dinner, opt instead for ordering pizza in light of a hefty amount of work due in both physics and calculus the next morning, and begin negotiations accordingly. John’s an intractable sort.

“No fungus.”

“But it’s - ”

“No fungus.”

“Just on half, then.”

“The taste and smell permeate and contaminate the whole thing; no fungus.”

Hercules throws up his hands in frustration. “What do you want, then?”

“Olives?”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake. Why are you so wrong? Ham, tell Laurens just how goddamn wrong he is.”

“Laurens, you’re wrong.”

“Honestly, between the two of y - ”

“Hamilton!” He turns on hearing his name, and sees André standing at the base of the stairs up to Jefferson’s office. “Can I impose upon your free time for a last errand for the day?”

He blinks. “Oh. Sure.”

“We can wait,” John offers, but Alexander waves them on.

“Go. Order your pizza abominations and surprise me.” The challenge at least seems to unite them in common cause, and they head out the main doors, talking with their heads bowed low. Alexander turns and retraces his steps several feet to the staircase where André is standing with a travel mug in one hand and a packet tucked under the opposite arm. “How can I help you, Mister André?”

“I’m afraid the senator forgot to send along some committee notes from Foreign Relations before they released their pages, and I’m quite swamped for time.” He holds out the packet and asks, “Would you mind running this to Congressman Monroe’s office before you head back to Webster?
He chairs our counterpart committee.”

He takes it. “No problem. Um…?”

“Cannon two twenty-five.”

“Anything else I can do?”

André claps his shoulder. “That ought to suffice; enjoy your long afternoon, Alexander.”

So he changes course and heads down to the basement and tunnel level instead; it’s not a wholly inconvenient trek to the other side of the Hill, since Cannon lies adjacent to Webster anyway. They’ve been released early, it’s just past four, and the halls are fairly quiet. Last meetings for the day have started, tours are winding down, and there’s a last push behind closed doors to get the day’s work finished.

When he walks into Monroe’s office on the second floor, it’s to the chatter of voices on phones, another ringing in the background. He skips the busy secretary’s desk right inside the door and goes straight to rap on the half-open door of Monroe’s chief of staff instead. “Miss Tompkins?”

She glances up distractedly from her computer. “Hm?”

“Senator Jefferson’s office sent this over.” He waves the folder and, at her nod and beckoning gesture, steps into the room to hand it across the desk. “Foreign Relations Committee.”

“Thanks,” she murmurs absently, and then looks up again as he turns back for the door. “Thought we lost you across the aisle.”

He wonders if he should be honored or worried, that news of his exploits is drifting across the Hill. “I’m magnanimous enough to carry out a last favor for the estimable Mister André.”

“See you around, kid.”

He troops back out into the outer office. Midway to the door, over the sound of low voices murmuring on the phones, he hears faintly to his right… barking? A sharp glance and his eyes narrow, distaste curling his lip. “Seriously?”

“Thought that was you; our resident Capitol pit bull.”

Not much caring to have this conversation, but not much caring to have it overheard either, he sighs and steps closer to the desk in the corner where the jerk is packing his things up in a backpack, clearly getting ready to take off for the day. Alexander eyes his badge – James Reynolds. “You’re an intern?”

“Yup.”

Which perhaps explains Maria sticking so close at work, a quiet fuck off to the asshole. “Your daddy give money to the DRNC, or straight to Monroe’s latest reelection campaign, to get you that gig?”

Reynolds laughs; it’s not a pleasant sound. “Puppy’s got teeth; that’s cute.”

Alexander rolls his eyes and walks away. He can hear Reynolds gathering his things, and hears him start after him before he’s even cleared the office, but he doesn’t break stride, a mantra of not here, not now, not worth it echoing through his head.

It doesn’t last long. Reynolds gets up close behind him and asks mockingly, “You get that turn, like I
“said? Girl’s a *freak* in bed, she’s good, right up until you realize it’s not worth what a bitch she is out of it.”

Alexander stops walking; he takes a deep breath, pauses for two seconds, and then turns and grabs Reynolds by the front of his suit jacket and shoves him against the wall. “Leave me the fuck alone,” he hisses in the older boy’s face. “Leave her the fuck alone and maybe, just, you know, as a thought, grow the fuck up and stop sleeping with high schoolers.”

A passing staffer calls over to them, “Break it up, boys,” and Alexander huffs and obliges, stepping out of Reynolds’s space, shaking his hair out of his face, and turning to continue on his way.

He makes it one step before stuttering to a stop in shock. “You’re one to talk – heard about you, Hamilton. Heard you like ‘em older; a lot older.”

“The fuck are you talking about?” he turns and snaps, but Reynolds is grinning, far too knowing a look in his eyes.

“Who was it, though?” Reynolds grins. “Congressman? Senator? Which one would go for the creole orphan runt, you figure?”

*How does he know?* Or maybe more importantly – *what* does he know? The *creole orphan* part could have come from Maria, *maybe*, and that hurts a bit to consider, but there’s no way she knows about Conway, and he can only stare in horrified silence.

“Balance of probability says it was a man,” Reynolds continues on, unfazed by the public nature of the conversation and the salaciousness of his taunts. “So you like cock, too, that’s cool – I don’t judge.” Alexander forces himself to just turn around again, not react, keep going, keep walking –

- Reynolds snags him by the elbow and hauls him close to hiss right in his ear. “That pretty boy you were with your boyfriend? He the sweet little pet of some politician, too? And actually, hey, if you asked nice, Maria would probably let you two double-team her, that girl is such a sl –”

It’s with an absent sort of fascination that he watches the blood gush from Reynolds’s nose, before it even fully registers that his hand is stinging.

x---x

There’s a period that stretches on interminably where Alexander honest-to-god thinks he might be arrested.

Reynolds has an ice pack on his face, explaining to two Capitol Police officers in a nasally voice about what a *misunderstanding* it was, and *no hard feelings*, and maybe that would fly if every time the officers turned to glance at Alexander where they’d planted him just inside Tompkin’s office, he wasn’t glaring murderously at the bloody-nosed victim.

And every time they turn to look at Alexander, Reynolds grins at him as best he can and winks, and he knows the corner he’s been painted in here – spill the dirt on Reynolds and Reynolds starts lobbing rumors and speculation in the air and sets a ball rolling he *knows* Alexander doesn’t want.

But Monroe and Tompkins are arguing somewhere in the inner offices, now that the commotion has largely taken over the bullpen, and then Adams comes sweeping in, looking beady-eyed and peeved, and if there were a single person on the Hill he *didn’t* want attempting to arbitrate this moment, it’s probably John Adams.
The officers have a quick word with the congressman and the senator and throw Alexander a pair of warning stares, at which he looks to the ground, chastened, flushed in his embarrassment. But they leave without any formal proceedings beyond the initial incident report, no charges, and he feels fortunate for that, and even deserving of the spittle-laden tirade John Adams sends his way, standing in the doorway of the office and blocking Alexander in while he yells at him.

But then a steady, quiet, “John, that’ll do,” interrupts the man, and Alexander realizes that was just the warm up. He looks up as Adams moves aside, straight into the eyes of Washington, and all of Adams’s cynicism is replaced with this complete and utter… disappointment, and he wishes for nothing more in that moment than to simply melt into the floor. “Come with me, Mister Hamilton.”

Tilghman gives him a tight, apologetic smile as he troops dutifully through Washington’s office to a small conference room in the back corner. The senator directs him to a seat across the table, facing the door, and takes up the opposite one where he just sits, hands clasped on the table top, staring at him while he fidgets uncomfortably under the scrutiny.

He’s not sure how long he lasts under that gaze. “Sir, I - ”

“You signed something before you came here,” Washington cuts him off. “An agreement to adhere to a certain basic code of conduct, at work, at school, in your day-to-day living in the dorm. A basic respect paid to your peers, the staff both in the Page Program and on the Hill, and a level of decorum afforded to all others fitting of this institution and the uniform you wear that represents it. When you signed that form, you agreed to abide by those standards; when your parents signed your permission to be here, they vouched for your capacity to conduct yourself in an appropriate manner; when I selected you, above thousands of other applicants for this spot, it was in confidence that you both understood and were willing to follow those fundamental guidelines.”

He can barely swallow for the tightness closing around his throat. “Sir…”

Washington holds up a hand. “I want you to think right now, very hard, if what you are about to say will improve your situation. Apologies are meaningless, absent sincerity; and excuses are the tool of a fool who does not regret his actions, only the consequences they have brought about.”

He says nothing. The senator sighs and his shoulders sag a bit, weary. “I don’t get it, son,” he confesses. “You knew you had a problem, the potential to find yourself here. Why go looking for trouble?”

“I – sir?”

“Why court confrontation, Alexander? Why were you there at all?”

“I wasn’t… Mister André sent me on an errand!”

“Which you should have declined,” Washington says, sharp. “Passed on to one of your peers, or explained your efforts to avoid Mister Reynolds. André is an understanding sort.”

He frowns, perplexed for a moment, and then… then he gets it. Washington has wrapped up the altercation today with an assumption about his request to move across the aisle for work, and it’s not an unreasonable one. Had they been on the floor, he wouldn’t be running messages for Jefferson’s office anymore, it was such a fluke of circumstances that found him there at all.

There’s a brief moment where he has the impulse to explain, but he’s not entirely sure it’ll help matters to say it was someone else he was seeking to avoid with the move across the floor. But… he
could run with it. Removed from Reynolds’s taunting sneer, the immediate threat of retaliation, explain to Washington about Reynolds and Maria, see if the leadership can’t do something to ensure a bit of distance between them or, even better, get Reynolds booted from his internship and off the Hill, and –

A knock on the doorframe cuts off his trail of thoughts. He stares at the table, until a voice draws his attention sharply up. “This one’s better, Senator…”

Washington turns away and looks at some papers in the man’s hands. They confer quietly for a moment, and Alexander is staring, frozen, too stunned to pay attention to the substance of their conversation until the newcomer turns a rueful smile on him. “Tough luck, kid.”

He turns away, and is almost out the door before Alexander stirs himself out of his stupor enough to blurt, “Who are you?”

If his tone is rude, Washington is too surprised to comment on it. “Did you two never meet?”

“Guess not,” his staffer muses. “Spoke and emailed so much before you got here though, just kinda felt like I knew you.” He reaches a hand across the table. “Benedict Arnold.”

He shakes it, and murmurs, “Alexander Hamilton.”

“Sorry it wasn’t under better circumstances,” Arnold laments, and then turns and heads out of the room.

Washington is talking again, but Alexander is staring after Arnold, mind working in overdrive, shocked and confused, drawing up new conclusions and discarding them just as quickly, trying to fit together pieces in a puzzle, some final picture that’s shaping up into something awful that he can’t quite wrap his head around yet and –

-and he realizes he’s not registered a word from the senator’s mouth. “What?”

Washington sighs and paraphrases. “Go home, Alexander.” He slides across the paper Arnold had brought in, and he looks it over for a minute, stomach sinking.

It’s a travel itinerary.

“Benedict will call to explain, make sure someone can greet you when you land; will you require assistance getting to the airport in the morning? We can arrange a cab for you, or -”

“No,” he blurts. “No, I…” he stares blindly at the paper in front of him. “I’ll… take the metro…”

Arnold knows. Arnold knows everything. The man in the library, the man who threatened Conway, who threatened to ruin him, ruin them both…

Benedict Arnold.

Washington’s chief of staff.

He forces himself to look at Washington, to try and read anything under the disappointment, the reluctant sympathy in his eyes, in his face, but the man’s inscrutable.

Does he know?

Alexander can’t say either way; just knows he needs to get out of there, now.
The sheer normalcy at Webster is jarring, though he can’t say why he should have expected some broad announcement of his shame. He passes Abigail and Anna on his way in, changed out of their uniforms and heading out again. They say hi and continue on their way, just any other day.

Alexander rejects the impulse to go sequester himself in the room, figures Aaron’s probably up there anyway, and instead follows the noise to the common room. John and Hercules are in there, seem to have spread their physics homework across the table and then abandoned it in favor of some competition involving flipping playing cards halfway across the room into a metal tin.

“Alexander!” Hercules misses a toss by a solid foot and a half. “My man. Where you been?”

“Oh, you know me,” he sits stiffly on the sofa, gets an absent nod from Robert, who is studiously ignoring the shenanigans going on around him. “Easily distracted.”

“Not an uncommon malady around these parts,” Robert murmurs, glancing up as John lands a two of clubs into the target.

So he sits and watches, mind blank, feeling like there’s something he should be doing – not homework, that’s stupid, he’s got no more class, and Christ, is that going to be fun sorting out, half a semester’s credit, but for now he has more important things to worry about. More important than fucking packing, which he also has to do. But there’s something… something he’s missing, something crucial, something…

“Who ordered like, four pizzas?” Shippen sticks her head in the room, and when she turns to give Alexander a questioning, perturbed look, that something slams into him with the force of a hurricane. She beckons him out into the hallway while Hercules and John go to sort out their delivery order, pulls him down to a quiet spot and asks, “What happened?”

“I…” was set up, he wants to say, “…did something stupid.”

He’d been wrong. The question wasn’t what Reynolds knew about him and Conway, nor how. The question was why.

“I don’t suppose there’s any appealing the decision?”

He stares, blinks once. What does Washington know?

Does it even matter?

“No,” he stammers. “No, they… my flight’s been booked. Mid-morning.”

She sighs. “I’m really sorry, Alexander. You’re… well. You’ve been great to have around. We’ll miss you.”

“Thanks,” he replies on auto-pilot. “Um – can we just… keep this between us tonight?”

“Sure.” And with a sympathetic pat to his arm, she leaves him to rejoin his friends, laughing and eating, pretending nothing is wrong while he walks it back in his head. What had Arnold said to Conway, during their awful confrontation?

*He will fucking ruin you if you become too much of a liability.*
And then Lee, two nights earlier…

_I don’t care who on the Hill, among the leadership, treats you like a little pet…_

…and Shippen, not two weeks ago.

_I’ll email Mister André and Mister Arnold, and let you know what the leadership says._

And Washington, granting him permission to move to the other side of the Senate floor:

_Your file will remain with Senator Jefferson’s office…_

John André. The self-described gatekeeper of information to the minority leader – _what comes in, what goes out_. He’d have access to all of the information the program has about Alexander – _creole orphan_. But the other half of a collaborative cover-up for a senator who likes to dally with the teenage boys on staff?

He’s so close to writing it off as ridiculous, but there’s a limit to coincidence, and he remembers something else, something Arnold had said.

_That’s what you told the good cop, what? Six weeks ago now?_

He hadn’t yet realized the substance of the argument, hadn’t dwelled on that implication, but now it catches up to him with a force that takes his breath away.

Conway had run to him for damage control after the _first_ kiss, the one after the all-night session, the one that had sent the senator into a panic. And if André is, in fact, the _good cop_ –

The whole thing had been planned. Running into Alexander the next morning. Enlisting his help in a project that would quite intentionally keep him off the floor, away from Conway. Taking him out afterwards for coffee, the casual questions about how he was settling in…

It had been a test. All of it. See how shaken up he was. Give him the perfect opportunity, a private camaraderie with a known _friend_, as it were… see if he’d _tell_.

See if he was a liability.

And then he’d proved himself one, at the exact moment he thought he was doing the safe thing, the _responsible_ thing – through his request to Shippen, he’d broadcast his discontent straight to the two people he needed to avoid. And then it was just a matter of opportunity.

_Why_ did Reynolds know anything, however vague, about Conway? Because Shippen and André are friends, and somewhere along the line she mentioned the altercation outside Webster; because André ran with that, sussed out who Reynolds was, enlisted or coerced his help, told him exactly what to say to get Alexander’s blood up, what to say to ensure his silence in turn about Reynolds’s relationship with Maria Lewis.

What to say to try to goad him into doing something stupid. And then he’d sent Alexander there like a good little boy, with a smile and a pat to the head, and let him dig his own grave. Because now…

_…what can he say? He’s embarrassed, humiliated, and any attempt to shed light on any of it looks like ill-contrived revenge, at best. Who would believe him, disgruntled and disgraced and kicked out the door and back to his island exile? He’s burned the bridge with Washington, doesn’t know if he can trust the man, anyway. There are any number of senators and staffers he’s _friendly_ enough with, but probably not many who would be inclined to trust outrageous allegations from him on the heels_
of his ouster. Any attempt to talk to Jefferson would go back through André, which got him into this mess in the first place, but…

He thinks about the little notebook Jefferson gave him his first day on the Hill, upstairs tucked away with his schoolbooks; thinks about a slip of paper tucked into the pages somewhere.

“Where you headed?”

He’s on his feet before registering the conscious decision to move, and John’s words snap him back into reality.

“I, ah…” he looks down at John’s vaguely curious expression, engrossed in his homework as he is, and realizes… this is it. He has hours left with John Laurens, and he’s going to spend it lying to him, by omission at least. “Remembered something I need to get done; I’ll be downstairs.”

John nods absently; Alexander turns and makes for the stairs, dashing first up to their room to retrieve the notebook. Then it’s straight back down, to the basement, to the computer lab. He picks a station at the end, the side facing the door, knows he won’t notice people coming and going if he can’t see them, once he gets focused.

And he starts writing.

x---x

Alexander spends two hours upstairs, one on either side of the ten o’clock bed check. Ostensibly, he spends that first hour cleaning, tidying up his cluttered belongings, except what he’s really doing is making sure it’s all organized, ready to be thrown into his big duffel bag in the morning. After Lee checks in, with no comment about Alexander’s impending departure, he waits the obligatory hour until he’s fairly confident the proctors will be asleep, and then, grasping his thumb drive tightly in his palm, creeps back downstairs.

It hardly matters; he could blandly ignore curfew, if he wanted to broadcast his expulsion to everyone. Even now, what would Lee do, or Shippen, if they found him down here, typing away like he did so many other nights since January?

There’s nothing they could do, not really. But he doesn’t want anyone asking questions.

He does, however, risk going up to the common room to brew a cup of coffee as it winds down towards four a.m., because even he has his limits; and on the whole, it seems altogether more likely that it’d wake Shippen instead of Lee and she’s a more tolerant sort. But no one stirs, not until the usual movement starts around five thirty, and some people file downstairs to check e-mail before classes as it closes in on six, and none seem especially surprised to see him down there, don’t notice that he’s wearing flannel pajama pants with his t-shirt, until John comes wandering down at five after and stares at him.

“Did you sleep at all?”

“Busy,” he closes out his document and sits back in his chair with a weary sigh.

John eyes his pants. “You going to class like that?”

“No.” He blinks fast, wills away the emotion pricking at the corners of his eyes. “Um. Will you tell Mister Troup I’ll be late? Just… if he asks?”
He assumes he won’t ask.

“Sure.”

“I just…” he nods at the screen and smiles, apologetic. “I gotta finish this.”

And John shakes his head, rueful, understanding, and shrugs. “Okay. I will never understand how you write like that, though.”

“Like what?”

He stops and considers, trying to put words to it, and eventually lands on: “Like you’re… running out of time.”

And he retreats, misses Alexander’s stricken stare at his back, and he’s left again in isolation as his peers file into their first lessons for the day.

He has to move fast. Pulls his document back up and clicks print, and then runs over to make sure the printer has enough paper in the tray. Counts the pages as they come out, triple-checks that he has them all, and then staples the whole thing together along the left side, top, middle, and bottom.

Back at the computer, he closes out the file and pops out his thumb drive, once he’s sure that no copy of it saved on the desktop anywhere. Then, drive tucked securely in his pocket, makeshift booklet and his tiny notebook in a white-knuckled grip, he dashes up the stairs and shuts himself into the blissedly empty room. Pulls his bag out from under his shared bunk and drops it, open, in the middle of the floor.

With shaking fingers, he pulls out the battered slip of paper from his little notebook and stares at the phone number written down on it. There’s a telephone perched on top of the dresser Aaron and Hercules share, a telephone he’s had exactly zero occasion to use this whole semester – it only calls local, and he has no one local to call.

Except.

It doesn’t connect until midway through the fourth ring, and he’s almost given up hope, before a bland voice answers, “Madison.” He opens his mouth but it’s gone suddenly dry, and the words get stuck in the back of his throat. “Hello?”

“I – it’s Alexander,” he manages to stutter, after a moment, afraid the man will just hang up. “Hamilton.”

There’s a perceptible shift, something wary, and he can’t blame the man. “It’s very early, Alexander,” he probes cautiously. “What can I do for you?”

“I need to speak with you. In person. Privately.”

The pause drags on even longer that time. “I was of the impression that you were leaving this morning.”

“I am. My flight’s at nine thirty. Um… I’m sorry, for the late notice.” Silence. “It’s really important.”

After a moment, Madison says, “Hold on,” and then by the sound of it, mutes his end of the call. The silence drags on, and Alexander starts fidgeting, tapping anxiously at the dresser he’s leaning against. Then – “A car will pick you up at Webster at eight; we’ll talk on the way to the airport. Acceptable?”
He thinks it over. “Can… can you pick me up from the metro station instead?”

“That’s fine. Eight o’clock.”

“Thank you.”

The call ends with a click.
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

Two Virginians and an immigrant share a really uncomfortable car ride to the airport.

Chapter Notes

The fallout, pt 1

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There’s a really weirdly awkward moment where the driver of the SUV climbs out and takes Alexander’s bag, and calls him sir as he directs him into the driver’s side back seat, and he can’t help but be a bit bemused at Madison being carted around in a big, anonymous government vehicle, until he climbs into the car and almost scrambles right back out again.

“Hey, kid.”

Jefferson’s sitting in the opposite corner, looking supremely bored while he flips through a briefing book. Madison’s on the same bench, in the middle of the car, and he gestures Alexander onto the seat opposite, looking curious if a bit impatient at his sudden hesitation.

This wasn’t the deal, he wants to say, but climbs in slowly, careful of the bundle of papers in his hand, and perches awkwardly, aware enough to realize that he’d marvel at the spaciousness of the vehicle if he weren’t so petrified. The windows are heavily tinted – bulletproof; his mind supplies, realizes that Jefferson probably gets some basic protection as the minority leader – and a partition separates them from the front seats.

A little mobile meeting space.

“Rush hour traffic, probably about a twenty minute trip,” Madison tells him. “What’s up?”

“I, um…” his gaze flits to Jefferson again, but the man is barely paying attention, is engrossed in whatever is already in his hand. “What happened, yesterday, at Congressman Monroe’s office?”

Madison nods, clearly knows the story in all its bloody glory. “His intern, Reynolds, he, ah… he’s been very verbally aggressive… abusive… with one of the pages. Maria Lewis. Maybe physically, too. I… thought someone should know.”

Madison sighs and pinches the bridge of his nose, shakes his head. “There’s always one.”

“What?”

“Intern getting involved with a page.”

“…Oh,” he says faintly, and abruptly recalls Aaron’s paranoia.

“We’ll look into it, hopefully at least scare him into backing off, but it’s not… it’s generally up to the
discretion of the office where the intern works. They aren’t paid employees. We’d rather it didn’t happen, but it’s legal and there’s not a lot the leadership can do about it in any case.”

“Oh,” he reiterates. “Um.” Clears his throat, wills down the nausea threatening to rise up in his stomach, and asks, “What about senators?”

Madison sits back and asks haltingly, “Senators and interns?”

Staring determinedly at the floor, he corrects, “Senators and pages.”

The car goes abruptly, resoundingly still and silent, save Jefferson, who is still flipping obliviously away through his binder. After a half minute or more, Alexander forces himself to look up at Madison’s wary stare and cringes inwardly.

Sensing the sudden tension in the vehicle, Jefferson finally looks up and says, “I feel like I missed something,” right as Alexander shoves his bundle of pages into Madison’s hands, careful planning of how to ease into this revelation lost, his words escaping him with Jefferson’s decidedly more ostentatious presence. Madison’s quiet, sometimes dry stoicism he can handle, but…

He eyes the cover and Alexander can see him mouth the title, a bit baffled; he then turns and starts reading, eyes widening in shock and the color slowly seeping out of his face, flips quickly through the next couple pages, and breathes, “Alexander…”

“What did I miss?” Jefferson prods.

“We… Jesus Christ, we can’t do this here,” Madison mumbles, skimming through pages and pages of printed emails. “We need to go back to the office.”

“No,” Alexander starts upright in his seat, fighting down the instinctual rise of panic. “No, that’s not… I’m leaving. My flight is in a little over an hour.”

“You can’t leave like this.”

Jefferson makes a grab for the packet in Madison’s hand; the younger man holds it over to the opposite side and bats him away.

“Everything I have to say, I wrote down right there.”

There’s a moment where he thinks Madison, incredulous, frustrated, and wide-eyed, is going to argue, and he’s not sure what, if any, authority either of them can claim to drag him back to the Capitol, and maybe he really didn’t think this through… but then he sighs, resigned, and runs a hand down his face and asks bluntly, “Were you forced?”

“What? I- no.”

“Coerced.”

“No.”

“Given… alcohol, anything that might have impaired your…”

“No!” he yelps as Jefferson makes a successful lunge for the papers. “I’m not – this isn’t about Conway. Not entirely, anyway. I don’t… want to ruin him over this.”

“Whaaat?” Jefferson goes a bit bug-eyed, reading the first page, and Alexander wants to just sink into the leather seat and hide. “For fuck’s – okay, but you’re smart enough to know this is the end of
his career, so what -?”

“Is it?” he challenges doggedly, and both men snap their gazes up to him. “People knew. Mister Arnold knew. Mister André.”

“That’s a very serious allegation,” Jefferson says, dubious.

“I stand by it. And for all I know, if they knew, so did the men they worked for.”

“You called us, kid.”

He juts his chin out, stubborn. “No, I didn’t – I called Mister Madison. And asked to speak with him. Privately. No one told me you were coming along too.”

And Madison actually looks a bit chastened at that as he leans forward and catches Alexander’s eye and holds it, steady. “I promise you, Alexander – Senator Jefferson knew nothing of this.” By the sound of Jefferson’s audible cringing as he reads, Alexander’s fairly inclined to believe him. “I can promise you that Senator Washington didn’t either. And I can’t stress enough how important it is to go back and sort this through, thoroughly, and not just - ”

“No,” he mumbles, “I… I can’t. I’m done. I can’t do this anymore.” Can’t fathom facing Washington again; can’t fathom facing John, after what he’s done, both this morning and… in the past two months.

Madison swears softly under his breath. “Okay. Okay. Then in the next…” he glances out the window to check where they are, “ten minutes or so, I need you to help me understand my next step. Pretend the senator isn’t here.”

“Thanks.”

“Shut up, Thomas,” he snaps, eyes never leaving Alexander’s face. “You’re not alleging a crime; you don’t seem to hold the senator in any particular ill-will. What is it you want me to do with this?” He nods at the papers in Jefferson’s hands.

“I…” He squeezes his eyes shut and wills the tears back. “You told me, my first day here, to call you. If I found myself in trouble, alone in a strange city, that I couldn’t handle on my own.” Jefferson presses himself even tighter into the corner of the car while he reads, like an emotional teenager is the last thing he’s interested in dealing with. “Well, I called you because I don’t know.”

“Okay,” Madison soothes, and Alexander thinks he’s actually somewhat relieved by that answer; he opts not to dwell on the implications of that. “Okay. Then I’ll handle it.”

x---x

When Madison climbs back in the car after exchanging a last word with the anxious teenager at the terminal, Jefferson is shaking his head back and forth, and muses casually, “I’m going to kill that son-of-a-bitch.”

Which one? Madison wonders, but instead says, “We have a problem.”

“Almost nothing here is verifiable one way or the other?” Jefferson suggests. “Yeah. We have the
emails, which’ll be enough to compel Conway’s resignation, but the rest is… guesswork. Clever
guesswork, I’ll grant you, and apparently some strange turnabout where Hamilton and Arnold were
somehow never in the same room until yesterday, but -"

“Okay,” Madison holds up a hand to cut him off, “Two problems, then.” Jefferson cocks a brow,
curious, and he elaborates. “If I’m not mistaken… Thomas Conway’s apartment is in Virginia.”

Jefferson groans. “Ohh, that stupid asshole.” The car pulls back out into the slow-moving terminal
traffic, and he turns to stare absently out the window, thinking. “He said-she said is going to get us
nowhere here. If Arnold says the kid’s crazy, he’s never been to the Library, he doesn’t even know
how to read,” Madison snorts, “what then?”

“I don’t know. We need to talk to George.”

“The sad thing is, three and a half years in my office, I don’t even know if I would take André’s
word over Hamilton’s. He’s always been a little freakishly omniscient.”

“Which you’ve always enjoyed, until now.”

“Yeah,” the senator fires back, “because I was smart enough not to ask questions.” Madison runs his
hands through his hair, frustrated. “We could put them and Conway in three separate rooms and
Prisoner’s Dilemma them.”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake.”

“Can you even do a Prisoner’s Dilemma with three people? I guess we don’t need Conway; run one
scenario with André and Arnold, another with the proctors…”

“Thomas, I know you love the sound of your own voice, but can you shut up and let me think?”

After a long moment, he reaches over and presses the intercom to talk with the driver. “Can we find
somewhere to pull over?”

“I can circle back around to the cell phone lot.”

“That’ll do.” He flips the speaker back off and reaches into his pocket for his cell phone, ignoring
Jefferson’s quizzical stare as he flips through his contacts and places a call.

It picks up on the second ring. “André.”

Madison holds up a hand for silence in the car, and tells him blandly, “The senator and I are going to
be a little late this morning, would you mind opening the office?”

“No problem; everything okay?”

“Just taking Hamilton to the airport, he wanted a word with the senator before his flight.”

There’s a pause that’s just a moment too long, a telling moment. “I see. Give him my regards.”

“Will do.”

He ends the call. Jefferson frowns, perplexed. “Okay, so?”

“So…” he looks out the window and watches as they pull around into a mostly empty lot on the
outer reaches of the airport complex. “Now we wait. And in about… eh… ten minutes or so, we call
Tench Tilghman and see if anyone’s come calling for Arnold.”
Tilghman informs them that, “Benedict just ran out for a breakfast meeting, need me to leave him a message?”

So Madison hedges a bit. “Don’t suppose you know where? I’ve got some time-sensitive docs I meant to get to him last night.”

“Oh, that place with the stupid name, near Dupont Circle.”

“Founding Farmers?”

“No, the other one.”

Jefferson suggests, “Eggsistential?”

“That’s it,” Tilghman says when Madison relays it with a long-suffering sigh. “The omelets are pretty good.”

“I hate this city,” Madison mutters under his breath when he hangs up.

“Uh huh,” Jefferson nods indulgently. “So, uh – how exactly do you see this going, Jem? Go storming in, see if it’s André that Arnold’s meeting, and duke it out over scones and coffee?”

“This isn’t a court of law, Thomas,” Madison fumes, “I don’t care how circumstantial it is.”

Jefferson holds up his hands defensively. “Whoa – I get it, okay? I am ready to start ruining some days. But in the name of discretion… I’m thinking there might be a better way.” And he gets out his phone and makes a call of his own, a wide and slightly manic smile spreading across his face when it’s answered. “Gilbert – are you home, or standing in the middle of an Iowa cornfield?”

“Don’t be silly, Thomas, the crops are barely sprouting yet.”

“So you’re home, then?”

“Oui, so to speak – on my way to meet Adrienne at Le Diplomate. They have excellent beignets.”

He winces. “That sounds lovely. Except for the part about the beignets and Le Diplomate, but I suppose you could take Adrienne somewhere else instead, so your date isn’t totally ruined.”

“Thomas,” he sighs, “qu’est-ce qui se passe?”

Being summoned to a clandestine meeting on a random Thursday morning by his chief political opponent in the Senate at his own campaign offices is perhaps one of the more bizarre things to happen to George Washington in his D.C. career. His arrival at said office renders the experience no less odd, none of the usual hustle and bustle of activity and volunteers – just a few of the full-time staffers making calls quietly at their desks. One of them waves, and he nods; the others are engrossed in their work and didn’t even see him walk in.

He heads down the short hall in the rear of the office suite, dark and empty, save for the sound of
heated voices coming from a meeting room near the far end. He can hear Lafayette and Jefferson, seemingly at odds with one another, a strange enough occurrence in its own right.

“…never should have allowed him to -”

“Jesus Christ, what were we to do? Kidnap the kid?”

“Gentlemen,” Washington steps through, a deep frown furrowing his brow, and six eyes turn to land on him. Lafayette and Jefferson standing several feet apart, the former with his arms crossed over his chest, the latter with his hair mussed and askew, likes he’s been worrying it in frustration; Madison, sitting at the table and ignoring the other men, engrossed in a stack of a papers in front of him, pen in hand. “Quite upending the order of things today, no?”

“We need to talk,” Jefferson states, blunt. “Shut the door.” Washington cocks a cool brow, but obliges. “James and I spoke with Hamilton this morning, before his flight.”

He sighs. “I had no choice, Thomas, you know that. I hated seeing him go.”

“I know. I don’t fault you for the decision. But you made an assumption, in the course of events, that was quite wrong – Hamilton and Reynolds only crossed paths the first time last week. His request to move across the aisle was unrelated.”

His frown deepens, and he takes up a chair at the end of the table, Madison to his right, and waits while Jefferson fills in a seat on his left and Lafayette on his other side. He opens his mouth to ask the logical follow-up, pauses, and redirects. “Why are we doing this here? And why is Gil here at all?”

“Because we dragged him into it,” Madison shrugs, with an exasperated glance at Jefferson.

“Thanks, for that,” Lafayette grumbles.

Madison ignores him and picks up the packet of papers he’s been studying. “And we’re here because this can’t come within spitting distance of the Hill until we figure out what we’re going to do with it.”

Washington can feel his brows climbing slowly up his forehead. “And that is…?”

Jefferson leans over and pulls the whole thing out of his chief of staff’s hands. Clears his throat, and begins to read: “The charge against me is an altercation with one James Reynolds; my real crime is an amorous connection with a federal elected official - for a con-”

“What?” He half-climbs to his feet, but Jefferson holds up a hand, urging patience, patience he is less than willing to oblige. “Who?”

“We haven’t even reached the best part, I’m -”

“Goddammit, Thomas, who?”

The younger senator’s jaw works a moment, terse, before he grinds out, “Thomas Conway.”

“Oh, Christ.” He slumps down heavily in his seat and runs a weary hand over his face; thinks back on that conversation he and Jefferson had, after granting Alexander permission to move across the aisle, their quick musing over the boy’s disrespectful conduct towards Conway the week prior. “Amorous connection?” he probes, inwardly cringing.
“He spent six hours at the man’s apartment on April fourteenth; they weren’t playing Monopoly.”

“Thomas…”

Madison snatches the packet back and flips through several pages, and then clears his throat. “I cannot get the thought of you in my bed from my mind. After these past weeks of stolen moments where we could seize them, to be able to take my time, to touch you, to hold you…” He cuts off there and stares blandly. “That’s the most detail either committed to email. Hamilton provided a rather, uh… thorough account of events, if you take him at his word.”

“Do you not?”

Madison shrugs. “This wasn’t a bargaining chip – he very nearly panicked when I asked him to stay. I’ve no reason to doubt him. But frankly, I’m not worried about Conway right now – he’s done, he’ll resign.”

“Then what are you worried about?”

He goes back to the first page. “My real crime is an amorous connection with a federal elected official for a considerable time, with the knowing enablement of senior staffers at the highest levels in both parties, who I now suspect have long been engaged in a coordinated cover-up of the senator’s indiscretions.”

“So this wasn’t even the…”

Madison cuts him off with a stern look, and finishes, “Objectively, I am also forced to conclude that both resident program proctors have been, at the very least, derelict in their professional duties, though I cannot speculate as to whether one or both had any knowledge of what, precisely, they were assisting in covering up.” He gingerly lays the pages down and meets Washington’s eyes levelly. “We have a problem, George; we have a problem on many levels, and at the crux of all of it, a sixteen-year-old kid who’s going to land back home in less than eight hours, who has just been completely burned by a, frankly, massive failure of this institution to adequately protect the children entrusted to its care.”

He tentatively pulls the packet across the table and begins skimming; thinks about Alexander Hamilton while he does. Ambitious, persistent, cocksure Alexander Hamilton, impressive academic record, far more impressive in his own words that he put to paper, and he’d brought every ounce of that rapier intellect and more than his fair share of wit and sass right along with it, and then…

Then that request, that damned conversation – a personality conflict, he’d called it, and neither he nor Jefferson had pressed the matter. Saw him hesitant, defensive, attributed it to midterm exhaustion. And then yesterday, he’d been… stunned. Resigned. Scared, a voice insists in the back of his mind, though he can’t say if it’s his memory playing tricks on him in light of the name he’s just read in the damning manifesto. “Benedict Arnold,” he says slowly, softly. “The two never met, not until yesterday.” He backtracks and rereads the account of the library altercation following the narrative of the evening spent in the senator’s apartment that he can’t quite bring himself to peruse yet. “The two never met, because I ceded any responsibility for the boy over to you, Thomas.”

“It wouldn’t have mattered,” Jefferson shrugs. “The relationship, for want of a better word, had already run its course by the time Hamilton became aware of Arnold’s role.”

“But we would not have come to this!” he slaps his hand down on the table. “Clandestine meetings
while our colleagues wonder on our absence, the victim of the whole affair expelled by my call…”

“George,” Lafayette leans in, “what were you to do? You made the only call available to you, working with the knowledge you had at the time. And had the thing blown up in Conway’s face two, three weeks ago? André’s role would never have been sussed out.”

He exhales heavily and reads on, brow furrowing thoughtfully. “How confident are we, about André’s place in this whole scheme?”

Jefferson slides his phone across the table. “Gil took that this morning; about half an hour after Jem called André to let him know we had to see the kid off to the airport and would be late into the office. Getting their stories straight, I presume – they can’t have realized that Hamilton pieced the whole conspiracy together.”

Lafayette clears his throat and corrects pointedly, “They’ll start to wonder, with the two of you dropped off the grid.”

It’s not the best of photos, was clearly taken a bit surreptitiously. But it’s clear enough to make out Arnold, and André, hunched over coffee, and a third man, surly, sitting back and glaring on, arms crossed.

He lets out a slow breath. “Charles Lee.” Hesitates in asking the next question, but can’t not, not after all of this, and… “Tell me, honestly now – did he think I knew?”

Silence stretches on just a moment too long, and then Jefferson shakes his head and spreads his hands. “He didn’t know what to think. Can’t blame him. Didn’t trust me either, it was Jem he called this morning.”

“I don’t understand,” he murmurs, tracing the timeline back. The all-night budget session and, Christ, the von Steuben debacle… “I don’t. All this time… if he was being hurt -”

“He doesn’t claim that he was,” Madison breaks in quietly. “He doesn’t, George,” he insists, at Washington’s incredulous stare. “Don’t get me wrong, his perception is, uh… questionable, and that’s a whole different tangled mess that’ll be someone else’s unhappy job to unravel, but… this wasn’t written with the aim of ruining Conway, much as he knew that would be its effect. Hearing Arnold confront Conway in the library suggested that this mess was bigger than just the two of them – realizing just who Arnold was, connecting the pieces through Shippen and André, told him just how much bigger. He couldn’t stand by in silence, in the knowledge that history was only doomed to repeat itself – but he’s also terrified of being made into the story.”

The room plunges into an awful quiet while they collectively mull the fiasco confronting them. Washington’s phone vibrates in his pocket and he shifts, retrieves it. Adams. Wondering where he is, no doubt, the morning’s session delayed an hour and still no leadership present.

One thing is apparent though, and he looks up at Lafayette, finds the younger man already peering at him, waiting, assessing. He nods, and his campaign chief rises quietly to his feet and heads out into the main part of the office without a word, just as skilled at reading him after all these years.

When the door closes again, he turns to Madison. “Alexander entrusted this to you?” He nods, solemn. “And what is your recommendation?”

Madison looks momentarily taken aback by the deferral, but answers without hesitation. “Procure Conway’s resignation. Remove Arnold and André from their posts with all haste. Get Horatio Gates in a room and demand to know just what kind of ship he’s running over at Webster. For starters.”
“Hm.” He closes the hastily-compiled booklet and stares blankly at the unassuming title on the otherwise empty cover page. The Conway Cabal. Not so much as a hint as to the shocking revelations that lie inside. “There’s one other thing.”

“Hm?”

“We’re going to have to send the students home. This is… Christ, this is unforgivable.” Neither Jefferson nor Madison object to that conclusion. “James, would you mind stepping out and calling Franklin to let him know we’ll be by in a half hour?” He nods and stands, follows Lafayette out the door, and when the two senators are left alone in the room, Washington props his head in his hand, elbow on the table, and mutters, “I just…”

“What?”

“We stood in the Hale Room, you and I -”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake, George.”

“We stood in the Hale Room,” Washington repeats quietly, staring unseeingly down at the table, “Thomas Conway by our side, and made light of the fact that a grown man, a powerful man, was behaving inappropriately towards a teenage boy.”

Jefferson jabs a finger harshly across the table. “Don’t you dare put that on me; Conway didn’t take the kid downstairs and grope him because Friedrich von Steuben batted his eyes at him first!”

“And what message did we send, in not pulling Alexander out of the room the moment it -”

“You reprimanded the German chancellor,” Jefferson throws up his hands in frustration, “in front of a round dozen senators and congressmen, and their staffs, I hardly think Conway implied somehow that you condoned his next actions.”

“Then why -?”

“Because he could,” Jefferson says bluntly, answers the question before he can even get it out. “Because that’s how it works. He saw something in Hamilton that told him it was a risk worth taking, a risk he thought he could get away with, and you know what? He almost did. We wouldn’t be sitting here if Hamilton hadn’t stumbled upon Arnold in the library, all of these assholes would have gotten away with this, so can we fucking focus, please?”

x---x

On its surface, confronting Conway sounds like it should be the most straightforward component of beginning to sift through the chaos. There’s not much arguing around an email inviting a sixteen-year-old to spend an evening at his private residence, and the only real impediment Washington can see to compelling the man’s resignation is if he argues against the substance of said emails, claims they’re altered, which… wouldn’t prove much of an impediment at all.

(“He propositioned him at a government email address,” Jefferson bemoans on their way to give Franklin a heads-up about just how shitty his day is about to become, “how fucking stupid…?”)

This is a new one though, in Washington’s political career, and he cannot predict how it will go,
forces himself not to try; which is a good thing, in the end, because the meeting itself defies any and all expectations.

Conway’s chief of staff is in the outer office when they walk in, and he looks up, vaguely startled at the delegation that troops in, unannounced, just before lunch. “Evan,” Madison nods tersely, gets a halting greeting in response. “Is the senator in?”

“Uh, yeah,” he glances back towards the inner doorway. “Let me check in, he just canceled a conference call, and -”

“I’ve got it, Evan.” Conway takes a half-step through the doorway, eyes sweeping over the assembled trio, looking… exhausted. Resigned. “Gentlemen.” He beckons them through, leaving a perturbed-looking Edwards behind, and then leads the way to a small conference room neighboring his private office.

He sits down on the far side of the table, and watches, silent, as Washington, Jefferson, and Madison file in and sit opposite. There’s a terrible, still moment, waiting and watching, no one quite willing to be the first to speak, and then Conway sighs and reaches into the inner pocket of his jacket and pulls out a plain white envelope.

He sits down on the far side of the table, and watches, silent, as Washington, Jefferson, and Madison file in and sit opposite. There’s a terrible, still moment, waiting and watching, no one quite willing to be the first to speak, and then Conway sighs and reaches into the inner pocket of his jacket and pulls out a plain white envelope.

He turns it over in his hands a couple times, staring unseeingly, and then sets it gently down on the table and slides it over towards Jefferson. “I’m not sure,” he says faintly, “if that goes to you or to Franklin.”

“Governor Livingston, actually,” Madison corrects, without even bothering to verify the contents even as his boss slides out a single sheet of paper and quickly scans the single sentence on it.

“Oh.”

Washington glances over, reads the succinct resignation letter; supposes Arnold or André gave the man a heads-up as to their suspicions, but then…

…he frowns and looks up at the young man across the table. “You dated this yesterday?”

“Wrote it last night,” he confesses with a harsh and self-deprecating laugh.

That draws everyone’s attention, and Jefferson probes cautiously, “Hamilton didn’t mention speaking with you after...”

“No,” he sighs. “No, we’ve had no contact since he shifted his duties across the floor.”

“At which point, you and your cohorts began scheming on how to best nullify any damage he might do to the party, to the Senate, to -”

“They aren’t my cohorts,” Conway refutes, eyes blazing.

Jefferson scoffs. “Did you, as Hamilton suspects, seek John André’s assistance in keeping him out of trouble with the proctors at Webster?” Conway presses his lips together, tersely silent. “Then they’re your cohorts.”

After a moment, the fire leaves his eyes and he corrects softly, “I didn’t want him gone, I… he needed… time. Space. But when I heard what happened yesterday… well. I knew that was André’s doing; knew Alexander was too smart not to figure out something was amiss.” He closes his eyes and runs a hand across his face. “Jesus. I’d told them to leave him be. He wasn’t going to…”
He trails off, and Jefferson snorts. “What? Tell? Well that was a pretty epic miscalculation in retrospect, huh?”

“Thomas…” Washington sighs, weary, but Jefferson’s not having it.

“He didn’t just tell,” he continues, “he wrote it down. All of it. Every last… creepy email you sent the kid, entirely too much detail, to be honest, about everything you did to him -”

“Did Alexander,” Conway murmurs softly, gaze fixed off to the side, staring blankly at the window, “give the impression that he was an unwilling participant?”

There’s something fragile in the question, and Washington thinks it might be asked out of genuine worry, more so than a place of defensiveness. And so he offers what little reassurance there is to be had, and answers, “No – he was actually quite adamant on the point. It was the machinations of Arnold and André that drove him to this; the betrayal of trust among the program proctors – and the suspicion that it had happened before and would happen again.” Conway lets out a slow breath, and Washington waits until he reluctantly turns to again meet his eyes before adding, “But you know very well that it doesn’t matter.”

“Did you forget that the law in Virginia is different than D.C.?” Jefferson demands, “Or were you just that assured of his discretion at that point that you didn’t care?”

The lack of answer is answer enough.

“You’ll want to retain counsel,” Madison breaks an uncomfortable silence. “It’s… possible that the state won’t seek charges, given that the relationship was otherwise conducted legally in the District.”

“Barely,” Jefferson huffs.

Madison shoots his eyes up to the ceiling, begging patience. “Thomas…”

“I can assure you, Senator Jefferson,” Conway says evenly, eyes closed wearily, “I am aware that Alexander is not yet a legal adult, you needn’t try to further guilt me over it.”

“Were you aware that he skipped a grade, the precocious little shit?” Conway looks up sharply. “Turned sixteen the same month he got here, barely squeaked in over the cutoff.” By the look on the young senator’s face, no, he hadn’t realized it. Washington knew, of course, had briefly bandied about the idea of deferring Hamilton to a shorter summer slot because of it, but he can’t help but be surprised that Jefferson had taken more than a passing glance at the boy’s file. “I’m pissed, alright? Pissed. I don’t know what you did to that kid, that infuriating genius of a kid, to convince him that any of this was okay, to worry so goddamn much that he was going to get in trouble, somehow, if anyone found out.”

“I didn’t do anything,” Conway retorts. “I never threatened him, never suggested… in fact, I think I made it very clear, after the first incident, that my professional fate lay in his hands.”

“But it made it awful convenient, didn’t it?” The younger man works his jaw, tense. “He doesn’t want to feel like a victim in this, fine - I hope, for his sake, that he never fully grasps just how egregiously you violated the trust implicitly granted you by this institution. He’s sixteen, for God’s sake.”

There’s so much more Washington wants to know, but it would be irresponsible to allow this conversation to progress any further, given the impending legal questions.

But he can be patient and wait for the inevitable testimony – and not just that of the disgraced senator
in front of him – before the Ethics Committee. Compelled by subpoena if necessary.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 23 will pick us up right where we left off on Monday. Much love, thanks for reading, enjoy your weekend, and stay safe if you're in any one of the pockets of weather insanity happening right now.
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

The fallout, pt 2.

Chapter Notes

Surprise, Monday update comin' at ya a little early. The epilogue will probably pop up Tuesday night as well, my mornings are weird this week.

By the time they’ve finished with Conway, Horatio Gates is en route to Franklin’s office. Before joining them, Washington stops by his own office and finds Tilghman dashing about, looking frazzled. “Senator, oh my God,” he tosses something on one of their intern’s desks in the corner and then hurries back across the office to snatch something off the printer. “The White House has been waiting on an answer about the thing next week, Adams has been hounding me all morning about tomorrow’s vote, Arnold just up and left a little while ago and-”

“Tench. Slow down.”

“I can’t,” he protests, “I’m short-staffed and -”

“Tench.” Something in his tone finally gives the young man pause, and he stills and takes in the somber look on his boss’s face a bit better. “Forget the rest of it. I need your help, and it cannot wait.”

He blinks and glances around. “Sir?”

“Find the contact numbers for the staff of the Page Program, and meet me in the office.”

It hadn’t occurred to him that Arnold, suspecting he’s been caught out, might simply disappear. Though retrospectively, can’t decide if he’s all that surprised about it.

And in an odd way, it gives him a certain grudging respect for the way John André walks into the meeting room near Franklin’s office half an hour later and, upon seeing a perplexed Shippen and a sullen Lee already present, has the audacity to double down on his actions.

“This isn’t a road we need to go down, Senator.” He doesn’t address his own boss, standing in the corner with his arms crossed over his chest; instead, looks straight at Washington, sitting opposite the proctors and gesturing the newcomer into a chair. “I can handle him.”

“He’s already resigned. It’s done.”

André pulls out the chair and lowers himself into it. Leans across the table, earnest, and urges, “Don’t accept it, then. You really want to have this fight now? The cloud of a sex scandal looming over an election campaign? Not just your run-of-the-mill intern pawing, either.”
He can see Shippen startle in his peripheral vision, but he holds André’s gaze levelly. “I can only hope you’re seeking to get a rise out of me, rather than honestly believe that I would claw my way to the White House at the expense of Alexander Hamilton’s welfare, and who knows how many others like him.”

André scoffs. “There are no others like him. I’ve been cleaning up Conway’s messes since he took his seat, I had it handled.”

“You didn’t have it handled!” he roars, and maybe the man was more successful in baiting him than he’d like to admit. “Handling it would have been alerting your boss at the first sign of a problem. Handling it would have been prioritizing the safety and security of the students under our care, not contriving the expulsion of the victim of our collective failures in the name of your partisan interests!”

“John!” Shippen exclaims, clapping a hand to her mouth.

But the man ignores her, cold and calculating as he sizes up the irate senator before him. “You think the party is the sole benefactor of keeping Conway’s misdeeds quiet? You’re running for president, Senator Washington. The boy was your page, the program is managed out of your office – and you are the one who expelled him.” He sneers and shakes his head. “You want to do this, fine – but be prepared to either look like a hypocrite, only ordering an investigation in light of a failed cover-up; or worse, a dupe, unable to keep this body and your own staff in check, and unable to see what’s going on right under your nose.”

Jefferson twitches in the corner, and then orders dismissively, “Get out.” André shifts his gaze, eyes flashing, but Jefferson just waves him off. “Clear out your desk; Capitol Police will escort you from the building. Feel free to email any threats you’d like to lob my way.”

André frowns at him for just a moment, says, “You’re making a mistake, Senator,” and leaves without further delay. Washington watches irritation flicker across his younger colleague’s face, and senses the remark was intended somewhat differently than the warnings sent his own way.

Whatever its intent, it’s got Jefferson’s blood up, and he stalks over to stand in front of Shippen and Lee, glaring. “Mister Lee – the authority to dismiss you from your post, sadly, does not rest with us; rest assured, Senator Franklin and Director Gates are currently conferring on precisely that subject. You can expect your instructions to vacate Webster Hall in due course. As for you, Miss Shippen…”

She blinks up at him, wide-eyed, and he sighs and deflates a bit. “Best I, or anyone else in the loop on this whole shit-show, can surmise, your greatest crime was in being too free in the offering of information about the charges under your watch and having a deplorable taste in men.” She goes pink, and Washington cringes inwardly, very much keen not to add a sexual harassment complaint to the day’s proceedings. “Regardless, you will not be asked to return to the position, if and when the program resumes.”

“I… what?”

Washington clears his throat. “We cannot, in good conscience, allow the term to proceed. And once we’ve sorted through the present mess, we’ll be conducting a full structural review of the program. The students will be informed of the decision by the end of the day, and we’d ask that you refrain from preemptively offering any more details in the dorm. We have failed young Mister Hamilton every step of the way; the least we can do, for right now, is protect his privacy in the matter.”
The Senate reconvenes after lunch, still blissfully unaware of the turmoil rocking the leadership. Washington and Jefferson meet Madison in Washington’s office, where he’s waiting with a comprehensive list of contact information for the families of the other twenty-nine pages. Lafayette is there waiting in the outer office, chatting with a troubled Tilghman who doesn’t know everything, but knows enough.

Lafayette follows them into the back where Madison has holed up, and they fill in around the table. “We need to address the body,” Jefferson leans back, resting his head against the back of the seat. “Soon, because God knows I don’t put much faith in Arnold, André, and the proctors to keep their mouths closed.” Which is a point none of them can argue. “Closed session. No gallery; no press. Put the pages in another room and talk to them separately.”

“Don’t you think you should talk to their families before they all go running back to call home?” Lafayette asks, skeptical.

“How fast can we make thirty phone calls?”

“Twenty-nine,” Lafayette corrects quietly.

Washington clears his throat. “Twenty-seven; we’re not calling anyone and not addressing anything until we get Henry Laurens and Philip Schuyler up to speed. They don’t need to hear this news and be left wondering if one of their children was caught up in it. And the students themselves don’t need to know the particulars, not right now. Just that they’re being sent home, and through no fault of their own.”

Madison coughs softly. “And what about Hamilton?”

That’s a whole different conversation, and one he’s not looking forward to; nor is it one he can justifiably delegate to somebody else as he’d done the day prior. He swallows thickly. “We’ll need to make that call before he lands. After we speak with Henry and Philip, I’ll talk to his family.”

An uneasy silence descends over the room. He frowns as Madison glances at him and then sideways at Lafayette, and then shakes his head and stands. “I’ll get in touch with Schuyler and Laurens.”

Jefferson jumps up after him. “I’ll talk to Franklin about closing the gallery in a couple hours.”

Once they’re gone, the door closed behind them, leaving Washington and his campaign chief ensconced in privacy, Lafayette murmurs quietly, “He doesn’t have a family, sir.”

The stresses of the past several hours all seem to crash into him at once, a wave of weariness and frustration – directed mostly inward, to be sure. He props his head in his hands and lets out a heavy sigh, shaking his head back and forth. He’s slipping – he knows that, has known it since Lafayette pulled the boy’s application out of a stack, Arnold’s discards – he’s not from Virginia, what’s there to talk about? – and handed it over with a quiet, I think you should look at this one, Senator.

And he distinctly recalls making mention of his parents in the process of telling Hamilton to go home, and feels a well of shame rise up in him anew. “I failed that boy, Gil.”

“How?”

“I… dragged him into this world, and never took the time to get to know him. Gave him a chance few others would have dared, and then left him to flounder…”

x---x
“He did not flounder. He didn’t, George,” he stresses. “I met him, that first morning, you forget – when he was nervous and overwhelmed, and thirsting to prove himself. Tell me that he failed, in that. Tell me that he did not become the singular standout of his class.” And in truth, he cannot; even with his expulsion, his will be a name they’ll be on the lookout for, in the years to come. “Whatever it is that’s left unsaid in his, ah… his pamphlet, whatever vulnerabilities Conway seized on and exploited – spending that first morning with you instead of Thomas would not have changed that outcome.”

An insidious voice at the back of his mind can’t help but question that, though. Despite the speed, the fury with which Jefferson rose to the boy’s defense following today’s revelations, he knows their relationship throughout the term was of a more… benevolently antagonistic sort.

Lafayette peers at him intently for a moment, and then directs, “Have Madison call his guardian.”

“Given the sensitive nature of the topic at hand, I should think a basic decency would dictate -”

“They don’t need,” Lafayette waves his hand vaguely in Washington’s direction, “this,” and he’s too taken aback to be affronted. “Due respect, this isn’t about you, and no one needs your guilt. They need to know what happened, and be reassured that Hamilton is physically alright, albeit confused and likely upset. And that the situation is being treated with the utmost urgency. As the last person Hamilton spoke with before he left, Madison is best poised to offer those reassurances.”

It feels weak, the abdication of that unhappy responsibility, but Madison takes it in stride, sequesters himself in Washington’s private office to make the call and forbids even Jefferson from sitting in the room with him.

Which leaves Washington to worry about a peeved Henry Laurens, annoyed at being summoned across the Hill, whose expression shifts to more of a vague confusion upon seeing Philip Schuyler sitting there already, waiting patiently. “Good grief, what did they do?”

Because what else would these two men have in common, to be sat down together in such a way. “Nothing whatsoever,” Washington assures them, and waits for Laurens to take his chair. “But I wanted to do you the courtesy of a forewarning –the term is going to be ended early and the students sent home; the program suspended until further notice.”

Schuyler is privy to certain things of which Laurens has not yet been made aware, and he asks shrewdly, “Something to do with the last-minute closed session that just got tacked on to the day’s schedule?”

He clears his throat and holds each man’s gaze in turn, somber. “Thomas Conway just resigned. It was brought to the attention of the minority leader this morning that he engaged a page in a sexual relationship, and that there was an active attempt to shield the situation from-”

“How?” Laurens asks sharply.

Washington pauses and frowns. “For the sake of the privacy of the student in question, I am not going to divulge that information any further than is necessary; rest assured, neither of your children.” Laurens presses his lips together and looks off to the side, thoughtful and distracted. “I hardly dare dream it possible, but I’d like to keep the details behind the resignation out of the press until we’ve made arrangements for the students; ideally until they’re off the Hill completely and away from reporters. I won’t ask that you conceal the truth from Eliza and John, but hope you’ll be mindful of when and how you pass along that information, if you so choose.”
“Uh… hello?” There’s a confusion to the familiar voice that Alexander knows has everything to do with the unfamiliar number from which he’s calling, and he sags a bit in relief, half-expecting the call would go unanswered.

“Hey.”

There’s an immediate rustling, shuffling on the other end of the line. “Oh my God,” Edward says, and then a soft ow! and some hissed background voices while he excuses himself from whatever he’s doing. “Dude. What’s the story?”

He scuffs his feet on the ground and leans heavily against the partition separating him from the next payphone, entirely too cognizant of the crowd of people moving constantly around him in the terminal. “I’m an idiot.”

“Yes, but you’re my idiot.” He huffs out a laugh. “Where are you?”

“Miami. Connection boards in about a half hour. What are you up to?”

“Quote-unquote doing homework with David and René.” Which probably means video games, with a side of Spanish, but by the sound of it, Edward has excused himself to another room and so he cannot hear any of the tell-tale noises. “So… dad says you got in a fight.”

A huff of breath escapes him and he thunks his head against the metal barrier. “He mad?”

“Is he mad?” Edward repeats. “Dad?” There’s a short pause, and then, “You know what he’s like. More of a… natural consequences sort.” Alexander distinctly remembers the time Mister Stevens shoved a box of condoms at his son after he came home late from a date because natural consequences has its limits and this is one consequence I, for one, am not ready to deal with.

Edwards enthusiastic response of oh awesome, these things are expensive was probably not quite what his father expected, but at least served to reassure that he had a grasp on the basics of responsible sex.

“He’s disappointed, I think, but it’s not like he’s going to… I don’t know, try to punish you.”

And he never really has; never really needed to, to be honest, but Alexander can’t shake loose that bundle of nerves and anxiety in his chest, misplaced as it feels intellectually, and he tries and fails to ask casually, “You coming to the airport?”

“I… yeah, of course, but… what’s wrong?”

He swallows. “Nothing. I mean – God, I’m just… such an idiot.”

“It’s alright. I mean, I’m sorry and all about getting sent home early but it’ll be nice to have your ugly mug back around these parts.”

“You always know just what to say.” Blinking back the tears pricking at the corners of his eyes, he glances up at an arrivals and departures board and verifies he’s still on schedule. “Six forty-five, yeah?”
“Yup. Maybe dad’ll even let me come alone.”

Right. Because Edward turned eighteen while he was away, he can do that now. “I’d rather survive the trip back to Christiansted, if it’s all the same to you.”

“Hardy-har-har.”

“I’m gonna head to my gate.”

“See you in a few hours, kiddo.”

The call disconnects with a click.

---

“You can go on in, John.”

He sighs and draws a deep breath, willing a certain steadiness to his outer façade that he does not feel inwardly, nods his thanks to his father’s secretary, and pushes his way into the oversized office, the man’s privilege as Speaker.

The man in question is sitting behind his desk, but the chair is angled away, towards one of the windows at the side of the corner office, gazing off in the distance, distracted in a way he doesn’t often see his father. It’s not until the door closes with an audible snap that he registers the second presence in the room. “Jack,” he swivels around. “Come sit. Please,” he tacks on to soften the order. John obeys quietly, and holds his father’s gaze levelly, waiting. After a long moment of silence, he says eloquently, “Um.”

“How are you?” he asks quickly, and John blinks in surprise. “Mister Henry said you seemed a bit off today, when I called the cloakroom.”

Heat rises in his face, and his hackles right along with it. “I—father, you can’t… I’m working, or I’m supposed to be, you can’t just summon me on a whim to—”

“I’ve been… I want you to trust me, son. I want you to… feel like you can come to me. And talk to me. And I feel like I’ve destroyed that, between us. Have I?”

And he repeats, eloquently: “Um.”

“I’ve been… I want you to trust me, son. I want you to… feel like you can come to me. And talk to me. And I feel like I’ve destroyed that, between us. Have I?”

John stares, comically wide-eyed in his mortification. “I… trust you. I do.” He swallows thickly, feels heat building behind his eyes and it’s just too much for one day, after what Alexander pulled this morning, and… “It’s just that some days, it’s… harder. Than others.”
And Speaker of the House Henry Laurens rises from his chair and circles the desk, pulls his son up and crushes him into a fierce embrace, John stiff and baffled throughout and increasingly convinced that something is simply not quite right, especially when his father mutters harshly, “None of it matters, understand? I’m sorry I… I don’t want you to feel like you have to hide any part of yourself. Not from me, not from anyone.”

“Dad,” he pulls away, wild-eyed. “What is the matter?”

And his father notes dumbly, “You’re crying.”

He swipes angrily at the tracks of moisture slipping down his cheeks. “You’re scaring me,” he admits. “But that’s not… it’s just been a day, okay? He just… he was just gone, no warning, no explanation, no goodbye and -”

And the blood drains from his father’s face and his eyes widen. “My God. Did he…? Are you…? Jesus Christ, I’m going to kill him.”

“What? Who?”

“Washington.” And that stops him short, because he’s felt much the same impulse since Lee answered their frantic queries about Alexander’s whereabouts with a bland Washington kicked him out and something about a fight, but he suspects that’s not what his father is referring to. “He said you weren’t caught up in this, and -”

“What are you talking about?”

His father’s mouth snaps closed and he blinks down at him. “I – what are you talking about?”

“Uh.” He goes a bit pink. “Alexander. He got expelled and didn’t tell us. Just… vanished while we were all at class this morning.”

“…Oh. I – yes, I heard a page landed himself in trouble. Punched someone in Monroe’s office, I believe. I didn’t realize it was your… friend.”

“A very good friend,” John tells him lightly, “but that’s all he ever was.” Laurens nods and sighs, releases the hold he still has on his son’s shoulder and crosses back around the desk to collapse in his chair. “What’s the matter, dad? What’s got you all…?” He waves a hand vaguely, unsure how to describe this frantic mood.

His father sighs and shrugs, a bit helplessly. “This isn’t really meant for wider consumption yet, and it’s probably best that you not share details among the pages that aren’t yet offered to the group as a whole.” John blinks. “Thomas Conway resigned this morning; apparently got himself mixed up in an inappropriate relationship with one of your classmates. Washington pulled me and Philip Schuyler in to assure us it had nothing to do with you or Eliza before the news spreads.”

There’s a vague part in the back of his mind that’s trying to decide if he should be appalled at whatever logic drove his father’s regretful summons and heartfelt confessions, but it’s drowned out by the sudden ringing in his ears, the lump in his throat.

“Conway?” he repeats in a whisper.

x---x
Washington expects any number of queries directed to his office after the ongoing closed session being handled by Franklin and Jefferson, but Tilghman sticking his head in the room and informing him, “John Laurens would like a word, sir,” is not what he initially had in mind.

He sighs and runs a hand across his face. “Henry wasted no time there, I see. See if he can stop in before the session tomorrow morning.”

“He, ah… he’s here.”

Oh. “Send him in, then.” He’s not as well known to Washington as some of Patsy’s other ‘Congressfriends,’ but he knows the Laurens boy to be kind and caring, compassionate, but there’s something hard and unforgiving in the boy’s eyes, when he steps through, something that only deepens when he offers, “Have a seat, John.”

“I’d rather not, sir.”

So he nods and sits back, steeplesthis fingers, elbows propped on the desk. “You’ve spoken with your father, then.” John nods, terse. “We’ll be ending the program early, I’m sorry to say. Can’t justifiably continue, after learning of the - ”

“He didn’t know if he could believe you,” John blurts, wiping angrily at his eyes. Washington cocks his head sideways, confused. “My father. Because I came out to him six months ago, and he found that to be somewhat less than politically convenient, and I guess he thought… poor, repressed gay kid, easy mark if you know what you’re looking for…”

Washington just watches him, concerned, dearly hoping he’s not about to learn his assurances to Speaker Laurens were actually a lie, when John’s next words stop him cold.

“But Conway found an easier target, didn’t he?”

He attempts to tread carefully. “John, I’m sure you understand that in the interests of privacy and especially given all of your status as minors, I cannot share with you specifics of -”

“So we’re just going to pretend Alexander didn’t get kicked out because of -”

“Mister Hamilton,” he cuts the riled teen off sternly, “was removed from the program because he engaged in a physical altercation on Capitol premises.”

“An altercation he was sent to by one of the people who was fired today!”

“Mister Hamilton,” Washington repeats quietly, “was removed from the program because he engaged in a physical altercation on Capitol premises. As I think he would… confirm, were you to ask him directly.”

John’s eyes flash, and he opens his mouth, preparing to argue… and then he bites his tongue, listens to that which is said, unsaid… that which Washington did not deny – and he deflates, wipes a hand over his face and closes his eyes and whispers, “Yeah, okay.”

“I am trying to do everything in my power to make this right,” he tells him softly. “And I don’t know that I can. Politics is a cynical world, and just when I thought I had seen its limits…” John blinks quickly, eyes red. “John, if there’s some insight you think you might possess about what brought us to this point…”

But he shakes his head. “Not me. I don’t know what she knows, but… it’s Angelica Schuyler you want to talk to.”
The news over lunch that Alexander Hamilton had been kicked out of the Page Program came via one of Angelica’s intern friends.

“Did you hear? Guess Hamilton did it, after all.”

“Hm?” she’d glanced up at CJ as he dragged a chair out and settled himself in with a giant cup of cappuccino.

He grinned. “The Hamilton kid? Finally figured out how to make Washington lose his cool; rumor has it he fucking decked somebody yesterday in Cannon.”

“What?”

“That douchebag who interns for Monroe.” Couldn’t say she blamed him, at that. “Washington put his ass on a plane this morning, he’s done.”

And that made her a little regretful, because he’d been an interesting one and someone Eliza counted a friend; but she didn’t think much else on it as they resumed work for the afternoon, nor as whispers started circulating about some cloak and dagger closed session in the Senate, a bunch of hush-hush meetings among the leadership.

And he doesn’t immediately come to mind when Congressman McDougall tells her, looking a bit perplexed, “Senator Washington wants to see you over in Hart, Schuyler.”

“I- me?” she demands, and he just shrugs and waves her along.

So she goes trekking across the Hill and up to Washington’s third-floor office in Hart, where Tench Tilghman is looking worn, conferring in low tones with Gilbert Lafayette, which is… weird enough in its own right, because Washington is the sort not to tolerate the mixing of his office with his campaign, and she hasn’t seen Lafayette on the Hill since he left his job as a policy advisor to be campaign chief six months prior.

But Lafayette is just as charming as he ever was, if a bit more sober than is his wont, and he clasps her hands with a fond, “Mademoiselle Schuyler – I trust you are well.”

“I am. I was told the senator wanted to see me?”

“Yes, yes,” he guides her back to the inner offices and directs her through the already open door, where Washington is sitting and typing away at his computer as he absently directs her into a seat opposite him at the desk.

“Thanks, Gil,” he murmurs. “Close the door on your way out.” Finishes what he’s doing, and then turns a serious gaze on Angelica that sets her instantly on edge and makes her sit straighter in her seat. “Thank you for coming on such quick notice, Miss Schuyler.”

“What can I do for you, Senator?”

He studies her for a moment over steepled fingers, looks somber, reserved in a way she’s not sure she’s ever seen from him and he murmurs, “I need to ask you something – I want to emphasize beforehand that this is mostly a corroborative exercise, and I doubt there’s much you can tell me I won’t have guessed to some degree anyway.”
“Oh…okay.”

“Back in February, you asked your sister to pass along a message to a couple of her classmates, that they’d do well to exercise caution around Thomas Conway.” Her stomach sinks. “Is that… an apt summation?” She nods dumbly. “Why? What inspired such a warning?”

And she’s not stupid; the closed session, the secret meetings, the sudden disappearance of one of those classmates, and she claps a hand to her mouth and sucks in an unsteady breath. “I didn’t… oh God, I didn’t think he’d -”

“Miss Schuyler – Angelica. Please… calm yourself. You are not in trouble. I am simply trying to grasp a larger picture surrounding a situation that has arisen, and I believe you may hold the key that will tell me where to start looking. You began your term as a page the same month Mister Conway was sworn in.”

Mister – not even Senator anymore.

“I…” she hesitates, and pleads, “I’m sorry, sir, but I… it’d betray a confidence, and I’m not sure…”

He holds up a hand and she snaps her jaw shut while he watches her, a light frown playing across his lips but it’s more thoughtful that displeased, she thinks. “I understand. Perhaps we might compromise – I will tell you my suspicions, and you will tell me if I hit near the mark. Acceptable?”

She nods and whispers, “Yes, sir.”

“I know you, Angelica – I know you’d never have kept silent had you suspected anyone was in present danger, so here’s what I think: I think initially, it was as you told your sister, and she relayed to her friends. Conway was particularly friendly with a small group of students in your class. Male students, exclusively, sparking a certain speculation of chauvinism.” He looks at her expectantly, until she nods her agreement. “And I think you probably thought little else of it for a time after your term ended.” She nods again. “But you’re a sociable girl, you likely kept up connections from your time here, and sometime in the months after you left – perhaps even a year or two later – you heard a rumor.”

And again, she nods miserably. “Yes, sir.”

“The substance of that rumor, I would guess, is that one of those preferred male students, after he left the program, after his eighteenth birthday, engaged in a physical relationship with Mister Conway. A one-time thing, or ongoing, I cannot speculate. And again, beyond the initial shock, you thought little of it – strange, even distasteful given their ages and prior professional relationship, but not of questionable legality, and with the boy outside the umbrella of the Page Program, not even within the particular purview of Senate Ethics. You did not tell your father.”

“No.”

“But then you saw something one day that reminded you of how it’d started that first term; and in an effort to warn off the students involved without betraying that confidence, you enlisted your sister’s help.”

“And I was already too late,” she says faintly.

Washington sighs and studies her a moment, and then tells her, “You understand that, officially, you don’t know about whom I’m referring.”

“And unofficially?”
He shrugs. “I don’t think it would have made any difference, had you passed along your warning earlier or not at all. And, by the picture that is slowly shaping up throughout this… interminable day… my impression is not that Mister Conway is entirely a villain; certainly not even the most villainous character of this particular saga. A man with some grievous flaws, to be sure, ones that preclude him from being afforded a position of trust in this institution any longer. Ones that may land him in legal jeopardy, in fact. But at its core, I’m starting to suspect this was just… a perfect and devastating confluence of factors that drove this situation tragically out of hand, and compounded by a complete repudiation of any basic principles among those poised to do anything about it.”

x---x

The pages are all so collectively stunned by the news that they’ll be returning home more than a month earlier than scheduled that, when the press release about Thomas Conway’s resignation drops just after five, it earns little more than a passing mention as they sit and mull their impending departures in the common room.

John doesn’t linger, can’t stand hearing the idle speculation in light of what he knows; can’t bear another quizzical look from Hercules, who has enough pieces to connect those dots, or Eliza, who has either guessed well enough the connection between Conway’s departure and Alexander’s, or had a similar sit-down with her father as he did.

But his search for solitude is in vain, Aaron already sequestered in their room, perched up on his top bunk and reading. He spares a disinterested glance as John walks in and collapses on his own bed, and turns a page in his book. “I suppose moving out shall hardly be an inconvenience for you – doesn’t your father have a place in Adams Morgan?”

He does, but John just scowls, though their respective positions preclude Aaron from seeing it.

“It did say Hamilton was going to be the doom of us all.”

It takes a moment for his words to catch up with John, and then he’s jumping right back off his bed and staring, slack-jawed at Aaron. “What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Aaron just scoffs, and John reaches up and smacks the book out of his hands.

He looks up through narrowed eyes, which he promptly rolls at the outrage on John’s face. “Please. You know exactly what’s going on here.”

John stands on the edge of Hercules’s bed so he can snag a fistful of an affronted Aaron’s shirt and drag him in to hiss, “I know what’s going on here because I’ve spoken with my father and with Senator Washington today, neither of whom mentioned Alexander’s name. So what the fuck do you know?”

Aaron shoves him off and he stumbles off of the ledge where he’s perched and catches the post of the bed for balance. “Enough,” he sniffs.

“And just how long,” he whispers, “have you known enough?” Aaron’s lips purse, eyes tightening, and John breathes, “Jesus Christ – you knew? You knew that he… that they…”

“I suspected,” he corrects, irritably.

“And you didn’t tell anyone?” he demands wildly.

And Aaron looks at him at that, nonplussed. “Of course I told someone, right after I saw a senator
getting handsy with a teenager in a dark room in the goddamn National Archives.” John pales, his stomach turning over – that was months ago, so early in the term, and – “I was assured it would be looked into, quietly, discreetly, and later that there seemed to be no cause for concern.”

“Jesus.”

“And maybe then, there wasn’t,” he shrugs. “But given that the individual to whom I relayed my concerns is currently packing and preparing to vacate the premises this very night,” he points to his left, in the direction, John realizes, of Lee’s room, “I’m going to assume I simply chose to place my trust in the wrong person.”

x---x

Alexander jolts awake when the plane touches down and his first thought is that, though he’s only shifted one time zone, his inner clock is going to be even more screwed than usual, after last night’s all-nighter and then two disjointed naps on his two flights today.

His second thought is ow, because he yawns and his ears pop violently.

His third thought is… a surprising sort of relief. His return is ahead of schedule, and with it comes some problematic considerations for school and his efforts to escape Saint Croix once again next year, come time for college, but for the moment… he can breathe. Can settle back in at the Stevens house as best he was ever able, keep a passing eye on the goings-on in D.C., and just… let himself be removed from it. He did the right thing… he thinks, handed off the problem to someone better poised to sort through it and decide how best to handle it.

And Edward can give him good-natured grief about his expulsion and his violent tendencies and Mister Stevens can be quietly disappointed at his lack of self-control, and he can handle both of those things. Mister Pendleton and Reverend Knox will be disappointed as well in his early return, after so strongly advocating to get him there in the first place, but…

In the grand scheme of things, it seems a small price.

So he clambers off the plane alongside a bunch of tourists – wedding season, he thinks, watching the young, starry-eyed couples looking excitedly around the airport, as if it looked much different than any other airport in the world, honeymooning or doing the married-on-the-beach thing, and he winds his way around them all, no sense of novelty to these surroundings he never left until his flight off the island in January, on his way to D.C. and –

-and he steps through the barrier dividing the secure part of the terminal with the baggage pickup area and feels his stomach promptly plummet, every reassurance he’d just allowed himself vanishing in an instant as he sees Thomas Conway’s face on a mounted television screen broadcasting CNN International.

People start moving around him, where he’s just stopped and stared, and he forces himself to move closer, to look at the headline below the picture even as the image shifts to the anchors, the captioning too tiny for him to read from here.

Sen. Thomas Conway (DR-NJ) Resigns

And the chyron below it:
first term senator cites ‘personal matters’ in unexpected departure

It’s been- he counts back in his head, accounts for the time difference- what, nine hours, since he left a frustrated Mister Madison at the departures lane at the airport in D.C. He’s not sure what he expected – nothing this quick, certainly, nothing this public, because resignations come with questions and personal matters won’t cut it for long and –

-and then the picture shifts to one of Washington, and his heart climbs up in his throat as the headline below changes.

Capitol Shakeup

Sen. Washington (I-VA) fires longtime chief of staff, cancels campaign events

And in that moment, three fundamental truths occur at the exact same time:

First- Madison and Jefferson are merciless.

Second- this is going to be a thing, a capital-S Scandal.

And third- in the presumption of the former, someone will have called ahead of his arrival.

Why he shouldn’t have considered that possibility before now, he cannot say – the prevailing assumption that Madison, like Arnold and André, would seek to protect the Senate to some degree in this, and if Alexander wanted to wipe his hands clean of it, then why should anyone argue and open up yet another avenue of liability in the matter. He can’t decide now if the notion makes him foolish, because he’s a minor and of course a decent and responsible individual would feel obliged to alert the guardian who gave him permission to be there about what had happened, but he thinks it’s more of simple cynicism that’s been engrained through this whole disaster.

So he stands and stares at the news coverage he can’t even hear, a new sense of panic rising in him because this isn’t what he expected, and even if he had, he’d have anticipated having more time and –

“Alex?”

The quiet voice cuts into his distress like a shot and he whirls and stares and registers the last piece of this catastrophe falling into place as he sees Mister Stevens’s expression shift from hesitant to something decidedly more anxious at whatever it is he reads on Alexander’s face, and Alexander in turn realizes…

…he’s alone. Edward hadn’t been allowed to come.

The last thread by which he’s been clinging to his composure frays, and he backs up as Mister Stevens takes a small step towards him, shaking his head frantically back and forth, and the anxiousness in the man’s eyes shifts yet again to something altogether more heartbroken and it’s too much, too strong a whiplash from his expectations of the last five minutes and the last nine hours and he presses his eyes closed and wraps his arms around his middle and cringes against the hand that lands on his shoulder.

Undeterred, Mister Stevens pulls him, stiff and unyielding, into a gentle embrace. He gasps wetly and can only think of Conway’s wandering hands and questing touches and…

…and Mister Stevens’s embrace is firm. It is unreserved and unconditional, and the beginnings of a sob tears its way out of Alexander’s throat as he slumps into the hold. “Okay,” Mister Stevens
murmurs above him, cheek pressed into Alexander’s hair, “okay.” And they stand there a moment, oblivious to the crowds around them, just another emotional reunion, until he pulls back slightly and looks down at Alexander, whose gaze is fixed determinedly down at his shoes, and asks softly, “What do you need?”

That, at least, he can answer without pause. He forces his eyes up, allows as much naked vulnerability as he can bear display and begs, “I need to go home.”

There’s a hitch in Mister Stevens’s breathing, a crack in his own composure, but he forces a watery smile and says, “Let’s go home, then. Edward’s waiting.”

x---x

It’s a twenty minute drive between the airport and Christiansted and Alexander spends the first several minutes crying quietly in the passenger seat, not entirely clear why. He’s hit this emotional critical mass, after so long trying to hide in D.C. and so long before that just being determinedly fine about everything, always.

Once his sniffles space out a bit, Mister Stevens says quietly, “I appreciate that you probably don’t want to… talk about this.” He twitches and Jesus, is that the understatement of the century. “We’re going to have to come to some accord where you talk to somebody, eventually, but I need to ask you two questions now and I need complete honesty from you.”

Alexander sinks down in his seat, pretty sure his guardian just promised to send him off to therapy, but he nods reluctantly and waits with bated breath.

“Is there anyone you need to see right now?” He blinks over, confused. “A doctor, or… there are places you can get testing done, no questions asked, and -”

“Jesus,” he sighs, heat rising in his face, “no. I’m not…” He thumps his head back against the headrest and closes his eyes. “I paid attention in health class, I heard the talk right alongside Edward.”

Eyes fixed determinedly ahead, Mister Stevens murmurs, “It’s not necessarily you I’m worried about.”

He wants to disappear into the seat. “We were – he – I’m not worried about it.”

“Okay.” He glances sidelong and then back at the road and shifts topics. “The man who called me, James Madison? He said that some people knew what was going on and were trying to keep it quiet, but that you didn’t actively tell anyone until this morning. Is that true?”

Some people. Not just Arnold then. If André was fired too, though, it wouldn’t be such a high profile event, given Washington’s presidential ambitions. “Does it matter?”

“It matters very much to me.” Alexander looks over and up at him, taken aback by the poorly-veiled anger in the man’s tone. “They expelled you. I got a call that you’d gotten in a fight, from a man who has now been fired, I’m told, because he knew weeks ago, if not months, that something was not right. I’m told that the fight itself was deliberately provoked to justify your expulsion, for fear that you’d become a political liability, and I’m just… trying to understand. What changed, overnight?”

He shrugs dully. “I figured it out.” Mister Stevens looks at him, confused, and he glances away, watches the last of the daylight slipping below the horizon out the window. “It wasn’t about Conway. He didn’t force me into anything. He was nice. But it became apparent eventually that he was nice a lot, and there was a network of people willing to do anything to keep it covered up time
and again.”

“And by calling it a cover-up,” Mister Stevens comments lowly, neutrally, not looking over at him, “you’re acknowledging that it was wrong in the first place.”

“I’m not an idiot, I know that screwing the underage help is a career ender.”

“And you know damn well,” he says sharply, and Alexander flinches, “that you’d have been first in line to condemn the man had it been anyone else in your position.” He turns back to the window and sighs, staring unseeingly as they approach the limits of the town. “It’s alright, Alex. It’s alright to be hurt and confused for a while, while you work through.”

“Oh, for the love of – I’m okay.”

“No,” he murmurs softly, “you’re not. But you’re home, and you have as much time as you need to work through whatever’s happening in your brain. And if you want to be mad at me while you do, that’s okay, too. I’m not going anywhere.”
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Two weeks later, there's a lot of stumbling and fumbling and trying to figure out where things go from here.

Chapter Notes

I'm sorry, this got stupid long.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Two Weeks Later

He picks up a photo from the mantelpiece and studies it a minute in the calm quiet, broken up only by the occasional sound drifting through from the little bungalow’s kitchen of keys tapping away at a laptop, the steady white noise filtering in from the open windows of nearby traffic, birds calling, a dog barking.

There’s something peaceful in it, something casual and unrushed. Something wrong, too, out of place, and not just the stark difference from the pace of D.C.

He taps at the smaller boy in the picture, smiling at his companion atop a giant cup of ice cream shared between them, delight and mischief apparent in his dark eyes. “Is this Alexander?”

“Hm,” Thomas Stevens comes to peer over his shoulder. “He was seven, Edward nine.”

“Am I mistaken in my recollection that he’s only been under your care a few years, or were they already friends?”

“No, they were friends. In fact,” he takes a closer look at the picture and smiles faintly, a bit sadly, “that was taken by Rachel. Alexander’s mother,” he clarifies after a moment. “Outside her store over on Company Street.”

Washington replaces the photograph carefully and accepts the cup of coffee from the younger man in whose space he’s so thoroughly intruded, and follows him to sit while they wait. “How did she die?”

“Came down with the flu early in 2014; they both did, actually. Alexander started to get better, Rachel got worse and was hospitalized with pneumonia. He came here to finish recovering and his brother was with her when she died.”

He blinks up in surprise at the mantel, half-expecting another boy to materialize in any of the pictures there. “I did not realize he had any siblings.”

Stevens chuckles mirthlessly and wipes a weary hand over his face. “At the risk of sounding
uncharitable, he may as well not. James was – is – more than five years older, was a few months shy of eighteen when Rachel died. Given their age difference, it’s probably not all that surprising that they were never particularly close, but…”

He trails off and sighs, shakes his head. It’s on the tip of Washington’s tongue to tell the man he needn’t share the tale, it’s none of his business, when Stevens continues bluntly, “Simply put – when their father took off about two years earlier, it hit James much harder than it did Alexander. And I suspect that he never quite managed to forgive Alexander for being the one to survive the illness that claimed their mother so soon after.”

Alexander Hamilton has been on Washington’s mind daily – probably hourly, to be honest – in these past couple weeks; and now, sitting here in this cozy space, this perfectly comfortable home but one in which he simply cannot envision the boy, it occurs to him just how much more complicated the label of orphan is, as it applies here. “Did he disappear as well?”

“No; they both went to live with a cousin, the only family they had left on the island. And Peter…” he lets out a heavy breath and looks down at the floor. “Well – Peter was a troubled young man. Able financially, perhaps, to take on the care of two adolescent boys, but I suspect emotionally he was ill-equipped, given how deep and fresh their wounds were.”

“It ended poorly?”

“It ended tragically,” Stevens corrects softly. “Six months after they moved in, Peter killed himself. James had finished school by then, turned eighteen, and he dumped Alexander with Family Services. And, to be fair, he was hardly in a place himself to assume the care for his younger brother – but then he ran off as well, abandoned him as effectively as the father had done. Alexander hasn’t heard one word from him since.”

Washington stares at the picture of the little boy across the room, and thinks back on his interactions with Alexander Hamilton, too few as they were. Tries to reconcile the carefree boy with the ambitious, audacious applicant, the feisty, cocky page, the defeated teen who he’d expelled, and the coldly clinical author of the pamphlet blowing the whistle on the corruption happening under all of their noses.

“I regret,” he murmurs slowly, “that I may have contributed, however inadvertently, to what seems an avalanche of undue disappointments in recent years.”

And Stevens shrugs, resigned. “He doesn’t blame you for sending him home; I think he felt fortunate not to be charged with assault, to be honest.”

Which he gets, but it doesn’t change the fact that it was a situation Alexander should never have found himself in to begin with.

Doesn’t change the fact that there’s nothing much to be done about it, at least nothing that won’t raise questions Alexander doesn’t want being asked. The provocation had been designed to paint the boy into a corner and it had succeeded beautifully, even if Alexander had thrown a wrench in the scheme by unveiling it on his way out the door. Maybe, had he acquiesced to Madison’s request to stay behind, they’d have been able to do something – he’d have gone home anyway, they all did, but the expulsion could have been quietly rescinded, he could have finished out the semester via online arrangements worked out for the rest of the students.

But he rose to Reynolds and André’s bait, is named in a police report somewhere. Any attempt to excuse or explain makes him the story; would have done so back in D.C., in all likelihood, but it would have been more contained.
It’s also not a leap, having read the gritty document thoroughly, to suppose that Alexander thought – thinks? – that he deserves the punishment, and not just for losing his temper and problem-solving with his fists.

There’s a creak of a hinge through the window that overlooks the backyard, the gate of the tall wooden fence swinging inwards. Two voices chatting and laughing follow soon after, happy in this unguarded moment.

“I’d like,” Washington says, “to speak with Alexander alone, if he’s willing. But as we spoke on the phone, it is your privilege, as his guardian, to refuse, or to be in the room.”

Stevens offers him a wry smile as quick feet dart up the steps onto the back porch. “Guardian or not, I’ve not had much luck telling Alexander Hamilton what to do since he came to live in this house as a skittish and sullen thirteen-year-old; I shan’t try to start today.”

And then the back door is opening with a flurry of activity. “Dad!” the unfamiliar of the two voices hollers, “we’re home. Alexander did your books,” he continues over the thud of bags and shoes hitting the wooden floor, “he says Nick Cruger isn’t a criminal, he’s just criminally stupid.” Stevens snorts and shakes his head, and then softer footsteps are padding down the short hallway from the door. “I hope you didn’t eat lunch, mom sent us home with some of those fajita rolls you like, and also she said to remind you that she’ll be out of town on the -”

The young man keeps talking as he bypasses the living room and heads towards the kitchen, and then seems to register the extra presence and backtracks. “Oh.” Alexander nearly barrels into his back with the sudden reversal of direction, a heavy binder tucked in his arms. “Hi?”

Edward’s eyes widen as he finally realizes who it is that he’s looking at, and he breathes a faint, “Ohh,” and Washington cringes ahead of the inevitable surprised exclamation from the kitchen, followed by –

“Monsieur Hamilton!”

“Er… Monsieur Lafayette?”

And then they’re off in rapid-fire French of which, despite the man’s best efforts in his younger days, he still doesn’t understand a lick. Judging by the expression on Stevens’s face, nor does he, but the conversation sounds… clipped, at least from Alexander’s end. But he’s trusted Lafayette with more than this in the years of their camaraderie and trusts that he shan’t lead him astray in this delicate endeavor.

Indeed, it’s only a minute before Alexander is coming slowly to hover in the threshold of the room again, eyes flitting about the place nervously before landing on Stevens and muttering, “The courtesy of a heads-up was too much to ask?”

“Would you be standing here right now if I had?” A tinge of pink rises in the boy’s face, the
beginnings of outrage behind his eyes, but Stevens cuts him off wearily. “Senator Washington would like a word; you are free to refuse. But I’d rather beg your forgiveness a thousand times than have you run off on me, and I wasn’t altogether confident that you wouldn’t.”

Two things become immediately obvious. First, that Alexander’s transition home has perhaps not been altogether smooth or happy. Second, that whatever quiet tension is radiating between Stevens and Alexander, it’s news to Edward, whose gaze is bouncing back and forth between them, wide-eyed, and that speaks to a certain skill at compartmentalization that slots just one more fragment of a piece of a complex puzzle together in Washington’s mind, a puzzle that’s been preoccupying him since he answered that damned summons from Jefferson.

A puzzle that’s brought him here, against the advisement of Lafayette, who still came gamely along when his protests went ignored, and Jefferson, who pointed out – not wrongly – that one slip-up could turn into a news cycle that none of them need right now.

After a tense moment that hovers uncomfortably between the four of them, Alexander deflates a bit and turns his attention to Washington, jerks his head towards the rear of the house. “Outside?”

“If that is what you prefer.”

Edward follows him as he turns to head back the way they came in, leaning in and whispering quickly for Alexander’s ears alone. He waves the older boy off, shakes his head once, and leads the way out to the back porch without a backwards glance, pausing only to slip his shoes back on.

When Washington catches up, he’s leaning against the railing, staring absently out over the quaint space enclosed by a privacy fence. The senator takes up a seat on the top step, giving the teen the high-ground, as it were, and follows his gaze. The yard has grown a bit wild, like someone started a landscaping project and then lost interest. It strikes him an ideal spot for the imaginations of two young boys to run free.

Yet much like the house itself, he can’t see Alexander in it. Even now, absent the page uniform in which he’d always seen the boy, dressed for the island humidity as the season fast approaches summer – he looks restive, unsatisfied. Looking ahead to his next escape, a stranded traveler barely tolerant and only because he’s no other options.

The subject of his scrutiny kicks at the bottom of the rail and asks, “How do you know Mister Lafayette?”

“Oh.” He blinks in surprise. “He’s my campaign strategist.”

“No,” the boy mumbles, “I mean… how do you know him? How did you meet?”

Oh. “We were stationed in Brussels together, at NATO headquarters. My last post, his first.”

“And he defected?”

A bark of surprised laughter escapes him, but he shakes his head, though the boy isn’t facing him to see it. “No, he ran off to a warzone and got himself shot. Discovered a knack for diplomacy during his recovery, and the French government asked him to resign his commission and serve as UN ambassador instead.”

“Which was Senator Jefferson’s last job before he ran for office.”

“Hm,” he nods slowly. “We have our great political disagreements, Thomas and I, but our respect for Gilbert has long been a steady common ground.”
“Does he know why he’s here?”

And because honesty is about the only thing he has to offer Alexander Hamilton, Washington informs him bluntly, “Gil is here because he’s richer than God and chartered a private plane so that we might avoid being recognized in airports, on a flight.”

“That for your benefit, or mine?”

“Yours, mostly.”

“Oh, so he does know why he’s here.” Washington presses his lips together and sighs. Alexander, for the first time since they stepped out on the porch, turns and meets his eye levelly and says, “I told Senator Jefferson and Mister Madison that I have nothing else to say.”

Which maybe helps him better grasp the hostility radiating off the boy. “I’m not here to interrogate you, Alexander. In truth, I’d like to offer you an apology, but I’m getting the sense that you’ve little interest in hearing one from me at present, so I’ll settle for filling you in on where things stand.”

He scuffs at the scratched wood under his feet. “Conway resigned, Arnold and André fired, the program halted and indefinitely suspended… we get the news here, too.” A sardonic smile twists up the corner of his mouth as he glances up. “Impressive job from the press office, by the way, in keeping those things separated in the media.”

“I think,” Washington tells him lightly, “that you understand this business well enough by now – we cut deals to keep those things separated in the media, while your classmates were still on the Hill.”

“And what does the Post get for exercising restraint in connecting those dots?”

“The Times, and they get to break the exclusive in tomorrow’s Friday evening news dump about Thomas Conway pleading guilty to a class one misdemeanor charge in the state of Virginia.”

That succeeds in shocking the hostility out of him, but Washington is sorely mistaken if he expected any great measure of surprise from Alexander. He turns around and leans heavily back against the railing, and runs a weary hand down his face. “Okay,” he sighs. “Okay.”

Washington is confident that Alexander hadn’t realized when he wrote the thing that Conway would be vulnerable to such a charge, but he’s clearly realized it in the intervening time. “He will be prohibited from any further contact with you, as part of the sentence.”

“I don’t think there was much danger of that anyway,” Alexander mumbles down at his shoes.

“If you don’t already know… legally, your name cannot even appear in the court proceedings; it has not been used in closed-door meetings of the Senate Ethics Committee. If any media outlets were to suss out your identity somehow, there are strong journalistic ethical standards that prohibit the naming of minors and victims of sex crimes.” Alexander goes red and opens his mouth, but Washington cuts him off firmly. “It doesn’t matter, Alexander – consent is at eighteen in Virginia. Mister Conway knew that when he invited you there. I’m not going to be patronizing and tell you your feelings are wrong, or that they’ll change over time. They might, they might not, and for now, they are what they are. But Mister Conway broke the law, end of story.”

“And it doesn’t matter at all, what I say?”

“No.”

“That’s really kind of humiliating,” he swipes angrily at moisture pooling in the corners of his eyes.
“I can decide what to do with my body in the Capitol basement, but not a few miles across the river?”

“Anything that occurred in the Capitol basement, as you say, may have been within the letter of the law, but I can assure you that there is no scenario in which the Senate body as a whole would not consider it a gross abuse of power.” Alexander flinches and turns away, and Washington feels himself soften and asks gently, “Alexander – do you… understand that you’re not in any sort of trouble?” He twitches, but doesn’t answer. “It doesn’t matter what preceded the moment, when the line was finally crossed – the onus was always on him, ethnically and legally, not to cross it.”

For a couple of minutes, he thinks he’ll get no more out of Alexander, standing there with his elbows propped on the railing, head in his hands; but then he abruptly comes over and surprises Washington by collapsing on the steps by his side, hands running anxiously through his hair as he speaks to the ground. “I do know that, you know? I’m not… I know that it was… not good, what happened. But I don’t feel tricked, I wasn’t forced, I…”

“Was it the thought,” Washington probes, curious, “that there had been others, upon overhearing Mister Conway’s conversation with Mister Arnold in the library, or the thought that someone would stand silently by and let it happen, that truly bothered you?”

Alexander goes very still for a moment and then snaps his gaze up to Washington’s. There’s something haunted in it, something there and then gone again just as fast, before it too is hidden away beneath the careful detachment that the boy seems to have perfected in the fallout of events. “Maybe I do feel tricked, then,” he says evenly. “Touché.”

Which…isn’t what Washington was getting at, at all, but he lets it go, adds another piece to this disjointed puzzle for later contemplation.

“So were there others?” Alexander asks after the silence threatens to grow awkward, and then hastily backtracks. “Sorry, that’s… probably not something you’re at liberty to… yeah.”

There’s a minefield in the question, though the senator can’t quite discern in which direction it lies. He opts for an honest answer, if an incomplete one. “I can tell you that, during Mister Conway’s first year in office, a page expressed discomfort over his behavior to Mister Lee. That seems to have been the foundations for the cabal, as you called it.”

Alexander nods slowly and stares off into the distance. When he doesn’t respond further to that line of inquiry after a couple of minutes, Washington decides to take his chances with contrition. “I regret,” he says slowly, and senses the boy tense predictably by his side, “that our first real conversation was me dragging you into my office to expel you.”

“Well,” Alexander cocks a half-smile up at him, “I certainly regret that, too.”

“I’m not even talking about the incident with Reynolds, or any of the rest of it. There is simply no reason that, prior to May, I shouldn’t have taken some time to get to know you beyond the scope of the application process.”

“I understood,” he murmurs quietly, and Washington supposes that if anyone would, it’s this young man who has lost so much.

He clears his throat. “It might seem far too little, far too late. But I want to be available for any further questions you might have, any concerns.” He slides a folded piece of paper from the pocket on the front of his shirt. “You can call or email me, any time. Or Mister Madison, if you’re more comfortable speaking with him. I assume you still have his contact information.”
Alexander takes the paper slowly and nods, a bit pink in the face. He makes to fold it straight back up, but then the hand-written line at the bottom catches his eye and he frowns. “What’s this one?”

“Ah. That is Mister John Laurens’s email address and cell number. He came to ask if I had yours, prior to his return to South Carolina; I offered to pass his along instead, if you and I spoke again.”

“If.” Alexander sighs.

He smiles apologetically. “I cannot help the private musings of John Laurens; I won’t affect ignorance and pretend he did not immediately associate your departure with that of Mister Conway. That said, I do not think you’ll find he thinks any less of you for it.” Alexander lets out a heavy breath. “Also…”

“What?”

“He may have, ah… punched Mister Lee, just before the man vacated Webster Hall.”

“What?”

“Right in the mouth.”

“No,” Alexander grins up at him, far too delighted. “Dear Laurens – my knight in shining armor.”

“I, of course, cannot condone such violence, and only heard about it much later, after the students vacated the premises as well.”

Which is the absolute truth and one he’s glad for – unsurprisingly, Lee hadn’t been eager to call attention to the incident – but Alexander nods indulgently. “Uh-huh.”

He smiles faintly and pauses, trying to wrap his head around the final point he wants to make, how to phrase it without further burdening Alexander’s misplaced sense of guilt. “I’ve one last thing to say, and then I shall leave you in peace.” Dark eyes peer up at him a bit nervously as Alexander chews on his lip, anxious. “I know it seems… chaotic. It is, in truth, the upheaval brought about through your disclosures to Mister Madison two weeks ago.” The teen frowns and looks down, and Washington says, “I’m nevertheless glad you spoke up. It was an untenable situation, and such an extraordinary confluence of circumstances that put you in the unique position to realize just how much so. And I think you did realize that, ‘else why bother? And I hope that, despite any misgivings you have over Mister Conway’s fate – you can accept that you did a good thing.”

And he climbs to his feet, doesn’t wait for an answer, doesn’t want to pressure one out of him. His hand is on the doorknob to go back into the house, when Alexander’s quiet voice gives him pause. “Senator?” he turns, and finds Alexander blinking up at him, eyes shining. “Good luck in November. I’d vote for you if I could.”

“That means more to me than you know, Alexander.”

Edward is up and out the door like a shot the moment he sees Washington walk back in. The senator crosses to the kitchen where Stevens is leaning against a counter and talking quietly with Lafayette even as he continues to peruse his campaign correspondence on the open laptop at the small dining table.

Washington clears his throat softly to announce his presence. “We shan’t impose upon your hospitality much longer, Mister Stevens.”
“It’s no trouble,” he shrugs a bit helplessly, like he’s still trying to wrap his head around the situation at all. “I hope Alexander wasn’t too… well,” he looks down, a shadow passing over his face. “I shouldn’t say that. He’s angry; of course he’s angry. But I think he still hasn’t quite figured out just who it is he wants to be angry with. So it just kind of… comes out.”

“In my experience,” he murmurs, thinking of Patsy and the long struggles and frustrations with her condition, that potent anger with no productive outlet, “he’ll lash out most towards those with whom he feels safest.”

Lafayette shoots him a quizzical look, but Stevens smiles faintly. “He barely spoke to me the first year he lived in this house; I can only hope you’re right.”

Yes, Alexander Hamilton is an enigma who will weigh frequently on Washington’s mind in the days and weeks to come.

“There’s one last thing I wanted to… well.” He sighs and crosses his arms, frowns down at the floor a moment, collecting his thoughts. “I realize that Alexander’s sudden dismissal from the program may have cast a shadow of uncertainty on his prospects for next year. I understand he’s had his heart set on going to New York for some time now.”

Stevens shrugs. “Columbia was always going to be a long shot; but yes, I imagine the partial-credit and accompanying explanation will jeopardize the potential for any scholarships that might have made it possible.”

“You understand I can’t un-ring that bell?”

He glances up sharply. “Did Alexander ask you to?”

“No, heavens no. Alexander…” he shakes head. “It was a broader sort of justice he sought, I think, than clearing his own name, though I do also believe that his reluctance to humor the notion that he ought not have been expelled is fear-driven.”

“It’s the only deniability he has,” Stevens nods slowly, “given the timing of things.”

And Washington can’t really argue that I got in a fight must sound preferable to the boy over I got caught up in a cover-up for a sex scandal. He’s not foolish enough to think the students weren’t speculating among themselves, the moment they were told, can’t imagine the Laurens boy was the only one to make the leap.

“I have something for him, something that I think he is not yet ready to accept from me; something that he would find too… transactional, at the moment.” Lafayette looks up again quickly at that, brow furrowing. Washington ignores him and crosses instead to the door, where his jacket is hanging on a hook, and he withdraws a thin envelope, plain save for Alexander’s name scrawled across the flap. “But I find myself invested in his future, and I hope that you will hold on to this for him, for when the time is right.”

Stevens stares warily at the envelope. “What is it?”

“A recommendation letter, co-signed by myself and Senator Jefferson.”

The younger man blinks as he pulls it slowly into his own hands. “Sir…”

“It explains that the episode for which he was expelled was the culmination of a systematic failure of the administrators of the program and, indeed, the Senate as a whole, to adequately protect the students under our charge; and that Alexander demonstrated a great deal of personal courage in
bringing the matter to light, even after his dismissal, in the hopes of protecting future students in the program.” Stevens looks at a loss for words, and Washington concludes quietly, “It does not, I think, suggest that Alexander himself was the one who suffered most for our failures, but he is free to read the letter when he is ready and decide to submit it, or not.”

“I… you realize that, by the time he is submitting college applications, the election will be over.”

“I do.”

“That in all likelihood, he’ll be applying to Columbia with the weight of the president-elect’s recommendation behind him.”

He just smiles faintly. “Pass it along when you deem the time right. Or get in touch, before applications come due, and I might broach the matter with him then.”

Stevens can’t seem to tear his eyes away from the letter in his hand, as if he’s trying to see straight through the envelope and read the text beyond. Lafayette coughs abruptly after a long and heavy pause, and slings his bag over his shoulder and stands. “We really must be going, I’m afraid.”

The boys never come back inside, and they leave Stevens to convey their farewells.

x---x

“I can feel you thinking, Gil. Brooding.” Lafayette glances up over the top of his computer, opposite a small table that folds down from the wall in the tight confines of the plane. “Being all… judgey.”

He quirks an unimpressed brow. “That is not a word.”

“What do you know, you’re French.” Speaking of… “What did you say to Alexander, when he first walked in?”

With a poorly-suppressed sigh, Lafayette closes his laptop and rests his elbows on the table, gives a half-hearted shrug. “He wanted to know what business you could possibly have there with your campaign strategist.”

It hadn’t quite occurred how that could come off. “He thought I was there to play politics?”

“For heaven’s sake, he didn’t know what to think, you just materialized in his living room.” Washington had known from the moment he raised the possibility that Lafayette was against him making that sojourn; still, his teeming frustration takes him aback. “Anyway,” he sucks in a calming breath, “I told him that we all have need of a friend by our side, from time-to-time, and to read no further into it.”

He opts for light-hearted. “Well, I told him you were there to throw money around.” His companion smiles vaguely and looks distantly out the window, over the sprawling expanse of the Atlantic. “I just hate being the villain in his story.”

Lafayette turns back with a flash of exasperation. “You’re not the villain, you’re a politician, and he’s been rather burned by some of those of late.”

“Gil…”

“You can’t do this, George,” he smacks a hand down on top of his closed computer, “you can’t watch over his life like some quasi-father figure, you can’t pull strings to get him into college like it will somehow negate all of the bullshit of the past few months, and even if you could? Alexander
Hamilton will never, ever, fill the void in your heart left by Patsy’s death, ça va?”

“I – Jesus, Gil,” he gapes, stunned. “No, ça very much does not va, thank you very much.” Lafayette snorts derisively. “You think this is about Patsy?”

“Of course it’s about Patsy,” he counters. “It’s about Patsy, and probably a little bit about all the other young boys, not much older than Hamilton, who you couldn’t save two, three decades ago.” His expression turns thunderous; Lafayette is undeterred. “Couldn’t save them, couldn’t save her… maybe this one, this boy… maybe he’s your last chance.”

“Okay,” he rises awkwardly in the cramped space under the low bulkhead, “you know what? Maybe this isn’t the best -”

“Sit down,” Lafayette jabs a finger at him, and he complies, wide-eyed. “You wanted to do this, so let’s do this. Why are we here, George?”

“You know damn well why we’re here.”

He cocks a cool brow. “By all means, then, let me know when I should pencil in our visits to all the other boys Thomas Conway lusted after since he took his seat.”

“It’s not the same,” Washington says softly, and gets an incredulous stare in return. “C’mon, Gil, it’s not.”

“Casse-toi, it is the same. You think the boy who went to Charles Lee for help didn’t spend the rest of the term, while he ran around doing your bidding, terrified? You think the boy – the one that you know of – who Conway lured into his bed the moment he turned eighteen was somehow in a position, magically, overnight, to make that decision independent of the professional roles they played respective to one another a year earlier?” He shakes his head slowly and asks softly, “You think what you did, today, was a kindness?”

“It was not my decision to spring the interview on the boy.” Lafayette stares at him, expectant, and he frowns. “He was going to find out soon enough. He had a right to know.”

“Yes, maybe,” the younger man allows, a frown playing across his lips. “But to know what? That a quick and dirty blowjob in Conway’s office was fine, but an evening in an actual bed made the man a criminal? He’s still trying to process the part where the man who made him feel special, in a world where men have done little but disappoint his every expectation, was something of a habitual predator, abetted by others in positions of highest authority around him. He’s still trying to come to terms with his own choices that put him in that position.”

“It was not my decision to spring the interview on the boy.” Lafayette stares at him, expectant, and he frowns. “He was going to find out soon enough. He had a right to know.”

“Yes, maybe,” the younger man allows, a frown playing across his lips. “But to know what? That a quick and dirty blowjob in Conway’s office was fine, but an evening in an actual bed made the man a criminal? He’s still trying to process the part where the man who made him feel special, in a world where men have done little but disappoint his every expectation, was something of a habitual predator, abetted by others in positions of highest authority around him. He’s still trying to come to terms with his own choices that put him in that position.”

“He should never have been in a position to make those choices.”

“And yet, he was and he did, and he cannot wave them away with such useless conjecture of how things ought have been.”

“In the state of Virginia -”

“Oh, for – the man isn’t even a sex offender in the state of Virginia!” Lafayette throws his hands up in frustration. “He’ll get a fine that’s little more than a slap on the wrist, the embarrassment of a national news cycle, and then he’ll go on with his life. And in conflating the whole thing with what is ultimately little more than a technicality, you’re denying Hamilton any agency at all, because it’ll make you feel better if he accepts that he was the victim from the first moment Conway so much as looked at him wrong, and cedes any of the responsibility and guilt he’s feeling.”
Washington blinks at him, uneasy, taken aback.

“And that,” Lafayette pushes on relentlessly, “would be maybe, sort of, an understandable impulse, if a cruel one that would force Hamilton into a certain acceptance he might never completely feel. Is it really so hard to fathom that this boy who has seen his life repeatedly upended and been powerless to stop it – this boy whose very presence in D.C. was an act of rebellion against a system that tried to tell him no – would be desperate to avoid the conclusion that this, too, spiraled out of his control? That what truly frightens him isn’t the world seeing him as a victim, but in being obliged to see himself as one?”

“Gil.”

“But the part that’s been lost on me – right up until you alluded to her in that kitchen – is why you feel the need to take that responsibility and guilt he feels onto your own shoulders.”

Words have escaped him, and he can only watch and listen in stunned silence as Lafayette barrels on mercilessly towards what Washington has realized to be his inevitable, devastating conclusion.

“Hamilton will be fine, whether or not he gets his scholarship to the Ivies. He has people to catch him, and if the blip on his high school record keeps him on the island an extra year or two? He’ll find another way to write his way off again. You,” he jabs his finger back at him, “you’re already doing your job, hard as it’s making mine. You’re untangling the corruption in the Senate and working to ensure it doesn’t happen again – that is your only responsibility to Alexander Hamilton now.

“You need to stop treating him like he’s something fragile in need of your protection, but you’ll never, ever able to do that as long as the boy is inextricably linked in your mind with Patsy. Because after a dozen years watching her condition escalate, hundreds of seizures… if only she’d had that one seizure that killed her a week later. A day. Six hours. If only – you’d have been there to meet Hamilton. He’d have spent four months sitting on the federalists’ side of the dais, and Thomas Conway would hardly have had occasion to speak to the boy in the first place.”

x---x

Alexander is sitting on the front porch when Mister Stevens returns home from a quick run into work that evening, staring at the new contact he’d added to his phone hours earlier, the battery dying for the number of times he’s done this since.

He looks up when a voice cuts into his thoughts. “You boys eat yet?”

“No, uh,” he rubs awkwardly at the back of his neck, “Neddy went out with David and René. Think he reached his limit of being frustrated while trying not to be frustrated with me.”

A resigned sort of weariness descends over the man’s face, but he forces a smile and nods, clasps Alexander’s shoulder briefly as he climbs the steps. “I’ll text him. How’s breakfast for dinner sound?”

“Alright.” He goes back to staring at his phone, and Mister Stevens continues on into the house. As the screen door is swinging closed though, Alexander murmurs quietly, “I’m not my brother, you know.”

Mister Stevens catches the door and takes a slow step back out onto the porch. “What?”

He squeezes his eyes closed and sucks in a deep breath before twisting around to stare up at him beseechingly. “I wouldn’t run out on you. I’m not James.”
“Oh, Alex…” He steps fully back outside and closes the door, slumps heavily against it and shakes his head. “That isn’t… that’s not where my head was. I don’t think that it was, anyway.” Alexander waits, expectant, feeling a bit lost, and then recoils when he says: “The God’s honest truth, Alexander, is that you terrify me.”

“Um. Wow.”

“That’s not… Jesus,” he sighs and pinches at the bridge of his nose. “Just… can we talk inside? It’s been a day.” Which sounds like a bit of an accusation in its own right, as much as Alexander knows Mister Stevens doesn’t mean it as such, and he forcibly fights down his instinctual prickliness and troops dutifully after him to the kitchen.

Where, bless him, the first thing the man does, despite the hour, is start putting on a pot of coffee, rambling away all the while. “I feel like we’ve been walking on eggshells with one another these last couple weeks. I know this thing that you never intended anyone to find out, and you don’t know how to deal with that; you’re so determined to pretend nothing happened, and I couldn’t figure out how to tell you that the senator had gotten in touch, that he wanted to come talk to you, that he felt I was owed a face-to-face conversation after everything… and I was afraid of how you’d react to the idea of me sticking my nose into the world you’d just so determinedly left behind, so I didn’t tell you, until I just never did, and then you left to go spend the night at Ann’s, and…”

Part of Alexander is morbidly curious as to what the two men found to talk about before he and Edward showed up; the other part realizes he’s probably happier not knowing. And he can’t deny that it chafes at him, the thought of them talking about him without being there to defend himself, as it were.

“And for my part…” Mister Stevens sits the pot back on the warmer and then leans against the counter, shoulders tense. Alexander watches quietly from a chair at the table, waits him out. “I got a call two weeks ago that shocked me to my core,” he murmurs softly. “And part of my dealing with that has been reassessing our relationship these past three years, and I just… don’t think I’ve ever been very good at this. At… being what you ever needed me to be along the way.”

He starts more upright in the chair, taken aback. “That’s not… I don’t need -”

“Jesus, Alex,” Mister Stevens sighs, presses the button to start the pot brewing, and turns around to meet his eyes levelly, “of course you do, we all do.” He feels his cheeks warm up under the steady gaze. “And I know it couldn’t have been much of a choice, staying in the group home or coming here. But I guess I thought… it had to at least be better.”

“It was,” he breathes, panic clawing its way up his throat. “It is, I don’t…”

“Don’t look like that, Alex, I’m not sending you back for god’s sake.” So he forcibly calms his breathing and ducks his head down low to hide the more determined flush that he can sense spreading across his face. “That’s kind of the point I’m trying to get at here though – this has never been home to you. You were so… withdrawn, when you got here, with both me and Edward, and I guess I thought that, over time, once you settled in, there’d be a more… fluid dynamic between us. Maybe not something entirely parental, which I don’t think you ever much wanted, but I can’t escape the sense that, three years on, you still feel like you’re visiting your friend’s house and you listen to me and follow the few rules I ever give you because it’s the polite thing to do when you’re a guest.”

And that… that punches at something deep in his gut, echoes of his explanation to John all those months ago of his particular circumstances. “I’m sorry,” he whispers down at the table, shame doing no favors in calming the fierce flush across his face. “I’m… grateful, truly, for -”
Mister Stevens makes a low noise of frustration and lowers himself into the chair opposite. “This, right here – this is why I’ve been reluctant to have this conversation. You don’t need to feel guilty for not being happy here; and I don’t know that there’s much I could have done differently to help make you so – I know there’s no replacing what you’ve lost. But I thought that if you couldn’t quite be happy, at least you could be comfortable, but right now you’re neither and that frightens me, Alexander, because some days it feels like the only thing keeping you here is the vague inconvenience of not being quite sure where else you’d go.

“And so I screwed up today, and I apologize. Because if I can’t trust you, I can hardly ask you to trust me. But this is just out of my… I don’t know how to talk to you about this. I’m scared of pushing you away, and even more so of giving you too much space to work things through on your own, because I think that’s probably where I fucked this up the first time.”

Alexander forces his eyes up to meet his guardian’s desperate stare, and he asks feebly, “Did it never occur to you that I might just be helpless?”

“No,” he shakes his head and smiles a tight smile. “I think you’re anything but. It’s just… you don’t always have to fend for yourself. And maybe I’ve not been very good at communicating that to you, or maybe this is just your preemptive defense against the possibility of someone else leaving you, yet again, but,” Alexander’s eyes dart back down to his lap, heat prickling behind his eyes, “I’ve never seen you coming to live here as simply being about giving you a place to sleep.”

“I do know that,” he mumbles.

“Then you understand why I am simply terrified, right now?” He cringes, but doesn’t respond. “I think I accepted some time ago that you’re going to leave soon, and probably never come back, and that the best I can do is ensure you’re set up for success when it happens. But now… I’m terrified of sending you to school next fall, or keeping you here until you’re eighteen and then watching you go anyway, without understanding how this happened. And I’m terrified far more of reaching that point without you ever trying to understand how this happened.”

He looks up sharply at that and stares and frowns. “What the hell does that mean?”

“You told me in the car, on the way home from the airport, that no one forced you into anything, and yet I’d bet all the money in the world that this was never once about sex for you.” The red flush of mortification returns full-force. “So what was it about?” For a terrible, drawn-out moment, he thinks Mister Stevens is going to watch him expectantly until he provides a satisfactory response, but then the man sighs. “You don’t need to answer that question today; you don’t need to do so with me. But you just told me that you’re not going to run, and I’m going to hold you to that.”

Which… wasn’t how he meant it, and it feels a little manipulative to have his words twisted so. But the weary place in the back of his brain that’s just so fucking exhausted shouts down the part that wants to argue, because he knows Mister Stevens is grasping at anything he can, given the reality that he has so little leverage with which to work here.

And so: “Okay,” he agrees softly, and the man releases a heavy breath Alexander didn’t realize he was holding, bracing for the potential eruption. “I need time.”

“I know.”

“I am home though, okay?” He talks down to his lap, barely audible. “Maybe it took going away to see it as such. And maybe it doesn’t often seem like it but… I’m glad to be back.”

Which perhaps is not the heartfelt declaration of attachment the man craves, but he smiles softly and
Alexander takes a mug of coffee and sequesters himself away in his room shortly thereafter. There, he sits on the bed and plugs in his dying phone and stares some more at the recently-added contact, running the mantra over in his head.

*I'm not my brother.*

He taps out a short message slowly, second-guessing himself every step of the way, whether to say more, to say less, to say nothing at all, until he smacks the *send* button in a fit of conflicted frustration.

To: J.Laurens

*I’m sorry for running out on you.*

And he waits, and second-guesses some more, and flops himself back on to the bed and stares broodingly up at the ceiling, until his phone buzzes not five minutes later and he’s fumbling frantically for it, yanking it too hard and dislodging the charger and nearly dropping it on his face as he scrambles to see the reply.

From: J.Laurens

[img]

*compliments of the Schuyler sisters*

It’s been so long, it takes him a minute to place the context of the photo – the end of their first week on the Hill in fact. Their nighttime jaunt down the Mall, bundled up against the cold, and Angelica, the only one of them with a phone on hand, snapping pictures all the while.

He has no recollection of this one being taken, even though the moment comes back to him with a wave of warmth that radiates down to his toes. Him and John, wrapped up in a tight embrace, standing under the *U.S. Virgin Islands* pillar at the World War II Memorial, flurries sticking to their hair and his nose tucked into John’s coat collar.

It feels like a reassurance and a promise, and a little bit like starting over, all at once.

x---x

There’s a deceptive lull Friday afternoon between the work day ending, the Senate breaking early ahead of the weekend, and the expectation of an explosive news story early in the evening. Washington’s fidgety distraction is interrupted by a vague text from Jefferson, asking if he can stop by, and he’s surprised, sitting in his study, when he hears Martha answer the door an hour later to the sound of excited exclamations and laughter.

By the time he makes it downstairs, all of thirty seconds later, his wife is whisking the girls away to undoubtedly ply them with some of the currant cake she’d made yesterday while he was away.
Marty, towering above both Martha and her sister, is dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, but thirteen-year-old Polly is still in her distinctive Catholic school uniform.

“Last day of term?” he asks Jefferson, the two hanging back to watch as the other three dart about the kitchen.

The other man waves off a silent offer of a piece of cake, and then Martha waves them on and ushers the girls outside onto the back deck. “Just picked her up,” he nods, part in answer to the question and part in answer to the unspoken offer of something a bit stronger than the pitcher of fresh lemonade in the fridge. “I hope it’s not too much… having them here.”

Washington looks up at him in surprise as he pours two glasses of whiskey, rare as it is to hear Jefferson sound particularly tentative about anything. But then he takes his meaning and smiles faintly, leads the way back up to his study. “I think the sting of Martha’s grief is not so sharp. The fond remembrances of her friends can be appreciated as such.”

They settle in the two cozy armchairs, angled in towards a fireplace that rarely gets used these days. Jefferson leans back, crosses his ankle over his knee, and asks, “And for yourself?”

He lets out a slow sigh. “You’ve been talking to Gil.”

“He frets.”

“I know.” After a moment he sits back in the chair and shrugs helplessly. “I miss her.”

“I know.” And there’s something sharp and vulnerable in the younger man’s eye, and Washington has to wonder how jagged those wounds still cut, so many years later, so well hidden beneath a carefully-honed, aloof veneer. “She’d kick your ass to see you moping though.”

He can’t help the laugh, brittle as it feels. “That she would.”

They sit quietly for a few minutes, savoring slow sips of their drinks. Jefferson fidgets in his chair though, anxious and distracted, full of nervous energy; Washington waits him out with a watchful patience he learned years ago in his first profession, until the younger man puts his whiskey glass down and leans forward, elbows propped on his knees. “Just to be clear, in the hour we have left until Callender drops his story…”

“Yes?”

“There are a number of reasons this situation could be used to throw a lot of unpleasant rumor and speculation on you.”

“Yes,” Washington murmurs curiously, “I seem to recall John André laying them out.”

Jefferson exhales heavily, and Washington thinks he at last grasps that final interaction between Jefferson and André – the veiled threats thrown Washington’s way had also been meant as veiled instructions for Jefferson. “I thought,” Jefferson muses slowly, once he’s mastered his irritation, “to offer to handle the investigation as a matter of internal party affairs, given André’s apparent role as the quiet ring-leader. Which – oh chill out,” he waves off of storm-cloud Washington can feel brewing across his face, “I know that was a fantasy. And in lieu of the politically sensible thing to do, here’s what I have to offer: I will stand by your side, a united front, through every gritty facet of this fiasco. You will discourage your allies from condemning my party for the sins of one man. I will dissuade my party from using the exploitation of teenagers as cannon fodder in an upcoming presidential election they are all but assured to lose.”
“A standard of common decency would belie the need for such an accord.”

“You’re insane if you don’t think both of those conversations have already been happening behind closed doors,” Jefferson fires back bluntly.

“No,” Washington murmurs and sighs, and shakes his head, “no, I know. And we have our professional disagreements, Thomas, but that’s not who we are.”

“Hm,” Jefferson studies him closely, discerningly, eyes piercing. “And you, George – you have this fantasy about upending our dysfunctional system and ushering a new age of rational discourse and political integrity brought about through the sheer force of your venerated reputation.” He shakes his head, more resigned than dismissive. “Godspeed to you, then.” Reaches once more for his glass and throws back the last few drops in it. “If I thought there was a chance in hell of beating you, I’d have run in a heartbeat after you announced.”

“I have never harbored any delusions to the contrary.”

“Instead, once the present mess is largely settled, I’m going to do the next best thing and endorse you.”

There’s a long, uneasy silence, a tense moment where Jefferson stares intently at Washington and Washington watches him in turn, frowning, with the distinctly keen feeling that he’s missed something. “You’ll jeopardize your leadership position.”

“Well,” Jefferson murmurs softly, “I was going to lose that anyway.” Washington blinks, confused, and he elaborates, “I’ve written the Board in Virginia. I’m withdrawing from the ballot in November.”

And that shocks him more than any of the rest of it. “Thomas. What – why?” He just shakes his head. “People will think it’s about Conway.” A flicker of irritation crosses Jefferson’s face. “André, then.”

He waves a hand. “Ehh. It’s…” He pauses a minute, trying to collect his thoughts, wrap his head around what he’s trying to say, and jumps to his feet and starts pacing in the small space between their chairs and the fireplace while he muses. “André wasn’t my man. I mean, he was, he spent years in my office, but… the party was always his first master.”

“Yes, I recall he got his start under Yates when he was majority leader.”

“Jem never wanted him there. Liked him well enough, I think, and I chalked it up as territorial, but… well. He may have seen the error of his ways from your politics,” Washington snorts, “but if there’s one thing he internalized all of those years ago in your office, it was your sense of government ethics.”

“James was an intern for six months, Benedict Arnold was my chief of staff for years. I hardly think there’s some pervasive aura of integrity anyone’s picking up through osmosis.”

Jefferson waves him off. “Arnold came to work for you when you were already a force to be reckoned with in federal politics; James was there when D.C. was still trying to wrap its collective head around your audacity of remaining independent. And all this time, my prevailing assumption was that you shunned the party because you didn’t need the party.”

Washington offers a dry smile. “I like to think my motivations are rarely so spiteful.”

“No,” Jefferson muses, and stops his pacing to lean against the mantel above the fireplace. “But you
learned in the Army the value of being your own commander, didn’t you? That anyone who outranks you, so to speak, might share a general common vision, but will have different priorities, different values… and sometimes may simply be wrong.”

“You think your party bosses put André in your office to manage shit like this?”

“I think they put André in my office so that they wouldn’t have to, yes. And I let them, because he was a problem solver and I liked that about him because I learned in the diplomatic corps that it’s the deals made behind closed doors that make the world go ’round. So I never bothered to worry myself over just how he was solving those problems.”

Washington leans forward and cocks his head sideways, still trying to understand. “You did the right thing when it counted.”

“Jem did the right thing,” Jefferson corrects quietly, crossing his arms over his chest and staring broodingly down at the floor. “I wasn’t even supposed to be in the car.”

“Thomas…”

“And,” he cuts him off, “I’m like ninety-eight… nine… ninety-nine percent certain that if it had just been me, alone in the car with Hamilton, we’d still be sitting here today. But what concerns me,” he continues slowly as Washington watches him, frown playing across his lips, “is the one percent that’s not sure. What concerns me is that I am not altogether confident that after another term or two, I won’t become that person who sees the political before the human consequences. So…” he spreads his hands and shrugs, “Perhaps it’s simply time to quit public service. Return to life on the farm, spend some more time with the girls.” His lips quirk wryly. “See what the future holds.”

---

The news breaks Friday evening. Alexander reads the story from the Times on his phone that night before bed, cringing the whole way, but it’s… anticlimactic. Nothing he didn’t already know, and, as Washington promised, nothing that even comes close to identifying him. Doesn’t even specify if Conway slept with a male or female student, or even the age of the student in question. Simply draws the connection between the resignation and the suspended Page Program, with a blandly uninteresting quote from the leadership about the handling of the situation within the Senate, and referring legal questions to the relevant parties in Virginia.

Conway’s lawyer declined to comment.

So, that’s that, for now. It is what it is, and it’s time to move on.

Except.

He sighs and copies the link, and thinks about his conversation last night with Mister Stevens about being home and being comfortable, and he thinks about his conversation with Washington a few hours earlier about recognizing an untenable situation when he sees one, and it was probably foolish to ever seize upon the notion that he could hide this indefinitely from the one person he’d wished to have on hand as a confidante in the earliest of those tumultuous days in D.C. So he pastes the link into a text and sends it without additional comment.

And then he gets ready for bed. Brushes his teeth and splashes water on his face, pulls on a pair of flannel pants and his hoodie with the frayed drawstrings, and then pads quietly barefoot down the hall to the room on the other side of the bathroom.

He pauses there at the door and closes his eyes and listens for any noise within, and then sucks in a
deep breath and pushes into the dark room, illuminated only by the light of a phone screen. “Hey,” the owner of said phone says neutrally as Alexander closes the door, but he doesn’t reply, just crosses the room and climbs under the blanket, squeezes himself onto the side of the bed, and determinedly buries his face in Edward’s shoulder. “This why George Washington was in my house yesterday?”

He nods, mute.

“This why you stopped writing me back midway through the semester?”

Another nod.

“This why you’re hiding?”

“’m not hiding,” he grumbles, and then jams his cold toes under Edward’s calves for good measure.

The older boy hisses and then slithers down the bed to lie on his side, dislodges Alexander’s head so they’re face-to-face, and he asks, curious, “Did you actually hit someone for being an abusive asshole towards one of your classmates?” He sighs and nods, and then Edward follows it up: “Did you hit that abusive asshole because you couldn’t hit this one?” He waves his phone demonstratively. “No, hey, c’mon,” he says when Alexander tries to twist away and hide his face again. “You okay?”

And if he can’t admit this to Edward, of all people, the longest-lasting intimate relationship he has left in this world… “Not really, no.”

“Are you going to be?” He shrugs dully and fidgets with the cords on his sweatshirt, until Edward declares, “Yeah, you will.”

Despite himself, he cocks a half-grin. “How d’you know?”

And like it’s the most obvious thing in the world, he says: “Because you’re Alexander Hamilton.” A hand reaches out to grab his and still the nervous twisting, and he forces his eyes up at Edward’s, shining brightly in the dark. “Just you wait.”

Chapter End Notes

WELL HELL.

Thanks to all you crazy kids who were brave enough to click on this (seriously, a Hamilton/Conway tag, wtf?) and see it through. It was quite the undertaking - my giant master document where I sketched out every last thought and outline and research and pieces of scenes and background scenes and future scenes trying to figure out where I was coming from and where I was going was yet another 50k words longer than the story itself so, yikes.

I’d love thoughts (who doesn’t?) or any questions or clarifications or anything. I’d tell you to find me on Tumblr (I mean, you are welcome to), but I still can barely figure out how the site works because I suck at the Technology thing and I kind of forgot it existed for the better part of a year until recently, so. I’m faceofpoe there as well, in any case.

Thanks for reading. I won’t lie, I imagine my head will be stuck in this universe for a
while. (When will Alexander see John again! Will he go to Columbia! What about the hurricane, there has to be a hurricane!). No particular plans for a full sequel, but I could probably be persuaded to thread some one-shots at some point into a series if anyone's interested.

Much love to you all-

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!